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ARTICLES/ARTYKUŁY

Mystical Contemplation and Other Ways of the Cognition of God According to Saint John of the Cross

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Abstract: This philosophical article analyzes the direction of changes in human knowledge of God under the influence of mystical contemplation in the teachings of Saint John of the Cross. The introductory part features the specificity of various types of knowledge of God: based on the beauty of nature, metaphysical analysis of the world, and faith. This serves as the backdrop for showing mystical contemplation, its nature, and the goal it pursues. The author makes a thorough analysis of the character of transformations in knowledge of God (including faith) under the influence of mystical contemplation. This idea is emphasized by John of the Cross. Yet, it is not well-developed. Conclusion: contemplation makes it possible for a man to free himself from thinking about God in worldly categories, in particular from categories of the anthropomorphic nature, because the aim of mystical contemplation is to prepare the human mind to see God after death.

Keywords: intellect, faith, love, union with God, purification

Representing the path to the union with God, Saint John of the Cross indicates how each of human spiritual faculties reaches this state. Here, we will focus on only one of them—the intellect and its cognitive acts. Speaking of the intellect, the Saint mentions four constituents related to human cognition. The starting point are the natural acts of cognition, insufficient for the union. Subsequently, John states that to direct the mind to God, acts of faith are necessary. Faith allows for the appearance of contemplation purifying human cognition, experienced in the form of the dark night. The last constituent described by the Saint are the cognition acts of an intellect united with God.

In analyses conducted by John, the process of transforming human cognition initiated by the contemplation is described rather generally, without explaining the transformation undergone by faith. The reason why contemplation purifies human cognition is also not entirely stated.

This article is a modified, English version of some parts of my monograph written in Polish *Doświadczenie mistyczne w doktrynie świętego Jana od Krzyża* [Mystical Experience in the Doctrine of Saint John of the Cross: Philosophical Analysis] (Niziński 2021). This text deepens the topic of the effects of the mystical cognition of God presented in my monograph.

The aim pursued by the author of this article is to explain these matters. Thanks to their clarification, it will become easier to understand the specificity of cognizing God through contemplation compared to other kinds of knowledge about Him. The method applied here is a philosophical analysis of human cognition with consideration of the constituents employed by John of the Cross. Although the topic of the dark night described by the Saint has witnessed a great number of studies, it appears that no one has analyzed the transformation of the human cognition in the indicated perspective. Most of the contemporary studies analyze the topic in the context of Dionysius the Areopagite, theological virtues or anthropology.[1] Only few of them look at faith in the broader context of human knowledge.[2]

1. Types of the Cognition of God Based on the Doctrine of John of the Cross

Cognizing God plays an important role in the doctrine of John of the Cross, because, at least at the initial stage, it sets a direction for human activities. John maintains that there are different ways to know God. The Saint writes: "It is noteworthy that the intellect can get ideas and concepts in two ways, naturally and supernaturally." (John of the Cross 1991a, II, 10, 2)

John is not opposed to the natural cognition of God. He recognizes a certain similarity between creation and God, which in philosophical terms could be considered as John's acceptance of the analogy (of being) between God and creation. It is thanks to this similarity that God can be known in a natural way: "On this spiritual road the consideration of creatures is first in order after the exercise of self-knowledge. The soul thereby advances in the knowledge of God by considering his greatness and excellence manifested in creatures [...]. The invisible things of God are known by the soul through creatures." (John of the Cross, 1991d, 4, 1)

John claims that creation is the reflection of God. Therefore, at the initial stage of pursuing Him, he recommends using the beauty of nature to direct the mind towards God. We know from witnesses' accounts that he taught his fellow brothers how to find God in the beauty of creation. John writes: "In the living contemplation and knowledge of creatures the soul sees such fullness of graces, powers, and beauty with which God has endowed them that seemingly all are arrayed in wonderful beauty and natural virtue. The beauty and virtue derive from above and are imparted by that infinite supernatural beauty of the Image of God." (John of the Cross 1991d, 6, 1)

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[1]   Blommestijn 2000, 228–41; Bosch 2019; Doohan 2013; Gaitán de Rojas 2018, 63–88; 2019, 35–61; Gianola 2015; McGinn 2019, 9–33; Guerra 2014, 330–348; Martín Velasco 2011–12, 123–69; Rodríguez Moreno 2018; Sanabria Chamizo 2021; Tatar 2019a; 2019b, 6–24.

[2]   Huguenin 2003, 79–116.

2. The Character of Knowledge Gained in a Metaphysical Way

In addition to the way of knowing God's perfections through His reflection in created things, there is also a way of metaphysical cognition. Some philosophers will say that the cause is known by the effects of its action. Metaphysics follows this path. It is enough to recall the well-known five ways proposed by Saint Thomas Aquinas. Grasping an aspect of familiar reality which does not explain itself—e.g., the fact of the world's existence—one can come to its cause and learn, although to a very limited extent, about the nature of the cause which would be to be God.

In this case, He would be understood as a necessary existence (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, 4, 2). God known in this way is a certain postulate explaining the facts directly available to us, which in themselves do not contain this explanation. One could say that God known in such a way is some kind of "extension" of the world—its principle or cause (Barth 1997, 21–22). The world is beings of unnecessary existence, and God is a being of necessary existence, that is, an existence that exists by itself—as expressed by Saint Thomas Aquinas. In this case, God is a certain concept which helps the intellect to understand part of reality available to us.

By stating that God is necessary existence, we have made little progress in the knowledge of God, because we only know what it means to exist unnecessarily, and the very knowledge of what necessary existence is remains inaccessible. Nobody has the experience of being able to exist always. The only thing that can be said about this existence is that it is not what all beings are, because they exist without necessity.

A similar situation is with another notion received in this way and which describes God. According to Aristotle, God was to be a pure act, that is a being which, thanks to the fullness of perfection, is not subject to change, but moves other beings itself. As a consequence, God understood in this way would have to be immaterial, unchangeable, timeless—that is, eternal, infinite (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, 4, 1, ad. 1; I, 10, 1; I, 44, 2, ad. 2). When we look at the positive content covered by these terms, it basically does not appear, because all these names indicate what God is not. God is not in time, God has no parts, God is not material, etc. In principle, we learn how we should not think about God (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, 10, 1, ad. 1; I, 4, 3, ad. 4).

The knowledge of God gained metaphysically is poor and not obvious. In addition, we can say that such cognition is not direct. It also lacks certainty and obviousness. Although for those who follow the reasoning of Thomas or Aristotle and adopt their vision of reality which we learn directly as well as accept their method of reasoning, the conclusion is obvious, yet the method or the departure point for everyone analyzing their texts are not so. It is enough to look at the history of philosophy to see how many people reject this type of arguments (explicitly: Charles Hartshorne, Xavier Zubiri, implicitly: René Descartes, Baruch Spinoza, David Hume, Gottfried Leibniz, Georg Hegel, Immanuel Kant, Edmund Husserl, Martin Heidegger).

Knowledge gained in such a way rather does not establish any relationship with God. Although the intellect may recognize the conclusiveness of reasoning, whether by Thomas or Aristotle, the result of this reasoning does not stimulate the will to establish a relationship with God understood in this way. How and why to love a pure act—an immovable being that sets in motion everything but itself? Why to love pure existence? The situation seems a little different in the case of getting to know the beauty of God in creation. Perhaps this beauty inspires man to admire the wisdom of God and to seek Him in some way. However, it does not ignite anything else in man.

3. Inability to Unite with God Through Indirect Forms

John lists two reasons for which it is not possible to unite with God using these above-mentioned indirect cognitive forms. The first one—resulting from longing for God Himself and not for his approximate figures. The second one—one can unite with God not with the help of some distant image, but only by getting to know Him.

John states that getting to know God in creation can, up to a certain point, stimulate man to seek God, because creation says something about His beauty and omnipotence. However, after some time, this type of cognition ceases to be sufficient for various reasons. In the quotation cited below, where feelings shape the relationship between God and man, longing for God Himself is the reason for which getting to know God in creation ceases to be enough: "The soul, wounded with love through a trace of the beauty of her Beloved, which she has known through creatures, and anxious to see the invisible beauty that caused this visible beauty." (John of the Cross 1991d, 6, 1)

For the Spanish mystic, in order to unite with God, it is not enough to have in the mind a more or less approximative image to Him. The intellect, in order to unite with God, must get to know God Himself. If the will tends towards God by following the image which it receives from the intellect, then its love is imperfect when the image of God is imperfect. Moreover, a question always arises that it is true that we have some intuitions derived from natural cognition of who God could be—but which of these intuitions is true?

John, emphasizing some initial cognition of God through His traces left in creation, observes that none of these traces, however, offers the true cognition of God and thus cannot serve as a means of becoming united with Him.

> It is noteworthy that among all creatures, both superior and inferior, none bears a likeness to God's being or unites proximately with him. Although truly, as theologians say, all creatures carry with them a certain relation to God and a trace of him (greater or less

according to the perfection of their being), yet God has no relation or essential likeness to them. Rather the difference that lies between his divine being and their being is infinite. Consequently, intellectual comprehension of God through heavenly or earthly creatures is impossible; there is no proportion of likeness. [. . .] Thus no creature can serve the intellect as a proportionate means to the attainment of God. (John of the Cross 1991a, II, 8, 3)

Therefore, John concludes:

Similarly, if the soul in traveling this road leans on any elements of its own knowledge or of its experience or knowledge of God, it will easily go astray or be detained. (John of the Cross 1991a, II, 4, 3)

Nothing in this life that could be imagined or received and understood by the intellect can be a proximate means of union with God. In our natural way of knowing, the intellect can grasp an object only through the forms and phantasms of things perceived by the bodily senses. Since, as we said, these things cannot serve as a means, the intellect cannot profit from its natural knowing. (1991a, II, 8, 4)

This does not mean that John rejects the helpfulness of our imperfect knowledge of Him at the initial stage of tending towards God. After all, we need even a minimal amount of knowledge of God in order to become converted and start looking for Him. Nevertheless, when John addresses those who want to mystically unite with God, he mentions the true knowledge of God, and not some preliminary or approximate one, as one of the conditions. Therefore, neither the knowledge of God achieved through philosophical considerations nor the reflection of God's beauty in creation can serve as a means to unite mystically with God.

4. The Need to Direct All Faculties to God

According to John of the Cross, the necessary requirement for union is the subordination of all human spheres to God—not only the intellect. In order to meet this requirement, John states that it is necessary to properly direct cognition, and this is only possible through faith. Hence his known requirement to live by faith. Faith fulfills two functions in the doctrine of John of the Cross. The first one is personal openness to God. The second one is the true cognition of Him.

In what way does faith open one to God? It creates a personal relationship between man and God. John writes: "God is the substance and concept of faith." (John of the Cross 1991d, 1, 10) "Faith, consequently, gives and communicates God himself to us but covered with the silver of faith." (1991d, 12, 4)

In order to better illustrate the difference between the cognitive element of faith and the relational element, that is one that creates a personal relationship with God, the following example can be used. I believe that Ramses II existed, although I never met him. I also believe that he was a pharaoh. Thus, thanks to trust put in historians who are experts in matters related to the history of Ancient Egypt, I know something about Ramses II. However, it is cognition which is not based on vision, because I personally did not have the opportunity to get to know this individual, but on the basis of historians' authority—and in this sense my knowledge of Ramses II is similar to religious faith, because it informs about things which are unknown and unattainable for me with my current education. Thus, any knowledge based on authority contains an information element. However, faith, spoken about by John of the Cross, contains another element particularly important from the point of view of religion, which is the establishment of a personal relationship with the One in whom one believes.

Therefore, religious faith not only informs me about what God is like, but when I believe in Him, it establishes a personal bond between me and Him, opening me up to God, and He, as the substance of faith, comes to me with this faith. In the Gospel, a man begging Christ for a miracle, when questioned whether he believes in the Son of Man, is asked whether he is ready to accept Christ along with His teaching. Faith aroused in such a way allows Christ to enter into the life of a person who is asking for a miracle. This is the element of faith that Federico Ruiz mentions saying that according to the doctrine of John of the Cross it introduces a passive (i.e. mystical) character into a relationship with God, and thus gives God Himself. He states that God is a more active and personal subject of revelation, even before man believes in Him, than a passive object of human observation and search (Ruiz 1986, 169). Expressing it in other words, before man starts believing in God, God stimulates him to believe beforehand. Faith, therefore, first establishes a personal relationship with God and then informs man what God is like. This statement by Ruiz also explains why for John of the Cross faith is always an indispensable attitude at every stage of the way leading to God, even when man has already achieved the mystical union. Thanks to faith, man is always open to God, allowing God to work in him.

Thanks to faith we get to know God, because faith is based on revelation. In revelation God presents Himself to us in our cognitive categories (Barth 1946, 258). This is the character of revelation contained in the Holy Scripture. As part of this revelation, as Karl Barth says, it is God who presents Himself, using our language and images available to our consciousness (Josuttis 1965, 12). He selects some well-known elements from our reality and compares Himself to them. In other words, God uses a certain resemblance of the world to Himself to let Himself be known by us. For example, He compares His love for man to maternal, paternal, nuptial love, etc.

This type of cognition is also indirect cognition, because we are led from concepts known to us to reality which is directly inaccessible to us, but also is incomprehensible (it is God). The function of faith described here is informative. Thanks to

this positive, or informative, element of faith, we know what we can think about God, or what He is like, and in this sense faith puts man on the way to God.

The supreme example of adapting God's speech to our understanding is the Incarnation, in which God becomes reality best known to us, i.e. the human one. God becomes man. It could be said that Christ, possessing two natures—divine and human, is the most adapted form of translating incomprehensible divine reality into reality we know best, i.e. ourselves.

If metaphysical cognition, based on the beauty of creation, can be laden with poverty and a large dose of non-obviousness, then in the case of faith, the guarantee of certainty and truth of this type of knowledge of God is God Himself, because the shape of revelation is given by Him. Thus, it actually directs the mind towards God.

John states that the merit of faith is that it presents us with God as He really is—e.g., as omnipotent, merciful, loving, seeking us, etc. If man accepts the revealed content about God as true, then he can be sure he is focusing on God Himself. John writes in an explicit way:

> We can gather from what has been said that to be prepared for this divine union the intellect must be cleansed and emptied of everything relating to sense, divested and liberated of everything clearly intelligible, inwardly pacified and silenced, and supported by faith alone, which is the only proximate and proportionate means to union with God. For the likeness between faith and God is so close that no other difference exists than that between believing in God and seeing him. Just as God is infinite, faith proposes him to us as infinite. Just as there are three Persons in one God, it presents him to us in this way. (John of the Cross 1991a, II, 9, 1)

This is why John states that in order to get to know God truly, man must keep believing. The feature of getting to know God based on faith is truth and certainty, because it was God Himself who decided how to present Himself to us: "they must lean on dark faith, accept it for their guide and light, and rest on nothing of what they understand, taste, feel, or imagine." (John of the Cross 1991a, II, 4, 2)

However, there is a certain price to pay for following the path of getting to know God based on faith: "For though faith brings certitude to the intellect, it does not produce clarity, but only darkness." (John of the Cross 1991a, II, 6, 2) The element of mystery related to faith concerns what given perfection in God is. When God says that His love for us is like the love of a mother or father, revelation, at the same time, contains a correction regarding this love. By way of addition, we learn that God loves more perfectly than a mother, because a mother can forget about her child, which does not happen to God. Moreover, when we begin to inquire what this God's love for man is like, we must take into account that it is not imperfect love, that is, changeable, self-interested, and we are loved by Someone who is bodiless, timeless, infinite, loving with all He is, etc. Ultimately, we come to the conclusion that God's love for us is

so perfect that it is difficult to comprehend. Therefore, faith, due to the incomprehensibility of things it teaches us about, is dark to our intellect.

There is a positive element in the content of faith, because it informs us what God is like, but how it is realized in God exceeds our ability for cognition and hence faith is at the same time dark cognition. As a consequence, faith moves away from such understanding of God as man attains with the help of his own thinking, imagining or feeling about Him. In other words, there is also an element of mystery or an element of ignorance in faith, because our intellect is adapted only to getting to know the created world. In revelation, God uses reality which is known to us in order to later transport us to a fundamentally different, incomprehensible reality. Although we know how a mother can love a child, we are not able to comprehend how God loves us, because this love is essentially more perfect than a mother's love and exceeds it infinitely.

> Faith, the theologians say, is a certain and obscure habit of soul. It is an obscure habit because it brings us to believe divinely revealed truths that transcend every natural light and infinitely exceed all human understanding. [. . .] The sun so obscures all other lights that they do not seem to be lights at all when it is shining, and instead of affording vision to the eyes, it overwhelms, blinds, and deprives them of vision since its light is excessive and unproportioned to the visual faculty. (John of the Cross 1991a, II, 3, 1)

Cognition through faith, though true, is imperfect because it is not vision. This is indirect cognition, because it is effected through words or images that need to be exceeded. The advantage of following faith is to give the right direction to the intellect, pointing to God being His "outline." Thanks to faith, the intellect rejects images that do not refer to God; therefore, faith makes our intellect open up to God, but it still does not see Him:

> She says these truths are sketched deep within her, that is, in her soul, in her intellect and will. For these truths are infused by faith into her intellect. And since the knowledge of them is imperfect, she says they are sketched. Just as a sketch is not a perfect painting, so the knowledge of faith is not perfect knowledge. Hence the truths infused in the soul through faith are as though sketched, and when clearly visible they will be like a perfect and finished painting in the soul. (John of the Cross 1991d, 12, 6)

At this point, we are forced to expose this element of teaching by John of the Cross, which concerns the difference between natural cognition and the one based on faith. According to John, these are two different types of light that lead to cognition. However, one light excludes the other. John emphasizes that cognition based on faith does not rely on the light of the intellect, because it gets to know another reality and is not capable of getting to know divine reality: "The light of natural knowledge does not

show us the object of faith, since this object is unproportioned to any of the senses. Yet we come to know it through hearing, by believing what faith teaches us, blinding our natural light and bringing it into submission." (John of the Cross 1991a, II, 3, 3)

In explaining the darkness of faith, John derives it from the fact that it itself is a light, but of such intensity that it blinds the mind, stopping its functioning. Faith is therefore a light for John, but at the same time, being another kind of light, it extinguishes the light used by the intellect: "Other knowledge is acquired by the light of the intellect, but not the knowledge of faith. Faith nullifies the light of the intellect; and if this light is not darkened, the knowledge of faith is lost." (John of the Cross 1991a, II, 3, 4)

He who stops at faith gets to know in a pure way a reality other than that which is accessible to our intellect. "It [faith] has the characteristics of crystal, being pure in its truths, strong, clear, and cleansed of errors and natural forms." (John of the Cross 1991d, 12, 3) The more someone departs from rational cognition and the more they stop at faith, the better they will know God and, consequently, unite with Him. "And just as God is darkness to our intellect, so faith dazzles and blinds us. Only by means of faith, in divine light exceeding all understanding, does God manifest himself to the soul. The greater one's faith the closer is one's union with God." (1991a, II, 9, 1) This means that according to the teaching of John, the intellect should move from its understanding of God to how He is presented by faith.

In connection with the above, there is an important element regarding the nature of the purification of faith. I think that this topic is inadequately dealt with by commentators and John of the Cross does not stress it too much. According to John, cognition based on faith extends between two poles. On the one hand, John states that faith is pure as a crystal (cf. John of the Cross 1991d, 12, 3). Therefore, when man accepts faith with all simplicity, that is, he stops only at the objective formulations contained in revelation, then his faith is just as John writes: pure, clear and free from errors.

On the other hand, John states that when man learns something new, he tries to learn it through the content already known and faith teaches him about new and unknown things:

> The intellect knows only in the natural way, that is, by means of the senses. If one is to know in this natural way, the phantasms and species of objects will have to be present either in themselves or in their likenesses; otherwise one will be incapable of knowing naturally. [. . .] For example, if we were informed that on a certain island there was an animal whose like or kind we had never seen, we would then have no more idea or image of that animal in our mind than previously, no matter how much we were told. (John of the Cross 1991a, II, 3, 2)

That is why the intellect tries to bring what it has been told about God closer to itself. It is an attempt to understand faith. The intellect cannot fail to make this kind of effort, because it wants to somehow grasp the revealed content. This natural human need is taken into account by God who reveals Himself in the form of man (i.e. Jesus Christ) in order to lead the human intellect to unknown reality.

Therefore, it is obvious that man who believes must play a certain role in interpreting the content of faith. Man always interprets revelation. This interpretation may be more or less correct. Hence, this type of cognition may improve. An example of the interpretation of faith is Job, who has a certain idea of God's care and justice. It is a similar situation with Saint Peter's understanding of what mercy towards one's neighbor should look like. Job's and Peter's attitudes show that faith is not a passive acceptance of the revealed content, but is always its interpretation. It is impossible not to interpret the revealed content, because this would mean the unnatural passivity of our intellect.

As Hans-Georg Gadamer (1993, 257) writes, we already approach every content that is given to us from a subjective perspective, which constitutes a certain pre--understanding of this content. It is enough to recall the example of paternal love. One knows difficulties that man experiences in accepting God as his father when he himself had a tyrant father or did not know him at all. Such a person undertakes the effort of faith, but his traumatic events from the past strongly distort this faith. In faith, one goes from the known (one's own father) to the unknown (God as a father). For someone who did not know their father at all, comparing God to a father means nothing. Faith is therefore also the active cognition of God, because faith is also an activity of the mind, that is, a certain effort made by man to understand its content. Consequently, in faith-based cognition, one can grow indefinitely, moving from less perfect forms of faith to more and more perfect ones. Faith can be great and little, correct or wrong (heresy). In general, we are inclined to think about God in human terms. Therefore, Job and Peter initially find it difficult to accept God as He reveals Himself to them, and they must undergo the purification of faith.

John clearly warns that the role of detailed reasoning regarding the content of faith in uniting the intellect with God should not be overestimated. For, in this case, reasoning is the natural light of the intellect:

> Hence while the intellect is understanding, it is not approaching God but withdrawing from him. It must withdraw from itself and from its knowledge so as to journey to God in faith, by believing and not understanding [. . .]. In this way it reaches perfection, because it is joined to God by faith and not by any other means, and it reaches God more by not understanding than by understanding. [. . .] For its own well-being, the intellect should be doing what you condemn; that is, it should avoid busying itself with particular knowledge, for it cannot reach God through this knowledge, which would rather hinder it in its advance toward him. (John of the Cross 1991c, III, 48)

> Consequently, a soul must strip itself of everything pertaining to creatures and of its actions and abilities, (of its understanding, satisfaction, and feeling), so that when everything unlike and unconformed to God is cast out, it may receive the likeness of God. (1991a, II, 5, 4)

Nevertheless, it seems impossible for the intellect itself to give up the function of interpreting revelation. After all, it is natural for us to try to understand what we believe in, but at the same time we move away from the purity of faith. The more we try to understand the image of God revealed to us, the more we move away from God.

5. The Purification of Faith

In what direction should the purification of faith proceed? It takes place in the context of comprehensive transformations preparing man for union with God. John shows two components determining the right path of these transformations: contemplation, i.e. inflow of God into the faculties, so that He could act in them, and preparation for seeing God. Union with God through love is the anticipation of the future vision of God. It is this goal that determines dynamics of the transformation of the action of all faculties, including the sensory sphere. It is here that we are able to discover the reasons for the radicalism of the Saint's doctrine also in matters related to cognition, i.e. the functioning of the intellect. Therefore, we must now delve into the nature of man's union with God, as understood by John.

5.1. The Mystical Union as the Fulfillment of the Faculties with God

God, in order to unite man with Himself, makes him similar to Himself in action. The first requirement for union is the equality of man's and God's love. This is a requirement resulting from God's absoluteness. John writes:

> If anything pleases him [God], it is the exaltation of the soul. Since there is no way by which he can exalt her more than by making her equal to himself, he is pleased only with her love. For the property of love is to make the lover equal to the object loved. (John of the Cross 1991d, 28, 1)

> With God, to love the soul is to put her somehow in himself and make her his equal. Thus he loves the soul within himself, with himself, that is, with the very love by which he loves himself. This is why the soul merits the love of God in all her works insofar as she does them in God. Placed in this height, this grace, she merits God himself in every work. (1991d, 32, 6)

In the mystical union, the Holy Spirit becomes the love that man has in himself as his own. And it is thanks to Him that he has the same love that God has:

> Because the soul in this gift to God offers him the Holy Spirit, with voluntary surrender, as something of its own (so that God loves himself in the Holy Spirit as he deserves), it enjoys inestimable delight and fruition, seeing that it gives God something of its own that is suited to him according to his infinite being. [. . .] Nevertheless, it does this truly and perfectly, giving all that was given it by him in order to repay love, which is to give as much as is given. And God, who could not be considered paid with anything less, is considered paid with that gift of the soul; and he accepts it gratefully as something it gives him of its own. In this very gift he loves it anew. (John of the Cross 1991c, III, 79)

> It is the breath or spiration of the Holy Spirit from God to her and from her to God. (1991d, 39, 2)

Then, the remaining faculties are adjusted along with the senses to actions focused solely on God. John illustrates the functioning of man united with God in such a way:

> These souls, consequently, perform only fitting and reasonable works, and none that are not so. For God's Spirit makes them know what must be known and ignore what must be ignored, remember what ought to be remembered—with or without forms—and forget what ought to be forgotten, and makes them love what they ought to love, and keeps them from loving what is not in God. Accordingly, all the first movements and operations of these faculties are divine. There is no reason to wonder about these movements and operations being divine, since they are transformed into divine being. (John of the Cross 1991a, III, 2, 9)

John adds:

> God now possesses the faculties as their complete lord, because of their transformation in him. And consequently it is he who divinely moves and commands them according to his divine spirit and will. As a result the operations are not different from those of God; but those the soul performs are of God and are divine operations. (John of the Cross 1991a, III, 2, 8)

This means that getting to know such man no longer has signs of human action. The only administrator of the activity of the human intellect is God. The consequence of union with God understood in this way is John's expression of the nature of human acts in maximalist terms. Man acts only when God acts in him, and everything that man does has a divine character, embracing the entire human existence: "Thus in this state the soul cannot make acts because the Holy Spirit makes them all and moves it toward them. As a result all the acts of the soul are divine, since both the movement to these acts and their execution stem from God." (John of the Cross 1991c, I, 4)

John also expresses this in the following quote:

> O enkindled love, [. . .] [you are] bestowing divine knowledge according to all the ability and capacity of my intellect, communicating love according to the greater power of my will, and rejoicing the substance of my soul with the torrent of your delight, your divine contact and substantial union, in harmony with the greater purity of my substance and the capacity and breath of my memory! (John of the Cross 1991c, I, 17)

And also in this one: "Thus all the movements of this soul are divine. Although they belong to it, they belong to it because God works them in it and with it, for it wills and consents to them." (John of the Cross 1991c, I, 9)

This means that the transformation of human cognition based on faith should go in the direction of increasing submission to God's action, i.e. increasing passivity and, consequently, reducing the degree of the interpretation of the content of faith.

5.2. Preparing the Intellect to See God

At this point, we touch upon a sensitive point of the doctrine of the Saint Carmelite, which is systematically overlooked by commentators. We can ask a question: where did John come up with such a concept of union, which so totally concentrates man on God?

John writes that man is called to see God, and contemplation granted in life does not provide it, although it pours into the intellect God Himself, but in a dark and general form. Therefore, union in this life, even if it is the most perfect, due to the inability to see God, is not the final phase of man's union with God. Only seeing the essence of God after death will complete the mystical union with Him during life (John of the Cross 1991d, 38, 5). John writes: "One of the main reasons for the desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ (Phil 1:23) is to see him face to face and thoroughly understand the profound and eternal mysteries of his Incarnation, which is by no means the lesser part of beatitude." (1991d, 37, 1)

I think that answering the above-mentioned question should follow the path that I will present now. For John, the mystical union with God is the anticipation of *visio beatifica*. If the mystical union means a state similar to the contemplation of God in heaven, the path leading to this state of union must aim not so much as to attain union with God during life but, above all, prepare for *visio beatifica*. This means that the process of spiritual maturation must adapt us to directly seeing God after death.

So, what would it be like to be with God after death? John of the Cross knows the writings of Saint Thomas Aquinas. Aquinas writes about *visio batifica* in the *Summa theologica*, as well as other works. He offers a vision of this state in accordance with Aristotelian terminology. Happiness after death will consist in updating the intellect

with the absolute Truth, which is God, and the will with the absolute Good, which is also God. God is absolute. Hence, in heaven the intellect apart from Him will not be able to get to know anything else, and the will will not be able to love but God, because God will update the entire potential of these faculties. In other words, there will be no place for other acts of knowing and loving outside God, because God, being infinite, will completely fill them with Himself. Therefore, according to Thomas, after death, God becomes the only object of cognition and love (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I, 12, 1, 8–10; I–II, 3, 1). Getting to know only God, the intellect participates in the divine cognition of the world, because God is the creator of this world and at the same time maintains it in existence. Hence, in God, the intellect gets to know everything. Loving only God, the will participates in divine love, and thus loves creation with the same love as God. Hence, God, as the Absolute, completely absorbs and fulfills human spiritual faculties, and these remain passive, because all their ability to get to know and love is realized by seeing God and possessing His love.

The mystical union described by John is just a foretaste of *visio beatifica* presented above. It is a state close to *visio beatifica*, but not the same due to corporeality. Therefore, the process leading to this union must be aimed at gradually making God the only object of human cognition.

This is where the principles concerning the transformation of human cognition and the functioning of other faculties derive from. When God is not yet the sole object of human faculties, that is, when these are not yet completely purified, contemplation, that is, the divine light present in man, causes everything that is not God to be removed from these faculties. John derives the application of this principle from the philosophical rule: "for two contraries cannot coexist in one subject." (John of the Cross 1991b, II, 9, 2; II, 5, 4)

Commentators of this doctrine only mention that this is the principle that John uses, but they do not give reasons for its validity. However, it can be noted that this principle finds a reason for its application in the understanding of the nature of contemplation only if it is assumed that its ultimate stage looks exactly as Thomas Aquinas explains: when man sees God after death, God is the only object present in human faculties.

When we analyze how John describes the mystical union with God to which man is to strive for in his spiritual life, it is clear that it is understood maximally. Three spiritual faculties: the intellect, memory and will are to be focused solely on God and moved only by Him. Even the corporeal sphere is to be subordinated to this logic. This is well-reflected in the following quote where John describes the state of the inner disposition of man who unites himself with God:

> Ridding oneself of what is repugnant to God's will should be understood not only of one's acts but of one's habits as well. Not only must actual voluntary imperfections cease, but

habitual imperfections must be annihilated too. No creature, none of its actions and abilities, can reach or encompass God's nature. Consequently, a soul must strip itself of everything pertaining to creatures and of its actions and abilities, (of its understanding, satisfaction, and feeling), so that when everything unlike and unconformed to God is cast out, it may receive the likeness of God. And the soul will receive this likeness because nothing contrary to the will of God will be left in it. Thus it will be transformed in God. (John of the Cross 1991a, II, 5, 4)

This requirement must be met in an unconditional way. According to John, man is of such a nature that when he concentrates on even the smallest thing that is not God, he ceases to strive for Him. This further emphasizes the rigorous characteristic of John's doctrine, but it must be remembered that the goal is to be a state in which only God fulfills human faculties:

> Any little thing that adheres to them [the faculties] in this life is sufficient to so burden and bewitch them that they do not perceive the harm or note the lack of their immense goods [which is God], or know their own capacity. It is an amazing thing that the least of these goods is enough so to encumber these faculties, capable of infinite goods, that they cannot receive these infinite goods until they are completely empty. (John of the Cross 1991c, III, 18; cf. III, 72)

The consequence of such requirements to be united with God is a well-known set of aphorisms: "To come to the knowledge of all desire the knowledge of nothing." (John of the Cross 1991a, I, 13, 11) And further on (1991a, I, 13, 12): "When you delay in something you cease to rush toward the all. For to go from the all to the all you must deny yourself of all in all. And when you come to the possession of the all you must possess it without wanting anything. Because if you desire to have something in all your treasure in God is not purely your all."

Every love, every knowledge, every possession and even movement of the senses, when it is not related to God, even the smallest, is so focused on itself that it obscures God, preventing union, since God is to be the only object to be seen after death.

So, what is the right direction for transformations that purify faith? It is getting closer to seeing God, where the intellect only admires and no longer interprets. It is a passive state when God Himself fills the human intellect with Himself. Hence, the nature of the purification of the intellect consists in the increased simplification of faith. This also explains the appearance of a period of darkness on the way to God. This darkness is associated with abandoning the anthropomorphic forms of thinking about God. This can be seen in the example of Job and Saint Peter.

When discussing the nature of contemplation, John constantly explains it by stating how man becomes equal to God in the action of his faculties. In the following text, we read that what individual faculties are to be cleansed of is, of course, all that

is not God in them. At the same time, it should be noted that the presence of this something is the result of the activity of the faculties. Hence, the action of contemplation is to lead to complete passivity of the faculties, and purification must reach the deepest essence of man. Therefore, it is not surprising that the purification to which man must be subjected is something terrible for him.

> That the intellect reach union with the divine light and become divine in the state of perfection, this dark contemplation must first purge and annihilate it of its natural light and bring it actually into obscurity. It is fitting that this darkness last as long as is necessary for the expulsion and annihilation of the intellect's habitual way of understanding, which was a long time in use, and that divine light and illumination take its place. Since that strength of understanding was natural to the intellect, the darkness it here suffers is profound, frightful, and extremely painful. This darkness seems to be substantial darkness, since it is felt in the deep substance of the spirit. (John of the Cross 1991b, II, 9, 3)

Along with the purification of the intellect at the initial stage, one can feel emptiness that God will quickly fill: "Once the soul disencumbers these faculties and empties them of everything inferior and of possessiveness in regard to superior things, leaving them alone without these things, God engages them in the invisible and divine." (John of the Cross 1991d, 35, 5)

5.3. Contemplation as the Purification of the Intellect

In this way, we can render the process of cognition taking place in a believer who has imperfect faith. On the one hand, he fulfills the acts of faith. These acts are both divine, because they refer to revelation, and human, because man accepts this revelation in his own way. On the other hand, faith opens man to the direct communication of God in contemplation. As a result, God Himself, pouring His presence into the human intellect, becomes a direct and experimentally present object of its cognition. This means that a believer has in his intellect both the image of God based on faith and God that directly infuses Himself into the human mind. The image of God received on the basis of faith is certainly imperfect in some aspect due to the activity of the human intellect interpreting revelation. On the other hand, this direct presence of God in man adapts man to the future direct vision of God and thus gradually silences the activity of the intellect consisting in the interpretation of revelation, because according to the principle adopted by John, two contraries cannot coexist in one subject: the human image of God, although stemming from faith, and God Himself. The intellect in its understanding of God purifies itself so that it becomes more and more passive, thus freeing itself from everything that distorts faith. This means that under the influence of contemplation, it prepares itself to see God. It should be noted that the same process also occurs in memory and will, according

to the nature of their action. Therefore, as part of contemplation, hope and love are also purified.

Consequently, contemplation simplifies faith by silencing all human activity of the intellect in favor of pure acceptance, making it more and more perfect: "the affections, feelings, and apprehensions of the perfect spirit, because they are divine, are of another sort and are so eminent and so different from the natural that their actual and habitual possession demands the annihilation and expulsion of the natural affections and apprehensions." (John of the Cross 1991b, II, 9, 2)

A feature of the light of contemplation, which is God in His simplicity, is simplicity and purity. He can infuse Himself in a man and it is takes place during contemplation, when the faculties are passive. This state of passivity is identical with the purity of the faculties: "the spirit must be simple, pure, and naked as to all natural affections, actual and habitual, in order to be able to communicate freely in fullness of spirit with the divine wisdom." (John of the Cross 1991b, II, 9, 1)

The fruit of the purifying action of contemplation is to make the action of the soul faculties divine. This means that God becomes their object, and they, in turn, remain passive. Nevertheless, these are still human faculties: "My intellect departed from itself, changing from human and natural to divine. For united with God through this purgation, it no longer understands by means of its natural vigor and light, but by means of the divine wisdom to which it was united." (John of the Cross 1991b, II, 4, 2; cf. II, 13, 11)

A "new" man arises as for the way of action and henceforth freely allows God to fill his own intellect and other faculties with His presence.

Conclusion (And Broader Context)

The aim phrased in the introduction, related to the clarification of rules governing the transformation of human cognition under the influence of contemplation, narrows down to an emphasis of two issues. According to the Saint, the process undergone by the human cognition during the dark night, leading to union with God, aims to prepare one for seeing God after death. It seems that John of the Cross shares with Thomas Aquinas the view, though he does not mention it, that contemplation of God after death will rely on possessing God as the sole object of human cognition. Moreover, John suggests that then, the intellect will be seeing the divine essence only passively, which we can understand as that the intellect, on its part, will no longer perform any acts related to interpreting that which it is seeing. This results in the generality of cognizing God, which occurs during the lifetime of a person united with God (only after death will this cognition be of specific character). John, showing the path undergone by the human cognition that prepares the man for seeing God,

depicts the purification of the human intellect as liberating it from all cognitive forms produced by the man. The same process is also undergone by faith. Transition from the imperfect faith to the purified faith relies upon progressive liberation of the intellect from anthropomorphic ways of cognizing God. Generality is the first feature of the cognition that contemplation is.

For the sake of complementing the understanding of contemplation in the teaching of John of the Cross, it is worth recalling its other features, which were not analyzed in this article in detail. And so, the second feature of contemplation, at the same distinguishing it from other types of the knowledge about God, is that it is the knowledge that flows from love, as it is love that causes conversion and drawing closer to God. When love increases, cognition of God intensifies, though there is no increase in concepts that bring closer to Him. Hence, the reason for growth in getting to know God is growth in love, not the perfection of reasoning. John writes:

> This divine contemplation has the property of being secret and above one's natural capacity, not merely because it is supernatural but also because it is the way that guides the soul to the perfections of union with God [. . .]. Speaking mystically, as we are here, the divine things and perfections are not known as they are in themselves while they are being sought and acquired, but when they are already found and acquired. (John of the Cross 1991b, II, 17, 7)

In other words: mystical cognition is not about thinking, but about opening up to God through love. Only then does He allow us to experience Himself directly. However, getting to know Him through intellectual search does not give this type of knowledge.

Thirdly, contemplation is more tasting than comprehending the particulars of the doctrine. Writing to a certain nun, John mentions this type of knowledge and compares it to theological (speculative) knowledge that includes only the informative aspect of faith: "Even though Your Reverence lacks training in scholastic theology, through which the divine truths are understood, you are not wanting in mystical theology, which is known through love and by which these truths are not only known but at the same time enjoyed." (John of the Cross 1991d, "Prologue," 3) This enjoyment of God—that is, experiencing certain feelings or spiritual emotions—is getting to know Him directly without the necessary prior theoretical knowledge.

Therefore, contemplation is the emotional presence of God (John of the Cross 1991d, 11, 4) which arises thanks to the mutual sharing and union of loving God and man (1991c, III, 24). At this point, it should be remembered that spiritual feelings are completely different, because they are higher than those we usually have in mind. They also have a different nature than the emotions that psychology mentions. Contemplation, in its final phase, is a kind of enjoyment of God that brings us closer to seeing Him.

Fourthly, as it is a knowledge resulting from love that provides closeness, therefore, a mystic will not explain very well what he feels. At the same time, however, he more and more unwaveringly abides by such-known God. His knowledge, being close to seeing, gives him more confidence than any other knowledge. This knowledge is the most important, because it relates to getting to know what is the most crucial in the absolute sense, i.e. God, hence this knowledge is of an existential character. John of the Cross equates mysticism with wisdom and distinguishes it from scientific knowledge, which he values less because it relies on details concerning God:

> The reason is that God transcends the intellect and is incomprehensible and inaccessible to it. Hence while the intellect is understanding, it is not approaching God but withdrawing from him. It must withdraw from itself and from its knowledge so as to journey to God in faith, by believing and not understanding. [. . .] Since the intellect cannot understand the nature of God, it must journey in surrender to him rather than by understanding, and thus it advances by not understanding. For its own well-being, the intellect should be doing what you condemn; that is, it should avoid busying itself with particular knowledge, for it cannot reach God through this knowledge, which would rather hinder it in its advance toward him. (John of the Cross 1991c, III, 48; cf. 1991a, II, 16, 7)

Such a drawn up background reveals the uniqueness of contemplation as a special form of cognizing God. Human intellect in its natural acts of seeking God, whether through metaphysical thinking or discovering His signs in creation, produces an image of God subject to the world it lives in. Satisfying oneself with such an image of God makes uniting with Him impossible. It is also Revelation, which is the basis of faith, that employs images derived from the created reality in order to say something true about God. A man beginning to live in faith, setting their mind on God while simultaneously opening up to Him, involuntarily thinks of God in anthropomorphic categories. Such a form of cognition does not allow for uniting with God. It is only contemplation, understood as God pouring into the human faculties, and hence the intellect, that gradually allows to make human cognition based on faith a pure reception of God. Only then, when God Himself will become the proper object of human cognition, will the man unite with Him.

Translated by Karol Matysiak

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Via Ethica in Justifying the Credibility of Christianity and the Church According to Marian Rusecki

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Abstract: The article presents *via ethica* in justifying the credibility of Christianity and the Church according to Marian Rusecki (1942–2012). The professor from Lublin, although he was the creator of both the so-called models and an impressive set of credibility arguments, he did not comprehensively develop *via ethica*. The purpose of the article is to present the basic assumptions of that type of argumentation found in his work. A thorough analysis of his scientific achievements allowed for a critical synthesis and a comprehensive exposition of the methodological conditions of *via ethica* in Rusecki's approach. In demonstrating the credibility of Christianity and the Church, within *via ethica*, the fundamental issue is to define the relationship between religion and ethics. There are many different relations between them and they need each other, therefore, it is a mistake to separate them or to reduce religion only to ethical principles. The foundation of *via ethica* is the individual existence and dignity of man; these constitute the priority values of religion and ethics. The promotion of the revealed dignity of the human person and the apologia for the human rights that stem from it constitute the credibility of the Christian ethos. The absolutely unique feature of Christianity is the ethos of following Jesus Christ. According to Rusecki, the essence of *via ethica* is based on the outright uniqueness of Christian ethics. Ethical indications constitute the originality of Christianity in relation to other religions.

Keywords: v*ia ethica*, Jesus Christ, credibility of Christianity, ethics, religion, human dignity

The aim of fundamental theology is to study and demonstrate the credibility of Christianity and the Church. Therefore, within the framework of fundamental ecclesiology, which is integrally related to fundamental Christology, paths (*viae*) have been developed to demonstrate the credibility of the Ecclesia: *via notarum*, *via paradoxae*, *via historica*, *via communionis*, *via testimonii*, *via empirica*, *via significationis*, *via essentiae*, *via finalitatis*, *via prophetarum*, *via dialogica*, *via ethica* (Seweryniak 1997, 27–48; 2010, 14–23; Artemiuk 2019, 56; Kaucha 2005, 92). The essence is to demonstrate the absolute uniqueness and credibility of Christianity and the Church. Since the Ecclesia is a personal reality and thus living and dynamic, demonstrating its originality and credibility requires a holistic, ever new and in-depth reflection.

In Poland, after the Second Vatican Council, research on justifying the credibility of Christianity and the Church was conducted by Rev. Prof. Marian Rusecki (1942–2012) (Rychlicki 2013, 241–42; Kaucha 2013, 5–12; Kaucha and Mastej 2019, 952–68). The most important assumptions of the credibility assessment project are

included by the theologian from Lubllin in, e.g., the paper *Modele uzasadnień wiarygodności chrześcijaństwa* [Models for Justifying the Credibility of Christianity], which he delivered during the Second International Congress of Fundamental Theology in Lublin (September 18–21, 2001) (Rusecki 2001d, 355–402).[1] Moreover, the issue of the credibility of the Church is covered in many of his publications (Rusecki 2014, 42–44, 281–96; 1994a, 143–56; 1993b, 377–90; Kaucha 2007, 133–45; 2018, 91–99). The purpose of this article is to show the basic assumptions of *via ethica* according to the professor from Lublin. Although he did not comprehensively develop *via ethica* as a way of justifying the credibility of Christianity and the Church, one can find premises in his work that allow identifying the essential assumptions and elements of that type of argumentation.

1. Religion *vs*. Ethics

In demonstrating the credibility of Christianity and the Church, within *via ethica*, the fundamental issue is to define the relationship between religion and ethics. The theologian from Lublin addresses the above issue when discussing the genesis of religion (Rusecki 2007b, 174–79; 1997c, 135–39).

Thus, he emphasizes the significance of ethics in the process of demonstrating the uniqueness of religion. The professor's presentation of the relationship between religion and ethics begins by describing two extreme views, i.e., the identification of religion with ethics and the radical separation of the two.[2] In his opinion, the identification of religion with ethics and morality is evident in everyday life, an example of which is the belief of many that "religion comes down to morally good behavior: religion is nothing more than a field of study dealing with human moral norms and behavior. Sometimes it is even said that it does not matter what a person believes in and what convictions one has, as long as one acts honestly." (Rusecki 2007b, 174–75) The theologian from Lublin associates the first attempt at the so--called scientific reduction of religion to ethics with Immanuel Kant, who, although denied the possibility and value of a rational justification of the existence of God and religion, recognized its need in social life for practical reasons—he considered ethics to be the only basis of religion (Rusecki 1997c, 135; Kowalczyk 1986, 322). According to the German philosopher, "ethics is the field of science dealing with the moral law inherent in man and relating free human acts to it. Every man is aware of a sense of moral duty and respect for moral norms. In essence, this is what religion also comes

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1   German-language version of the paper: Rusecki 2001a, 355–402.
2   "Whereas formerly it was more common to equate those two fields, reducing religion to ethics or morality, today, some circles want to radically oppose the two realities." (Rusecki 2007b, 175)

down to." (Rusecki 2007b, 175) Ultimately, Kant not only seeks the basis of religion in ethics but also reduces the role and significance of religion to tasks typical of ethics (Kowalczyk 1986, 322). Rusecki, referring to the attempts to replace religion with ethics, considers such a postulate to be groundless and unjustified.

The radical separation of ethics from religion is found in views that reject the need for religion, i.e., primarily in atheistic, materialistic or secular directions (Rusecki 2007b, 175). The extreme separation of ethics from religion, however, raises the problem of determining the source of the moral norms a person should follow and, consequently, the way of justifying sanctions resulting from non-compliance. Although the simplest solution to that seems to be a reference to natural law, according to Rusecki, the issue of the origin of natural law and the legitimacy of the universal validity of the ethical principles derived from it needs to be dealt with (Rusecki 2007b, 175; Wojtyła 1959, 99–124; Krąpiec 1983, 220–236; 1968, 11–37; Rosik 1964, 39–57). For if one assumes that binding norms have their source in the interpersonal arrangement, there is a justified concern as to their permanence, since "the changing human will under the influence of certain ideologies, especially totalitarian ones, would decide about the right to life, significance, fate, vocation, destiny of man, family, nations." (Rusecki 2007b, 176) In the opinion of the theologian from Lublin, a tradition to exclude religious ethics from the applicable moral norms would also be accompanied by the temptation to disregard and break the binding rules, e.g., to "become a 'precursor' of future good in the future, 'better' times." (Rusecki 2007b, 176) Secular ethics has other drawbacks, including "the lack of sufficiently strong motives for moral conduct and moral sanctions." (Rusecki 1997c, 137) The above-presented reasons, although not sufficient to completely negate the possibility of the existence of secular ethics, nevertheless reveal doubts as to its origin and the validity of the justification for its application in individual and social life.

After critically presenting the two extreme views on the relationship between religion and ethics, Rusecki moves on to discuss their distinctiveness and the mutual need that exists between them. In his opinion, the fundamental difference lies in the fact that

> the whole person is involved in religious cognition and experience, while in the case of ethics, the dominant role is played by will. [. . .] In ethics and morality, man strives for good, which one realizes through actions. In a sense, it can be said that the ultimate pursued goal is the absolute good, the ideal, which man wants to achieve and realize to some extent. In religion, which is based on a living connection between man and God, the goal is never a creation of man but is given. It existed before and independently of man. (Rusecki 2007b, 178; cf. Krąpiec 1991, 242–44; Zdybicka 1993, 375–76)

The above statement emphasizes the professor's position on the issue of the genesis of religion, i.e., that there is always divine revelation at its origin (Borto 2018, 50–51;

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Ledwoń 2018, 122–23). The adopted theological-religious perspective cannot constitute a basis for stating that the absolute good pursued by a non-religious person is only their creation. The theologian from Lublin only claims that a believer finds in religion a reference to God, who embodies the absolute good.

The professor believes that the relationship between religion and ethics is vital and consists in the fact that ethics is a necessary element of religion:

> ethics always falls within the scope of religion. There is no religion without ethics, without principles of moral conduct. Alongside the set of truths of faith, worship and organization, ethics is one of the essential structural elements of religion, which is fully understandable since every religion through, e.g., moral and right conduct is the way to achieve salvation. (Rusecki 2007b, 178)

The concept of the revelatory genesis of religion promoted by Rusecki also emphasizes the objective character of ethical principles conveyed by non-Christian religions, as they refer to revelation.

According to the theologian from Lublin, just as religion needs ethics, ethics needs religion. Justifying that thesis, he states that

> religion, if it is revealed, provides man with fully true rules of conduct (independent of the changeable human will, conditioned by many factors), which are inalterable [...]. Moreover, religion provides the deepest motives for morally good conduct, which boil down to the salvific will of God wishing to save man [...]. Religious moral principles teach consistency between inner beliefs and external conduct, hence it is possible to avoid internal division in man. Religion also points to the sanctions of immoral behavior. (Rusecki 2007b, 178–79)

Bearing in mind the essential connection between ethics and religion, the professor also notes and emphasizes their social and culture-forming role. Both religion and ethics contribute to the preservation of a certain social order (Rusecki 2006b, 219–21). Thus, religion and ethics are an indispensable part of human life, as they set norms and rules of conduct, both on an individual and social level.[3] Religion and

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3   At this point, it is worth mentioning the professor's appeal to scientists to maintain the ethical character of research and scientific discoveries. Those conducting scientific work should be guided by principles characterized by respect for the dignity and rights of the human person, as only then can they serve the common good: "[...] science often serves evil aspirations, contributing to, for example, the degradation of the environment, violation of human life, human dignity, human rights (abortion, *in vitro*, experiments on human embryos), contributing to the development of increasingly modern weapons. What is the reason for that? In short, research and scientific discoveries must take ethical principles into account. Their application without an ethical dimension breeds chaos, disintegration in social life, strikes at the dignity of the human person and becomes a threat to man and even to humanity as a whole. The issue of ethics in science must be considered a particularly important area. John Paul II repeatedly taught about the primacy of ethics over technology and, above all, the priority of a person over a thing. Scientific

ethics are an inspiration for broadly understood culture, contributing to the creative involvement of man in the culture formed by a human being. On the other hand, however, religion and ethics, with the good of man and the human community in mind, set boundaries for the creators of culture.

There is a relationship of mutual synergy between the basic principles of secular ethics and Christian morality. The Church, while respecting the autonomy of secular (natural) ethics, acknowledges the primacy of revealed ethics. At the same time, it claims that the fundamental ethical principles derived from natural law and the Old Testament law expressed in God's commandments were completed by Jesus Christ. Thus, Christian morality fulfills, enriches and organizes the principles of natural ethics in what concerns human conduct, the meaning and purpose of human life and the ultimate fulfillment of the human person. Rusecki emphasizes that Christian ethics, which promotes specific conduct and values, has for centuries inspired man to develop creatively, both on an individual as well as social level. Christianity motivates the believers to live by faith and mobilizes "to achieve the highest values and truth, goodness, beauty, love, holiness and ultimate fulfillment thanks to them and in them." (Rusecki 1997a, 517; cf. Rusecki 1989, 161–76; cf. also Zdybicka 1989, 137–48; Słomka 1989, 159–78)

2. Personal Existence and Dignity of the Human Person as the Foundation of *Via Ethica*

According to the theologian from Lublin, the foundation of *via ethica* is the individual existence and dignity of man (Mastej 2023b, 94–98). These have their basis in God's creation of man in God's image and likeness, as mentioned in the Bible (cf. Gen 1:26–27; 2:7) (Rusecki 2007a, 161; 1992, 451). As a result of God's creative act, man came into existence as a person.[4] Man's personal existence is made evident, on the one hand, in the resemblance of a human being to the Creator and, on the other hand, in their distinctiveness from all other creation. Man has a unique personal structure, which is expressed above all by the possession of reason, free will, the capacity to love, the search for truth, the ability to ethically behave, the ability to create culture, and the desire for eternal life (Rusecki 2007b, 164, 237). Personal existence is expressed by means of rational, conscious and free action in the area of ethics and moral responsibility. Rusecki points out that "it is the very sphere of spiritual

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research must be linked to ethics; only on that condition will it not be a threat to man but will serve the common good, the person and humanity." (Rusecki 2008, 95)

4   The primacy of the human person constitutes the uniqueness of Christianity, as Rusecki recognizes: "It must be said that the concept of man is absolutely characteristic of Christianity and is even its property." (2010, 364; cf. Rusecki 2006b, 227–28; 2007a, 162; 2006a, 139–44; 1995, 25)

life, causing the subjective existence of man, that makes man similar to God [...].” (2007a, 163; cf. Rusecki 2012, 204; 2014, 84) The dignity of the human person is the foundation of ethics, which safeguards human rights and defines the duties of man. The professor explains that

> in Christian philosophy, scholastic and neo-scholastic theology, the image and likeness of God were considered to be the two highest powers of man, which distinguish a human being from the world of other creatures, i.e., rationality and free will. These powers are functions of the soul created by God—by His breath. (Rusecki 2014, 83; cf. Borto 2022, 775–88)

At this point, it should be noted that rationality and free will attest to the personal existence of man and God’s giving man the ability to act morally and, consequently, to take responsibility for own actions.

For *via ethica*, the fact that man in the act of creation was endowed by God with a conscience that enables man to meet God is also crucial (Rusecki 2010, 343–44). Through a conscience, God conducts a dialogue with man, the purpose of which is the spiritual development of the individual, the maintenance of personal dignity and helping to respect others. Rusecki reminds that

> conscience, being a special moral sense of man, regulating their conduct and the ultimate norm for judging human actions, is a special sphere of God’s action in man. Conscience is often considered either a divine law inscribed in the human heart or the voice of God in man (cf. Sir 17:6–7; Lam 3:40–42; 2 Cor 1:12; Rom 2:14n). (Rusecki 2007a, 166; cf. Rusecki 2011, 45)

Created by God, man was also invited into the relationship—to participate in the dialogue of love and in God’s life. The obstacle to the realization of that communion became man’s sin. God’s response to man’s disobedience was redemption. The theologian from Lublin recalls the Christian truth: “man is therefore not only created but redeemed and invited into eternal dialogue with God. That dialogue elevates man above all beings, for a human being has become a partner of God, the Infinite Person.” (Rusecki 2007a, 165) The work of redemption, i.e., the reconciliation of man with God and the renewal of the human existence tainted by sin, was accomplished by Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God. In His person, there is not only a perfect union of the divine nature with human nature but also the reconciliation of humanity with God (Rusecki 2007a, 167).

Since personal existence and human dignity constitute priority religious and ethical values, Christianity guards them, guarantees respect and their defense: “[. . .] Christianity proclaims the primacy of the right to life and its value from the moment of conception to natural death. It defends that principle uncompromisingly, with no exception. It does not give permission to the experiments on human

embryos, a kind of eugenics of the purity of the 'scientific race.'" (Rusecki 2011, 49; cf. Rusecki 2006b, 228–29) The fundamental right related to the dignity of a human person is that to life from the moment of conception to natural death (Rusecki 2011, 49). The promotion of the revealed dignity of the human person and the apologia for the human rights that stem from it constitute the credibility of the Christian ethos.

3. The Christian Ethos of Following Jesus Christ

A truly unique feature of Christianity is the ethos of following Jesus Christ (Seweryniak 2010, 22). *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* explains it as follows:

> In all of his life Jesus presents himself as our model. He is "the perfect man," who invites us to become his disciples and follow him. In humbling himself, he has given us an example to imitate, through his prayer he draws us to pray, and by his poverty he calls us to accept freely the privations and persecutions that may come our way. Christ enables us to live in him all that he himself lived, and he lives it in us. (*CCC* 520–521)

With the above statement from the Catechism in mind, first, a reference is made to the earthly life of Jesus from the perspective of a personal role model, and then, the flagship elements of the Christian ethos are indicated.

The life of Jesus of Nazareth is a testimony to an unprecedented relationship with the Father, revealed to His disciples as His personal experience of God. In His earthly life, the Son constantly experiences closeness to the Father, knows Him and is one with Him (Rusecki 2000, 63; Szymik 2021, 80). The Evangelists testify that Jesus often spends time in prayer, which is a personal relationship between the Son and the Father. He knows that he has received a mission from the Father, the purpose of which is to reveal God's love and to accomplish the work of man's redemption (Rusecki and Popławski 2002, 785). The Son completes that mission through perfect obedience to the Father, which is the antidote to human, sinful disobedience.

In the life of Jesus, His pro-existential attitude is clear as He identifies with the poor, the hungry, the persecuted, the sick, the suffering and the abandoned (Rusecki 2007a, 433; Mastej 2023a, 356–57). He brings comfort, forgiveness, love and peace to people, which is especially noticeable in His attitude towards those on the peripheries of socio-religious life as well as women and children (Rusecki 1994b, 240; 1987, 123; Mastej 2001, 187; Seweryniak 2001, 236–41). Kindness towards those who need help is more important for Him than the Old Testament sacrifices made to God (cf. Matt 9:13; 12:7). The attitude of Jesus towards people expecting help from Him is revealed by the miracles He performs (Rusecki 2014, 34; 2002, 153; 1990, 75).

These reveal His concern for man; both in the temporal and supernatural dimensions (Rusecki 2007a, 273–74; 1990, 79–81; 1997b, 151–202; 1996, 408–26; 2001c; Mastej 2018, 60–63; 2023a, 357–59). Jesus reveals His love most fully through His passion and death on the cross and resurrection. In the Paschal Mystery, His pro-existential attitude is love to the end. Relating the pro-existential attitude of Jesus to the Christian life, Rusecki states:

> a characteristic feature of Christian morality is also its pro-existential character. It directs the Christian towards others, forms in them the attitude of love towards their neighbors [...]. It is expressed in the lifelong commitment of the follower of Jesus Christ to other people. In that respect, morality in Christianity is closely linked to supernatural *agape*, constituting a further argument for the credibility of Christianity. Here, too, it is closely linked to love, which is the perfect fulfillment of the law. (Rusecki 2007b, 480; cf. Rusecki 1993a, 229–47; cf. also Kaucha 2002, 31–35; Sokołowski 2007, 41–59)

The model for living left by Jesus reveals the truth about man and man's call to a relationship with God and people (Rusecki 2006c, 241). Jesus is the fullness of anthropological revelation, because the deepest essence of man is shown in Him. Jesus Christ is both God and perfect Man and, therefore, "manifests the greatness of man in the eyes of God." (Rusecki 2007a, 278) From Revelation comes the teaching that man's life cannot be limited only to the natural and immanent dimension, since man's personal existence definitely transcends it. Therefore, a transcendent eschatological dimension must complement the perspective of man's existence and meaning (Rusecki 2007a, 278). Jesus is "the ideal Man, the model and standard of human existence and the way to the fullness of humanity, which is attainable only in God, i.e., ultimately in eschatological reality." (Rusecki 2007a, 167) Taking a biblical-theological perspective, the professor unequivocally states: "without Christ, man could not exist at all, and after the fall of the first people, he could not achieve salvation, become a child of God, fulfill his deepest desires, and achieve self-realization." (Rusecki 1997c, 218) Continuing Rusecki's thought, one must add that

> the unique feature of Christian morality is conversion (Greek *metanoia*). It is a complete change of life—of thinking and acting—prompted by acceptance of the word of God. Every Christian is called to a constant conversion of his or her heart. This shows that conversion is never a one-time act, but a long-term process, linked to an existential effort. (Rusecki 2007b, 479)

A specific feature of Christian morality is that it presents the rules of conduct from a positive perspective, unlike many other religions, which present moral norms from the negative perspective. Jesus' message revealed in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt 5:1–7:29; Luke 6:17–49) is a signpost on the path of personal development of

man, which Rusecki emphasizes in his writing: "in this sense Christian morality has an eminently progressive and dynamic character at the same time, which does not have some end point, but is subject to constant improvement in love for the brethren in imitation of Jesus Christ." (2007b, 479) The New Testament's moral message covers all areas of human life (Rusecki 2011, 47).

Christianity offers man "a new horizon of existence and the possibility of becoming, developing, growing to resemble the supreme personal Being, participating in His life. [...] The inner bond with God encompasses and mysteriously permeates the entire human being, the entire existence of the human being, the entire human 'I.'" (Rusecki 2001b, 124) In Rusecki's view, in Christianity "man through faith and baptism is given a new existence, even a new ontology." (2011, 128) Through this, the believer is given the opportunity for personal and moral perfection, in the image of Christ. The anthropogenic significance of Christianity lies in showing man a sure path leading to moral and personal perfection. Rusecki points out that the sacraments, the word of God, liturgy, prayer, and the daily life of faith have an important role in such an understanding of human personalization (Rusecki and Mastej 2009, 117; Rusecki 2014, 169). The all-round development of man "on the path of following Jesus becomes the true *via ethica* of ecclesial credibility." (Seweryniak 2010, 22)

Rusecki (2001d, 371) points to modern man's anthropological demand for the fullness of being and the need for the final personal fulfillment. At the same time, believers realize they cannot fulfill this deepest longing on their own, so they need supernatural help. The essence of the path Jesus reveals to man is filial obedience to the Father and boundless love for people. Rusecki identifies the Christian desire for moral perfection with the pursuit of holiness and emphasizes that "holiness is not a state that is acquired only after death, it originates from baptism and develops during earthly history." (2010, 247) At the same time, the professor stresses that the Ecclesia equips believers with supernatural means to help them achieve moral perfection. However, he notes that "supernatural life, that is, divine values, can be embodied in the lives of believers in various ways, from an outstanding degree—as is the case in the lives of heroic Christians, or saints—to an average or even minimal degree [...]." (Rusecki 1997a, 519) The primary issue is man's openness to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, willingness to cooperate with God's grace, and consistent observance of the Gospel.

The essence of the *via ethica* is founded on the absolute uniqueness of Christian ethics. Rusecki stresses that "the commandment of love is central to Jesus' teaching. He makes it the absolute principle of the Christian life. We should love God above all things, each other, and even our enemies. We are to love God in our neighbors." (2000, 63) The professor states:

What distinguishes Christian morality from other religions, however, is the Person of Jesus Christ. The Incarnate Son of God, the ultimate Lawgiver, proclaimed the new law

and fulfilled it perfectly. The Master of Nazareth made the moral value of an act solely dependent on one's inner disposition, thereby laying the foundations for a new morality and even, according to R. Schnackenburg, the foundations for morality in general. Jesus also draws attention to the necessity of replacing the spirit of the Law with the spirit of love. The commandment to love (even one's enemies), uniquely realized in His atoning death on the cross, has special significance against this background. At the same time, He instructed His disciples to abide by it. Notably, this commandment of love has no precedent in the history of religion and is not an element of morality in any religious doctrine. In this sense, the commandment speaks to the credibility of the claims of Jesus Christ. (Rusecki 2007b, 479)

Jesus reveals a new ethic that is not about the literal fulfillment of the law, but the love of God and neighbor, including enemies. Christianity is not just a matter of conviction, accomplished only on an intellectual level, but also a decision of the will, that is, an entirely personal commitment to Christ, accepting His person and trusting Him, following Him and living in union with Him. Therefore, as a revealed and salvific religion, Christianity is a value for man that unites and accomplishes the highest good, namely God and eternal life with Him. To achieve this good, it is necessary to live according to Jesus' instructions in the Gospels. The moral principles presented by Christianity are not the product of the human mind, but were revealed by the Incarnate Son of God (Rusecki 2011, 44–45). The divine origin provides guarantees of their truthfulness and salvific effectiveness. The ethical credibility of Christianity is confirmed by the saints and the blessed because in their lives, evangelical principles found fulfillment and proved effective.

Finally, it is worth adding that Rusecki (2010, 257–59), in discussing the following Jesus throughout the history of Christianity, also emphasizes the charitable ministry of the Church. Thus, he highlights the practical and humanistic character of the *via ethica*. The active love of Christ's followers is a clear sign for the world of Christianity and the Church's credibility. According to the professor, the way of demonstrating the credibility of the Church by referring to Christian ethics should also highlight its contribution to culture, especially education, literature, architecture, art, and Christian music (Rusecki 2001b, 131–97; 2011, 64–126). Indeed, the referenced cultural fields have multiple relationships with Christian ethics.

Conclusions and Topicality of *Via Ethica*

Summing up the subject matter covered, it must be said that while Rusecki dealt with the issue of the credibility of Christianity and the Church and is the creator of both the so-called models and an impressive collection of credibility arguments, he

did not clearly define the methodological conditions of *via ethica*, nor did he build a separate ethical argument. Significantly, however, we find elements of *via ethica* in much of his scientific legacy. Making them clear was the purpose of this paper.

This research highlights the most relevant methodological considerations of *via ethica* of Rev. Prof. Rusecki:

1) Ethics and religion remain in manifold relations with each other and need each other; therefore, it is a mistake to separate them or to reduce religion only to ethical principles.

2) Christianity is a revealed and salvific religion; therefore, its essence cannot be reduced to a set of ethical principles alone.

3) The foundation of *via ethica* is the individual existence and dignity of man; these constitute the priority values of religion and ethics.

4) The promotion of the revealed dignity of the human person and the apologia for the human rights that stem from it constitute the credibility of the Christian ethos.

5) Moral principles are an essential and necessary element of Christianity, but they do not exhaust and replace it.

6) The whole beauty and essence and meaning of Christian ethics can only be understood in the perspective of reason and faith, which allow us to recognize and discover the supernatural source of Christian morality, which is Jesus Christ the Incarnate Son of God.

7) In Jesus Christ, ethical principles find their justification and the certainty of eternal reward for obeying them or punishment for disregarding them.

8) Christian moral principles regarding respect for human life from conception to natural death have been revealed to man by God and therefore cannot be freely changed, even by democratic vote or referendum.

9) Christian morality is the complement and fulfillment of the law resulting from God's creative act, so the Church does not depreciate the value of ethics based on natural law, because the Church believes that it can assist man's development.

10) Christian moral principles correspond to man's nature and to man's eternal search for value and for a way to achieve personal perfection.

11) The human person needs God's help for personal fulfillment in the deepest dimensions of existence.

12) A unique feature of Christianity is the ethos of following Jesus Christ; morality is not merely a set of norms but a way of living by faith, which leads man to full union with the Triune God.

13) Christian ethics constitutes the originality and absolute uniqueness of Christianity compared to other religions.

14) *Via ethica* collaborates with other ways of justifying the credibility of Christianity and the Church (e.g., from sanctity; martyrological, agapetological, bonative, veritative, culturalist, axiological, praxeological comparativist, personalist).

Rusecki's *via ethica* is personalistic in nature. The professor strongly dissociates himself from a noetic view of the principles of Christian morality. Instead, he links them with the person of Jesus Christ, from whom they originate, and with the person of man, who has been invited to accept and realize them in life. The personal character of the ecclesial community, which is both the Tradent of the revealed moral norms and their definitive interpreter, is also important.

Rusecki's *via ethica* can provide an important point of reference for contemporary debates on ethical and religious and social issues, especially when questions arise about the universal foundations of morality, the dignity of the human person, the place of religion in social life, the need to shape attitudes and educate for values (Wszołek 2021, 103–22; Pabich 2020, 383–400; Zubrzycka-Maciąg 2018, 149–62). The professor's emphasis that the dignity of the human person comes from God can be used as an important starting point in contemporary bioethical discourses and discussions on human rights, new technologies such as artificial intelligence, or the limits of biotechnology research such as human cloning and genetic experimentation (Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith 2024; Chyrowicz 2009, 1–25; Sinkiewicz and Chudzińska 2018, 7–24).

Remembering the unchanging yet universal Christian moral principles present in Rusecki's work, as well as showing the elements and manner of justifying the credibility of Christianity and the Church in the *via ethica*, is important in the context of the contemporary confrontation with the idea of the "dictatorship" of relativism, which Pope Benedict XVI has alerted believers to (Warzeszak 2011, 291–322). Therefore, Rusecki's *via ethica* is a significant alternative to relativism, as it proposes an ethic based on objective and unchanging norms rooted in God's revealed truth and guaranteed respect for the dignity of the human person. However, it should be recognized that such a conditioned Christian foundation of morality may be difficult to accept by those who do not acknowledge the supernatural origin of ethical principles, moreover, they are guided by the belief that the defense of universal and fixed moral principles is an expression of intolerance and limits their freedom.

Bearing in mind contemporary worldview debates, the *via ethica* should seek new platforms for dialogue with people with different worldviews, while preserving the fundamental ethical principles proclaimed by the Church. This task is difficult, since relativism, which assumes that truth and moral values are changeable and depend on subjective feelings and sociocultural situations rather than objective norms, is sometimes considered the most important principle of individual and social life. By demonstrating the disastrous consequences of relativism for man (e.g., rejection of objective moral principles causes confusion in interpersonal relations and instrumental treatment of the human person), Rusecki appeals for an unambiguous witness of Christian life, highlighting values such as truth, goodness, love, solidarity, sacrifice, justice, freedom. In his view, it is these values that modern man longs for.

His *via ethica* also reveals new possibilities for ethical reflection in the perspective of interreligious dialogue. His proposed concept of religion's revelatory genesis invites a comprehensive ethical argument referring to the transcendent origin and universal validity of ethical principles. Since religion originates in divine revelation and the principles of moral life belong to its essence, they thus have a supernatural genesis. The difficulty is that Rusecki himself does not conclusively assert the revealed origin of specific religions (with the exception of Judaism and Christianity), and thus does not affirm the supernatural origin of the moral principles present in them. However, this does not undermine the value of the professor's achievements but opens up the possibility for further research, development, and reinterpretation of the *via ethica* in justifying the credibility of Christianity and the Church in the spirit of new challenges.

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Shaping Love Through Contemplation According to St. Titus Brandsma OCarm (1881–1942)

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Abstract: The article is a theological-spiritual analysis of the teaching of St. Titus Brandsma (Anno Sjoerd Brandsma), a Dutch professor and martyr from Dachau, who lived in the years 1881–1942. This study seeks to show that in the Carmelite's opinion, the contemplation (active and passive) of transcendent Love serves man in the formation of human love—for God, for people and for all creatures. In this way, mysticism does not alienate man, but introduces him to concrete reality, inspiring him to deep commitment and taking responsibility for himself and others. This is of particular importance in the ongoing spiritual battle between good and evil—individual and social. Seeing the dangers of the anti-human ideology of Nazism, Fr. Titus, seeing the dangers of the anti-human ideology of Nazism, tried to show contemplation as a way to return to the Truth and as a chance to save the human family. The analysis carried out in this study, focusing more on the substantive aspect of the writings and less on their chronology, makes it possible to discover the logic, coherence, and originality of Brandsma's thought.

Keywords: contemplation, love, person, development, nature, mysticism, Brandsma, Carmel, spirituality

Although the word "love" is not an unambiguous expression, it is most often used to describe the highest form of personal relationships, having its origin in God, who has revealed himself as the absolute love (cf. 1 John 4:16). In theological terms, love is a gracious gift of the self-giving God, a virtue necessary for salvation, directing the person towards God, towards himself (but in a completely different way than egoism), towards other created persons and—in a sense—towards the entire reality. In psychology and sociology, it is both an emotion and an attitude, as well as a principle for solving life's problems, a foundation for building civilisation. Love is a gift to the person, its most appropriate affirmation, but also an invitation to respond to this gift in an appropriate way. It is not reducible to a merely brief and spontaneous response, but demands the formation of the human heart, a proper education. And here the ever-present problem arises—how to form man for mature love? How to properly understand love?

An interesting attempt to answer these questions can be found in the life and writings of Titus Brandsma OCarm[1]—born in 1881, Dutch priest, monk, professor,

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[1] It is worth recalling his *curriculum vitae* at this point. Anno Sjoerd Brandsma (later Titus—in the Order) was born on February 23, 1881 on the Ugokloster farm near Bolsward in Friesland, the Netherlands.

philosopher, theologian, lecturer,[2] ecclesiastical assistant of the Association of Catholic Journalists, rector of the Catholic University of Nijmegen, poet and publicist, martyr of the Second World War, killed in Dachau in 1942, saint of the Catholic Church (Brandsma 1985, 132).[3]

It seems that in the rich academic legacy and other writings he included the thesis that the contemplation of God plays an unusually important role om the formation of man and his love towards the others. In this paper we will try to present this thought in a systematic way and comment on it.

The published writings of Brandsma total close to eight hundred titles; and among them are academic studies—books and articles on philosophy, sociology, mysticism, Mariology—as well as encyclopaedic entries (e.g., in the *Dictionaire de Spiritualité: Ascétique et Mystique*) (see Brandsma 2021b, 169), as well as many popular science articles (e.g., in the journal "De Gelderlander" between 1938

He was raised by loving and deeply religious parents: Gisme Postma and Titus Brandsma (Vallainc 1963, 18–19). Initially, he wanted to join the Franciscans, but due to his frail physical build, he was advised against it. And because he had a great veneration of the Mother of God, and also showed inclinations to contemplative life, in 1898 he joined the Carmelites in Boxmeer and took the name Titus—the same as his own father. In the years 1900–1905 he studied philosophy and theology in Boxmeer, Zanderen and Oss. In 1905 he was ordained a priest. In the years 1906–9 he studied philosophy in Rome at the Gregorianum University and attended lectures in sociology at the Leonianum Institute. In 1909, he defended his doctorate in philosophy and returned to the Netherlands. In the same year he began his work as a professor of philosophy in the monastery of Oss and served until 1923; at the same time, he also taught the history of the Church. Because the missions of the Church were close to his heart, in 1919 he asked to be sent as a missionary to Brazil. However, this was not put into practice. In order to help Catholic schools, in 1925 he founded the Union of the Directorate of Catholic Secondary Schools and during the German occupation he was its chairman (Sacra Congregatio 1983, 21–23). In the years 1923–42 he began working as a professor at the newly established (in 1923) Catholic University of Nijmegen. He taught there the philosophy of nature, theodicy, philosophy of history and the history of Dutch mysticism. In the years 1932–33 he was the rector of this university. In 1932, he organized the national Mariological congress. In his research work, he was keenly interested in the unity of the Churches—especially the Eastern Churches. In 1912, he founded a magazine on Carmelite culture "Karmelrozen." From 1935 he was an ecclesiastical assistant to Catholic journalists in the Netherlands. In 1940, after the German army entered the Netherlands, he opposed—as a Christian and priest—the neo-Nazi ideology. And although—as it was noted in the beatification process—no one had ever heard words against the Germans or even the Nazis from his mouth, on January 19, 1942 he was arrested and imprisoned in Arnhem, Scheveningen, Amersfoort, and finally in Kleve and Dachau (Germany). On July 26, 1942, he died in Dachau as a result of poisoning with an injection of phenic acid (Scapin 1985, 203–4; Sacra Congregatio 1983, 24–25, 81). Despite the long period of Calvary, he never regretted his apostolic activity in defense of the faith and the inviolable rights of the Catholic Church, by which he had just been imprisoned (Sacra Congregatio 1984, 73). The diocesan process began on January 11, 1955 in Nijmegen (Arribas 1998, 341). He was beatified as a martyr on November 3, 1985 by John Paul II, and canonized on May 15, 2022 by Pope Francis.

2   In fact Fr. Titus did not have a great gift for speaking and his listeners described his voice as not very "oratorical" and somewhat monotonous (Romeral 2022, 105).

3   It is worth adding here that Brandsma was not endowed with any extraordinary mystical graces or miracles (Dowlaszewicz, Jongen, and Nadbrzeżny 2013, 51); however, he did have contact with them—for in 1931 he met and spoke personally with Therese Neumann (1898–1962), a German mystic and stigmatic (Brandsma 2021a, 431).

and 1941) (see Boaga 2008, 107–8). Brandsma wrote many letters and their addressees included academics, Catholic school principals, those in charge of the Catholic press, family members, religious superiors and fellow Carmelites. He also wrote poetry (even in prison), which shows the harmony between loving God, family ties and commitment to everything that constitutes human life—often marked by suffering (Polkowski 2023, 10–21; cf. Brandsma 1985, 167–68; 2022b, 425–31).[4] After being arrested, he also kept a diary for a short period (on January 23–31, 1942) (Brandsma 1985, 149).

Throughout his life he wrote mainly in Dutch, but he also used Latin, Spanish, French, English and German language.

The primary source helpful to this study are the following:

1) Brandsma's writings—published in an English-language critical edition, in a series entitled: Collected Works of Titus Brandsma (see Brandsma 2121 a, 2021b, 2022b); and also published in other books in Italian and English;

2) documents of the canonisation process prepared by the Sacra Congregatio pro Causis Sanctorum (1983, 1984).

The more important studies on Brandsma include publications by authors such as Josse Alzin, Miguel Maria Arribas, Josef Rees, Fernando Millán Romeral, Santino Scapin and Fausto Vallainc. They are all mainly biographical, hagiographical or hagiological in character. However, they do not constitute strictly theological studies.

It is therefore all the more worthwhile to attempt to identify and discuss one of the main theological and spiritual theses contained in Brandsma's legacy. A certain difficulty may be the fact that he was not a theologian in the strict sense, but a philosopher, publicist, journalist, retreat preacher and pastor. Nevertheless, he had sufficient theological training, was passionate about Church history (and especially about the Dutch Church), and studied and cared deeply about the spiritual legacy of his entire Carmelite Order—both branches: the Discalced Carmelites and the Calced Carmelites.[5] It must also be assumed that he accepts this teaching as his own as well.

The aim of the article is to verify the hypothesis that according to the Dutch Carmelite contemplation gives the human person the ability to shape its love in the proper way—towards God, towards man and towards the world. The analysis of the writings will be focused on the substantive aspect of the Carmelite's views, at the expense of chronology, at the same time giving the opportunity to systematize them and

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[4] It is believed that the posthumously published work of Fr. Titus is the most significant for his academic output (see Bazydło 1976, 1040): *De groote heilige Teresia van Jezus* (Brandsma 1946), as well as *Werken der H. Teresia* (Brandsma 1918–26).

[5] It should be noted that although Brandsma was a Calced Carmelite, he did not dissociate himself from the legacy of the Reformed Carmel (John of the Cross and Teresa the Great), for he believed that this was a common Carmelite heritage that should unite rather than divide (Brandsma 1994, 91).

provide them with a theological commentary. So far, there has been no similar study on Brandsma's achievements.

The theme largely determines the structure of the paper; the consecutive points of the article will focus on the following topics: understanding contemplation according to Fr. Titus; building a relationship of love with God; proper shaping of relationships to others; loving creatures and the whole world in God.

The work will use the personalistic theological method (taking as the key the hermeneutic phenomenon of the human person). It will contain the following characteristic elements: historical description[6]; theological description; explanation; understanding, i.e. sketching as comprehensively as possible a picture of thoughts concerning the discussed topic in a personalistic perspective[7]; verification of the hypothesis and presentation of conclusions derived from the analysis (cf. Bartnik 1998, 201–45).

Brandsma was convinced that only Christian love is able to overcome human egoism, interpersonal anti-relations, Nazi neo-paganism. He was aware that the existence of evil in the world is caused by the fact that, as St. Francis put it, true love is not known and is not loved: *Amor non amatur* (Brandsma 1985, 127–28). For this reason, Fr. Titus wanted to proclaim to the world with his whole person the Love that can be experienced in contemplation, and through this Love people can understand and fulfill themselves in the Universe.

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[6]   *Nota bene* Brandsma himself often used this element in his academic studies. Historical description is related to the context of the words spoken or written. And although—as already mentioned—the main emphasis will not be placed on chronology, but on the content of the statement, it is nevertheless good to remember that Brandsma wrote and preached during the period of the ever-increasing threat from Nazism, also when he was already in prison. He saw how great a danger for man was posed by German nationalism, National Socialism, which were based on the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. He feared that the Christian vision would be replaced by an anti-Christian one, and this would have fatal consequences for the good and dignity of the human person, as well as of the entire community. Hence, as a lecturer in contemporary philosophy, he strongly criticized Nazism in his classes with students and strongly opposed the Dutch Nazi Movement. At the same time, he was aware that sometimes you have to pay for opposition with martyrdom and he was ready for it. He was arrested for resisting the occupation authorities, or rather he was defending the foundations of Christianity with his words, being faithful to the instructions of the Dutch bishops (Brandsma 1985, 134–35, 137, 150). It is worth adding here that Nietzsche prophesied that a man would be born who would bury the humble and weak man, and this would be an act of human liberation, and at the same time a complete rejection of God and Christianity (see Góźdź 2022, 370).

[7]   And although it is difficult to classify Brandsma as a systemic personalist, it should be noted that he affirmed the unique value of the human person. The personalistic approach will help in this study to look at various dimensions of human existence in a coherent way. The Carmelite himself also took great care of it.

1. Contemplation as Directing the Nature Towards the Supernatural

Brandsma noticed that a frequent reason for people's departure from faith, or even conscious denial of the existence of the supernatural world, is having an incorrect image of God. At the same time, he came to the conviction that attempts to direct people towards transcendence could not be limited only to apologetics, which, *nota bene* he considered sufficiently developed at that time, but that the beauty and splendour of God should be shown to them so that they could be fascinated by Him. Consequently, he saw the need to present God in a new way, with new concepts, clear for contemporary culture. He claimed that new times need new forms of expression (cf. Brandsma 1985, 187–88).

Father Titus hoped that man could be defended against moral evil, existential emptiness, by appealing to human nature, which is open to love. Since the experience of love is stronger than theory, Brandsma saw it as the basis for defeating all anti-human ideologies, especially the Nazi ideology that was the threat at the time (cf. Brandsma 1985, 129). In order to avoid an inappropriate anthropocentrism, Fr. Titus added that within the human being resides a loving Creator who is Love itself. He wrote: "[. . .] We must see God as the basis of our being . . . and to adore Him not only in our interior, but in everything that exists, to begin with in our fellow man, but also in nature, in the universe." (Brandsma 1985, 189)[8] This vision of God can transform the whole man, his interior and his actions. Consequently, Fr. Titus writes: "God, who dwells in our being, God, who acts in the cosmos, must not merely be the object of our intuition. Rather, God must manifest Himself in our lives, express Himself in our words and in our gestures, radiate from our whole being and from all our conduct." (Brandsma 1985, 189)[9] It should be noted here that Brandsma stood in opposition to Pelagianism and claimed that man cannot perfect himself by his own power alone. He expresses this with the metaphor of the sunflower, which constantly turns, by the force of nature, towards the sun. It is likewise with people— it is not us who are to seek God with our eyes and by our own power, but it is Him who attracts us with His light, and we are only to be constantly turned towards Him.[10] Man can then make full use of his intelligence and not stop at the surface of

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8   In this and all other cases translated by Maciej Górnicki. In the original: "[. . .] Si deve vedere Dio come lo sfondo del nostro essere. . . e adorarlo non solo nel nostro intimo, ma anche in tutto ciò che esiste, prima di tutto nel nostro prossimo, ma anche nella natura, nell'universo."

9   In the original: "Dio che abita la nostra esistenza, Dio all'opera nel cosmo, non deve solo essere oggetto della nostra intuizione. Bensì, Dio deve manifestarsi nella nostra vita, esprimersi nelle nostre parole e nei nostri gesti, irraggiare da tutto il nostro essere e da tutto il nostro agire."

10 According to Fr. Titus—referring to the Carmelite tradition—Mary is a model of such an attitude of constant orientation towards God who reveals himself (Brandsma 1985, 193–95). It can be said that Brandsma took into account Christotypic Mariology, emphasizing the exceptional and unrepeatable role of Mary, but he went in the direction of ecclesiotypic Mariology, showing the Mother of God as a model for the Church (on these types of Mariology) (see Borto 2024, 729–30).

things, but rise from finite things to the infinite, by the power of God's transforming grace. Therefore, it is important to be internally focused, to be open to the illuminating rays of God, in order to burn irretrievably in the fire of His love (Brandsma 1985, 196). It is a matter of being—as Fr. Titus writes—absorbed into God: "Nothing is more important than to abandon oneself to God in everything, to surrender oneself completely into His hands. In His infinite and incomparable love . . . He wants to fill us with Himself if we only want to be filled by Him." (Brandsma 1985, 198)[11] It means surrendering to the creative action of the Holy Spirit and the entire Holy Trinity—God who renews everything, creates everything anew: man, the Church, nations, the face of the whole earth (Brandsma 1985, 196–97).

Here we are approaching an important point of Brandsma's teaching on contemplation and its meaning in the development of humanity. Father Titus, referring to the Old Testament story of Elijah, wrote that man's life is similar to the Prophet's journey to Mount Horeb, where he was to see God and also get to know a completely new dimension of his existence. This can also be done in the life of every human being through contemplation: "It is necessary to taste heaven already in this life, trying to see God united to us as much as possible: a God who lives and acts in all our realities." (Brandsma 1985, 197)[12]

He understood well that entering into an intimate relationship with God consists in gradually giving him all that constitutes the human person, that is, its interior and exterior dimensions. It is a process whose core is prayer, smoothly changing its shape, from an active to a passive form. At the same time, active prayer is constant meditation gradually transforming into simplified prayer, i.e. into active contemplation, and passive prayer is infused contemplation (passive contemplation) (Brandsma 1994, 9).[13]

According to Fr. Titus, a special harmony is created between active and passive contemplation, a unity of personal effort with the mystical life poured in as a gift from God. And even if human life sometimes brings with it physical pain or spiritual suffering, contemplation, understood as a vision of God's love and greatness, is

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[11]   In the original: "Niente vi è di più urgente che abbandonarsi del tutto a Dio, che mettersi totalmente nelle sue mani. Nel suo infinito ed incommensurabile amore . . . Egli vuole riempirci di se stesso, solo se noi desideriamo essere riempiti da Lui."

[12]   In the original: "Si deve pregustare fin da questa vita il cielo cercando di vedere Dio unito a noi il più possibile: Dio che vive ed opera in ogni nostra realia."

[13]   It is worth adding that Brandsma also accepted other descriptions of the degrees of prayer (which are an extension of the basic dividing into active and passive); e.g., after St. Teresa of Avila, he wrote about seven stages: meditation; affective prayer; the prayer of simplicity; prayer of rest; ecstatic prayer; total submission to God; spiritual engagement (Brandsma 2013, 22–23). In the successive stages of prayer, man is gradually made capable of being more open to the presence of the Beloved; the end is some ecstatic reality that silences any natural activity (Brandsma 1994, 69–70). It is not a matter of quieting down the activity and reaching stagnation, but only of quieting down the natural activity and zealously fulfilling God's will.

a compensation for all sacrifices, as well as the toil even of prayer itself and the exercise of the virtues (Brandsma 1994, 9).

It can be said that Brandsma actually took delight in in the harmony that exists between nature and supernature. He perceived that God wants to perfect nature in a process that requires human involvement, but which is not arduous. This happens by the grace of God. For although the perfection of the Creator surpasses all natural human faculties, it is God's will that these faculties should reach their fullness in Him. This harmony, combining the beauty of God and the beauty of the soul reflecting the beauty of God, exceeds natural human cognition (Brandsma 1994, 45, 73, 75). In this context, it should be added that Fr. Titus also perceived a harmony, created precisely through contemplation, in the very nature of man. Body and soul achieve a new more perfect coherence, which is not so much manifested in ecstasies as in the "death" of the old (sinful) life and in the new life in God, which leads to the resurrection (cf. Brandsma 1994, 78; 2013, 17).

While analysing the thought of the Dutch Carmelite, it is worth focusing attention on how the subject of contemplation is understood. For our Author believes that God is not only the object of the human intellect, but also of the will, the imagination and also of action (Brandsma 1985, 188). Thus, following Brandsma's thought intuitively, the whole human person is the subject of contemplation, together with the whole dialectic of being "separate" and "communal," up to a new form of existence.

Therefore a concrete question arises: can and should man do something to make his journey towards the loving God more and more intense? In Brandsma's statements one can find very specific answers, strongly rooted in ecclesial Tradition. First of all, he warned against a conscious lack of cooperation with God, i.e. quietism (Brandsma 2013, 20). He encouraged people to take advantage of practical tips on the choice of topics for active contemplation, the author of which is Blessed John Soreth (1394–1471), one of the representatives of the Carmelite family; one can get to know and accept God's love by contemplating (see Brandsma 1994, 62–64)[14]:

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14   Father Titus warns, together with the entire Carmelite school (among other things Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross), not to reject the mind in the mystical life—and in the Christian life in general; for the fire of love is born from meditation and imaginative or intellectual contemplation (Brandsma 1994, 19). He refers to Thérèse of Lisieux when she writes that in order to persevere in love for God, one must constantly contemplate His works and recognize in them the evidence of love (Brandsma 1994, 108). The Dutch Carmelite also states that it is rare that one can remain in "imageless" contemplation. At the beginning of the journey, man is not able to remain in full contemplation, and therefore he must direct all his thoughts, deeds, good works, meditating and imitating Jesus Christ in all things; when man is weakened in prayer, he must drink of the spirit of Christ and resist the temptation to seek some strength or image outside the mystery of the Incarnation (cf. Brandsma 1994, 90–91). Father Titus refers to two visions that Elijah received on Mount Carmel and on Mount Horeb: The first is an intellectual vision (in which the emphasis is placed on the content of the revelation that the Prophet is to convey to Ahab); on Mount Horeb, prayer consists in experiencing the action of the Spirit of God, who comforts Elijah and makes him strong. Both of these experiences are—according to Brandsma—closely related:

1) the beauty of nature (creation)—admiring the great works of the Creator;
2) the word of God (Bible)—getting to know and learning to love God's Truth;
3) one's own life—performing introspection and assesment of one's deeds before God, getting to know one's motivations, victories and defeats to understand the spiritual warfare one leads and God's action, to fulfil His will and become good example for the others.

Father Titus himself referred to the Carmelite tradition, which was formed by the first texts written at the beginning of the Order, which contained almost mystical descriptions of natural beauty associated with Mount Carmel, among other things (cf. Blommestijn 2002, 57). He also taught that the deepening of the contemplative life (cf. Brandsma 1994, 9–13) was served by such means as:

1) walking in the presence of God—in accordance with Elijah's well-known call in the Carmelite family: *Vivit Deus, in cuius conspectu sto* (1 Kgs 17:1); abiding before God (Blessed Lawrence of the Resurrection OCD (1614–91)), gazing at the Blessed Face (St. Teresa of Avila, St. Teresa of the Child Jesus);
2) getting to love solitude and being ready to make sacrifices—like Elijah, the contemplative and ascetic;
3) detachment from the world—learning to trust completely in the Father, following the example of Jesus Christ, who experienced all bitterness;
4) moral life—cooperation with God's grace in forming the virtues;
5) constant prayer—prolonged prayer, harmoniously combining oral prayer (also liturgical[15]) with interior prayer (meditation or contemplation).[16]

The purpose of contemplation is to allow ourselves to be absorbed by God, by His love. To support this claim, Brandsma relied on the writings of a mystic blind

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the intellectual enlightenment of the soul is connected with love, with the affective response of the heart. Brandsma was a conscious student and continuator of the Carmelite school, which he saw as combining intellectual enlightenment (emphasized in the Dominican school) with seraphic love (emphasized in the Franciscan school) (cf. Brandsma 1994, 17–18).

[15] It is worth adding here that although the Carmelite family strongly emphasises interior prayer, it does not relegate the liturgy to the background. This was the position of our Carmelite. He believed that on the path of inner development, liturgical prayer could become active contemplation. And so it was—in his opinion—in the case of St. Teresa of Avila. Besides, the contemplative life feeds on the Eucharist, like Elijah, who was nourished by bread as he moved towards contemplation of God on Mount Horeb (Brandsma 1994, 13–15). In Brandsma's teaching, then, contemplation has a Eucharistic dimension, that is, the Eucharist is its source, its place of practice and, in a sense, its culmination; for in Holy Communion we contemplate God.

[16] It is interesting to note that both Teresa of Avila and John of the Cross were keen to use the noun "contemplation" (abandoning the expression "contemplative prayer") to emphasise that it represents an alternative way of praying to "meditation." Saint Teresa was thinking particularly of those who find it difficult to practise prayer, which places great emphasis on the power of reason (cf. Herráiz García 2007, 307); she defined prayer as a loving conversation with God (see Lercaro 1969, 201).

from birth, John of St. Samson (1571–1636), known as the French John of the Cross, a Calced Carmelite. Accepting his teaching, Fr. Titus believed that all people are called to mystical life, and its essence is to see God everywhere—in front of us, with us and in us. The mystical life does not depend too much on man, but the stages of growth depend mainly on God's pleasure. God has also made human nature able to accept this grace, and it is man's task not to reject and not to destroy this receptivity. He is to try to remove all obstacles hindering God's action. Therefore, it is indispensable to practice virtues and strive for holiness. Nevertheless, we must not forget that the main meaning of spiritual life is to create a family relationship with God and to enjoy Him. When man cooperates, then God's wisdom fills people with His treasures, sweetness, love, gentleness and complete joy, and these gifts bear fruit in man with the desire to give his life to God and for God (see Brandsma 1994, 96, 98–100).[17]

We began our analysis by quoting Brandsma's thought that people's departure from God is often due to their creation of a false image of Him. Through his speeches and writings, Fr. Titus tried to prove the thesis that the way out for humanity, which loses its relationship with God and thus sinks into evil, is precisely contemplation—practised correctly. It leads to an experience of God's love, protects against a false view of reality and the temptation of egoism, opens the human heart and widens its horizons.

At the University of Nijmegen, in his famous speech on the idea of God, he stated that every era tends to have its own image of God—a Ruler, a King, a Good Shepherd, a Guide, a Father, a Guardian and Protector, a Giver of Life to plants and animals, a Sustainer of the whole world, planets and stars, a God who breathes life into people, dwells in them and opens the eyes of their mind to his presence. In doing so, he expressed the conviction that each of these images—in this case the real one—is very beautiful and that they should all be understood complementarily, yet they will not give a complete picture of God. Nevertheless, contemplation is necessary and serves to overcome a one-dimensional or narrow-minded view. It helps to broaden one's horizons and to direct oneself towards the light of the Teacher of truth (Brandsma 2021b, 105, 112). Father Titus was convinced that God, through contemplation, perfects man[18]—broadens his heart, making it capable of pure love.

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17 It is significant that Fr. Titus—even in the face of the approaching threats of war and inhuman ideologies—speaking about the relationship with God and prayer, strongly emphasized the calonic (beauty) and eudaimonic (happiness) elements; an example is his simple formulation: "Noi siamo stati creati per la gioia [. . .]" (Brandsma 1985, 200; "We were made for joy [. . .]").

18 In this way, Fr. Titus is part of the Church's tradition that the Christianisation of conscience involves a purification that not only leads to contemplation, but also flows from it (cf. Bernard 2001, 185–86); for only God can sanctify man—despite all his weaknesses (see Gogola 2012, 147).

2. Shaping the Love for God

In the beginning, teaches Brandsma, the love of the soul is disordered and therefore God Himself wishes to shape it in the right way. He does not forbid man to love the creature, but wishes him to love Him above everything else, and everything else only in Him, through Him and with Him. It is for this reason that God desires the human soul to go deep into itself and to contemplate Him. For He abides within it, but patiently knocks so that man opens himself and forms a relationship of love with Him. Hence, the soul is invited to let go of everything in order to unite itself with God in the depths of its interiority (Brandsma 1994, 72). Father Titus, as a faithful disciple of the Carmelite school, strongly emphasises the mystery of God's presence and giving in the depths of the human person.

As already mentioned in the previous section, Brandsma shared the view of many ascetical and mystical authors that the path of spiritual development, which, despite being a gift of God, also presupposes a great commitment on the part of man, leads to an ever greater intensification of the relationship with God, and sometimes even to a direct vision[19] and understanding of God, towards an ever greater spontaneity, to the point of assuming—metaphorically speaking—a second nature. Brandsma makes an implicit allusion here to the union of the two natures in Jesus Christ, and in this perspective he wants to show the new quality of existence that man receives by way of mystical union with God. Father Titus seeks to explain that this transformation (in theology—both Eastern and Western—often referred to as divinization) does not take place without reference to the humanity of Christ, who constantly remains the only mediator and helper. Contemplation is helpful here, drawing the subject (man) to the Object (to God) and subordinating the subject to the Object, so that the subject is completely in possession of the Object. A bond is formed which is so strong and completely transcends human nature that man feels that he knows the Supreme, but cannot understand what he knows. He cannot describe in words what he experiences. He perceives darkness and light simultaneously in his soul (Brandsma 1994, 101–2).

These reflections led Fr. Titus in the direction of apophaticism,[20] but he focused more strongly on the mystery of the "birth" of God in man—perhaps influenced by Rhineland mysticism. He wrote that God, hidden in the human interior, grows in those who meditate and offer Him their love. At a certain point, however, He no longer wishes to remain hidden and then others can perceive God's presence in the human

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[19] It must be added here that contemplation in its highest form—during mystical union—can be called "direct," although this does not mean that man is capable here on earth of seeing God "face to face" (cf. 1 Cor 13:12)—it is therefore knowledge through love, the so-called love-knowledge (Urbański 1999, 275; cf. Zawada 2002, 245–58).

[20] At this time, St. Elizabeth of the Trinity OCD was fascinated by apophaticism (1880–1906) (see Miczyński 2023, 975).

person. Brandsma sought to emphasise the metaphysical depth of union with the Creator by stating that God becomes our being, our life, the meaning of our existence and all our actions. Father Titus also illustrated this thought with the Carmelite symbol of the flame, portraying God as a burning fire within the human being, which gives warmth and which is meant to flare up ever stronger (Brandsma 1994, 103–4). Brandsma seems to have shared St. John of the Cross's conviction that by uniting with God, man can become the Burning Fire of Love. Following Thérèse of Lisieux (1873–97), he reiterated the need to rise from humanity to divinity in order to live in the womb of the Trinity, as the Word did and does—for all eternity (Brandsma 1994, 108).

Father Titus therefore viewed contemplation and human development from a Trinitarian and Christocentric perspective, giving these two fundamental dimensions of the Christian life existential and incarnational hue (i.e. with a strong emphasis on the Mystery of the Incarnation). The action of the Trinity in man is a continuation of the creative action. It is a continuation of the eternal birthing of the Son by the Father and the breathing of the Holy Spirit by the Father and the Son. The Dutch Carmelite saw that Christ, who took on human nature in order to make possible again the realisation of the union of our nature with the divine nature, is the way towards the Trinity indwelling in man. In turn, these reflections on the Mystery of the Incarnation directed Brandsma to the Mother of Christ. She became the model of receiving God's Son and forming a relationship with the Persons of the Trinity. On the one hand, man is given the identity of being a child of God, but at the same time he learns from the Mother of God how to conceive and bear Christ (cf. Brandsma 1994, 54, 79–80, 86–87, 97).

Here a very important aspect of the Dutch Martyr's teaching is revealed, namely the Marian dimension.[21] A particularly important—for Fr. Titus—object of contemplation was the mystery of the conception of Christ by Mary (Brandsma 1994, 89). It is understandable that Fr. Titus, being a Carmelite, referred to the figure of the Blessed Virgin Mary in his reflections, but it must be emphasised that some of his Mariological thoughts were quite daring. Since Mary is the Mother of the spiritual life, she is the Mother of life, knowledge and experience of the Lord (see Brandsma 1985, 195), it is necessary for man to become like her. We are even to become a "second-Mary" and the Mother of God should "live in us." These are, of course, metaphorical, mystical and poetic expressions, and their purpose is to show the significance and depth of Christian identity. Brandsma writes therefore that God is to

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[21]   It is worth explaining the reason why, at this point in this analysis, we are focusing on the Marian rather than the Christological dimension. From a strictly theological point of view, the order should be reversed. Our study tries to read the thought of Fr. Titus, who seems to have portrayed human development in the perspective of the chronology of salvific events. Hence, the mystery of the Incarnation precedes the mystery of Pascha. By analogy, the mysterious birth of God takes place in man, who enables the human person to offer himself—together with Christ—in a burnt offering of love for others. This is what happened in the martyrdom of Fr. Titus.

be conceived in us, and we—as the "second" Mother of God—are to bring Him to the world.[22] Father Titus was convinced that no devotion is as solid and concrete as Marian devotion (cf. Brandsma 1985, 193).

At this point it is worth emphasising once again that Brandsma linked contemplation closely with morality. Gazing at the love of God leads to true freedom and should become a path towards purification from sins and imperfections (Brandsma 1994, 44). Speaking in positive terms, contemplation also helps to persevere in conversion and to exercise virtues such as chastity, poverty and obedience, love of silence and interior concentration, humility, simplicity, modesty and a sense of minority (cf. Brandsma 1994, 31, 78–79, 109). On the path of contemplation, man begins to express his love for God also through his moral attitude.

The Dutch mystic was convinced that the right it is Jesus Christ who can give the proper shape to love, as he is the only Guide and Teacher of the virtues. Learning the mature love consists in following the path of renouncing everything that is not God, in order to love God more strongly and to love everything with Him—already in a new way. It is a path of a passionate nature, following Christ through the glorious Cross—understood not as accepting suffering for the sake of suffering alone, but as growing in love, ready to give oneself as a gift. It is also a journey through—using John of the Cross' metaphor—the "dark night" of faith, which is the absence of the image of any created thing, for the sake of detaching man from disordered attachments to creatures in order to make more room for the light of God dwelling in the human soul (cf. Brandsma 1994, 91–93).

It is noteworthy that in the teaching of our Saint we can find extensive reflections on the passion of Christ. Brandsma was convinced that the contemplation of the mystery of Christ's self-emptying, his death on the cross, leads to a deeper knowledge of the truth of how great a love God had for human beings. The pierced Heart of Jesus is proof of this (Brandsma 1994, 140).

Brandsma's description of the Saviour's Passion is characterized by dramatic literalism, insight, empathy, attention to detail, and then leads to the conviction that Christ's crucified love cannot be left unanswered and that it is necessary to express love to the Saviour in a similar way, being ready to carry one's own cross to the end.[23] Father Titus creates in a certain sense a theology of the Cross with an existential shade, having the following dimensions (see Brandsma 1994, 123–28, 140):

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[22] In this context, it is worth quoting a very interesting explanation of the spiritual meaning of the celebration of the three Masses on the Solemnity of Christmas. According to Fr. Titus, the liturgy leads us into three mysteries: the birth of the Son from the Father; the birth of Jesus from Mary; the birth of God in us. The Dutch Carmelite understood Christian vocations as being the "birth" of God (see Brandsma 1985, 191–92).

[23] Perhaps it was the contemplation of Christ's sufferings and the power of His love that gave Fr. Titus the strength to make a decision to oppose Nazism, and also to be faithful until his last earthly moments, which ended with a martyr's death in the Dachau concentration camp.

1) *agapetological*—Jesus is entirely burning with inexhaustible love and this love motivates him to accept the suffering caused by human sins;
2) *kenotic and glorious*—Christ's body and soul have lost the experience of the Father's presence; the human nature of the Son of God appears destroyed; however, voluntary humiliation and the accepted cross become the victorious throne of the reign of the Son of God; Christ conquers the whole world by his weakness;
3) *paschal*—weak people find strength in the fall and power of the Son of God; it is a test of faith for man not to doubt Christ;
4) *Marian*—the radical love of Christ can be most profoundly known to man through the Mother of God standing under the cross.

God regenerates man to love through the Cross, culminating in a state where man no longer lives only for the Beloved and in the Beloved. Brandsma was keen to use nuptial symbolism—the union of bridegroom and bride—alluding to the Book of the Song of Songs, which also inspired many Carmelite mystics (e.g., Teresa of Avila, John of the Cross). In such a close loving union with Christ, man is—like Him—"resurrected" and lives a new life. The supernatural and the natural are closely united, and nothing can take man out of this state of contemplation. Then man adores God in himself and is able to see Him also in all things (Brandsma 1994, 70–71).

Father Titus described the permanence of this union of the soul with God in biblical words speaking of the indissolubility of marriage (cf. Matt 19:6) (Brandsma 1994, 89). He seems to have seen the guarantee of the permanence of this bond in suffering—accepted and overcome by love. The words of his testimony, written in prison in Scheveningen, on February 12/13, 1942, in the form of a poem, are significant: "[. . .] I am happy in my suffering, / Because I do not consider it to be suffering anymore, / But is the fate that is most desired, / That unites me with You, O God." (Brandsma 2022b, 425) Father Titus understood his own suffering as a happy opportunity to become like Christ, and to embrace with love all that the Master loves. According to him, through contemplation, human love takes the shape of Christ's love and becomes strong as it is united with the love of the Saviour. The truthfulness of this experience was confirmed by Brandsma with his martyrdom, through which he did not want to separate himself from the world, but wanted to offer it up for others.

3. Shaping the Love for People

In Brandsma's writings many texts can be found which speak that contemplation does not stifle a person's love for others, but that it is actually indispensable for those who want to understand people and the situation they are currently in. The following words of Fr. Titus can be quoted as an example: "[. . .] We cannot understand the

person who loves God, the mystic, as someone who stays away from life, from history. On the contrary, whoever lives history and bears the burden of it must feel as his first and highest task: to come to know himself [. . .]. And through his intellect, come to meet God in the depths of his life." (Brandsma 1985, 189)[24]

The Dutch Carmelite was convinced that the right path of mystical life has a community dimension.[25] If contemplatives are looking at the same goal, then contemplation unites people into a family, which should become a place where virtues are worked out. History teaches that situations when God calls someone and leads without anyone's help, without a guide, are exceptions (Brandsma 1994, 99). Therefore, contemplation shapes in the contemplator love for people and, consequently, their mutual love.

On this basis, Fr. Titus claimed that the contemplative life is the source and inspiration for the apostolic life (Brandsma 1994, 19).[26] Through the prism of the Carmelite school, of which he was a student and continuator, he saw the apostolate as a manifestation of love (even at the cost of small imperfections—Teresa of Avila), expressed in:

1) helping the poor in order to preach the Good News to them (following the example of St. John of the Cross);
2) creating new environments and places of contemplation, and supporting missions (following the example of the Reformed Carmel);
3) intercessory prayer for others, in and outside the Church, combined with fasting and renunciation (following the encouragement of St. Teresa of Avila and St. Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi (1566–1607));
4) study, work, pastoral commitment, the preaching of the word of God and in any kind of service (as taught by John of St. Samson).

For this reason, Brandsma even wrote about the "apostolate of contemplative life" and, based on the experience of St. Mary Magdalene de' Pazzi and St. Thérèse of Lisieux, he was convinced that the mystical life itself is already—to the highest degree—apostolic life. The apostolate of prayer, in fact, is a missionary life (see Brandsma 1994, 25–27, 98, 114–15).[27]

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24   In the original: "Non dobbiamo considerare la persona amante di Dio, il mistico, come colui che sta fuori della vita, della storia. Anzi, chiunque vive la storia e ne porta il responsabile, deve sentire come suo primario, supremo compito, arrivare alla conoscenza di se stesso [. . .]. E attraverso il suo intelletto giungere ad incontrare Dio nella profondità della propria vita."

25   The development of man and his mystical life takes place within the human community, and in this community the most perfect activity is love (see González 2001, 291–301).

26   In Fr. Titus' view, social, cultural or political involvement is (is supposed to be) integrally linked to mystical life (Boaga 2008, 108). In fact he was very happy that he could minister until the end of his earthly life—even in Dachau; spiritually prepared and accepted into the Third Order the Polish priest Tadeusz Zieliński (Rees 1971, 175).

27   This expression is multivariate, it includes, among other things, the following aspects: (a) every apostolate must draw strength from contemplation; (b) the contemplative life has the function of the apostolate; (c) people should be taught contemplation in an apostolic way.

Father Titus repeated after St. Thérèse of Lisieux that love is the special apostolate in the Mystical Body of Christ, that is, in the Church. He admired in her attitude the fact that, being completely detached from the world, she was ready for martyrdom and wanted to conquer the whole world for God at the same time. She was also aware that this apostolate would not cease at the moment of her earthly death and her passage to the reality in heaven, combined with the *visio beatifica*, but giving love to people could be intensified (cf. Brandsma 1994, 113–14, 118).

Here Brandsma touched on the paradox of equating contemplation with apostleship. He explained that if one penetrates the secrets of God's grace, this lack of logic will prove to be only superficial. For one will realise that the essence of missionary commitment is asking for the graces of heaven for people, combined with offering oneself for them—together with Christ—on the cross. This is the most luminous, most perfect, intimate way of uniting the contemplative life with the active life: no longer in a single person, but in the Mystical Body of Christ. In this perspective, a life detached from the world, sometimes even limited to the simplest daily activities, can be entirely directed to the service of God and spiritually fruitful (cf. Brandsma 1994, 114–17).

Father Titus was convinced that contemplation in the perspective of a specific earthly situation should become a strength to undertake the spiritual warfare for the good of man and society. Therefore, contemplation should result in a solid assessment of reality and concrete action. Brandsma was a realist and was aware of many distortions and illusions masking evil in the times in which he lived. It caused him pain that this evil was often accepted and covered up by the academic world, by many professors who considered themselves Christians and at the same time claimed that love was socially useless and that rights belonged to the stronger one. He stated that one can often see in people a lack of love of neighbour and sacrifice, which are covered by talking about prudence, caution, self-control and realism—and this attitude is simply cold calculation (Brandsma 1985, 125; 1994, 150–151).

Seeing the moral evil affecting human hearts and social structures, as well as the great threat posed by ideological evil, Fr. Titus committed all his energies to overcoming the then increasingly widespread conviction that peace could be saved by arming oneself and defending one's rights by force. He opposed such logic and tried to convince people that this was leading the world to more and more wars. Therefore, every individual is responsible for creating peace in the world, and therefore any views and decisions that are wrong must be changed. Brandsma judged very harshly the society that does not do enough to prevent individual countries from arming themselves (Brandsma 1994, 147–48).

Therefore, according to the thought of the Dutch Carmelite, in the face of the threat of conflicts it is necessary to be an apostle of peace, that is, to bring this peace to the world. Such was Jesus Christ, who after his resurrection did not call for war, but spoke surprising words to his disciples: "Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives, I give to you" (John 14:27). Father Titus had the

courage to preach to everyone—including politicians, academics and journalists—the need to be open to the peace that Christ gives and which is the fruit of contemplation (see Brandsma 1994, 149–50).

Brandsma knew that being subjected to human nature, if it is wounded and turned away from God, is a threat to man himself. Society then becomes a victim of its worst qualities: the selfishness, anger and arrogance of the strong. What is needed, therefore, is resistance to all of that, because good must be stronger than evil (Brandsma 1994, 151). The way to overcome evil, at its deepest roots, is the contemplation of God and work on changing wrong ideas. The involvement of people from intelligentsia is indispensable here, in order to build a healthy mentality from the ground up (Brandsma 1994, 153).

As can be seen, contemplation is not some ephemeral remedy for social problems in the form of escaping from suffering and responsibility, but it puts the human world in order from the foundations—individually and socially. Society should be educated by the press, schools, meetings and congresses; one must try to influence the market and industry so that thinking is changed—from egoistic to altruistic. It is also necessary to overcome the lack of forgiveness that exists in relationships between concrete persons, but also that is hidden in the antipathies that exist between peoples or states.[28]

In a somewhat idealistic way, he wanted mutual love between people to be formed on earth in this way, so that one could speak about them as about the first Christians: "See how they love each other." Brandsma was convinced that there was a victorious force in true love, and the practice of life confirms this. He taught that solidarity with others and care for each other is very important. Even if there are some difficulties, true love—drawing its example and strength from Christ—will endure everything (Brandsma 1985, 128, 198–99).[29] Such love is the fruit of contemplation, which is able to unmask the falsified reality and protect the society from dangerous philosophical theories. Contemplation protects and shapes social love, which is the best guarantee for the improvement and healing of civilization (Brandsma 2022a, 19).

Father Brandsma saw the Church in this perspective—as a timeless community of those who help each other on the way to the ultimate goal. For this reason, he eagerly drew on the history and schools of spirituality, the experience of the

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[28] It is worth adding here that Fr. Titus directly accused Nietzsche's philosophy, claiming that it led people to war (see Brandsma 1994, 155–59). He called for showing National Socialism, based on this philosophy, as a mortal threat, in order to refute this doctrine. He encouraged everybody to do it with enthusiasm and positively, showing the great value of the human person—both in the natural and supernatural order (Brandsma 1985, 126).

[29] Father Titus was an example of remembrance and care for others. He was an example of caring for the poor (see Scapin 1985, 43–44). From the prison in Scheveningen on May 6, 1942, he wrote to his relatives: "I live always for you." (Brandsma 1985, 176) In other prison letters, he also gave evidence of his interest in his friends, relatives, religious family, the Church: he remembered their celebrations, birthdays, greeted their children, was interested in the life decisions of his friends; he greeted various people by name; he was interested in the number of novices and new priests (see Brandsma 1985, 176–85).

contemplatives and the saints. He focused particularly on the Carmelite family, but also held the Dutch mystical tradition in high esteem, with figures such as Beatrice of Nazareth, Hadewijch, Blessed Jan Ruusbroec, Nicolaus van Esch, Maria van Oosterwijck, Gertrude van der Oosten, Geert Groote, Gerard Zertbolt of Zutphen, St. Lidwina of Schiedam, Fr. Brugman, Francis Vervoort OFM, St. Peter Canisius, Jan Pilgrim Pullen, Maria Petyt (see Brandsma 2013, 79–361). And this invocation of history, evoking the contemplative experience of many witnesses, had a concrete and logical justification: Fr. Titus saw in their experience a great opportunity—the action of God wishing, through these very witnesses, to renew the world (Alzin 1954, 97),[30] that is, to regenerate people to love and also to responsibility for themselves and, in some sense, for the whole of created reality.

4. Shaping the Love for Creatures

We mentioned in our analysis that Brandsma listed the beauty of the created world among the proposed themes for active contemplation. The question that arises here is whether there is not a contradiction in Fr. Titus' statements. Since God is the *par excellence* object of contemplation, does not turning one's attention to matter, whether animate or inanimate, draw one away from the supernatural and distort one's heart and capacity to love? Brandsma believed that precisely a proper focus on the work of creation can deepen man's relationship with God and make him more like the Creator. Let us try to present and analyse the argument used by Fr. Titus.

According to him turning towards transcendence cannot be something opposite to immanence.[31] Therefore he stated: "It is not possible to make some division in our hearts between God and the world. But one must look at the world with God in the background [. . .]. Prayer is life, not just an oasis in the desert of life." (Brandsma 1985, 198)[32] It is precisely the contemplation of nature, its extraordinary beauty and the order existing in it, that makes people ecstatic. It leads to the discovery of its non-accidental purposiveness, the cause of which is the Creator of Nature (Brandsma 2022a, 11). Father Titus also writes: "God guides the stars and planets in their orbits; He gives life to plants and animals. He carries the world in His hand

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[30] Brandsma touched here on the mystery of God's "incarnation" in history—both individual and social; the more people open themselves for God's action, the more the reality can be transformed by love (Boaga 2008, 108).

[31] It is worth adding here that the antinomian method in theology—of showing Transcendence and Immanence at the same time—was known earlier. It was used, among other things, by Gregory Palamas (c. 1296–1359) (see Zhukovskyy 2023, 693).

[32] In the original: "Non si deve porre nei nostri cuori una divisione tra Dio e il mondo. Ma si deve guardare il mondo avendo Dio sullo sfondo [. . .]. La preghiera è vita, non un'oasi nel deserto della vita."

and guarantees its quiet permanence. God dwells within us and opens the eyes of our mind to what is important; he whispers his word within us and pushes us to fulfil it." (Brandsma 1985, 189)[33] He also states, referring to Thérèse of Lisieux, that her peculiar greediness in contemplating the beauty of flowers or the starry sky is understandable, but that it is nevertheless necessary, like her, to understand this beauty as an aid to elevating one's thoughts to God; for it is not an end in itself, but a means to that end. The macrocosm and the microcosm serve the contemplative in knowing and showing admiration for the Wisdom of God (cf. Brandsma 1994, 108; 2022b, 11, 13).

Man perceives that the animate world is a kind of a succession, from less perfect beings to animals, endowed by the Creator with consciousness and feelings in order to make their existence more beautiful. The whole world—inanimate and animate—culminates in human beings, endowed with immortal souls, made in the image of God and destined—according to the Genesis revelation—to reign over creation. Animals are to serve and please man, but at the same time man needs to develop a wise and healthy love of nature. This means that man must give the animals the same affection that God had for them when he created them—love and kindness. The point is that man should not succumb to hardness of heart, that he should learn to protect creatures weaker than himself (animals) from unnecessary suffering. The relationship with weaker creatures is in a sense a "school" of human sensitivity. This sensitivity, in turn, helps to build relationships with other human beings, the foundation of which is to be God's love. It is obvious to Fr. Titus that God should be the first addressee of human love, then other people, and only then the whole of creation (cf. Brandsma 2022a, 14, 18).

Therefore, through the contemplation of God's plan contained in creation, man can come to know his identity, distinction and dignity, as well as the fields of responsibility. His mental horizons are broadened and he can enter into proper coexistence with the world. A proper shaping of the relationship with all creatures serves the rapid development of man and the realization of his vocation to love God and neighbour (cf. Brandsma 2022a, 12). God's love allows us to love everyone, but love for creation also allows us to love God in a nobler and deeper way (Brandsma 2022a, 19).

The Dutch Carmelite relied on biblical passages (Deut 25:4; 1 Cor 9:9; 1 Tim 5:18) emphasising that, although they stand in defence of animals, above all they protect human beings from evil, from depersonalisation. He was convinced that in the upbringing of young people we must not forget to teach them the responsibility and care for weaker living beings. By caring for animals, young people become sensitive and noble feelings are awakened in them. Brandsma was concerned that modern

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[33] In the original: "Dio conduce stelle e pianeti nella loroorbita; donna vita a piante e ad animali. Egli porta il mondo nella sua mano e ne garantisce la tranquilla persistenza. Dio abita in noi ed apre l'occhio della nostra mente su ciò che conta; sussurra in noi la sua parola e ci spinge ad eseguirla."

civilisation is infected more and more with an attitude of boorishness and coarseness. God, on the other hand, desires that through man's reason and intellect, through his love, creation should develop in order and in its beauty (cf. Brandsma 2022a, 14–16).

Brandsma's presentation of the care of animals as a *sui generis* means of spiritual development is undoubtedly original and may seem too novel, but it is nevertheless defendable once clarified. It should be added here that Fr. Titus did not, of course, mean any exaggerated love for creatures, any morbid display of affection for them, or any excessive sentimentalism. He had no doubt that love for animals must be subordinated to love for human beings (see Brandsma 2022a, 20), and that this love is to be subordinated to love for God.

An inquisitive analyst might ask here whether Brandsma isn't losing his Christian Christocentrism here. This concern is dispelled by his words about man caring for the world of creatures in imitation of the Good Shepherd. The Carmelite also points out that since early Christianity Christ has been portrayed as the friend and caring guardian of animals. Therefore, this way of relating to nature was imitated by many saints, which was a manifestation of their innocence of heart, filiality of God, understanding of the work of creation and love according to the Spirit of God (Brandsma 2022a, 21).

Brandsma's Christocentrism can be seen in the fact that the Carmelite, following the suggestion of John of the Cross, presents the entire created world in the light of three great mysteries related to the Person of the Logos; these mysteries are: the creation of the world by the Word of God (cf. John 1:3); the incarnation of the Word of God; the resurrection of Jesus Christ. Along with man, the whole of creation is also—in some mysterious way—ennobled and clothed with beauty in the Incarnation and Resurrection.[34] Father Titus wrote that in contemplating this truth, the soul is "wounded by love" (Brandsma 1994, 88), experiences the love of God and desires to love like Him.

Approaching the conclusion, it is worth noting that the entire teaching of the Dutch Carmelite, although written in difficult times, was full of peace and joy. He was convinced that Christian love, formed in contemplation—towards God, towards other people and towards all creatures—should be actually symptomatic. If it is to conquer the world, it must be strong and courageous, ready to die with Jesus on the cross. Contemplation makes one look at one's own suffering in the light from above, understanding it as a gift from God. This, in turn, is the motive for joy, which is not a virtue but the fruit of love (Brandsma 1985, 200–201).[35] He identified his life with

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[34] It is interesting that Brandsma—not being strictly a theologian—intuitively came to the conviction that the great works of God are to be understood as events-symbols in the light of which the whole of reality is to be understood (for more on theological axiological-symbolic interpretation, see Nadbrzeżny 2024, 707–9).

[35] *Nota bene*, even when in prison, he described himself as an optimist and tried to write with humour (cf. Brandsma 1985, 152–53).

this teaching, based largely on the rule of the Carmelites, Fr. Titus became a prophet for the present times (cf. Strzelecki 2022, 6), which—similarly—are marked by various threats.

Conclusions

On the basis of the analysis presented above, it can be confirmed that the Dutch Carmelite considered contemplation to be a rescue for man threatened by evil, as well as an opportunity for the correct development of humanity. Therefore, the verification of the hypothesis posed at the beginning of this study—based on the source items— yields a positive result. We still need to answer the important questions that arise:

1) Was Brandsma not an excessive idealist?
2) Was his thought original and if so, what are its characteristics?
3) Was there anything that he failed to include; what research directions are worth undertaking?

To conclude we shall try to answer these questions.

Re. (1): Brandsma's writings often contain parenetic elements, models of behaviour; nevertheless, elements of idealism are closely linked to realism. Mysticism is portrayed on the basis of historical testimonies as well as in the concrete social context of the Dutch interwar period. What is important here is that Brandsma understood contemplation not only as extraordinary states of ecstasy (passive contemplation), but also as a simplified meditation, an intellectual focus on divine reality (active contemplation.), accessible to everyone.

Re. (2): The originality of Brandsma's thought consists in the skilful combination of themes, including: the transcendence of God with His immanence (the indwelling of the Trinity in the soul); love for God with the affirmation of His works (creatures); the calonic dimension (from Greek *kalos*—beauty) with the reality of suffering; the mysteries of salvation (especially: Creation, Incarnation and Resurrection) with the history of the world (theology of history); individual history with social history; contemplative life with social commitment; philosophical language with theological and poetic language; the spiritual tradition of the Reformed Carmel (the so-called "Discalced Carmelites") with the legacy of the non-Reformed Carmel (the so-called "Calced Carmelites"). The *novum* in his thought seems to be the presentation of the relationship between contemplation and the formation of a mature attitude of love in a human being involved in the world, and presenting the mystery of the Incarnation as a model and hermeneutical key for understanding contemplation as the "incarnation" of transcendence in material reality.

Re. (3): In the writings of Fr. Titus, little thought can be found on the subject of proper love and self-acceptance; this subject was later developed by psychology, and Brandsma did not address it, perhaps in order not to be misunderstood—as encouraging selfishness. Perhaps the hitherto unpublished writings of Fr. Titus will also contain reflections on this topic. It would certainly be interesting and necessary to reflect on the proper formation of self-love as well—through contemplation. The same can be said of the teaching of Fr. Titus' on love for people, especially the social dimension of love, family life or work.

The analysis of Fr. Titus' writings leads to the conclusion that his teaching is very tightly linked to the Carmelite tradition, which is closely associated with the Mother of God and such figures as: Elijah, the first eremites of Carmel, St. Simon Stock, Henry Hane (de Hanna), Blessed John Soreth, Frances d'Amboise, St. Teresa the Great, St. John of the Cross, St. Thérèse of Lisieux, John of St. Samson (Jean du Moulin) and many others (see Brandsma 1994; cf. García 2002, 69–72). At the same time, it is worth noting here that in Brandsma's thought a strong influence of Teresian and San-Juanist mysticism can be seen.

The Carmelite tradition focuses attention on the power of God's love. It is therefore worth concluding the analysis with the words of Fr. Titus: "We must flee from all honour and personal glory, seek nothing for ourselves. Instead, we are to win souls for Christ. Our love must be extreme, excessive: mad as the cross of Christ was mad. [. . .] Love is the first, greatest and most divine of virtues." (Brandsma 1985, 195)[36] Love shaped in contemplation conforms man to God.

Translated by Maciej Górnicki

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36   In the original: "Noi dobbiamo fuggire ogni onore e gloria personali, non cercare nulla per noi stessi. Ma dobbiamo guadagnare anime a Cristo. Il nostro amore deve essere estremo, eccessivo: folle, come fu folle la croce di Cristo. [. . .] L'amore è la prima, la più grande e la più divina delle virtù."

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The Integral Nature of the Liturgical Formation of the People of God in Light of the Apostolic Letter *Desiderio Desideravi*

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Abstract: This article focuses on the concept of liturgical formation, which Pope Francis identified as an urgent need for the entire Catholic Church in his Apostolic Letter *Desiderio Desideravi*. Since the liturgy is a concrete reality and not a mere idea, formation presupposes the prior fulfillment of conditions which are faith and awareness of the nature of the liturgy, as well as the proper disposition of a person based on Christian anthropology. First, the broad perspective of the liturgy was presented, which is the work of the entire Holy Trinity, expressed in the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, whose goal is to bring every creature into communion with the Creator. Man participates in this work as a corporeal-spiritual being with the ability to understand symbols and capable of liturgical action. Formation for participation in the liturgy involves not only intellectual preparation, but also ascetical preparation, that is, the involvement of the whole person and all the faculties of man in the process of becoming like Christ, the source of which is the celebration. Formation through participation in the liturgy applies to all conditions and forma of Christian life; therefore, based on the Apostolic Letter and the Church's teaching, a general characterization of the formation of the various groups of the faithful has been made. On this basis, liturgical formation is an integral process for the formation of the human person as a liturgical person, capable of realizing his vocation which comes from the fact of creation.

Keywords: liturgy, liturgical formation, *Desiderio Desideravi*, Pope Francis, liturgical theology, mystagogy

One of the pioneers of the liturgical theology movement has observed that the liturgy can be like the biblical Rachel (cf. Gen. 29:17–31): beautiful, but barren (Beauduin 1987, 145). Participation in the liturgy can be a moving aesthetic, emotional, or even spiritual experience resulting from its harmony, the beauty of songs and place—but at the same time not fulfill its fundamental purpose, which is the glorification of God and the sanctification of man (*SC* 7). The celebration might not influence Christian life, remaining merely a ritual-cult phenomenon limited to a few holy days each year. It cannot be said that such a liturgy is the source and summit of Christian life (*SC* 14). The reason for this does not lie in the liturgy, because that in fact is the work of the risen and living Lord Himself. The reason is to be found in man, affected by the results of original sin, and who from that time has had to make an effort to achieve unity within himself and unity with God (*CCC* 409).

From the very beginning, the Church has helped all its members in this process through liturgical formation, i.e., a kind of multi-level education arising from the

nature of the liturgy and leading above all to full, active, conscious, and communal participation in it (*SC* 14–20). In 2022 Pope Francis published the Apostolic Letter *Desiderio Desideravi*,[1] dedicated to this very topic. This letter is characterized by two issues: the fidelity of the liturgy reformed by the Second Vatican Council; and an urgent call for a fuller understanding of its spiritual depths, which will lead to a profound spiritual renewal in the lives of the faithful (Kaproń 2023). The Pope does not intend to treat these questions in an exhaustive way (*DD* 1) but, based on the essence of the liturgy, wants to show liturgical formation as an important, continual, and indispensable means of authentic and mature Christian life, serving also to preserve the unity of the liturgy and the Church (*DD* 61).

It is necessary to emphasize that until this time no document completely dedicated to this topic addressing all the faithful at once—both clergy and laity—had ever been issued. Many documents of the universal or local Church touching on the issue of formation had been addressed either to specific groups of the faithful more closely connected to the liturgical celebration through their ministries or functions,[2] or they merely mentioned a need for this kind of comprehensive formation.[3] *Desiderio Desideravi* is the first post-conciliar document of the Magisterium of the Church to be an effort to above all indicate theological conditions arising from the nature of the liturgy and to shape basic directions of liturgical formation.[4]

The goal of the present study is to introduce the concept of liturgical formation contained in the Pope's letter. First, the preliminary conditions necessary for effective formation will be discussed, and then the process itself, in the classic sense proposed by the Pope, i.e., for the liturgy and by the liturgy (*DD* 34). This paper, within the scope of the topic discussed, also takes into account the various states of Christian life, as this formation (as well as the document) concerns the entire People of God, and everyone, according to their own gifts and tasks, should follow the path of living faith, which awakens hope and works through love, so that in worshiping God the Father in spirit and truth all may be deserving of participation in His glory (*LG* 41).

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[1] The publication date is no coincidence. The solemnity of Sts. Peter and Paul (June 29) emphasizes the universality and unity of the Church, whose source is Christ.

[2] General guidelines regarding liturgical formation are contained in the conciliar constitution on the liturgy (*SC* 14–20). In addition to this, there exist documents of various ranks referring to so-called specialized liturgical formation, e.g., the *Instruction on Liturgical Formation in Seminaries* (Congregation for Catholic Education 1979), sections of John Paul II's apostolic exhortation (*PDV* 48), or the Instructions of local Bishops Conferences.

[3] Cf. e.g., John Paul II 1988a, nos. 14–15; 2003, nos. 72–73; cf. also *RS* 46.

[4] The topic of liturgical formation was brought up in session of the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments, which in February 2019 deliberated on the topic of "Liturgical formation of the People of God." Their letter is, to a certain extent, also a synthesis of these deliberations. Cf. Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 2019; Krosnicki 2019.

1. Preliminary Concepts of Formation

1.1. The Liturgy—*opus Trinitatis*

The Pope's vision of the liturgy, upon the basis of which he then formulates guidelines concerning formation, is surprising with its broad perspective of the theological understanding of the nature of the liturgy characterized by the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (cf. nos. 1077–1112). According to it the source of the liturgy of the Church is the eternal love of the Persons of the Holy Trinity for man (*DD* 2) expressed in Christ as "His infinite desire to re-establish that communion with us that was and remains His original design." (*DD* 4) This Trinitarian and at the same time Christocentric aspect is essential for understanding the dynamism and nature of the liturgy, which is not simply a ceremony. The revelation of the Holy Trinity is closely connected to the mystery of the incarnation of the Logos, since God does not reveal merely theoretical information about Himself but imparts Himself to man and enters into a relationship with him (Müller 2015, 452–53). The Pope clearly emphasizes that the personal encounter with Christ in the celebration is the consequence of His action, His "ardent longing" for our participation in the banquet, at one table (*DD* 4; cf. John 15:16), which ultimately anticipates the banquet of the Lamb in the kingdom of heaven (cf. Rev 19:9). Even if a person remains unaware and does not fully realize it, "every time we go to Mass, the first reason is that we are drawn there by His desire for us" (*DD* 6) leading to union.[5] In this context, the liturgy clearly appears not so much as a human activity, but as the activity of Christ who, through the power of the Holy Spirit, leads believers into communion with the Father.

If the first plan and "the ultimate end of the whole divine economy is the entry of God's creatures into the perfect unity of the Blessed Trinity" (*CCC* 260), it should also be noted that the yearning for a union of the Triune God with man is not simply the consequence of original sin. The Apostle Paul teaches that "In love He destined us for adoption to Himself through Jesus Christ," and "chose us in Him, before the foundation of the world, to be holy and without blemish before Him" (Eph 1:4–5). Although the fall of our first parents directed man more towards created things, it did not ultimately thwart the Father's plan. Communion as a goal stands at the beginning of creation, because creation, capable of love, finds its fulfillment only in knowing and sharing the love of the divine Persons (Müller 2015, 186). On this basis, the Pope highlights yet another dimension of the Trinitology of the liturgy, which permeates the theological reflections contained in his letter—the goal of the liturgy is identical with the goal of creation. Francis clearly has this in mind in another document, where he writes that,

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[5] The central place and orientation of the Paschal Mystery of Christ was also characteristic of the theology of the liturgy of Benedict XVI, who wrote that "The paschal mystery shines in the liturgy, through which Christ Himself draws us to Himself and calls us to communion." (*SCar* 35)

> The Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation. The world which came forth from God's hands returns to Him in blessed and undivided adoration: in the bread of the Eucharist, "creation is projected towards divinization, towards the holy wedding feast, towards unification with the Creator Himself." (*LS* 236)

Therefore the Pope can also write that, "all of creation . . . was a huge preparation for that Supper." (*DD* 3) Christ, by including man in His Eucharistic sacrifice of praise, opens the path, which had been closed by sin, for creation to return to the Creator. In the liturgy creation "is assumed in order to be placed at the service of encounter with the Word: incarnate, crucified, dead, risen, ascended to the Father." (*DD* 42)

The first condition for effective formation can be formulated on this foundation. The reality present in the liturgy must be objectively recognized and accepted by each individual. The faithful must be aware of what is expressed, and of what significance for his or her Christian existence is the personal encounter with Christ, in this celebration. This attitude is nothing other than—writes Francis—a "garment of faith" which comes from listening to the word of God (cf. Rom 10:17; *DD* 5), accepting the revelation of the Christian mystery, and being amazed by the Paschal Mystery of Jesus revealing God's plan (*DD* 24–26).

1.2. Liturgical Anthropology

In addition to faith, understood as the recognition and acceptance of the mystery of God in Christ, the Pope sees one other element as essential for effective formation. This is a maturely formed human arena that accepts the full truth of man, his dignity, destiny, and, above all, of the transcendent dimension of humanity. Man transcends himself and is then able to enter into a personal relationship with another person, and also with God, who has constituted him in his entirety. Therefore, corporeality, sensuality, and all creatures are forms of material reality and also symbols of mediation in this encounter, in keeping with the incarnational-historical workings of God (Müller 2015, 85).

In this perspective, the nature of the liturgy itself becomes even clearer, as it is, "consistent with all action of God, following the way of the Incarnation, that is, by means of the symbolic language of the body, which extends to things, space, and time." (*DD* 19; cf. *DD* 26) Thus for the Pope the liturgy has an incarnational nature, as had already been affirmed in the conciliar constitution, "In the liturgy the sanctification of the man is signified by signs perceptible to the senses, and is effected in a way which corresponds with each of these signs; in the liturgy the whole public worship is performed by the Mystical Body of Jesus Christ, that is, by the Head and His members." (*SC* 7) The longing of the Triune God to unite Himself to man through visible signs and symbols, among which the first is the Person of Jesus Christ, the Son of God, requires first the ability to read these signs, and then using them so that they

lead to the source of Christian life and give it shape (*DD* 45). Here the Pope clearly emphasizes that the symbolic reading of the language of celebration "is not a mental knowledge, not the acquisition of concepts, but rather a living experience." (*DD* 45)

Therefore, an essential condition for liturgical formation will be to educate people in an attitude that enables them to understand symbols (*DD* 47) and, as a result, to participate properly in the liturgical act. In this context, the Pope refers to Romano Guardini, who holds the view that the first criterion and task of liturgical formation is to reawaken man to the reality of the symbol (Guardini 2022, 48; cf. Worbs 2013, 289–300). Man is a being who in and of himself is capable of symbolic action and symbolic understanding (*DD* 28). In our times, however, he has lost this ability and thus the symbolic language of the liturgy is almost inaccessible to him (*DD* 27, 44). If the symbol is a corporeal-spiritual reality, an external sign of what is internal, then the primary task is to reacquire confidence in creation (*DD* 46) which—according to the methodology of incarnation—becomes an instrument of salvation and a channel of grace, a proto-sacrament. The Pope therefore speaks of the sacramentality of creation, which presupposes a symbolic, and not exclusively functional, understanding of it.[6] It is based on the fact that creatures and material realities point to spiritual and eternal meaning (Ratzinger 2012, 185–97). As a certain Carthusian monk teaches, after original sin, man's sense of sight was distorted. After man rejected the Light that was supposed to show him the way, things became a danger to him, because instead of pointing to the Creator and leading to Him, created things show only themselves, and, as a result, man stops at them (Guillerand 2006, 131). Hence the necessity of correcting this perspective, which will be served by liturgical asceticism.

In Francis' opinion, the education necessary to acquire an internal attitude of properly reading symbols is a process that encompasses the entire life of a person (*DD* 47). A gradual initiation into the life of the Church by one's parents, who introduce the meaning of even the simplest signs (e.g., the sign of the cross), builds a symbolic-sacramental sensitivity which will ultimately allow the child to personally enter the space of the salvific action of God in the celebration.

However, not only the family environment but also the Church plays a part in this process, which is why the ability to understand symbols is also part of the formation gained through participation in the liturgy. Here the Pope, who is not a rubricist, emphasizes the *ars celebrandi* as a specific means of molding an attitude appropriate for such participation.[7] On one hand "every aspect of the celebration must be carefully

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[6]   The question of the sacramental character of the symbol understood as a mediator of identity transporting man to the world to which he belongs, has recently been extensively discussed by Louis-Marie Chauvet. The author observes that what is most spiritual is accomplished through what is most corporeal. Therefore, man is formed and transformed by the symbolic order of the liturgy (Chauvet 2017, 137–42).

[7]   Francis is not alone on this issue. Benedict XVI wrote that "the best catechism on the Eucharist is the Eucharist itself, celebrated well." (*SCar* 64; cf. *SCar* 40)

tended to (space, time, gestures, words, objects, vestments, song, music . . .) and every rubric must be observed," as liturgical laxity leads to stripping the community of what is due to it, "namely, the Paschal Mystery celebrated according to the ritual that the Church sets down." (*DD* 23) But on the other hand, "The *ars celebrandi* cannot be reduced to only a purely rubrical mechanism . . . The rite is in itself a norm, and the norm is never an end in itself, but it is always at the service of a higher reality that it means to protect." (*DD* 48) The Pope seems to refer here to the Augustinian principle *Serva ordinem, et ordo servabit te*, when he writes that words and gestures form us, and bring order into our interior world (*DD* 51).

An interesting fact is also that among the acts of the *ars celebrandi*, Francis puts silence in first place, as the culmination of the sequence of rites and a symbol of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit (*DD* 52). Many other documents similarly emphasize the mystagogical and formative character of silence, which increases active participation (*RS* 39; cf. Sielepin 2006). Another powerful example is an analysis of the successive editions of the *Institutio Generalis Missalis Romani*, which shows that the latest edition of this document includes twice as many moments of silence as its first edition (Desthieux 2014).

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that in the Pope's opinion liturgical formation will have fulfilled its purpose when participants in the liturgy have deepened their rational act of faith by accepting the fullness of the revealed mystery, and are also able to understand the symbolic language of the liturgy, adapted to its nature, in order to enter into dialogue with God, who in the incarnate Son has revealed His life and invited us to participate in it.

2. Formation for Participation in the Liturgy

If Christian formation is the continuous process of personal maturation and becoming more like Christ, in accordance with the will of the Father, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit (*ChL* 57), then liturgical formation, as an essential part of this, can be called a vital incorporation into the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, who died and rose again, who is present and active in the liturgical celebration, and especially in the celebration of the sacraments. The fruit and the gift of such *actuosa participatio* in the sacraments is intimacy with God, which is the basis of the entire spiritual life (*PDV* 48).

2.1. Intellectual Formation

Being conscious of the broad theological understanding of such formation, Pope Francis gives it one more distinctive dimension. He stresses that above all, formation

is not a matter of something grasped mentally (*DD* 39) and, "does not consist in a mental assimilation of some idea." (*DD* 41) Neither is it a question of knowledge, or some type of abstract thought process, but at the same time it does not dispute the intellectual dimension (Jurczak 2020, 63). This is actually essential, even fundamental, for formation, but formation is not limited to it.[8] This is a very interesting statement, inasmuch as it is not uncommon for formation to be understood and conducted in just this way. In this key, liturgical formation consists of lecture series, speeches, tailored retreats, and the like. Sometimes these are expanded to include considerations and practical exercises (e.g., courses for lectors, acolytes, masters of ceremonies, extraordinary ministers of the Holy Communion, training for sacristans). Formation understood in this way would therefore consist in dedicating some time to acquiring knowledge, to making the mind aware ("enlightening"), directing it to what to pay attention to (e.g., during the Liturgy of the Hours one should concentrate on discovering in the texts of Morning Prayer the perspective of Christ's resurrection as the Sun of Justice, and in Vespers, His sacrifice). Such formation would, then, be a form of hidden knowledge that must be acquired (a form of gnosis) in order to properly participate in and celebrate the liturgy, and as a result the liturgy itself would be mainly an activity of the mind (spirit), an internal, intellectual, spiritual, and intangible effort.

Therefore, too, emphasizes Francis, theologians and various types of academic institutions play an important role. The results of their research and work should be made available to a wide range of interested parties, in order to contribute to an authentic and orthodox (leading to proper worship) deepening of theological knowledge. In his document the Pope particularly emphasizes three aspects of studies on formation (*DD* 35). The first concerns the field of liturgical hermeneutics, broadly understood, which deals with interpreting and understanding euchological texts and the other elements of the ritual. The texts very often have their origins in various historical, ecclesial, or even cultural contexts, which influence their form. Similarly, individual expressions (syntagms) also require appropriate philological tools in order to extract content that brings out the apostolic faith of the Church and that shapes the faith of the community and of individuals (theological synthesis) (Żądło 2011). The Pope then also points to those scholarly works that take into account the dynamics concerning the rites and their anthropological significance. A holistic concept of liturgical anthropology draws attention to the ways in which not only human desires (affective sphere) but also beliefs and personality are molded by participation in the celebration.[9] It is thus primarily a matter of integrally deepening the dialogue dimension of the celebration, which includes descending (katabatic, sanctifying) and

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8   This topic was raised in session by the Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments: "Liturgical formation cannot be limited to mere information about worship but must help in living out the liturgy so that it transforms life." (Congregation for Divine Worship and the Discipline of the Sacraments 2019, 93)

9   Man participating in the liturgical act as a person. Cf. Cockayne and Salter 2022, 72–106.

ascending (anabatic, latreutic) movement. The human person is not merely a viewer and recipient, for, "fruitful participation in the liturgy requires that one be personally conformed to the mystery being celebrated, offering one's life to God in unity with the sacrifice of Christ for the salvation of the whole world." (*SCar* 64) This personal conformity, essential for *actuosa participatio*, is at the same time both internal and external, that is to say, it presupposes that, "their interior dispositions correspond to their gestures and words." (*SCar* 64)

2.2. Ascetical Formation

Liturgical formation, as noted above, is not then an exclusively intellectual formation, because the liturgy is not an exclusively spiritual kind of worship. Christ is the Word made Flesh (cf. John 1:14). None of His actions were exclusively spiritual (non-material), nor exclusively physical. Works involving the tangible (cures, e.g.) were signs of spiritual effects (such as forgiveness of sins; cf. Matt 9:5). In other words, the glorification of the Father is proclaimed not only by the human soul, purified and united with Christ, but also by the body. The clearest example of this corporeal-spiritual union is the offering of Christ Himself, which is at the same time both physical (death on the cross) and spiritual as an expression of obedience to the will of the Father (cf. the prayer in the Garden) (Migut 2021, 87–100). The significance of the hypostatic union is crucial because it posits that the humanity of Jesus is not simply an instrument but the most perfect realization of the basic human acts of freedom, obedience, and creative dedication to God. Christology is thus the culmination of anthropology (Müller 2015, 390–391). Therefore liturgical education must not embrace the spiritual realm exclusively; but also the physical, the corporeal one. It must be integral (Araszczuk 2013, 114–15).

A suggestion concerning formation directed in this way also appears in *Desiderio Desideravi* (e.g., no. 47). When the Pope states that the existential engagement of the person of Jesus Christ is made according to the method of incarnation (hypostatic union), this means that it is, "the whole of creation that is assumed in order to be placed at the service of encounter with the Word: incarnate, crucified, dead, risen, ascended to the Father." (*DD* 42, cf. *DD* 11, 46) Consequently the whole man, body and soul, must be included in the transforming dynamism of Christ present in the liturgy, because the final goal of the incarnation is to make man like unto God (Müller 2015, 400). Ultimately, then, man, as a new creation, is incorporated into the eternal community of the Triune God (divinization). This process can be called liturgical asceticism, which is different from moral asceticism, understood as the exclusively human effort and activity for attaining spiritual perfection (*DD* 20). The asceticism that the Pope has in mind is the surrender to His love and allowing Him to draw the person (*DD* 6). His desire (cf. Luke 22:15) is the primary cause which draws man to participate in the liturgy.

The American theologian David Fagerberg writes that liturgical ascetism is not a form of ancient dualism or even of a modern spirituality condemning the body for the sake of developing the spirit. Liturgical ascetism is the reconstruction of the *imago Dei* and does not aim to liberate the spirit from the body, but to closely unite both, and to include both of them in the dynamism of the liturgy (Fagerberg 2013, 12). Since man is a corporeal-spiritual being, the medicine for the effects of sin must be applied to the spirit through the body and with the body. Ascetic action is not a rebuke of the body, but a response to love, and is only possible because baptism has already initiated the believer into the Paschal Mystery of Christ (Fagerberg 2013, 64). Baptism thus enables us to engage in the eschatological struggle, the first stage of which is to turn away from everything that can disorient this love implanted in man. Fagerberg lists many detailed forms of this struggle, which begins with overcoming disordered desires. Ascetical formation for the liturgy therefore concerns the spiritual and the material planes at the same time, in order to form a liturgical person capable of building a full relationship with God, with created things, and with his brothers and sisters (*DD* 3). It does not, however, end upon entering the place of the celebration.

3. Formation Through Participation in the Liturgy

Formation by participation in the liturgy is actually the fullness of this process and leads to bringing about the goal of Christian formation. The Pope does not use abstract formulations, but in several characteristic and seemingly identical expressions he uses unequivocally personalistic and theological language. First of all he writes—as mentioned above—that recognizing the mystery of God, which is what the liturgy is all about and towards which the entire formation effort is directed, "is not a question of something grasped mentally but a relationship that touches all of life." (*DD* 39) Next, he observes that this process, "does not consist in a mental assimilation of some idea but in real existential engagement with His person," on becoming Him, because the purpose and fullness of formation is to become like Christ (*DD* 41). So in essence, "The celebration concerns the reality of our being docile to the action of the Spirit who operates through it until Christ be formed in us. (Cf. Gal 4:19)." (*DD* 41) Formation is therefore based on existential commitment, which is accomplished sacramentally (*DD* 42). Based on the above statements of the Pope, it seems possible to propose three levels of development of Christian life shaped by the liturgy.[10] At the same time they can be applied to the various states of persons being

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[10] Marco Benini presents another perspective based on the Pope's letter, treating the story of the disciples on their way to Emmaus as a paradigm of liturgical formation understood mainly as a liturgical catechesis addressed to families. It is created by three principles: showing the connection between liturgy and life

formed, because although the call to holiness and the liturgy are shared by all, the degree of participation and the level of commitment may differ significantly.[11] Furthermore, the conciliar document on the liturgy had already emphasized that liturgical formation should take into consideration the age and condition, the way of life, and the standard of religious culture of participants in the liturgy (*SC* 19).

3.1. Formation of the Faithful—the Baptismal Priesthood

First of all, as Francis writes, formation consists in building a relationship with Christ which touches one's life (*DD* 39). This is the fundamental level and the first stage in drawing closer to Christ. An example of such a relationship can be the disciples and listeners of Jesus, those who heard about Him, gathered around Him, but whom He did not choose in the same way as the Apostles (*DD* 11).[12] All of these built a living relationship with Jesus which affected their lives authentically and concretely, but afterwards they returned to their everyday activities. But yet their lives had been changed. The woman suffering from hemorrhage, freed from that which had been limiting her life, was able to perform her household duties. Zaccheus, freed from greed and selfishness, became directed to serving others. The Kingdom of God, which had approached them in the person of Jesus Christ, became the source of a completely new life—not just a momentary experience.

This level of liturgical formation can especially be applied to those faithful who, following their vocation in family, marriage, or individually, develop a living bond with the Master through a regular participation in the liturgy which transforms their daily reality. The liturgy, as participation in the Paschal Mystery and an encounter with the Risen Lord seated at the right hand of the Father, gives meaning to their struggles. This is one of the more important and liturgically-oriented observations of the conciliar constitution *Lumen Gentium* as regards the worship of lay Catholics, participants in the priestly mission of Christ through the sacrament of baptism.

> For all their works, prayers and apostolic endeavors, their ordinary married and family life, their daily occupations, their physical and mental relaxation, if carried out in the Spirit, and even the hardships of life, if patiently borne—all these become "spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pt 2:5). Together with the offering of the Lord's Body,

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(e.g., through the testimonies of parents), deepening the understanding of symbols, and supporting active participation in the liturgy (Benini 2024).

[11] Francis proposes imagining identifying oneself with figures from Sacred Scripture, which is evidence of his own formation based on the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius of Loyola. One of the tools of this method is to engage the senses in contemplating scenes from the life of Christ (Ferrone 2023, 18–19).

[12] We can mention here e.g., the woman with the hemorrhage (cf. Matt 9:20–23), Zaccheus whose life changed after meeting with Jesus (cf. Luke 19:1–10), the two blind men from Jericho whose loud cries were heard and who followed Him (cf. Matt 20:29–34), Mary, Martha, and Lazarus (cf. John 11:2–44), and many others.

they are most fittingly offered in the celebration of the Eucharist. Thus, as those everywhere who adore in holy activity, the laity consecrate the world itself to God. (*LG* 34; cf. *ChL* 14)

3.2. Formation of the Clergy and Consecrated Persons

The second level of liturgical formation, as the Pope writes, can be classified as a real, existential involvement in His person. It assumes a deeper, more personal relationship than the one discussed above. An example here can be the Apostles, whom Jesus chose after a night spent in prayer (cf. Luke 6:12). They left everything and followed the Master, whereas the others (mentioned above) returned to their homes and daily lives. On this level all spheres of the life and activity of the person are re-ordered and incorporated into the mission of Jesus, in which these chosen ones participate in a manner different from the rest. The relationship uniting them to Him is now not simply friendship, but something greater. To explain the relationship between Jesus and the Twelve, St. John the Apostle uses the concept of *philia*, which Benedict XVI translates as the love of friendship (*DCE* 3).[13]

This level of formation can especially include consecrated persons and the clergy. Their participation in the liturgy is characterized by its frequency (daily participation in Holy Mass is recommended) and degree of involvement, which might be expressed by functions and services performed.[14] But above all it is their spousal relationship to Christ confirmed by the sacrament of holy orders or by vows or consecration. In a document on priestly formation John Paul II pointed out that a life of interior union with Jesus Christ, the foundation of which is baptism, and its food the Eucharist,

> has to express itself and be radically renewed each day. Intimate communion with the Blessed Trinity, that is, the new life of grace which makes us children of God, constitutes the "novelty" of the believer, a novelty which involves both his being and his acting. It constitutes the "mystery" of Christian existence which is under the influence of the Spirit: it should, as a result, constitute the ethos of Christian living. (*PDV* 46; cf. *EG* 264)

3.3. Formation for the Entire People of God

The last stage, we can suppose, no longer covers selected groups of the faithful, but concerns all participants in the liturgy. It is the common goal of all the baptized.

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13 This is different from *eros* or *agape*.
14 An example might be the instruction on the subject of the *Ordo Virginum*, which states, "They place the Eucharist at the center of their existence. It is the sacrament of the spousal covenant from which flows the grace of their consecration. Called to live in intimacy with the Lord, identifying with Him and conforming to Him, sharing in the celebration of the Eucharist where possible every day, they receive the Bread of life from the table of the Word of God and the Body of Christ." (*ESI* 32)

The Pope says that it is about becoming Christ (*DD* 41), and the ever-closer union with Him. This process is begun with the sacrament of baptism, "For our having believed in His Word and descended into the waters of Baptism, we have become bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh." (*DD* 14) Baptism guides the believer into the Paschal Mystery of Christ, that he may also take part in His resurrection and life. Francis adds that,

> Without this incorporation there is no possibility of living the fullness of the worship of God. In fact, there is only one act of worship, perfect and pleasing to the Father; namely, the obedience of the Son, the measure of which is His death on the cross. The only possibility of being able to participate in His offering is by becoming "sons in the Son." (*DD* 15)

Baptism therefore initiates the individual's eschatological struggle to imitate that which can be seen in the liturgy, namely a Person in filial communion with God the Father.

The focal point and goal of this level, then, is to become Christ-like and to be united with Him and to the Father through the action of the Holy Spirit. It was this topic which Jesus took up in the culminating moment of His mission, in His priestly prayer, ". . . so that they may be one, as we are one, I in them and You in Me" (John 17:22–23). This is also how the Trinitarian nature of the liturgy is brought about. The American theologian mentioned above evokes a moving illustration to describe what happens within a person participating in the liturgy. The person is like a block of marble with the image of God (the Son) hidden within, and every blow of the hammer and chisel of the Holy Spirit (the sacrament of repentance and reconciliation, ascetism) frees this image from the defects of the stone, in order to create a liturgical person who shares in the filial relationship of the Son with God the Father (Fagerberg 2013, 11). In this way liturgical formation, like liturgical ascetism, forms the person who is in communion with God through Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. A liturgical person is born, who stands before God and takes part in the holy offering through Christ, with Christ, and in Christ, in anticipation of the heavenly liturgy.

Benedict XVI describes this process of corporeal-spiritual formation perfectly,

> to want the same thing, and to reject the same thing . . . ; the one becomes similar to the other, and this leads to a community of will and thought. The love-story between God and man consists in the very fact that this communion of will increases in a communion of thought and sentiment, and thus our will and God's will increasingly coincide: God's will is no longer for me an alien will, something imposed on me from without by the commandments, but it is now my own will, based on the reality that God is in fact more deeply present to me than I am to myself. (*DCE* 17)

Conclusion

In one of the first documents of his pontificate Francis, speaking in the context of the evangelizing mission of the Church, emphasized the need for a progressive experience of formation in which the entire community participates, for a renewed appreciation of the liturgical signs of Christian initiation in a process that today can be called mystagogical initiation (*EG* 166). Applying these words to liturgical formation, one can conclude that post-baptismal liturgical formation bears the characteristics of a catechumenate, especially in relation to its final period, i.e. mystagogy. For the goal of mystagogy is a deepened awareness of the Paschal Mystery and the strengthening of its implementation in practice (*OChWD* 37). It is also nothing other than the practice of Christian life, having its source and summit in the liturgy.

The concept of liturgical formation presented in the Apostolic Letter *Desiderio Desideravi* proposes an integral and comprehensive introduction to the faithful of the mystery being celebrated. Given the difficulties in understanding and participating in the liturgy, Pope Francis is far from reforming it or replacing the current forms with others (old or new). He points to the need for proper and in-depth liturgical formation. This, in turn, is not limited to the catechetical (informative) dimension, but helps in experiencing the liturgy, so that the celebration of the Christian mystery unites one with Christ and in this way transforms Christian life, making it similar to the life of the Savior (cf. Gal 2:19–20; Sielepin 2023, 20–22). The liturgy, as the work of the new Adam, makes man by grace what Christ is by nature. This does not happen automatically but, respecting the freedom of the human person, it requires a commitment coming from a free decision. Liturgical formation is therefore an integral forming of the human being as a liturgical person who will be capable of fulfilling the vocation resulting from the very fact of his creation. Man "was created to serve God and love Him and to offer all creation back to Him." (*CCC* 358)

Translated by Mary E. Van Scott

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Augustine in the Footsteps of Moses: On the History of Interpretation and Impact of Exodus 3:14a

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Abstract: This article compares the revelation of the divine name to Moses in Exod 3:14 and its counterpart in Augustine's first vision in his *Confessiones*. The main aim is to elucidate the continuity and difference in Augustine's relationship with, and thought regarding, the figure of Moses and the revelation Moses received. Methodologically, it is based on comparing the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin versions of the text, their relationship with the history of thought, and on juxtaposing it with selected relevant passages in Augustine's work. It proceeds from the change brought about by the Greek text through its reception, with particular reference to Philo of Alexandria. The main part of this article focuses on the *Ego sum qui sum* as the content of Augustine's visionary experience and as an object of interpretation in interrelation with the philosophical concept of being; the main finding is that Augustine does not define God, but interprets his self-identification with being as the starting point for Augustine's own indirect reference to being and to humanity's relationship with the incomprehensible but repeatedly revelatory God.

Keywords: Augustine, Moses, Philo of Alexandria, God, being, theophany

In the history of biblical reception, it is not only the performance of the biblical interpreters that plays a role but also the influence of the biblical traditions. How do the reception and the received illuminate each other? This question should be taken into account when considering Augustine of Hippo's reception of such an important biblical passage as Exod 3:14a. Moreover, the very distinctive divine address to Moses contained therein has its own strong meaning and, in view of this, was also subject to some philosophical references in Augustine's writings. Augustine draws on philosophy to interpret the Bible, thereby revealing a relationship with the concept of being that has long been debated. Thus, one cannot help but notice clear specifics and differences in his thinking, especially in comparison with Platonism (Westphal 2004, 94–95).[1] In the following considerations, the specifics of Augustine's reception of Exod 3:14a will be discussed with particular reference to the seventh book of his

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[1] On the closely related but wide-ranging question of the relationship between ontotheology and the "metaphysics of Exodus," cf. Aertsen 1996, 3–4.

Confessions. In this context, the question will first be asked how the history of the impact of this biblical passage in Hellenistic and early Christian times contributed to Augustine's own understanding.

As will be shown later, Augustine finds an expression for the revelation of the divine name in Exod 3:14a. At this point, one should recall that Name Theology began to develop in the time of the Babylonian exile, which conceived the destroyed Jerusalem temple as the place of the presence of the divine name (cf. Deut 7:2–4).[2] One expression of this presence is Exod 3:14a. It has been disputed whether it is of pre- or post-exilic origin (Van Seters 2011, 144–45). However, this discussion cannot be addressed here. Augustine's reception reproduces Exod 3:14a in its Latin version, which in turn—as will be shown—presupposes the Greek text of the Septuagint. In order to at least indicate how the two versions relate to the Hebrew text and where they deviate from it, it should now be noted that in Exod 3:14a in the Biblia Hebraica, God interprets his name Yahweh by etymologizing אהיה אשר אהיה, "I am who I am."[3] This sentence has the character of a paronomasia in the sense of a semantic and phonological play on the name of Yahweh (Utzschneider and Oswald 2015, 123),[4] which is supposed to be hidden in the verb אהיה, the first person singular imperfect (*Qal*) of the verb היה ("to be"), as if the tetragram יהוה corresponded to the third person singular imperfect (*Qal*) of the verb היה.[5] In this passage, Yahweh proclaims and interprets his name to justify and legitimize his worship. Another important aspect of the abstract nature of this divine self-naming is the fact that it does not evoke any visual images.

In view of Augustine's recourse to the biblical tradition, the following will outline the development of interpretation, which could neither take sufficient account of the linguistic peculiarities of the Hebrew nor of the cultic context of Exod 3:14.[6]

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2   Cf. Bauks 2019, 340–341; Mettinger 1982, 59–66; Keller 1996, 113; Renz 2022, 126–27. For a discussion of Deuteronomistic "Name Theology," cf. Nentel 2000, 221–23.

3   On the literature on Exod 3:14, cf. Dohmen 2015, 160–161. For a summary of the previous interpretations and discussions, see Surls 2017, 4–13; Lewis 2020, 210–227; Davies 2020, 271, 274–78. Graham Davies points out the vagueness of the formulation and suggests that it should be understood as an *idem per idem* interpretation. However, his doubts about the etymologizing nature of Exod 3:14a are themselves uncertain, cf. Davies 2020, 278. Recently, there has also been a proposal to understand Exod 3:14 as created under the influence of philosophy but this proposal argues primarily from the history of reception and denies the uniqueness of this biblical passage, cf. Fieger and Roesner 2022, 15–25.

4   On the concept of paronomasia, cf. Reckendorf 1909, 162–67.

5   For a discussion, cf. Wilkinson 2015, 11–12, 41.

6   The semantic aspects of the Hebrew verb היה are the subject of extensive discussion, which cannot be dealt with here. Thus, one must consider the uncertainties of a possible comparison with the Greek concept of being. Among other things, a comparison can be made with regard to the conception of the relationship between being and movement. The verb היה is associated with movement, as shown by many years of research following William Albright (1924, 374), among others, who identified a causal form of the verb יהוה ("he who causes to be, brings into existence") in the name of God. For an overview of the discussion, see Parke-Taylor 1975, 58–60; Lewis 2020, 220–222.

1. The Path to Early Christianity

If Augustine finds a divine self-identification with being in Exod 3:14a, this can be seen as a philosophical interpretation of the biblical text. This reading has already been accommodated by the Septuagint, which renders as an equivalent ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν, "I am the Being One,"[7] a translation that linguistically greatly differs from its Hebrew model, since it introduces a personal pronoun; does not introduce a relative pronoun as an equivalent to the Hebrew particle אשר, "which"; forms a subject-predicate clause structure instead of a relative sentence; and renders the second verb as a participle, as opposed to the Hebrew imperfect (which more or less corresponds to the imperfective aspect of the verb in modern languages).

There is no recognizable error in the Greek text, as was assumed in earlier research (McDonough 1999, 131–32), but rather an expression of reader-friendliness. The translation comes as close as possible to the original. However, the Septuagint was unable to capture the Hebrew wordplay and its inherent understanding.[8] In addition, 3:14bβ reads ὁ ὤν, "the Being One" because it would be nonsensical to translate it with ἐγώ εἰμι, "I am" (Wevers 1990, 35). If one now asks about the influences that have contributed to the understanding of the Septuagint, philosophy comes to mind. Martin Hengel (1969, 189) doubted that the translation of the Septuagint itself was philosophically influenced. Although philosophy had an influence on general education in Hellenistic times, which is why at least the indirect influence of Platonism (Gericke 2012, 128) or popular philosophy cannot be ruled out (McDonough 1999, 134), it would be pure speculation to assume that the translators were interested in ontology.

The Greek version of Exod 3:14a represents a developmental step that was followed by Christian interpreters. Later, with the Latin Church Fathers, including Augustine, the effects of the Latin translation can be observed. In the Latin translation *Ego sum, qui sum* there is also a pronoun but in agreement with the Hebrew text there is a relative sentence structure and two identical verbs in the first person singular. The Vulgate translation is therefore somewhat closer to the Hebrew version than the Greek.

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7   On this, with regard to the relationship of verses 14a and 14b, cf. Gurtner 2013, 206–7: "… since a first-person subject would not work for the necessary ἀπέσταλκέν (a third sg form), Exodus is forced to resort to the participial ὁ ὤν, 'the One who is.' The first אהיה could be rendered as ἐγώ εἰμι because it is not formally the divine name, but introduces the divine name which Exodus renders ὁ ὤν …" For a discussion of the translation possibilities, see Birnbaum 2016, 276.

8   With regard to verse 15, cf. Birnbaum 2016, 277: "Unlike the Hebrew, the Greek does not raise the questions about a possible verbal connection between the pronouncement in Exod 3:14 and the name of God in Exod 3:15. If anything the Greek of Exodus may invite questions about why God issues two apparently unconnected statements and what precisely God's name is." Moreover, in the LXX the tetragram is generally replaced by κύριος (Lord), so that as Being One, he is the supreme One without a proper name, cf. Starobinski-Safran 1978, 51–52.

In order to place Augustine's reading of Exod 3:14a in its intellectual-historical context and to mark its continuity with the history of biblical interpretation, a brief sketch of the development of the interpretation of Exod 3:14a will now be made. It is assumed that the path from the Septuagint to the early Christian thinkers was also supported by the deuterocanonical Book of Wisdom, which speaks of God as ὁ ὤν (13:1) (Gilbert 2021, 82). An analogous idea is also found in the Dead Sea Scrolls, where God is referred to as *hww᾽ ῾wlm*, "eternal being" (1QS XI: 4–5).

This path then led via Philo of Alexandria, who also read the Septuagint and apparently preferred to speak of God as "the Being One" in connection with and motivated by Exod 3:14a, and then via the prologue to the Gospel of John (cf. 1:1–4), which may have been indirectly influenced by Philo, the "I am" sayings of this Gospel being—according to Emilie Zum Brunn—first linked to Exod 3:14 by Augustine (*Tract. Ev. Jo.* 38, 8–11; 40, 2–3; 43, 17–18 [CCSL 36, 341–45, 350–352, 380–381]) (Zum Brunn 1988, 110).[9]

In addition, this development was influenced by contact with the history of Greek philosophy which, however, cannot be traced here in its entirety (see below).[10] One should at least recall here the middle Platonist Numenius, who not only started from Plutarch's God as ὄντως ὄν, "true being" (see below), but also called his First God ὁ ὤν (Numenius, *Frg.* 13 des Places),[11] probably with knowledge of Exod 3:14a, since he knew the Exodus story (Numenius, *Frg.* 9 des Places).[12] He regarded divine being as incorporeal (Numenius, *Frg.* 4a25–32 des Places) and unchanging (Numenius, *Frg.* 3 des Places) and recalled Plato's (*Tim.* 27d) position that being always is and thus never comes into being. An important step for the identification of God and being in the Christian sense was the identification of the absolute "(I) am" (as in Exod 3:14) with the absolute "being" in Philo and later in Augustine, which was preceded by the identification of εἰμι and ὤν taken from the Septuagint and which is found in Cyril of Alexandria (*Comm. in Is.* I, 2 [PG 70, 0223]). In Pseudo-Dionysius, the identification of εἰμι and ὤν refers to the divine in its entirety (with reference to Rev 1:8) (*De div. nom.* II, 1 [PG 3, 637A]). It can be seen that without the reference to εἰμι in Exod 3:14a, an association of God and being in early Christian theology is difficult to imagine.

Philo's work contains not only scattered interpretations of this biblical passage but also related aspects of his philosophical understanding, which is why it is worth taking a closer look at him. While the Septuagint offers a different reading of Exod 3:14a, in Philo as a thinker there is a change of perspective in which ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν appears. Philo refers to God philosophically as "the being One," and he finds

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9   A certain precursor to this was Tertullian's identification of Jesus with *qui est*, "(He) who is" in *Or.* III, 3 (CCSL 1, 258–59). See below.

10   On "being" in the history of ancient philosophy, cf. McDonough 1999, 11–40.

11   On the comparison of Philo with Numenius, cf. especially Sterling 2015, 80–82.

12   On ὁ μέν γε ὤν *Fr.* 22 Leemans.

this designation more appropriate because it detaches him from characteristics of the inner-worldly realm. In doing so, he uses the masculine participle ὁ ὤν borrowed from Exod 3:14a (LXX) and occasionally also the nominalized participle τὸ ὄν (Kahn 1973, 455) as a "Platonized expression,"[13] sometimes almost side by side (*Det.* 160–161; *Deus* 69; *Mut.* 10–11; *Somn.* 1, 230–231; *Abr.* 121–22). For Philo, the absolute being is immovable and unchangeable (cf. *Deus* 22; *Post.* 28; *Mut.* 27–28, 57, 87), in contrast to the transient human being (*Det.* 160). Essentially, it can be said that he interprets the divine pronouncement in Exod 3:14a "in terms of the Platonic doctrine of being, as encouraged by the Septuagint translation on which he bases his commentary." (Runia 1995a, 209) He thus distinguishes between God as he is in himself and God as he is in relation to human beings, without the two contradicting each other. In *Somn.* 1, 230, it is pointed out that from the fact that nothing can be known about God, it follows that from a human perspective it is only appropriate for him εἶναι τὸ ὄν, "to be the Being One."[14] With regard to Exod 3:14—who God is, is his own affair, while for people he is, more than anything else, the God of the forefathers (cf. Exod 3:15; cf. also *Abr.* 50–52; *Mut.* 1, 12–13; *Mos.* 1, 76) (Runia 1995a, 210–211, 216).

Philo refers to the concept of being without avoiding the personal "God" and is the first to understand "being" as a divine name.[15] Thus, in *Abr.* 121 he refers to the Scripture that identifies the name of the Lord as ὁ ὤν, "the Being One" (McDonough 1999, 80–84). Before that, however, he argues in 51, alluding to Exod 3:14–15, that God himself does not need a name and prefers a "relative" (πρός τι) name to an eternal one so that people can address him.[16] In *Det.* 139, he at least implicitly indicates by the designation ὁ ὄντως ὤν θεὸς, "the God who is actually being," that it is derived from Exod 3:14a. In *Det.* 160, he invokes Exod 3:14a with reference to Moses to distinguish God from the finite, from that which only appears to be being: ὁ θεὸς μόνος ἐν τῷ εἶναι ὑφέστηκεν, "God alone subsists in being." Immediately afterward, in *Det.* 161, he speaks of τὸ ὄντως ὄν, "actual being," and in *Abr.* 80 and *Mos.* 2, 67 of τὸ πρὸς ἀλήθειαν ὄν, "true being."

In *Mut.* 11, however, he claims that God as ὁ ὤν πρὸς ἀλήθειαν, "being that is true," has no corresponding name,[17] and interprets Exod 3:14a as the principle that God is proper "to be" (εἶναι), not "to be spoken/expressed" (οὐ λέγεσθαι), and one who is οὐ λέγεσθαι, "not to be spoken/expressed," so that he can only be spoken of as unnameable. Similarly, in *Somn.* 1, 231, the name of God is ἔστιν "(he) is," so that one

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13   For the reference to Plato (*Tim.* 27d) and a discussion of the continuity with Eudorus as to the concept of God, see Sterling 2016, 141. For the further discussion about τὸ ὄν, cf. Atkins 2021, 81 note 43.

14   Cf. Kweta 1996, 365. On the contrast between the inaccessible divine being and the unknowable essence, cf. *Post.* 168–69; *Deus* 62; *Spec.* 1, 32–44; *Virt.* 215; *Praem.* 39.

15   Philo thus deviates from Greek philosophy, cf. Runia 1990a, 11.

16   For more on this, see Birnbaum and Dillon 2021, 201–2.

17   What is meant is the "true name," not the personal proper name, cf. Runia 1990b, 76. Cf. also *Somn.* 1, 230–231; *Mos.* 1, 75.

cannot understand that which is inherent in him.[18] According to *Mut.* 15, the unconceivable God is also ἀπερινόητος, "inconceivable" and ἀκατάληπτος, "incomprehensible." Philo also explains the divine ineffability here with reference to Exod 33:13.

In *Mos.* 1, 75, however, he goes so far as to distinguish being from non-being based on Exod 3:14a: "Tell them first that I am he who is, that they may know the difference between that which is and that which is not (τε καὶ μὴ)." Then follows the instruction that οὐδὲν ὄνομα τὸ παράπαν ἐπ᾽ ἐμοῦ κυριολογεῖται, "no name of mine can be appropriately used,"[19] for no name can be suitable for the exclusive εἶναι: "To Him alone belongs being (τὸ εἶναι)."[20]

The previous overview shows how differently Philo treats the name of God. On the one hand, he calls him "the Being One" according to Exod 3:14a; on the other hand, he refuses to name him. Is this a development in Philo's thinking or just a divergence from his own views? If one tries to find a connection between these interpretations, one can conclude that Philo respected the divine name in Exod 3:14a and that the biblical passage refers to God who is, however, unnamable in the proper sense and at most indeterminable, while he can be named indirectly in a semantically empty and attributeless sense as "the Being One."

Philo quotes Exod 3:14a several times[21] and this is sufficient to conclude that he found a point of reference for identifying the biblical God with the philosophical concept of being. Exodus 3:14a served him in his attempt to free the idea of God from the ideas that people have of inner-worldly, not just physical, realities. In this respect, his understanding of the biblical passage in question is consistent at its core. As David T. Runia notes: "Philo, as the first in a long succession, interprets the divine pronouncement in Exod 3:14 in terms of the Platonic doctrine of being, as encouraged by the Septuagint translation on which he bases his commentary. God alone is the Existent (or the One Who is), in contrast to Non-being, i.e. created reality." (Runia 1995a, 209) Philo also became a mediator between the Septuagint reading of Exod 3:14a, without knowing the Hebrew text (Hertog 2012, 159), and philosophical inquiry of being. This shows once again why it is necessary to grant Exod 3:14a special significance—because of its content, but also because of the history of its impact. By identifying God with being, Philo anticipates Augustine. However, the relationship between Augustine and Philo of Alexandria will be

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[18]   If, according to Philo, God can be inferred from the consequences of his actions (cf. Runia 1986, 436–37), this corresponds to Exod 3:14–15, where God appears detached from attributes and can only be inferred from them.

[19]   On the nameless god, cf. McDonough 1999, 79–84, esp. 82.

[20]   Cf. Burnyeat 2006, 148 note 28: "Philo does not connect the name with eternity, but explains it as designating nothing but God's ὕπαρξις in contrast to his οὐσία or ποιότης, which are beyond our comprehension."

[21]   Allenbach (1982, 60) counts a total of 52 citations of Exod 3:14 in Philo's work, including allusions, 8 of which occur twice in one verse. The list of quotations and allusions compiled by Sterling (2014, 419) shows that from the book of Exodus, Philo most frequently quotes Exod 3:14, cf. 419.

only partially mentioned here.[22] Philo represents an important step in the development of thought.

2. *Ego Sum, Qui Sum* in Augustine

Augustine's interpretation of Exod 3:14a is remarkable, considering not only that he addresses it in 49 passages of his work (Glowasky 2020, 178) but also how much this biblical passage shaped his thinking. It is also very peculiar[23] and should therefore first be briefly placed in the intellectual-historical context of his work. Suffice it to point out what is usually recalled of the development of Augustine's thought, that it reflects his personal confrontation with Manichaeism, which in his opinion relativized the divinity of God (McDonald 1993, 73–75), and with the philosophy[24] that pointed him towards God and led him into his own inner self (*Conf.* VII, 17.23 [CCSL 27, 107]; *Conf.* X, 6.9–24,35 [CCSL 27, 159–74]). He himself defined the framework of his concern as the knowledge of God and the soul: "I want to know God and the soul" (*Solil.* I, 6.15 [CSEL 89, 11]; Vaught 2003, 8–15).

He owed the preparation for this realization to the Platonists (above all Plotinus, Porphyry and Iamblichos), whom he considered not to have attained it (*Epist.* 118, 2–22.33 [CCSL 31B, 112–27, 135]). Their books brought him to an inner turning point (*Conf.* VII, 10.16 [CCSL 27, 103–4]). However, he himself only came to this realization through faith in Jesus Christ as the Word of God made flesh (*Conf.* VII, 18.24 [CCSL 27, 108]). The deepest reason for this lies in the point of Augustine's question of God, which can be summarized as follows: "Gott ist für Augustinus der Seiende, weil er in seiner Liebe der gegenwärtige Gott ist." (Studer 1987, 152) For him, Exod 3:14a became a testimony to this divine presence, the interpretation of which is then shaped by his personal and intellectual development (cf. the entire interpretation Studer 1987, 142–52), which shall be analyzed below.

In his reception of Exod 3:14a,[25] he is preceded on the one hand by the Alexandrian tradition, which is consistent with Philo (Mrugalski 2021, 5–11 with Literature): Clement of Alexandria (*Paed.* I 71, 2 [GCS 12, 18–21, 131]; *Strom.* I 166, 4; *Strom.* V 34, 5–6 [GCS 15, 348]; *Strom.* V 82, 1–2 [GCS 15, 53]) and Origen of

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22 Augustine was probably directly familiar with only some of Philo's writings, but was above all familiar with his thought through the patristic tradition, cf. Solignac 1984, 1372. It is noteworthy, however, that Philo (and through him Basileus) and Augustine are the only biblical exegetes who, based on Exod 3:14–15, distinguish between God as essence and the God of the patriarchs, cf. Runia 1995b, 2.

23 On Augustine's conception of biblical exegesis and his distinction between the fourfold (historical, etiological, anagogical, and allegorical) sense of Scripture, cf. Lubac 1998, 123–32.

24 On the general influence of philosophy on Augustine's thought, cf. TeSelle 2008, 19–55.

25 On the history of the Christian impact of Exod 3:14, see Buffa and Meiser 2022, 197–200.

Alexandria (*Comm. Io.* II 13, 95–96 [GCS 10, 69]; *Princ.* I, 3, 6 [GCS 22, 57]). On the other hand, the Latin patristic tradition already quotes Exod 3:14a from Novatian, who in *De trinitate*, like Augustine later on, claims that *qui est* "(He) who is" as the name of God implies immutability (*Trin.* IV, 4.23–12.27 [CCSL 50, 17–19]). Like Augustine, they both also speak of the eternity, infinity, and incomprehensibility of God (Madec 1987, 122–24).[26] In *Or.* 3.1 (CCSL 1, 258–59), Tertullian refers to the name that God revealed to Moses, and in *Adversus Praxean* mentions *qui est* in a quotation from an adopted list of divine names and claims that the names of the Father are also those of the Son (*Prax.* 17, 1–3 [CCSL 2, 1182]). This development also includes Christian theology of the Logos (Justin Martyr, Irenaeus, Tertullian), which identified the messenger of Exod 3:2 with the Logos, but against which Augustine undertook "an ontologization of the name of God" (Mrugalski 2021, 1).

Augustine's identification of God with being, however, presupposes the Greek wording of Exod 3:14a;[27] for when in the seventh book of *The Confessions* he quotes Exod 3:14a, he prefaces it with the assurance *immo vero*, as if he had understood the quoted words as divine self-identification (*Conf.* VII, 10.16 [CCSL 27, 104]). Such an understanding—as well as Augustine's *idipsum*, "the selfsame" and *ipsum esse*, "being self," which will be discussed later—results more from a reading of the Septuagint than from Jerome's translation of the Bible. However, Augustine is not only a classical author who identifies God with being but also a thinker who can be compared with Moses, as shown in the following section.

2.1. Interpretation of the Mystical Experience in *The Confessions* VII

In Augustine's reception of Exod 3:14a, his life story, his religious experience, his biblicism and his philosophically influenced theology overlap. This can be seen in the way in which Exod 3:14a relates to his conversation with God (Cary 2003, 63) after his inward turn when he is in direct contact with the dual object of his main concern (knowledge of God and knowledge of the soul). In Book VII of *The Confessions*, Augustine describes his visionary ascent (Conybeare 2016, 85–88). In doing so, he summarizes the idea of turning inwards, with which he had already dealt in his earlier writings (*Fund.* 40–41 [CSEL 25, 245–47]), and in this context, he also draws on Platonic and Stoic thought (Cary 2003, 63–67). Starting from philosophy, he

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26 For the further Latin tradition up to Jerome, cf. Madec 1987, 125–30, esp. 129: "Dès la première citation latine, celle de Novatien, les conséquences fondamentales de l'identification de Dieu à l'Être sont tirées et atfirmées simplement: Dieu est, il est éternel, immuable, infini, insaisissable. Les textes forts d'Hilaire, d'Ambroise et de Jérôme ne disent pas autre chose, peut-être parce qu'il n'y a rien d'autre à dire."

27 Augustine himself had a positive, multi-layered, but not entirely consistent relationship with the Septuagint, cf. Kotzé 2009, 256–59. Cf. also Runia, 1995a, 217: "It is something of a mystery how this Philonic theme finds a place in the writings of Augustine. The Church Father mentions the Jewish thinker once in a rather critical vein."

simultaneously distances himself from it because he had only found what he was looking for, the Word made flesh, the Son who humbled himself and whom God then exalted, by reading the New Testament (*Conf.* VII, 9.13–14 [CCSL 27, 101–2]). It can therefore be said that he thereby presupposed an overcoming of the distance and opposition between the divine and the human, rather than direct access to the divine spirit in one's own mind, as Plotinus did (Cary 2003, 63). Moreover, in contrast to Plotinus, God plays an active and decisive role here by establishing a reciprocal personal relationship,[28] which anticipates the orientation towards salvation, as shown below.

In this context, Augustine comes as close as possible to the content of Exod 3:14a, albeit in the context of a broader consideration. Similarly, as on other occasions, e.g., in the interpretation of Ps 101 (102) when Exod 3:14a serves to interpret other biblical passages and does not constitute the main theme (Falardeau 2008, 144). In so doing, he not only engages in scholarly exegesis, but also wants to record the result of his search for knowledge of God (Feldmann 1991, 885–86). With this in mind, he reports on his first "Platonic ascent," which he experienced in Milan in 386 (Dobell 2009, 135): "Through this I was admonished to turn into myself and, guided by you, I entered into my innermost being (*intima mea*) . . ." (*Conf.* VII, 10.16 [CCSL 27, 104]) Then, experiencing the abysmal distance from God, he heard the divine utterance that culminated in the words: *Immo vero ego sum, qui sum*, "Truly I am who I am" (*Conf.* VII, 10.16 [CCSL 27, 104]). It was as if he had had an instantaneous experience of God—formally, comparable to Plato's experience according to *Epist.* 7, 341d— which simply erased his doubts: " . . . and I heard it as it is heard in the heart, and there was no reason at all to doubt it . . . " (*Conf.* VII, 10.16 [CCSL 27, 104])[29] This experience is followed by an awareness of the unchanging identity of God, who is *in se manens*, "abiding in himself " (*Conf.* VII, 11.17 [CCSL 27, 104]). A brief experience is enough to gain essential insight.

In the words of Exod 3:14a, which form the climax of Augustine's account of his own ascent,[30] it is as if God were repeating for Augustine his earlier words to Moses. However, this can be explained with the help of the words quoted above, that he is always the same. Thus, the words *in se manens* can also be read as an allusion to Exod 3:14a.

Augustine not only documented his experience, but also reflected on it and thought it through. It should therefore at least be noted that in the seventh book of *the Confessions*, the time in which the visions took place overlaps with the time in

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28 Cf. Beierwaltes 1991, 137. On the influence of Neoplatonism on Augustine, see Kenney 2005, 49–60.

29 A certain analogy can be found in *Homily* VII, where Augustine characterizes the experience of Moses "as if struck by lightning." *Serm. VT* 7.7 (CCSL 41, 75–76).

30 Cf. Dobell 2009, 198: "I submit that the Platonic ascent of *Confessions* 7.17.23 should not be understood as a singular experience, but rather as a type of ascent that Augustine was elaborating in the period between (roughly) 387/8 and 391."

which he wrote *the Confessions* around ten years later (Ruhstorfer 1998, 283–84, 293). However, in his accounts of the visions, it is not possible to distinguish what exactly reflects his authentic experiences and what is an interpretation of them. Rather, one can hypothetically assume that the latter merges into the former and trust in the authenticity of Augustine's account (Hattrup 2011, 444). Overall, it can be said that his experience, the content of which was light (*lux incommutabilis*, "unchanging light") (*Conf.* IX, 10.16 [CCSL 27, 103]) and the divine word, cannot be attributed to the performance of his intellect, so that it is rightly described as a "vision."[31]

2.2. On the Eternal *Esse* in Augustine

It follows from the previous considerations and must now be affirmed that Augustine not only read God's self-presentation in Exod 3:14a but also derived his statements about God from it, as if it were a template for what and how God can be thought about in the first place. From this perspective, the revelation to Moses gives human thinking an authoritative prerequisite for this. God speaks here of himself as the One who is and thus refers to himself as the Being One with which he is identical.[32] However, as already indicated, it also follows from Exod 3:14b.15 that God develops a relationship from within himself to that which is external to him and finite. Augustine was also confronted with both aspects in his vision. According to *De doctrina christiana*, the calling of Moses agrees with the fact that God gives everything its beginning (*Doctr. chr.* I, 32.35 [CCSL 32, 26]).

Augustine himself could not simply re-enact the story of Moses, but he understood *Ego sum, qui sum* as the starting point for further thought—and not only for himself, for just as Moses' mission to the Israelites is derived from the revelation of the name, for Augustine the divine *esse* becomes the point of reference for thinking through God's relationship with man, also with regard to the history of God's people.

Thus for Augustine, Exod 3:14a testifies to the transition between the eternity of the Creator and the perspective of creation, the priority of the former, and the dependence of the latter. This connection is already hinted at when Augustine says at the beginning of Book VII of *The Confessions* that God is the highest (*summus*), the one (*solus*), the true (*verus*), the incorruptible (*incorruptibilis*), and the unchangeable (*incommutabilis*) (*Conf.* VII, 1.1 [CCSL 27, 92]). If this being is eternal, it means "to be fully present" (*totum esse praesens*) (*Conf.* XI, 11.13 [CCSL 27, 201]; cf. *Conf.* IX, 10.24 [CCSL 27, 147–48]). Although Augustine does not refer to Exod 3:14a in these

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31   Cf. Miles 1983, 135: "The vision of God [. . .] is the only activity in which the soul does not construct from its own substance the image which is seen and remains in the memory after the moment of vision."

32   On the identification of God and being, cf. esp. Augustinus, *Trin.* VI, 10.11 (CCSL 50, 241); *Enarrat. Ps.* 68, 1,5 (CSEL 94/2, 259). On the Neoplatonic concept of pure being, which Augustine arrived at via Porphyry and Marius Victorinus, cf. Hankey 2010, 128. For a more detailed comparison of Augustine's concept of being with the concept of being in the philosophical tradition, cf. Anderson 1965, 19–25.

references, the biblical passage fits well with the words quoted as evidence—as evidence of the presence of the eternal. It thus testifies to the divine presence, which appears once but is not exhausted in it.

In Exod 3:14, God appears as the One who speaks of himself and as the One who reveals himself, who is not only present but also has a conversation with Moses as the representative of the Israelites who are to be liberated from Egypt, and more generally, as the One who of his own accord develops the mutual relationship of which Philo had already spoken, as previously indicated. In his Christological interpretation of Ps 101 (102), Augustine himself addresses in part the relationship between divine eternity and finite humans: "Then he called himself Creator for the creature, God for man, the Immortal for the mortal, the Eternal for the perishable man: I am who I am, he said." (*Enarrat. Ps.* 101 II, 10 [CCSL 40, 1445]; cf. also *Serm. VT* 7.7 [CCSL 41, 75–76]) Here, he also points to two aspects of being—first, being for himself and second, being for humans. God does not want, as it follows from his perfect being, that human beings are not (*Serm. VT* 7.7 [CCSL 41, 75–76]).

However, *Ego sum qui sum* raises a number of questions that require careful consideration. Augustine refers to God using various forms of the verb *esse* (in addition to the infinitive, also 1st, 2nd, and 3rd person singular): . . . *tu vero idem ipse es. Tu quis es? Idem ipse es.* "But you are the same. Who are you? You are the same." This is how he addresses God with his self-naming, from which he derives *qui sum*, "(He) who I am" as his name. To this Augustine adds, according to Exod 3:14b, *qui est*, "(He) who is," *ipsum esse*, "being himself" and *magnum est*, "Great Is."[33] However, this revealed divine identity, which is also expressed from the perspective of the recipient of the revelation, is incomprehensible. *Qui sum* is an expression of the incomprehensible.[34] That is why God comforts people in their weakness: "I am (as he said) the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac and the God of Jacob" (Exod 3:15). He thus provides an intelligible name that is identical to the former, which is also recognizable from the fact that both contain *ego sum* (*Enarrat. Ps.* 101 II, 10 [CCSL 40, 1445]).[35] At the same time, it expresses the divine presence, so that people should learn an understandable name and can find a relationship with the incomprehensible (Glowasky 2020, 183), so that they can participate in it, even some of those who were not yet born at the time (*Enarrat. Ps.* 101 II, 11 [CCSL 40, 1446]). This can be understood as the consequence drawn by Augustine from Exod 3:14a, in the awareness of God's eternal being.

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33 To *summum esse* "highest being," cf. *Conf.* I, 6.10 (CCSL 27, 5); *Enarrat. Ps.* 121.5 (CCSL 40, 1805).

34 According to Michael Cameron, in the *Enarrationes*, which are intended for people "of simple faith," Augustine concentrates on divine revelation in history, "to stimulate pastorally the initial steps of faith" (Cameron 2012, 17), so that Augustine distinguishes different stages of knowledge—from knowledge of revelation in history to spiritual contemplation.

35 Cf. *Enarrat. Ps.* 104.4 (CCSL 40, 1493); *Enarrat. Ps.* 121.5 (CCSL 40, 1802); *Enarrat. Ps.* 134.6 (CCSL 40, 1940); *Serm. VT* 6.5 (CCSL 41, 64); *Serm.* 7, 1.7 (CCSL 41, 70, 75–76).

Yet how can one orient oneself towards such a God? Given his absolute indeterminacy, this is not possible, whereas God, as the God of the forefathers, connects the present with the ancient past and is also the God of salvation (*Conf.* VII, 21 [CCSL 27, 110–112]). As a one-word interpretation for the revelation of the divine name, Augustine offers *idipsum*, "the selfsame," the pure self.[36] In his interpretation of Ps 121 (122) in particular, he conclusively explains how *idipsum* has become accessible to humans in the first place, although it remains inaccessible to human thought. However, nothing more can be said about it other than "the selfsame" (*Enarrat. Ps.* 121.5 [CCSL 40, 1802]). Yet it can be interpreted. It is itself incomprehensible because it completely transcends the human mind; but if God expressed it to Moses, then people can speak of it themselves, albeit in a very limited way, "by some proximity of words and meanings" (*Enarrat. Ps.* 121.5 [CCSL 40, 1802]). This is why Augustine identifies *Ego sum, qui sum* with *qui est* (given the connection between 14a and 14b) and then with *idipsum*. From the divine self-naming, Augustine thus derives the divine name in the forms that humans can use.

According to Augustine, human weakness is evident in the fact that he considers the divine name to be incomprehensible, particularly in relation to greatness ("There is much to understand, much to comprehend.") (*Enarrat. Ps.* 121.5 [CCSL 40, 1802]). This is similar to his interpretation of Ps 101 (102), where humans, who cannot comprehend being (*esse*), are contrasted with God as the "Great Is" (see above). Whilst Augustine recognizes a comforting function for the Word of God in Exod 3:15, it should be noted that for him, human weakness is not only of an intellectual nature but also manifests itself in the danger of despair.[37]

The contrast to God is terrifying for humans but it is precisely in this contrast that Augustine also finds encouragement for them. Here, too, God assures Moses that as "I am who I am" he is identical with the God of the patriarchs. What is more, he is close to everyone, even if the Old Testament tradition does not go that far. However, it does correspond to the words of Acts 17:28: "For in him we live and move and have our being." Ultimately, the incomprehensible is accessible to humans because the Word has become flesh, as Augustine's Christological reflections (see below) show.

Since Augustine's thought relates to being, it is appropriate to suggest several points of connection, especially with Platonic philosophy. Augustine thus dared to interpret the revelation of the name of God, with whose recipients he identified

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36   On *idipsum*, cf. also Augustine, *Conf.* XII, 7.7 (CCSL 27, 219). Augustine took this expression from six places in the Psalms in the Vulgate and linked it to the idea of the one, unchanging, eternal, and simple God, cf. Teske 2008, 122. For the reference of the *idipsum* to Exod 3:14, see Anderson 1965, 27; Kenney 2005, 77.

37   In *Homily* VII, with reference to Exod 33:18, Augustine speaks of Moses' despair as a human being who is far removed from the *excellentia essentiae*, the "excellence of essence," cf. *Serm. VT* 7.7 (CCSL 41, 75–76).

himself, by means of philosophy.[38] On the one hand, Augustine's Platonism is inconceivable without the Platonic question of being, which in turn was fundamentally influenced by Parmenides' theory of being (*Fr.* 8.1–4 [Simplicius, *In Arist. Phys.* 78,5; 145,1.5.27.29; 146,5]).[39] Plato wondered what the philosophers actually understood by "being" (*Soph.* 242c–244b) and what is that which always is (τὸ ὄν) (*Tim.* 27d). However, Augustine did not pursue these questions, which were later also discussed by the middle Platonists (Sterling 2014, 420–421), but referred to them in relation to God. To him, Plato's ὄντως ὄν, "actual being" (*Soph.* 240b7), is the one manifested God, *verum esse*, "true being" (*Serm. VT* 7.7 [CCSL 41, 75]). In addition, Augustine may have been guided by Plotinus' understanding of being as spirit and his juxtaposition of temporal being with its timeless divine principle, as well as Porphyry's identification of God, being and the One (Ruhstorfer 1998, 303–4). Other Platonic themes he takes up are immutability (*Phaedo* 78d)[40] and eternity (*Tim.* 37e–38a).[41] Furthermore, the actual being[42] is only one—God's being (God as *ipsum esse*) as one in contrast to Plotinus (*Enn.* V, 1.10 Henry–Schwyzer)—which exists in itself, but is not only for itself. The decisive factor for Augustine was the biblical text Exod 3:14a, in which he saw proof that the God who is and the God who appears are one and the same.[43]

When he reflects philosophically on God, he is aware of his human perspective and endeavors to speak of God's being rather indirectly. This can be seen in the way he prefers the concept of essence, whereby essence refers to being (Teske 2008, 119). He also sees it as equivalent to Aristotle's οὐσία, which he prefers to *substantia*.[44] In *De trinitate* he explicitly derives *essentia* from the substantivization of the verb

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[38] To summarize Augustine and philosophy, cf. Fuhrer 2023, 93–108—with a reference to *communis opinio*, according to which "with his repeated recourse to Marius Victorinus, he points to the tradition in which the two doctrines [i.e. Christianity and Platonism] were considered compatible." (Fuhrer 2023, 96) On Augustine's reception of Neoplatonism and his polemic against Manichaeism with the help of philosophy, cf. Kenney 2005, 49–60.

[39] His oneness, his sameness, his necessity, his wholeness, his completeness, beginninglessness and endlessness, his ungenerability, his immortality, his inmobility, his eternity, his indivisibility, his placelessness, his timelessness and his constant presence can be cited for comparison. Cf. Catapano 2024, 125–50.

[40] Cf. Anderson 1965, 33: "Since God is a metaphysically simple being and ordinary substances are not, Aristotle's theory of predication does not apply to God in the ways it does to ordinary substances."

[41] On the expression ἀΐδιος in the sense of necessarily imperishable and necessarily unborn nature, identity, and immutability in Plato, cf. Festugière 1971, 254–71.

[42] On ὄντως ὄν, "true being" in Plutarch, *E Delph.* 19, 392 E, and on Apollo identified with το ὄν in 8, 388 F, cf. Whittaker 1969, 189.

[43] I.e. also in contrast to the three gods of Numenios (*Frg.* 9 des Places: αὐτοαγαθον, the *Good-in-itself* / αὐτὸ ὄν *Self-being*; ποιητὴς / δημιουργός *Creator*; ποίημα *creation*). Cf. Kahn 1973, 122–30.

[44] Cf. Augustine, *Trin.* V, 8.9 (CCSL 50, 216) and, in relation to Exod 3:14, *Trin.* VII, 5.10 (CCSL 50, 261). On Aristotle's God as οὐσία cf. *Metaph.* 1072b22–30. For this, see Zubiri 2010, 47: "Aristotle considers the θεός as an οὐσία, as something that is fully self-sufficient." On Augustine's use of *substantia* and his preference for *essentia*, see Teske 2008, 125–26. On Augustine's limited and rather indirect knowledge of Aristotle, cf. Tkacz 1999, 58–59.

esse.[45] *Essentia* itself is therefore understood as being in itself (*ad se*). Thus Augustine identifies God with both being and essence, God being the supreme essence that is being (*Civ.* XII, 2 [CCSL 48, 357]; Anderson 1965, 73–74).

It also thus raises the question of how Augustine connected biblical exegesis with philosophy in the first place. He not only subjected the Bible to a literary interpretation but also searched for its hidden meaning. In his view, such a procedure is possible because God entered the human world and declared: "I am who I am," as Augustine states in *De vera religione* (*Ver. rel.* 49.97 [CCSL 32, 250]), and then he calls out: "Let's climb the steps (*gradus*) that divine Providence deigned to set up for us." (*Ver. rel.* 50.98 [CSL 32, 250]) Augustine regarded allegorical interpretation as a step on the gradual path to the eternal (Cameron 2012, 95). Allegory and philosophical thinking could thus exist side by side.

Therein lies also a certain analogy to the connection between philosophy and biblical exegesis in Philo of Alexandria. Above all, however, Augustine's concept of being shows a kinship with Philo's entirely transcendent being, whose eternity, immutability, and incomprehensibility are emphasized. For Philo, however, the divine name is the medium of man's indirect relationship with the Being One, whereas for Augustine it is primarily a medium of revelation. Here, *esse* is related to revelation.[46]

Augustine does not investigate being.[47] In *Homily* VII, where he interprets the doctrine of the Trinity from the divine revelation in the burning bush (Exod 3:1–4:17), Augustine derives *esse* from Exod 3:14a as an expression of immutability and eternity (*Serm. VT* 7.7 [CCSL 41, 75–76]). The immutable is that which is unlimited; and this is also complementary to truth (*Civ.* 8.11 [CCSL 47, 228]) and stands in contrast to changeable human existence. However, while Moses asks for the name of God in Exod 3:13, Augustine asks *quid est . . .* , "what is . . . " Even more clearly, when he asks in *Homily* VI, in which he deals with the revelation of God in the burning bush, *Quid est hoc?* "What is this?" and then . . . *quid vocaris?* " . . . what is your name?" (*Serm. VT* 6.4 [CCSL 41, 64]), he asks about the identity of God. This formulation of the question is clearly different from Moses' question about the divine name in Exod 3:13. From verse 14a it is clear to him that God identifies himself with being, which he expresses from his human perspective with *idipsum*. Augustine indirectly interprets immutability, but also eternity and truth as if they were complementary aspects of being. They are entirely his own. As

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45 Cf. Augustinus, *Trin.* V, 3 (CCSL 50, 208). Only philosophical consideration leads to the conclusion of Exod 3:14a in the concept of *essentia*, which has "die Bedeutung des allein wahren und unwandelbaren 'Seins'" (Ringleben 2018, 147) for Augustine, *Trin.* VII, 5.10 (CCSL 50, 260–261). Of the 188 occurrences of the term *essentia* in Augustine's complete works, 182 are found in *De trinitate*, cf. Ayres 1999, 98.
46 On the close but hardly verifiable connection between Augustine and Philo, see Runia 1995a, 217–18.
47 It is therefore understandable when Marion (2008, 182) argues that Augustine is primarily concerned with immutability and not with being. But why should one concern oneself with divine immutability in the first place?

the unchangeable and the eternal, God is the precondition of human existence, just as truth is the guarantee of human knowledge. He is also One, but not, as in Plotinus, the One "beyond being" (*Enn.* VI 9, 2.12 ff.; *Enn.* III 8, 10.28 Henry–Schwyzer; cf. earlier the idea of Good in Plato, *Rep.* 509b).

Yet this God can be experienced by everyone as one who is near. As already indicated, God's being is also for humans. According to Augustine, God does not only make himself known so that people know that they know nothing about him and can still think about him. It has already been indicated that for Augustine, *Ego sum, qui sum* has a Christological aspect. The incarnation of Christ made it possible for Augustine to identify the revealing being and his revelation without relativizing his transcendence. Exodus 3:14a provides him with proof of this (*Enarrat. Ps.* 121.5 [CCSL 40, 1805]). Just as God has always revealed himself, so he revealed himself in Christ, and when the Word became flesh, it was shown that the Word with whom God identifies himself in Exod 3:14a is identical with Christ (Studer 1997, 150–151). According to Augustine, the eternally self-same God revealed himself to Moses and in Christ, as can be derived Christologically from Exod 13:14a. What is true in the metaphysical sense is fulfilled in history. Was he also thinking here of the content of his visions?

Conclusion

How did Augustine follow in the footsteps of Moses? In his vision, according to the seventh book of *The Confessions*, he heard the same words as Moses and, like Moses, encountered the presence of divine authority, anticipating future redemption (this time in the form of resurrection). Augustine's account of his experience also has a basic structure that is analogous to the biblical account of the revelation to Moses: according to it, God reveals himself of his own accord to an individual through his word and in conversation with his human counterpart. In both cases, the dominant phrase is *Ego sum, qui sum*, which Augustine heard according to his own testimony and which corresponds to the words already heard by Moses. However, he heard them not as a divine mediator, but as an interpreter. As such, he relied on the biblical tradition of the divine revelation of God's name in Exod 3:14a, as developed through Greek, and then Latin translations. Thus, this biblical passage could be read as a divine self-identification with being. While in the Hebrew version of Exod 3:14a, Yahweh reveals his name and thus his powerful presence, in the Greek version (of which Augustine was probably aware) it is transformed into a divine statement about who he is, abstracting from anything definite. Thus, Augustine found in Exod 3:14a not only an instrument of interpretation for his experience but also a divine self-manifestation that legitimized thinking and speaking about the incomprehensible, yet did not

result in the clarification of being itself. The revelation of the divine name allowed Augustine to speak of that which the incomprehensible himself has made comprehensible. What is to be understood is what God makes known of his essence, while he allows his being only to be referred to.

In reflecting on his vision, Augustine himself thus stands on a line connecting his experience of the appearing God and the thought of the God who is in himself. The interpretation of Exod 3:14b in relation to the concept of being made it possible to think about God without referring to all specific attributes that would relativize his infinity. Both revelation and incarnation answer the question of the relationship between the infinite and the finite.

Translated by Michael Pockley

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Gérard Philips and the Triumph of *Via Media*: A Historical Note on the Redaction of *Lumen Gentium*

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Abstract: This article aims to investigate the redaction aspects of the dogmatic constitution of the Vatican Council II on the mystery of the Church *Lumen Gentium*. It is hoped that this attempt will provide a good understanding of the spirit that worked behind the written text and the theological vision that accompanied its creation. In order to achieve this aim, the author presents the historical aspects of the redaction of the document, focusing his attention on the efforts of the main redactor of the document, Mons. Gérard Philips, to introduce a conciliatory approach, a *via media*, so that there would be no winners nor losers behind the successful realization of the document's writing. This article begins with a highlight of the essence of the Council as a peaceful process, as wished by Philips. The story continues with the remark on Philips' painful attempt to redact a new schema,—as the Council Fathers had rejected the original schema previously prepared by the doctrinal commission—due to the negative judgement by Fr. Sebastiaan Tromp, the secretary of the doctrinal commission, who said that the new proposal was "unworthy" of the Council. Yet, Philips' painful attempt complete the redaction process of the document in peace was ultimately successful, as the majority of the Council Fathers unanimously accepted the final draft of the document, which was subsequently issued as the key document of the Council.

Keywords: Vatican II, conciliar process, *via media*, Gérard Philips, *Lumen Gentium*

Gérard Philips, the president of the *periti* for the sub-commission that worked on the schema *De Ecclesia*, concluded his examination of the history of *Lumen Gentium* by affirming that the constitution, even in its genesis, already gave a general view of the mystery of the Church, revealing its depth and richness in a way that had seldom been done before. By revealing the depth and the richness of the mystery of the Church, the document offers a renewal which is rooted in the most ancient treasure of God's revelation of His love to mankind so that future generations will very easily measure the important meaning of the constitution (Philips 1966, 173).

Wanting to observe the above-mentioned important meaning of the constitution, this article attempts to investigate the redaction of *Lumen Gentium*, particularly with regard to its external aspect, i.e. from a historical point of view. It should be noted that the production of this key document of Vatican Council II was a dramatic process called "A Play in Six Acts" (Moons 2021, 78). It is hoped that this article sheds light on the historical background of *Lumen Gentium* as a conciliar document which proposes a contemporary reflection of the Church's identity as a mystery of

communion. In particular, the article will analyze its redacting method in order to get an insight into the inner spirit and the interior vision of the document as a fruit of the conciliar process.

The article focuses on the process of writing the document, particularly from the perspective of its redactor, Philips, in order to grasp the inner spirit and the interior vision of the conciliar work on *Lumen Gentium*, which is essential for understanding its nature. This particular perspective is valuable, considering that he was "arguably the most influential theologian at Vatican II," to the extent that Yves Congar joked that Vatican II should have been named "Louvain I" referring to Philips' university. However, despite his significant role in drafting the conciliar document, his contribution went largely unnoticed at the time, and is typically forgotten today (Weigel 2022).

This article, dedicated to investigating the redaction of *Lumen Gentium*, presents a sequence of narrations and ends with some concluding remarks. The first part of this article outlines the general redaction process which is characterized by the participation of opposite groups which were involved in a particularly strong dynamic, but which nevertheless managed to end the debate in a peaceful way. The second part describes the painful situation that Philips had to face after he was appointed as the new redactor for the new schema. The situation was caused by the fact that the first schema which was presented by Cardinal Alfredo Ottaviani, the leader of the commission which prepared the schema, had been rejected by the Council Fathers. Ottaviani at that time was furious because of the rejection. The third part presents the other side of the conflict, showing how Philips successfully managed to create a cordial atmosphere in the face of objections and fierce reactions from Fr. Tromp, the secretary of Ottaviani, and established a good cooperation between them. The fourth part shows the Philips' special efforts characterized by the "conciliar approach" of *via media*. This article ends with some concluding remarks confirming the successful outcome of this approach in the final vote on the last schema, *De Ecclesia*, on November 21, 1964.

1. No Winners or Losers

During the creation of the dogmatic constitution on the Church, there were many difficult phases due to the diverse opinions of the Fathers and various schools of theology. The most difficult phase occurred during the third session (1964), when the Council had to formulate the meaning of collegiality in Chapter III. For this reason, Pope Paul VI communicated a Preliminary Explanatory Note (*Nota Explicativa Praevia*) that interpreted it. The principal author of the Note was Philips, as the Pope had ordered the doctrinal commission to prepare it (O'Malley 2013, 244; Alberigo 2007, 73–74; Schelkens 2006, 134–41).

From the perspective of the development of theological reflection on the Church's government, it is important to note that this topic of collegiality holds particular significance as an emerging ecclesiological project, which, however, has not been completed during the Council period. The communication of the Preliminary Explanatory Note and its insertion at the end of the ratified document thus expressed the difficulty at that time to reach a neat formulation that could satisfy all parties which participated in the Council with regard to this important theme. From another perspective, the writings of Joseph Ratzinger, Umberto Betti, Johannes Cornelis Groot, Stanislaus Lyonnet, Joseph Hajjar, and Georges Dejaifve commenting on or trying to help understand the topic in *Lumen Gentium* Chapter III show how important it is to decipher it (Baraúna 1965, 731–850). Despite such ecclesiological difficulties, it is worth noting that this topic has a significant value seen from the future perspective of the Church (Tagle 1993, 149–60).

It is interesting to mention, e.g., an echo of the progressive voice on the topic of collegiality, presenting the positions of the opposite groups. Below is a quote that mentions the Note as "a tool" for those who opposed collegiality, that "they could— and would—use to interpret the chapter as a reaffirmation of the status quo," saying:

> The Note won the support of the minority for the chapter and for the schema, as shown in the final voting—only 5 negative votes out of 2,156 cast. The price for the virtual unanimity was high. No matter what the pope hoped to accomplish, he in fact gave those who opposed collegiality a tool they could—and would—use to interpret the chapter as a reaffirmation of the status quo. If there was anything about the Note that gave the leaders of the majority pause, it was the ready, even gleeful, support the doctrine of collegiality now received from Council Fathers who had done everything they could to scuttle it. (O'Malley 2013, 245)

Ultimately, however, the Council was significantly able to offer a very essential document of the Church regarding herself, characterized by the concept of "mystery." It is noted that in *Lumen Gentium* the Council wants to offer a theology on the Church in the proper sense, by subordinating the discourse on the Church to the discourse on God (Ratzinger 2001; Thornton and Varenne 2008, 85–102). Although there were serious debates on some issues, it is important to quote the remark of Philips, the influential *peritus* responsible for the redaction of the constitution, regarding the process of the Council. Philips fondly remembers the peaceful essence of the conciliar dynamism during the sessions:

> Thus the session, which had at times been very lively, ended with a peaceful gesture, which makes it impossible to speak of winners and losers, term which are in any case quite out of place in speaking of a Council. This will be clearer to future generations than it is to us. (Philips 1966, 137)

2. A Painful Attempt to Create a New Schema

On October 18, 1962, one week after the opening of the Council, Cardinal Giovanni Battista Montini, archbishop of Milan and future Pope Paul VI, wrote a letter to Cardinal Amleto Cicognani, Secretary of State and closest collaborator of Pope John XXIII, lamenting the Council's lack of an organic plan of work. In his opinion, the Council should have been considering a unique topic, i.e. the Church. It should have been, in a certain sense, the continuation of Vatican I. Special attention should have been paid to the power of the episcopate and its relation with the Roman pontiff (Saranyana 2014, 10–11).

Several months before, in March 1962, Pope John XXIII had asked Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens, archbishop of Mechelen-Brussels, Belgium, who had criticized the prepared schemata, to write a plan, insisting that the Council's document should first address the inner life of the Church (*Ecclesia ad intra*) and then elaborate on the outer life of the Church (*Ecclesia ad extra*). Later, he suggested the title *Lumen Gentium* (Sullivan M. 2007, 90). Wanting to set the Council on a truly pastoral course, Suenens simplified the plan, which was ready at the end of April 1962. He shared it with his closest friends, such as Montini. In May 1962, Pope John XXIII told Cicognani to send it to some influential cardinals, so that they could offer their support when the right moment came. He also told Suenens to discuss it with several named cardinals (Suenens 1968, 88–105).

On the Council's first working day—October 13, 1962—Cicognani and Suenens agreed to draw up an alternative schema *De Ecclesia* (Wicks 2008, 78). Two days later, Suenens told Mons. Philips to do this work (Wicks 2008, 78). Suenens also told him that during the review in May and June 1962, leading members of the Council's central preparatory commission, one of whom was Cicognani, had sharply criticized the schema *De Ecclesia*. Their criticism was focused on the chapters on the Church Militant as a visible society, the membership of the Church, the episcopate, the ecumenism, and the Church-state relations (Wicks 2008, 76).

Meanwhile, Philips, a theologian from the Leuven Catholic University and a Belgian, like Cardinal Suenens, was chosen to be a *peritus* of the Belgian bishops. Suenens chose him because he saw him as a person who incarnated a certain *via media*. Such a personality would intimidate neither Cardinal Ottaviani nor Fr. Tromp, the persons responsible for doctrinal matters. As the *peritus* of the Belgian bishops, Philips would play a significant role in the writing of the alternative schema *De Ecclesia* (Volg Concilie, n.d.).

Monsignor Philips (1899–1972) was a priest of the diocese of Liège and, from1967, of the new diocese of Hasselt. Having a notable diplomatic talent, Philips gained experience in the parliament as a Belgian senator. He was a co-opted senator for the CVP (Flemish Christian Democrat Party). He studied theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University. Immediately after teaching at the Minor Seminary of

Sint-Truiden and at the Major Seminary of Liège, he became a professor of dogmatic theology at the Leuven Theological Faculty (KU Leuven, n.d.).

Philips was the head of the Catholic Action in Flanders, which made him familiar with the problems and the role of the laity in the Church. He played an important role during the Second World Congress of the Lay Apostolate in Rome in 1957. As a senator of the Kingdom (1953–68), he developed a broad interest in social and political problems, and intensely studied parliamentary techniques. He held that when making policy, one should always know how to compromise (Lamberigts and Declerck 2012, 167). He was a correspondent member of the preparatory theological commission in 1960–1962, and he guided the writing of the *De Laicis* chapter of the schema *De Ecclesia*. Thus, to a certain extent, he was privy to the process from the very beginning (Wicks 2008, 76; von Teuffenbach 2006, 75, 586).

Being the *peritus* of the Belgian bishops, Philips worked as a key person formulating the ideas of the Belgian bishops. To be precise, it is worth noting that, from a broader perspective, the Belgian bishops and their *periti* made a great contribution during the Council. This "Belgian Squad" also included Cardinal Suenens, Bishops André-Marie Charue, Emiel De Smedt, Karel Calewaert, Guillaume Marie van Zuylen, Jules Daem, Charles-Marie Himmer, and Jozef Maria Heuschen, with Philips, Albert Prignon, Gustave Thils, Lucien Cerfaux, Charles Moeller, Philippe Delhaye, Béda Rigaux, Albert Dondeyne, Willy Onclin, and Victor Heylen as their *periti*. It is also worth noting a number of non-Belgian *periti* who collaborated closely with this "Belgian Squad": Congar (French ecclesiologian), Aimé Georges Martimort (French liturgist), Roger Etchegaray (secretary of French Episcopal Conference), Albert Bonet (Catalan judge of the *Rota*), and Jorge Medina Estevez (Chilean canonist) (Lamberigts and Declerck 2012, 167).

Philips worked at the Belgian College in Rome, gathering ideas from Congar, Joseph Lécuyer, Giovanni Umberto Colombo, Karl Rahner, Henri de Lubac, Otto Semmelroth, Marcos McGrath, Ratzinger, Cerfaux, and Onclin. Yet, it was uncomfortable for him to write a text that would replace the draft of the doctrinal commission of which he was also a member. Moreover, once he did it, he was hurt by Cardinal Ottaviani who revealed and protested his text on December 1, 1962 in the aula, during the presentation of the schema *De Ecclesia*. On the one side, for Ottaviani the process was unfair and unacceptable because, in his capacity as the head of the commission, he had to present Philips' schema that he disliked. While on the other side, Philips was unable to respond because he wrote the schema merely in fulfillment of his assigned duty (Wicks 2008, 76–78).

In fact, the first version of Philips' schema was ready in late October 1962, and at the end of the first session the amended version was distributed in 300–400 copies and caused a violent reaction in the hall from Cardinal Ottaviani (Lamberigts and Declerck 2012, 175). There were critical moments in the discussion on the schema *De Ecclesia* during the first session (O'Malley 2013, 153–59).

Presenting the schema to the assembly, Ottaviani said:

> Further, I'll tell you what I really think. I believe that I and the speaker for the commission are wasting our words because the outcome has already been decided. Those whose constant cry is "Take it away! Take it away! Give us a new schema!" are now ready to open fire. I'll tell you something you may not know: even before this schema was distributed—Listen to me! Listen to me!—even before it was distributed, an alternative schema had already been produced. Yes, even before the merits of this schema have been looked at the jury has rendered its verdict. I have no choice now but to say no more because, as Scripture teaches, when nobody is listening words are a waste of time. (O'Malley 2013, 153)

In his conciliar diary, Philips noted that this incident was the most painful for him (Schelkens 2006, 9, 86). Ottaviani himself believed that the schema would gain limited support, therefore he presented it with a lack of conviction. The supposed problems were the identification of the Catholic Church and the mystical body of Christ, and the excessive emphasis on the Church's dimension as a society, which would damage her dimension as a mystery. The interventions of the Council Fathers, some of whom were very influential, including Cardinals Josef Frings, Augustin Bea, Giacomo Lercaro, Suenens, and Montini revealed the need for serious revision of the work. Montini is thought to have briefly presented the content of his above-mentioned letter to Cicognani to the assembly (Saranyana 2014, 11).

3. *"Concilio Indignum"*

On February 26, 1963 the Philips' schema was chosen as the main text for the rewriting of *De Ecclesia*. He was named as the *peritus* for Bishop Charue and the president of the *periti* in the *De Ecclesia* sub-commission. On December 2, 1963, Charue was elected second vice-president of the doctrinal commission, and Philips was also appointed vice-secretary of the doctrinal commission. Thus, Charue and Philips were added to the existing *praesidium* of the commission, in which Ottaviani was the president, Michael Browne was the (first) vice-president, and Tromp was the (first) secretary. In his new position, Philips formally assisted Tromp, but in fact replaced him (von Teuffenbach 2006, 36; Lamberigts and Declerck 2012, 167).

Tromp described the situation with irony. Juridically, he was the first secretary, and Philips his adjunct, but actually Philips was the first secretary, and Tromp a clerk. A secretary would have been the first counsellor of the president, but Tromp had never been one, as the situation changed at the time. Ottaviani was juridically the president, but *de facto* it was Suenens *via* Charue. Thence, Tromp thought about resignation, but he decided against it, as he knew the Pope would not like it. Being

trapped in such a situation, he decided to help as much as he could, but in truth he considered the new design to be an "unworthy thing for the Council" (*Concilio indignum*) (von Teuffenbach 2006, 36–37; Wicks 2008, 79).

Tromp himself was known as a figure with "dictatorial" and "tyrannical" style, who led the work very strictly and defended his opinions with much vigor. While his numerous reports showed that he was very faithful in reporting different positions, they did not reveal any doubt or compromise (Komonchak 1995, 177–80; von Teuffenbach 2006, 32). He dominated the commission with his clarity, strength, and sharpness, along with his intellectual expertise as well as powerful vision and statements. He played his role with the temper of a "fascist" or "dictator": he yelled, clapped his fist on the table, crushed those who opposed him, and it was clear that for him the less debate, the better (Congar 2012, 99).

Early on March 8, 1963, the situation changed significantly. Tromp raised a fundamental objection to Philips' schema. As Philips answered the objection, Ottaviani agreed with him and paid no attention to Tromp's difficulty. Ottaviani even finalized numerous other arguments and instructed Philips to revise the text in line with the remarks of the members (Wicks 2008, 78).

A definitive turning point came after Philips joined the doctrinal commission on December 2, 1963. A special type of cooperation developed between Philips and Tromp, who had known each since the 1950s. Tromp was certainly able to work with others, but he was so concerned about the fundamental matters that it was not easy for others to argue with him or realize their own ideas. He accepted other ideas only if he was sure that they could lead to the goal (von Teuffenbach 2006, 34).

When he worked with Philips, the division of labor functioned well. Entering into a new situation that demanded a certain self-denial on his part, Tromp still came to the meetings and participated in the work of the Council. He actually came up with many ideas and improvements, showing that in such a situation he was still a contributive theologian. But to a certain extent, the arrangement worked because Philips could get along well with the character of Tromp which was clearly discernible to others (von Teuffenbach 2006, 34).

It is worth mentioning that Tromp's suggestion to use *"subsistit in"* to describe the presence of the Church of Christ in the Catholic Church (*LG* 8) is notable as one of the most debated words in *Lumen Gentium* (von Teuffenbach 2004; Becker 2005; Schelkens 2008; Sullivan F. 2008; Ocáriz 2005; Welch and Mansini 2009). On June 29, 2007, the Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith mentioned this subject in a newly issued document entitled *Responses to Some Questions Regarding Certain Aspects of the Doctrine on the Church* (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith 2007).

4. The Triumphant *Via Media*

Philips himself attributed his increasing credibility to his proficiency in Latin. This was confirmed by Tromp in early October 31, 1960, when he said that Philips was very good in Latin (*optimus*), although unfortunately he could not frequently come to Rome for the meetings because he resided in Leuven. Certainly, his experience in negotiating the formulas of proposals and amendments with opposing parties during his years as a senator in the Belgian Parliament also played a part (von Teuffenbach 2006, 103).

Having a central role in the writing of major texts, i.e. *Lumen Gentium*, but also *Dei Verbum* and *Gaudium et Spes*, it was not easy for Philips to gain this credibility. The difficulty came not only from working with Ottaviani or Tromp, but also from trying to reconcile the different parts of the assembly: the right and the left, the conservatives and the progressives, the minority and the majority. For some, he was a traitor to the preparatory commission. For others, he was too accommodating of the old vision of the Church. However, knowing that both parties would sometimes be dissatisfied with his work, he believed that God was leading him along a conciliatory path (Wicks 2008, 79).

For example, having a good new revision draft on the Church as the mystical body from Congar, he decided to retype and reword it so that he could present it as his own, because if those on the "right" thought that it came from Congar, they would react with too much distrust. However, in these endeavors, which led to criticism from both parties, he never said or defended anything that he did not believe to be true (Wicks 2008, 79; Schelkens 2006, 99, 124).

Maintaining such a conciliatory approach, he composed the new schema using the old one, as directed by Suenens. He considered it again, supplementing and improving it (Marchetto 2005, 110). The link between the two texts was evident, as he noted that 60 percent of the new text was taken from the previous one (Marchetto 2005, 125, 137). He tried to integrate the criticized conservative ecclesiology into the new schema, while cautiously adding new accents to it (Marchetto 2005, 49).

Philips noticed that in theology there are two normal and enduring tendencies: one more concerned with fidelity to the traditional statements of faith, the other more concerned with spreading its message in the new world. Sometimes their confrontation might cause more vivid arguments and even appear as a conflict (Philips 1963, 225). The two streams should not fight but unite by working on their shortcomings and broadening their horizons. He further noted that caution was needed, but the propensity for excessive emphasis on systematization was a bad counsellor. A theologian did not have to decide everything because he was the minister and not the master of truth. At the Council, the main invisible actor was the Holy Spirit, whom the Fathers addressed before they gave their *placet*. In the midst of agitated discussions, He ensured the harmony of the whole Church. In the midst of human

conflicts, only the faith of Christ would be victorious (Philips 1963, 238). This conciliatory stance of Philips was underlined by Marchetto in relation to the debate on the conciliar hermeneutics (Marchetto 2005, 155, 189).

Philips saw his drafting as the promotion of an ecclesiology of *communio* at a fundamental level. Having been teaching on the Church as communion since the 1930s, he argued that a Catholic distinctive mark was the effort to unite *communio* and juridical structures from a deeper perspective. On the one hand, the juridical elements of the Church were necessary to reaffirm a real episcopal authority in the Church and to combine episcopal collegiality with the legacy of Vatican I regarding the papal primacy, yet they should be framed in and moderated by a clear concept of communion. On the other hand, bishop's collegial solicitude driven by affectivity would leave the doctrine of collegiality incomplete if it were left without juridical rules (Wicks 2008, 79).

Philips was also well aware of the patristic inheritance and current trends of theology, even if he was not an original thinker like de Lubac, Rahner, and Congar (Lamberigts and Declerck 2012, 167). He approached the work carefully, using a language that was more ecumenical, less juridical, and based on the Scriptures so that it would be easier for everyone to understand and reach a consensus. He did not want to eliminate the first schema and propose his own, whereas Rahner and Edward Schillebeeckx eliminated it and proposed their own observations (Marchetto 2005, 106–7). He made himself a Cyrenean, preparing the schema from the existing text and, after a proper rewriting, submitting it to the judgement of the Council Fathers (Marchetto 2005, 197). He simply mediated between different streams, giving a space to ideas using a conciliatory approach (Marchetto 2005, 215).

Philips shared the conviction that for a vital evangelization and living out one's faith, Christian doctrine should be deepened by turning to its early sources and thus making it more lucid in modern times (Wicks 2008, 79). However, he approached this with realism by developing solutions to gather a majority. Although he was criticized, he knew that it was not about triumphing over personal ideas, but about arriving at a consensus regarding what the Church today could accept as the expression of her common faith, without compromising on fundamental principles (Marchetto 2005, 226).

Despite the important achievements of scientific history and exegesis, Philips firmly believed that a conciliar text should not reflect the views of any theological school, but only the doctrine of the Church (Lamberigts and Declerck 2012, 168). A Council in its essence was not a congress of confronting tendencies of different schools, but a pastoral assembly of the bishops (Marchetto 2005, 315), hence it was impossible to speak of winners and losers (Philips 1966, 137).

In light of such a reconciliatory approach of its redactor, it is worth observing the creation of the last chapter of *Lumen Gentium* entitled *The Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God in the Mystery of Christ and the Church*, which was not without

controversy. Already in the preparation period, precisely during the work of the Preparatory Theological Commission, a major problem arose which divided the sub-commission working on the Marian doctrine into two opposing sides: either dealing with Mary in an independent schema or doing so in the context of the doctrine on the Church (Baraúna 1965, 1137). The way in which the Fathers and, of course, Philips as the redactor of the document solved this problem could arguably show the nature of the Council as a reconciliation of ways of being faithful to the revealed truth and then interpreting it within the historical path of the communion of the faithful.

After much debate, it was decided to write an independent schema entitled *De Beata Virgine Matre Dei et Matre Hominum*. The text was distributed to the Council Fathers during the first session of the Council on November 10, 1962 (Baraúna 1965, 1137). However, during the debates regarding the schema *De Ecclesia*, which had already taken place, some Fathers insistently expressed their desire to include the Marian text in the schema on the Church. This aspiration was not accepted by the coordinating commission which in January 1963 distributed the old schema on Mary, changing only the title—*De Beata Maria Virgine Matre Ecclesiae*. However, the desire to insert Marian doctrine in the schema on the Church continued to develop during the second session of the Council in 1963. The old schema on the Church itself, which was predominantly juridical and static, has been replaced with a new schema prepared by Philips, presenting the mystery of the Church in a harmonious and organic vision of God's salvific plan. With this new schema, it was then understandably possible to insert the Marian doctrine by presenting her person and her mission in the salvific plan of God, that is, Mary as a person privileged by God's mercy and a masterpiece of the work of salvation carried out by the Father through the Son in the Holy Spirit (Baraúna 1965, 1138–2239).

It was particularly in this new context of debate of the second session that the assembly decided on the destiny of the text on Mary. On October 29, 1963, a vote was taken on whether the Fathers preferred that the schema *De Beata Maria Virgine Matre Ecclesiae* to be included in the schema *De Ecclesia*. Cardinal Franz König of Vienna represented those who wished to integrate the schema on Mary into that on the Church, while Cardinal Rufino Santos of Manila represented the opposing view of those who wanted a separate schema on Mary. The result was *placet* 1114 and *non placet* 1074, thus a slight majority was in favor of integrating the text on Mary with the text on the Church (Baraúna 1965, 1138; Ratzinger 1966, 59).

Following this decision, Carlo Balić, the main editor of the schema *De Maria*, and Philips as the main redactor of the schema *De Ecclesia* were chosen to edit the chapter on Mary that would became Chapter VIII of the Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium* (Hauke 2019, 20). They were chosen as representatives of the two tendencies that had emerged during the debate of the second session and in the vote of October 29, 1963. They drew up no less than five schemata, the last of

which appeared as *Textus prior* in the left-hand column of the schema printed after the meeting of the doctrinal commission in March 1964. A new, amended version was then approved by the doctrinal commission in June 1964 and appeared in the right-hand column as *Textus emendatus*, accompanied by a note that the doctrinal commission was unanimously of the opinion that this chapter should be placed at the end of the ecclesiological schema, as it provides a useful summary of the entire content of the latter (Komonchak 1999, 74–75).

It is noted that while the new text bears the marks of the alternating influence of Balić's and Philips' approaches, it shows a clear evolution toward a Mariology that is essentially biblical, christocentric, ecclesiological, ecumenical, and pastoral, seen from the perspective of salvation history (De Fiores 1988, 471). Such an approach has led to a better understanding of the status of Mary. Mariology which is integrated into ecclesiology means that the idea of the Church now encompasses the heavenly Church. The result is that the eschatological and the spiritual aspects of the Church are strengthened, and the nature of the Church, which is not exclusively bound to the temporal dimension, is now clearer. With this expanded picture of the Church, including those who have completed their earthly lives, the liturgy sees itself as being celebrated in communion with the saints. Furthermore, the inclusion of Mary in the nature of the Church sheds some light on the mystery of the Church, because Mary personifies the Church as God's servant that moves through history carrying the hope of the world for God's salvation (Ratzinger 1966, 60). The significance of the text was then confirmed by Pope John Paul II, who recognized it as "in a certain sense a magna charta of the Mariology of our era." (De Fiores 1988, 472)

Then, if one pays closer attention, one can see the broader scene of the reconciliatory role of Philips and *via media* in the redaction of the Marian text of *Lumen Gentium*, particularly as regards the use of the term *mediatrix*. The schema *De Beata Maria Virgine*, which discusses Mary's titles, states that "in Christ Mary is truly mediatrix" ("Maria enim in Christo est mediatrix") with a mediation that "comes from the divine gracious purpose and the superabundance and the virtue of the merits of Jesus" ("ex beneplacito divino et superabundantia ac virtute meritorum Iesu provenit")[1] (Hellín 1995, 669). Yet this Mariological plan, according to which the title should to be taught by the Council in a systematic way, inevitably had to be revised, as the vote on October 29, 1963 decided to include the Marian schema in the ecclesiological one instead (Coman 2023, 440).

As a matter of fact, from an ecumenical perspective, this particular title of Mary is considered ambiguous or false by Protestants (De Fiores 1988, 472), while among Easterners it is commonly used in their liturgical prayers (Coman 2023, 440). As for Catholics, there were significant attempts in some circles to highlight this Marian title as a new dogma. In 1950, participants of the First International Congress of

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1   All translations from Latin are the author's own.

Mariology proposed to Pope Pius XII that she be proclaimed "the Universal Mediatrix of God and of Men." After Pope John XXIII convoked the Council in 1959, 382 bishops from all over the world asked the preparatory commission to include a definition of Mary's mediatorial role in the Council's agenda (Coman 2023, 424–25).

As regards this critical issue of Mary as Mediatrix, André Scrima, a Romanian orthodox monk and theologian who was the personal representative of Patriarch Athenagoras of Constantinople at Vatican II (1964–65), proposed a short document on the orthodox interpretation of Mediatrix, suggesting not to dogmatize the mediatorial role of Mary. Such an attempt would be unnecessary as in Eastern Christianity the title of Mediatrix is mainly used in the liturgical and contemplative devotion. Furthermore, it would also risk being ecumenically damaging and likely to provoke further divisions. This document was written on October 3, 1964. It was initially received by Philips on the following day before being disseminated among the Council Fathers (Coman 2023, 422–23, 434–35).

From his own position, Philips tried to soften the "maximalist" formula of Balić out of concern for ecumenical sensitivities and under the indirect influence of some non-Catholic observers. The formula of Balić in the initial schema says that it is "[. . .] not without cause that the Most Blessed Virgin is called by the Church the Mediatrix of every grace" ("Ita non immerito ab Ecclesia beatissima Virgo gratiarum Mediatrix nuncupatur") (Hellín 1995, 666). This expression was softened by Philips, who said that "her cooperation and mediation in the order of grace endures incessantly" ("eius in ordine gratiae cooperatio et mediatio indesinenter perdurat") (Hellín 1995, 584). While clearly confirming Mary's role, here Philips deliberately omitted the title of Mediatrix. However, on June 9, 1964 the commission decided to reintroduce the word Mediatrix in the Marian chapter, so that the text would obtain final approval during the third session of the Council (Coman 2023, 428–29). The text for the third session of the Council read: "Therefore B. Virgin Mary in the Church was also accustomed to be adorned with the title of Mediatrix, as well as with others" ("Propterea B. Maria Virgo in Ecclesia, praeterquam aliis, etiam titulo Mediatricis condecorari consuevit") (Hellín 1995, 586–88).

After the text was presented at the third session, many tendencies emerged from the Council Fathers, which were reported in the text that was distributed at the fourth session. The first tendency wanted to retain the affirmation of the word Mediatrix. This opinion underlined the use of the title in the piety of the people as well as in ecclesiastical documents. The second tendency was to remove the title, noting that it could cause ecumenical difficulties. The third tendency mentioned that the title functioned not in the sense of theological systematization but in the devotion of the people, as it was used in the Eastern liturgy to invoke Mary, together with her other titles. The Fathers that supported the third tendency argued that this option would not cause controversy. After evaluating these diverse opinions, the commission unanimously chose the third proposal enumerating various titles by which the

Blessed Virgin was invoked. The third proposed text thus read as follows: "Therefore B. Virgin in the Church is invoked with the titles of Advocate, Auxiliatrix, Adiutrix, Mediatrix" ("Propterea B. Virgo in Ecclesia, titulis Advocatae, Auxiliatricis, Adiutricis, Mediatricis invocatur"). Although it was accepted by the majority of the Council Fathers, the commission noted that there were still some redactional suggestions from the Fathers regarding the third text (*placet iuxta modi*), but since it would be difficult to accommodate all of them, the commission suggested to the Fathers to adopt in the fourth text the wording of the third text in its current form, believing that the proposed text was actually achieved through *via media* and would mostly obtain the agreement of all the Fathers (Hellín 1995, 586–89).

In fact, behind the scenes, the Commission must have taken some careful steps to arrive at this particular theological position *via media*. It was noted that the idea of placing the word Mediatrix in the context of liturgical piety, rather than proposing it as a doctrine, had grown in the minds of Catholic theologians and Council Fathers after long discussions. Previously, this idea was proposed by Moeller at the meeting of the doctrinal commission on September 22, 1964. It was seen as a feasible solution to one of the most central and difficult problems of the Marian chapter. For his part, as the main redactor of the schema on the Church, Philips asked for time to reflect on such an idea. After several weeks of consideration, which led him to recognize this proposal as a viable solution, in early October 1964 Philips sent a memorandum to the Pope asking his opinion on the three options that had recently been expressed at the Council regarding the title of Mediatrix. The Pope seemed to favor the third solution, which was to retain the title in the text but to place it in the context of piety and prayer, together with other liturgical titles. Philips then brought the matter before the doctrinal commission on October 15, 1964 and asked its members to vote. The third alternative was accepted, with 22 votes in favor and 3 against. This result led the commission to propose the third solution *via media* to the Council Fathers. Finally, on October 27, 1964, the text was approved by the Council Fathers with 1559 *placet*, 521 *placet iuxta modum* and 10 *non placet* (Coman 2023, 439–40). When the time came for the last vote regarding the Marian chapter as a whole on November 18, 1964, the text gained 2096 *placet* out of 2120 (Hellín 1995, xxxi).

Conclusion

In other scenes of the Council—precisely on July 7, 1964, and afterwards on October 24, 1964—Pope Paul VI consulted Philips on the thorny issues of collegiality of the episcopate and its relationship with papal authority. On November 22, 1964, a day after the approval and solemnly promulgation of *Lumen Gentium*, the Pope offered him a chalice, symbol of communion, to recognize his great contribution to

the writing process of the dogmatic constitution on the Church (Lamberigts and Declerck 2012, 168). The final vote on the entire schema *De Ecclesia* itself took place on November 21, 1964 and was an extraordinary achievement, as there were 2151 *placet* and only 5 *non placet* (Hellín 1995, xxxi).

Cardinal Medina Estevez, who was a young Chilean *peritus* working closely with "the Belgian Squad," including Philips, during the Council, testified in a letter of December 7, 2001 that Philips was a learned, wise, discreet, quiet, conscientious priest with a very remarkable breadth of vision, and whose intellectual honesty demanded respect, even from people who did not share his beliefs (Lamberigts and Declerck 2012, 168). Philips himself worked in the doctrinal commission until October 25, 1965, when a serious heart attack forced him to stop any activity and urgently return to Belgium (Lamberigts and Declerck 2012, 167–68).

Thanks to his particular method of conciliation, as well as his role and commitment to the Council, the task of ecclesiological renewal could be accomplished by Vatican II, while guaranteeing the continuity of the original message of faith in the Church. Due to the part he had played in the Council, he is called "a man of the Council" (*homo conciliaris*) (Lamberigts and Declerck 2012, 167–68; Marchetto 2005, 314). As a "conciliar man" he played an unique yet important role as "the strength in the weakness" (*la force dans la faiblesse*) (Grootaers 1998, 412–19). One can see in him the triumph of *via media*, i.e. the continuity of doctrine on one hand, and the spirit of the renewal on the other hand, united by a conciliatory approach. Through his humility while facing conflicting parties and through his dedication as a true son of the Church, he contributed significantly to making the pilgrim Church in the modern world a path worth following.

As shown during the Council of Vatican II, *via media* as Philips' way is a particular expression of the ministry of a theologian exercised in the Church and for the Church. While the strong emphasis on the nature of the Church as communion in the document of *Lumen Gentium* was formulated thanks to his approach of *via media*, one can also see that Philips placed himself exactly at the heart of the Church. With this spirit, through his special role during the Council, he made a significant contribution to the life of the Church as a whole.

Philips himself insisted that a conciliar text should reflect only the doctrine of the Church and not the views of any theological school. Such a view thus places a theologian not as a master but as a minister of God and the Church. He integrates his vocation as a professional with the products of his work on the one hand, and his own life as a man of the Church on the other hand. His calling as a theologian is to serve the Church of his time, which is still in her journey of hope, living in the world in need of dialog, sharing and reconciliation. Therefore, more than merely being "a man of the Council," Philips, or any true theologian, is "a man of the Church." With his work during the Council and his position as a theologian, he tried to unite God's children who had been divided throughout history.

Like Philips, theologians today should be, first and foremost, men and women of the Church as well as men and women of communion. More than being professionals, they are especially called to be men and women of faith living the *sensus fidelium* within the one, holy, and catholic Church, whose secure foundation are the Apostles. Therefore, today's theologians could learn from Philips how to participate in the mission of the Church while doing their work.

Considering the theologians' vocation as ministers of the Church, it follows that theology as their proper work is essentially a form of ministry for the Church. The conciliary way of *via media* that Philips took, or any other way and any other method used by any true theologian, seen from this perspective, should be viewed as a tool compatible with the realization of the purpose of the work itself, which is to serve the Church. Just as workers integrate their tools of work with their life, their spirit and their intention, theologians should also integrate their method of work and their theology with their life of service to the Church. Being ministers of the Church, they serve the Church and try to do their best, using their theology as a tool of service to the Church.

Philips himself noted that there were two normal and enduring tendencies in theology. The first tendency was fidelity to the traditional statements of faith, and the second tendency was concerned with spreading its message in the new world. Sometimes their confrontation might have caused vivid arguments and even conflicts. Nevertheless, in her journey throughout history since her birth on the Pentecost, the Church has gone through various situations and faced various problems. Today, 60 years after the Council of Vatican II, and also 1700 years after the Council of Nicaea I, there are still lessons to be learned. The Spirit of God guides His Church in His own way. Sometimes, He leads her through a Council with anathemas, and other times through a Council that integrates. Once with Athanasius' style, and at another time with Philips'. Faith and fidelity to the Church are expressed throughout history in different ways. It is the task and vocation of today's theologians to discern and serve with the same love of true ministers and servants of the Church.

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The Contribution of Eugenio Corecco to Understanding the Synodality of the Church

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Abstract: The Authors of the article, guided by the challenges of the modern Catholic Church regarding the promotion of the concept of synodality, analyze the invaluable contribution of Eugenio Corecco, a well-educated lawyer and theologian, the bishop of Lugano diocese in the years 1986–95, to the understanding and development of the concept. The article aims to underline the main elements of his thought, based on his experience and works. (1) Such an understanding of synodality mainly resulted from the impact of such personalities as Klaus Mörsdorf and Luigi Giussani on Corecco's intellectual and spiritual development. (2) The critical assessment of the "synodality crisis" perceived by Corecco in the direct post-synodal period, led him to the conclusions on synodality that will be presented here. (3) Indicating and describing the essence of synodality in comparison with the term *communio* which, according to Corecco, is irreplaceable, determines the fundamental influence on the proper interpretation of synodality and is its only method of identification. Synodality understood this way, according to Corecco's intention, eventually affects the main legal concepts connected with synodality in the Church. (4) The updating of Corecco's thought in the perspective of the ongoing Synod of Bishops on Synodality in the Church: "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission" complements the realization of the aim assumed by the Authors.

Keywords: Eugenio Corecco, the Church, the law, synodality, theology

Eugenio Corecco (1931–95), the bishop of Lugano from 1986 until his premature death, was one of the protagonists of the canonical reflection (Gerosa 1998, 423–37) after the Second Vatican Council. In 1980 he was the vice president, and since 1987, the president of *Consociatio Internationalis Studio Iuris Canonicis Promovendo* [An International Association Promoting the Study of Canon Law]. In 1982, he was appointed to the Pontifical Commission for the Revision of the Canon Law by John Paul II, which proves how respected he was among his peers and by the Pope (Moretti 2020). His speeches on synodality still remain up-to-date in the ongoing debate from the perspective of the synod concerning this topic called by Pope Francis. This artricle undertakes a deepened reflection on Corecco's thought, with the awareness that his contribution to understanding the synodality in the Church was not a systematic study of the issue and that it was not connected with a cycle of

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regular lectures on the subject, as the author himself admits at a conference devoted to him (see Corecco 1995, 137). First of all, one should notice the crucial importance of the topic of synodality in the life and activity of Corecco who on many occasions took various approaches to understanding synodality, which is reflected in his works, and which made it the main source of inspiration for his scientific output. The article aims to underline the main elements of his thought, beginning with the analysis of the situation of "synodality crisis," which Corecco sees in the direct post-synodal period, through the reference to the essence of synodality which he identifies with the term *communio*, and finally, by proceeding to the detailed description of how synodality presented this way allows one to understand in a specific and ultimately proper way the main legal concepts connected with synodality in the Church. Finally, an attempt at a reflection on the timelessness of Corecco's thought is made with regard to the ongoing Synod of Bishops on synodality in the Church: "For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission."

1. The Cyclical Development of Understanding Synodality by Eugenio Corecco

The concept of synodality seems to accompany Corecco throughout his life. Born in 1932 in Airolo in the canton of Ticino, at the age of 12 he entered the diocesan seminary. After graduating from the theological studies at the Pontifical Gregorian University, as a student of the Lombard Seminary in Rome and after being ordained in 1955, he served as a priest in Ticino, then he continued his studies in Canon Law in 1958 in the Institute of Canon Law at the Faculty of Catholic Theology in Munich. Under the guidance of Professor Klaus Mörsdorf, in 1962 he obtained a doctorate based on the work: *The Formation of the Catholic Church in the USA through Synodal Activity*. After that, in 1966 he obtained a Bachelor of Civil Law degree at the University in Fribourg, Switzerland. Already in 1965, he began his activity as a professor of the Canon Law in the Diocesan Seminary in Lugano. After the next two years of working as a scientific assistant of Professor Mörsdorf, he returned to Munich (1967–69), and in 1969 he became a professor of Canon Law in Fribourg, where he stayed until he was ordained bishop in 1982. He worked on the concept of synodality on numerous occasions and from various perspectives, both as a lecturer and as a priest who was actively engaged in the life of the Church.

A holistic look at his concept of synodality requires taking into account not only his addresses as a professor, a bishop, or the Pope's advisor but also his practical experience of synodality at the level of the diocesan, Swiss, or universal Church. As far as his works and speeches on synodality are concerned, three main categories could be distinguished: the first one of historical and analytical nature, aimed at

the critical analysis of synodality in the past and present of the Church; the second one aimed at the direct and systematic reflection on synodality in its ontological dimension, to use the term suggested by Corecco himself (see Corecco 1990, 303–29; 1997b, 82–108), and the third one, regarding synodality in its proper diversity at the level of life and mission of the Church meant in her totality as a community of bishops and the laity.

Among the historical works devoted to the analysis of his contemporary reality, and apart from the doctoral thesis (Corecco 1991a), one can also mention the work on the legislation of provincial and plenary synods of the United States of America (Corecco 1968, 39–94), on the reality of the particular Church within the canton, based on canton Lucerne (Corecco 1970, 3–42), as well as on the more general history of the synodal experience in the Latin Church and in the Byzantine Empire included in the article on synodality written for the *New Theological Dictionary* from 1977 (Corecco 1977, 1466–93; 1997c, 39–81). It seems that Corecco's interventions of a more systematic and doctrinal nature appear in two different phases, in the 1970s and again in the 1990s. In the first stage, apart from the second part of the above-mentioned article on synodality from the *Theological Dictionary* (Corecco 1977, 1483–93), the article that also deserves mentioning is *Struttura sinodale o democratica della Chiesa particolare?* [The Synodal or Democratic Structure of the Particular Church?], published in *Miscellanea*, the work to honor the Spanish lawyer Juan Becerrila y Antón-Miralles (Corecco 1974, 269–99; 1997e, 9–38). At the beginning of the 1990s Corecco, already as a bishop, published a few meaningful articles on synodality in the context of colloquies and congresses: *Ontologia della sinodalità* [The Ontology of Synodality], *Sinodalità e partecipazione nell'esercizio della "potestas sacra"* [Synodality and Participation in Practice of the "Potestas Sacra"] (Corecco 1991b, 69–89; 1997d, 109–29) and *Articolazione della sinodalità nelle Chiese particolari* [Articulation of Synodality in Particular Churches] (Corecco 1992, 861–68; 1997a, 130–139). Apart from the most significant ones, there are also others, shorter and more occasional, in which the author addresses the first or the second of the above ideas; in order to become acquainted with them, one should take a look at the general bibliography included in the book *Canon Law and Communio: Writings on the Constitutional Law of the Church* (Borgonovo and Cattaneo 1999, 45–53). When one speaks about synodality in the Church, what is mainly meant is the role of bishops, of priests and of laity in the Church and their mutual relations. The indications of the fundamental principles are properly used in determining the tasks for the faithful—both the laity and the clergy, in building the Church. Numerous works of Corecco were devoted to the issues of "sacra potestas," the mission of the laity, and to the mutual relation between the laity and the clergy, in which the meaning of synodality is developed and expressed in the concreteness of various ecclesial vocations. What is more, one should not forget about certain synodal experiences such as Corecco's participation in the Synod in Switzerland in 1972 and the Synod in Rome

in 1987, devoted to vocation and the mission of the laity, in which Corecco partici-
pated as a member invited by Pope John Paul II who, even before his pontificate, had
been exploring the issues of participation and the responsibility of the clergy and the
laity in the Church (Wojtyła 1981, 239–372). The Synod in Switzerland which lasted
1972–75, was intended by the Conference of the Episcopal Council to become a mo-
ment for reflection and a tool to realize the provisions of the Vatican Council with
the active participation of the laity (Moretti 2020, 123–34). Corecco becomes en-
gaged in the synod at both the federal and the diocesan levels. The very acknowledg-
ment of the boundaries of this experience made him aware of the limitations of the
democratic model which originated in the Swiss civil structures and is inadequate to
express the real nature of the life of the Church (Corecco 1972, 32–44). As will be
shown, this experience will be the starting point for his considerations on synodality.
The Roman Synod from 1987, on the vocation and mission of the laity in the Church,
20 years after the Second Vatican Council, regarded Corecco as a protagonist of the
innovations demanded by the Pope, both in the preparation of the preparatory doc-
ument as well as in developing synodal practice in the Church (Moretti 2020, 302).
It will also be an occasion for a deepened reflection on the position of the laity in the
Church and on the relation to the priestly ministry, and thus on some aspects of
the practical realization of synodality (Corecco 1987a, 162–71; 1987b, 46–57). Sum-
ming up, the issue of synodality accompanies Corecco throughout his life. He is an
active participant in the synodal experience, in particular in the meaningful mo-
ments of the post-conciliar period at all the levels within the ecclesial structure:
the diocesan, federal (of the Swiss Church as a whole), and the universal level. He
addresses the issue of synodality in the scholarly dimension, both at the historical
and systematic planes, complementing the issue with the interventions that con-
cern the role and the mission of the ordained ministers and the laity as well as their
mutual relations.

2. The Significant Influence on Eugenio Corecco's Thought

Before proceeding to a detailed analysis of Corecco's reflection on synodality, a men-
tion should be made of his deep bond with the so-called "Munich school" because it
determines his systematic approach to the entirety of canon law and, in particular, to
the discussed topic. Having discussed certain particular harmonies of thoughts, it is
worth asking whether and to what extent the meeting with Luigi Giussani, the
founder of the movement Comunione e Liberazione (CL), influenced Corecco's atti-
tude in reading and evaluating the mutual relations in the Church established by
Jesus Christ.

2.1. Eugenio Corecco and the Munich School

Corecco completed canonical formation at the Institute of Canon Law at the Faculty of Catholic Theology of the University of Munich. The Institute was established by Mörsdorf and was influenced by his vision of shaping canonical thought in the relation between theology and law within canon law (Gerosa 2006, 113–18; Cattaneo 2002, 825). Taking part in the ongoing discussion on the reality of law and the Church, Mörsdorf refuted the main assumptions of the thesis proposed by Rudolph Sohm that law and the Church are contradictory to each other. He showed that the canon law in the Church was not only introduced in order to organize the life of the community but also it is fused with the ecclesial structure and has been present in the Church ever since its initiation. The awareness of the ecclesial nature of the first Christian communities was the legal awareness, the fact is underlined in the discussion with Sohm and with other Protestant theologians. The specific concept of the canon law as well as the entire fully developed legal system must not be transferred to the reality of the original Church but it is necessary to prove that the Church as the legal reality has always been so. Due to the fact that after the unification of Italy, the departments of canon law were incorporated into faculties of law—such an approach was far from the so-called Italian school of canon law and it claimed the right to the exclusively legal nature of the discipline of the canon law.

Corecco, while studying in the Munich school, established and developed relations of deep friendship not only with Master Mörsdorf but also with other students, among whom one should mention Winfried Aymans and Oscar Seier, whose works on synodality and on the concept of *communio* contributed even more to the development of Corecco's concept. Without undermining the influence of the school as such, it seems that Corecco, with his individual effort, significantly contributed not only to its further development but also exerted influence on the reform of the Code of the Canon Law, thanks to the particular bond of respect and friendship with John Paul II (Astorri 2014). Corecco is far from denying the legal nature of the canonical study, however, he emphasizes the "theological" origins of the Church and her structures and thus he states the impossibility of transferring the legal concepts worked out by the civil law into the ecclesial reality (Wijlens 1992, 121–72; Cattaneo 2012, 381–83). He distinctly analyses this correlation in the debates on synodality and on the nature-related relations between priestly ministries in their various dimensions and God's people as a whole.

2.2. Eugenio Corecco and Comunione e Liberazione

The Milan movement CL, which Corecco was a member of, as well as its founder, Giussani (a friend of Corecco), also influenced his attitude. Meeting reverend Giussani strongly affected Corecco, who was fascinated with the charism of the priest

from Milan, who presented the power of the Christian experience and the answer to the deepest existential human needs in a new and entertaining way (Moretti 2020, 58–61). The necessity to accept the truth of human existence reflected in the Son of God the Man Jesus Christ guided young people to read and see the reality in the light of the Gospel. The sophisticated critical sense of the founder of the CL Movement prepared the participants of the movement not only for emphasizing what was positive in all the manifestations of the human culture and in the relations in the social and ecclesial spheres but also for noticing the dissonance with "the greater fullness" of life which was facilitated by the Christological event.

Moving to the canonical ground of comprehension and of regulating the internal ecclesial relations, the methods of management taken from the civil law can only be the object of the same critical analysis, which is why it is not surprising that they are inadequate. Although Corecco and reverend Giussani never confronted each other on the issue of synodality; it seems that the power of Corecco in criticizing those who deluded themselves into thinking that they can realize the Christian ideal of the Church, that is a well-integrated community, simply by copying the structures which originate in the civil models, and who suggested the concept of *communio* in order to indicate a new modality of a relation, including the hierarchical intra-ecclesial one, is also partly based on the intellectual consonance with reverend Giussani as far as the vision of the world and the way of perceiving Christianity are concerned. The basic specific nature of Giussani's approach should also be emphasized: the method of assessing reality should not be individualistic but rather "common or community-based," in accordance with the modality born out of the Holy Spirit. Here Corecco clearly refers to the CL formation program for Christian communities at universities:

> Every Christian possesses [...] a new method of life. [...] He is a new man who, no longer belonging to himself but to Christ, is committed to providing his community with all the spiritual and material goods, without excluding anything. Such a methodology is distinguished by the universal judgment or the judgment of a community (cf. *Comunione e Liberazione* for groups of Christian communities at universities, Milan 1971). Its meaning harmoniously results from the importance of judgment in human life because it animates, generates, and controls its development. If the Christian life was a communion, it would be impossible for the judgment which accompanies the life and rules it, not to be a communion as well. The collective judgment should not be perceived as the deductive application of an abstract criterion to reality in which one lives, nor as a common effort which is aimed at working out a common opinion which, however, is never arrived at but as the constant pursuit to read the reality which is co-created every day and shared in the community according to the principle of faith born by the common Spirit Who made the first Christians "of one heart and mind" (Acts, 4, 32). (Corecco 1997e, 28)[1]

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[1]   In this and all other cases translated by Andrzej Proniewski.

Thus one can understand how pluralism is expressed through fellowship (and how it should function) in the Church, as well as its true nature, and hence the modality of synodality in the Church, which will be presented further on, when the concept of *communio* will be discussed.

3. The Genuine Synodality According to Eugenio Corecco

As has already been mentioned above, Corecco does not develop his thought on synodality in a completely systematic way but he advocates for this matter a few times, with various insights or emphases depending on the circumstances. To follow the first assumption of Corecco's doctrine on synodality, the Authors will begin by examining Corecco's strong criticism that he transferred to his new post-conciliar synodal experience. The Church should aspire to the model of *communio* (Gerosa 1991) in order to understand the need for internal relations in the community of believers. In light of this principle, Corecco reinterprets the overall hierarchical and collective relations in the Church and presents their Christian authenticity and irreducibility to the state models, as will be shown on several examples.

3.1. The Crisis of Post-Conciliar Synodal Experiences

Corecco's starting point for his considerations on synodality is the observation of the crisis of the post-conciliar experiences. This crisis is mainly perceived at the level of particular Churches, that is, dioceses. The Second Vatican Council established several advisory councils which aim at supporting the mission of the Church: priestly council, pastoral councils as well as the councils proposed at the parish level which are mentioned in the Decree On The Apostolate of the Laity. However, according to Corecco, "they have already been experiencing a deep crisis" (1997e, 15), which results from a misguided attempt to build them modeled on democratic structures. In reality, as Corecco notices, while the problem of the way of the exercise of collegiality is not questioned at the level of the universal Church, at the level of particular Churches, the members are more and more in favor of democratization. Also "in terms of breaking up […] as if the structure of the particular Church (=of the dioceses) was radically different from the structure of the universal Church." (Corecco 1997e, 10) Corecco strongly emphasizes the fact that the universal Church and the particular Church can be ruled only by the same constitutional principles (see Corecco 1997e, 13). As "From the point of view of the constitutional structures, the Second Vatican Council discovered anew with all clarity, but also with all determination, that any office in the Church essentially has a synodal dimension." (Corecco 1997e, 13) If, at the universal level, the Second Vatican Council clearly stated the

modality of the synodal dimension in "structural and constitutional" terms (Corecco 1997e, 14), that is the acknowledgment of the supreme authority of the college of bishops in the hierarchical communion under the authority of the Pope, we should also acknowledge that it must also be present at the level of the particular Church:

> By the power of the principle according to which the universal Church is realized only by means of the particular Church (*in quibus*), it should, on the one hand, be stated that the synodal dimension of the ecclesial offices, which is an important aspect of the constitutional structure of the Church, must also be present and must be realized at the level of the particular Church, and, on the other hand, as the synodal structure is characteristic and it constitutes the basic dimension of all the ecclesial offices, it is the only possible form of shared responsibility and the participation of God's people as a whole in leading the life of the particular Church. (Corecco 1997e, 14)

The results are as follows:

> Any discourse on the subject of the "democratic" structure of the particular Church is therefore unacceptable from the ecclesiological point of view, and any attempt to interpret and experience the synodal structures of the particular Church (Synods, Priestly Councils, Pastoral Councils, etc.) in democratic categories is equivalent to falsifying the ecclesial reality. (Corecco 1997e, 14–15)

According to Corecco, the lack of proper awareness of the nature of the Church, that is insufficient ecclesial awareness, is the reason behind the deep crisis of the new diocesan councils. It is forgotten that "democracy, as every constitutional system, is a structure of power which, whether we like it or not, is, as any other system, authoritarian in a way, essentially in terms of the division of power." (Corecco 1997e, 17) This basic misunderstanding makes one perceive the new synodal structures with fear in advance as if they were a threat to the hierarchical power while, at the bottom, there is discontent because the possibility of influencing decision-making is very limited. However, in the Church, as reminded by Corecco—the relations between the hierarchy and other God's people "must never be ultimately expressed in terms of the division of power." (Corecco 1997e, 17) Since in the Church, against the order of the state, the power of bishops, that is their specific service and the ultimate responsibility, must not be delegated, similarly to the role of God's people, which does not depend on whether the hierarchy grants the laity some power. In both cases, the foundation of their shared responsibility in the Church is laid in the sacramental dimension. The mutual relations and the cooperation between them should therefore be considered in proper categories that originated in the theological reflection on the Revelation and not in more or less adequate analogies taken from the experience of the civil law. If it is true that since ancient times the reality of the Church has involved

indications and elements that have contributed to the evolution of the life of the Church, one must not disregard the risk of the uncritical adaptation of elements that are inappropriate for the ecclesial reality (Corecco 1997e, 24). "In the case of diocesan councils, they uncritically adopted the assumption concerning their activity that they should function in the image of a parliament or like democratic associations." (Corecco 1997e, 24) These statements should be understood in the light of the specific context of cantons in Switzerland in which the Church often had to take the form of democratic and parliamentary structures in order to be acknowledged as a public body (Corecco 1970, 3–42). However, the regulations of the German diocesan synods are also not free from this criticism (Mörsdorf 1969, 461–509). To overcome the crisis, it is necessary to refer to the categories which clearly determine the specific nature of the Church.

3.2. The Concept of *Communio*

To understand what human relations and cooperation in the Church should look like, one should begin with the mystery of the Church herself. Corecco used the concept *communio*, which summarizes the teaching of the Second Vatican Council on ecclesiology and it seems to him to be the most proper concept for expressing the deep nature of the Church (Saier 1973; Gerosa 2006, 130–148). The relation between the universal Church and the particular Church and the function of the bishops in them constitute the first and promising model of this new type of structure: "Episcopi [...] singuli visibile principium et fundamentum sunt unitatis in suis Ecclesiis particularibus, ad imaginem Ecclesiae universalis formatis in quibus et ex quibus una et unica Ecclesia catholica exsistit" (*LG* 23; "The individual bishops, however, are the visible principle and foundation of unity in their particular churches, fashioned after the model of the universal Church, in and from which churches comes into being the one and only Catholic Church"). The formula used by the Second Vatican Council *in quibus et ex quibus*, "recognizes the mystery of the Church in its institutional form. Therefore, it is a model which can be recognized only through faith, which, due to the strict logic, is not properly reflected in any constitutional state model, not even in the federalist model." (Corecco 1981, 1223; cf. Wijlens 1992, 130–131) The universal Church is not the sum of the particular Churches, nor are the particular Churches a small portion of the universal Church. Therefore, the mutual relation of the particular Churches and the universal Church cannot be understood in terms of an association or confederation but it is necessary to assume a different and specific concept, the concept *communio ecclesiarum*, which expresses the novelty of this state of affairs (Corecco 1997c, 64–73; 1997d, 109–11; 1997e, 10–11). The principle of *communio* also applies in the particular Churches with regard to the relations between the bishop, the other ordained ministers, and the lay faithful. It is also inappropriate to use the concepts of representation or monarchical power, which originate from civil-law

systems. This is a specific modality that also has its basis in the sacramental structure of the Church, in particular in the holy sacraments of baptism and ordination, and which does not have any equivalent forms in other legal systems and, therefore, can be referred to as *communio hierarchica* (Corecco 1997c, 73–79). Based on such a principle of *communio*, one can understand the methods of authentic synodality in the Church, both at the level of the relationship between the particular Churches and the universal Church and within the particular Church considered individually.

3.3. *Communio Ecclesiarum* and Collegiality of Bishops

The general council and various forms of particular councils and episcopal conferences are exceptionally solemn manifestations of synodality and *communio ecclesiarum* (Gerosa 2014, 65–77; Corecco 1972, 32–44). The Bishop of Rome has the highest and full authority in the Church and possesses "supreme, full, immediate, and universal ordinary power in the Church, which he is always able to exercise freely." (*CCL* can. 331) The Pope is also the Head of the College of Bishops who "together with its head and never without this head, is also the subject of supreme and full power over the universal Church" (*CCL* can. 336), *cum Petro et sub Petro* [with Peter and under Peter]. "The college of bishops exercises power over the universal Church in a solemn manner in an ecumenical council." (*CCL* can. 337 § 1) Here it should also be explained in what way the opinions of bishops, expressed individually or collectively, are decisive indeed if in any case, the result depends on the opinion of one of them (Aymans 1969). Other difficulties appear when attempting to define the power and competence of the conference of bishops, which, on the one hand, seems to be reduced to a purely advisory body but, on the other, is entrusted with the function of governing, which in some cases seems to enter the decision-making areas of the competence of diocesan bishops. To properly understand the nature of these forms of collegiality, and hence to be able to properly realize them, according to Corecco, it is necessary to return to the sacrament of holy orders because "synodality can be properly considered only as a proper dimension of the sacrament of ordination. Thus, thanks to the fact that all the bishops are ordained in the same sacrament, the essential relation of synodality is born." (Corecco 1997a, 132) Corecco notices that it is a phenomenon parallel to the one that concerns the Church as such. Just like the one Church of Christ is realized in two dimensions: particular and universal, "at the same time, there exists one sacrament of priesthood that provides the ecclesial service which is marked with the double dimension: personal, that is particular and universal." (Corecco 1997a, 132) The dialectic between the particular and the universal goes back to Christ Himself as He is the One Who appointed numerous apostles, and thus the bishops, but this is reflected in the person of the bishop and not the college as such.

"The sacrament of holy orders is a premise of the existence of the synodal dimension. Synodality originates from the initial dimension of the holy orders as the bishop's responsibility for providing unity with all the other bishops in order to ensure the salvation of the particular Church." (Corecco 1997a, 134) *Potestas sacra* of bishops (Corecco 1984b, 24–52) is manifested in two ways: in the preaching of the Word and in ministering sacraments (Wijlens 1992, 32–33). In ministering sacraments, the bishop acts alone, and with regard to the rite, it is always the same rite and it has the same binding power for the entire Catholic community. "The Word is easily submitted to various degrees of expressing and interpretation of the truth. Hence the only preaching of the Word, expressed at the level of universality of the Catholic Church can constitute the ultimate criterion of its veracity." (Corecco 1997a, 135; cf. Corecco 1997d, 115–18) At the level of the Word, the synodal dimension is celebrated and expressed in various ways. Thus the results of such an approach to understanding the synodal role of bishops can be seen in two particular moments in the life of the Church, even if they are not the only ones: at the General Council and at the Conferences of the Episcopal Council. In the case of the General Council, the opinion of bishops is deliberative but it should not be meant in the proper sense for the general theory of law:

> Voting itself serves to determine who among the bishops and which particular Churches represented by them reached the same assessment on the issues concerning faith and discipline, rather than to settle some issues. It is not a discretionary fact concerning power but—at least at the level of the fundamental issues—an act of observation. What is more, the common assessment of the Council itself does not result from the assessment of the majority, as it is in a parliament, but rather from the convergence of the opinions of bishops with the opinion of the Pope. Because it is a synodal event and not a parliamentary act of the majority, it is only natural that to make the decisions it is necessary to obtain moral unanimity. (Corecco 1997b, 104)

The conclusive argument in such a form results from recognizing the human will but "in the sense that the testimony of bishops on their faith and on the faith of the particular Churches is ultimate." (Corecco 1997b, 105) This particular concept of the nature of the opinion-forming voice of the bishops makes it possible to overcome the relation of competition or competitiveness with the function of the successor of Saint Peter—of the "Head of the Church": it is by no means a negation, neither it makes the other opinions redundant, but they are together "synodal" with the authentic testimony of the revealed truth. As far as the synodality at the level of particular councils and the synodal conferences is concerned, it is clear that synodality did not originate in the synodality of the universal college of bishops, as if it was just a small part taken out of the whole, but it embodies "synodality itself, by the power of sacrament received by particular bishops." (Corecco 1997a, 135) From this point

of view, according to Corecco, apart from the differences in the structures of particular councils and the conferences of bishops, their synodality originates from the sacrament of Holy Orders received by each bishop separately. Here Corecco seems to be warning against further increasing the frequency and further developing the prerogatives of the episcopal conferences, which could lead to diminishing the meaning of the role of a bishop (see Corecco 1997a, 135). Even if the episcopal conference was unanimous, it would not be granted the *status quo* of universality which is granted only to the whole College of Bishops with the Pope.

Basing synodality on the sacraments of the holy orders, in particular on the function of the preaching of the Word, on the one hand, Corecco manages to explain the real nature of the deciding voice of the bishops in the Council, thus solving the apparent contradiction with the prerogatives of the Petrine ministry of the Pope himself, but, on the other hand, he reassesses the authentic synodality of "working groups of bishops," such as the Episcopal Conferences, contributing to excluding the risk regarding the diminishing of the *sacra potestas* of each separate bishop.

3.4. *Communio* with Presbyters and Laity

The synodal structure, based on the episcopal ordination, is realized not only at the level of the Universal Church, but also within each particular Church. There must not be any difference of structure between the universal Church and the particular Church. As far as the relation with the clergy is concerned, Corecco emphatically reiterates that "a bishop, by definition, does not exist by himself but only with the college of priests" (1997a, 136), although the latter, having no granted fullness of the sacrament of holy orders, cannot represent the universal Church:

> The deep reason for the existence of the college of presbyters with the bishop as its head consists in the fact that the universal Church would not come to existence (with her synodal structure) in the particular Church if the latter was structurally heterogeneous with the previous one, that is, if it did not have the synodal structure but if it was managed monistically only by a bishop. The synodal nature of the particular Church as such results from the very nature of the sacrament of holy orders which is realized according to three various degrees: as bishops, priests, and deacons. (Corecco 1997a, 136)

There is a difference in synodality between bishops and priests—Corecco intentionally does not mention deacons. The bishop's ministry of sacraments is open to synodality in two directions: universal and particular. The universal dimension assumes *communio ecclesiarum* and is manifested at its highest level in the college of bishops *cum Petro et sub Petro*, but it is also expressed at the lower levels of cooperation. The second direction is the one within the diocese, which is practically manifested in the relations of a bishop with the clergy, but also, although in a different way, with all

the faithful. As far as synodality at the priestly level is concerned, as priesthood is of a lower degree than the whole of the bishop's ministry, its value is only internal. In other words, the bond between priests (or the clergy) and the bishop is synodal in nature, while there is no college of priests. The bond between priests and the universal Church is manifested in their unity with the bishop (Corecco 1997a, 137). Here Corecco wonders whether it is possible to broaden the concept of synodality in its previous meaning to involve also the level of the lay faithful. The answer to this question can always be found in the sacral nature of the Church (Corecco 1984a, 194–218). As is reminded by the Second Vatican Council, there is an essential difference between the ministerial priesthood, based on the sacrament of the holy orders, and the common priesthood which results from the sacrament of baptism (*LG* 10). They are "two different ways of participation in the one priesthood of Christ." (Corecco 1997a, 137) By the power of baptism, which is combined with the ordained ministers and which is also constantly present in the ordained ministers, the lay faithful take responsibility for the Church. Corecco is reluctant to assign this bond the connotations of synodality which he considers to be reserved for those who "were clothed" in the holy orders.

> The attempt to define this bond (the shared responsibility of the laity and of the ordained ministers in building the Church) as synodality would, however, mean giving the concept of synodality essentially different, and by that, heterogenous meaning and thus cause theological confusion. If it is true that the lay faithful are the members of the diocesan Synod, it does not mean that by the power of their participation in the diocesan Synod as such, the laity should be given some dimension of synodality which results from the sacrament of the holy orders because the nature and the purpose of the sacrament of baptism which would make them the participants of the sacrament of holy orders, cannot be changed. (Corecco 1997a, 138)

Corecco points out that although in the diocesan synod priests and the laity gather together, all of them are entitled to the consultative voice, it must not lead to the conclusion that their positions are equal. "Regardless of the ability of the canonical order for the more precise determination of the specific way of the priests' and the laity's voting, their ecclesial position within the diocesan Synod remains different in its essence." (Corecco 1997a, 138) Corecco seems to be hoping that the concept of synodality will no longer be used to indicate in an undifferentiated way the values of the laity's and the clergy's participation in the synod. According to Corecco, it would be better to use the concept advising to specify the laity's participation in the synod, as was suggested by Aymans (Corecco 1997a, 138) in his works. The concept of synodality could be reserved for the ordained ministers and as far as the laity is concerned, it would be better to use the term "advisory," in order to indicate that participation in the "synod" is not the privilege of the priesthood by the power of the sacrament of

holy orders but by the power of common priesthood which results from the sacrament of baptism. It is all meant to maintain proper proportions of the relations in the community of the Church of both the different lay offices and the different degrees of holy orders of the clergy which take into account the proper understanding of the hierarchical and synodal dimensions of the Church.

3.5. Advisory Voice

In order to complete this short review of Corecco's opinion on synodality, the Authors should re-analyze the concept of constitutional voting. As was shown above, the concept of *communio ecclesiarum* does not have any counterparts in the civil systems because it is based on the principle of faith rooted in the Christian revelation. Even the concept of the "voice of the bishops" cannot be understood as, e.g., the voice of a member of the civil parliament. Their voice is rooted in "the fullness" of the sacrament of holy orders and it is best understood as a testimony in the process of discovering the revealed truth. The advisory voice in the canonical system is reserved for the clergy and for the laity within the synods of different levels and for other consultative bodies and/or the co-responsible. Perceiving it from a purely civil perspective does not reflect the true meaning of this institution in the Church:

> The difference in relation to the general theory of the state law consists in the fact that in the Church, the advisory voice is not a limiting of the power of the weakest by the strongest. On the contrary, it institutionalizes the necessity inscribed into the dynamics of communion. It depends on the principle of *communio*, understood as the fact of the necessary immanence of constitutive elements of the ecclesial reality. In this particular case, it concerns the immanence *sensus fidei fidelium al munus docendi* of the sacramental ministry of bishops. (Corecco 1997d, 125)

The case of diocesan councils is paradigmatic. The particular Church consists not only of the bishop and his presbytery, but also of the lay faithful. Their participation in the co-responsibility in the Church within the diocesan and parish councils does not occur by the power of delegation of the ordained ministers or the support in replacement but is based on the sacrament of baptism and on the common priesthood. On principle, no faithful should be excluded. At the same time, the bishop, by the power of the received holy orders, is bound with the responsibility that he cannot transfer to anyone else. These two poles are not mutually exclusive, but they are ideally incorporated in the process of working out the common assessment which comprises all the opinions of the members and the conclusion of which is determined by the authority. In this sense, making use of the consultation with the clergy or with the laity is not only a formality but is a necessary method for the authority to take a decision in an ecclesiologically accurate way.

From the perspective of communion and immanence, the problem of authority in the Church defies the possibility of placing it, like in democracy, as a problem of power-sharing; at the same time, it sets the problem as the natural process of communicating based on the principle of the ecclesial communion of various diaconies and charisms. (Corecco 1997d, 127)

It can be seen here to what extent the method of common assessment worked out by the community of the faithful, according to the teaching of Giussani addressing his groups of Catholic students, constitutes an ideal pattern for realizing synodality. The synodal process of making decisions in the Church does not happen through a clash of different opinions, with the victory of the opinion of the majority of voters, neither can it be imposed by the authority of the bishop. This is because it is the result of community judgment, or in other words, the collective discernment under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, which according to its nature, aims at moral unanimity and specifies through the position of authority which confirms what was achieved and makes it binding. This procedure does not mean either the weakening of *sacra potestas*, or the more gracious assigning of the lay faithful some role in the responsibility for the Church by the hierarchs because also the role of the latter does not result from delegation but is based on the sacrament of baptism.

Concluding Remarks

Corecco's interest in synodality accompanied him throughout his life, in the theoretical sphere as a canonist and in the practical sphere as a priest in the Church who actively engaged in synodal activity at the levels of the diocesan, national, and general Church. His reflection on synodality, in particular on the need to be synodal, is characterized by the excellent theological approach: the reality of the Church originates in the Christian revelation, therefore its structure, including the legal structure, must be in accordance with its deepest essence. Hence the necessity of a critical approach to legal terms that originated in the experience of civil law in order to verify their adequacy and eventually modify them or create new ones. After emphasizing the boundaries of the democratic concepts of power-sharing, of representation, and of parliamentary systems, Corecco identifies the principle, based on the sacrament of the episcopal ordination, which allows for the proper functioning of the synodality of the Church in her specific nature in the concept of *communio ecclesiarum*. The hierarchical articulations do not constitute its criteria of the division of power but they represent the boundaries that Christ wanted, and that require the assessment of the community. Taking into account the current atmosphere in the Church and the almost feverish seeking of "synodality" in the Church, it seems that Corecco's thought, which would deserve a more extensive study and which would also take into account

the specific contexts in which his reflection matured, remains valid mainly in two directions. On the one hand, the fact that the law in the Church should become an increasingly perfect reflection of the theological nature of the Church, apart from the simplifications and the environmental influences, and, on the other hand, the fact that it is also a manifestation of ecclesiological vision which should be examined thoroughly in order to check if it is genuinely in line with the faith of the Church. From this perspective, the propositions of structural reforms which falsely present the spiritual origins of *sacra potestas*, are indeed far from the Catholic Church's opinion. On the other hand, the task of community assessment, however fascinating it may seem, is not deprived of actual difficulties concerning human limits and sin. In this sense, pursuing the path of constant conversion and listening to the Holy Spirit is always necessary, not only at the individual level but also at the community level. An analysis of Corecco's teaching on synodality and of the specific boundaries of some of his historic achievements constitutes a stimulus for discerning his entire, possibly even not fully recognized potential.

Translated by Monika Gierak

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The Tragedy of Divided Christianity: Diagnosis of Main Problems on the Basis of the *Vota* Sent to the Second Vatican Council

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Abstract: This article addresses diagnosing problems emerging from the existing divisions among Christians. The analysis is based on the *vota* submitted in the preparations for the Second Vatican Council. The voices of bishops, major religious superiors, and Catholic universities reveal four areas where a lack of Christian unity has disastrous consequences. The first area is sociopolitical and shows the problem of marginalization of Christianity, which cannot respond to the challenges the modern world faces. The second area concerns Christ's prayer for his disciples to be one, presenting Christianity as failing to fulfill the Savior's desires. The third, concerning the missionary and apologetic activity of the Church, reveals the incredibility and weakness of divided Christianity. The fourth, presenting the issues of interdenominational marriages, shows the consequences of an overly legalistic approach to sacramental reality. The final part includes conclusions and perspectives emerging from the analyses.

Keywords: Second Vatican Council, *Unitatis redintegratio*, Church unity, interdenominational marriage, *vota*

Upon summoning the Second Vatican Council, Pope John XXIII proposed that all episcopates, monastic superiors, Roman Congregations, and Catholic universities write honestly about how to change Catholicism to make it more evangelical and better prepared to respond to the signs of the times. His invitation was received enthusiastically, and numerous responses included not only suggestions for changes but also calls to show the contemporary "face" of the Catholic Church[1] and the image of the world in its various geographical and cultural areas. It can be said that proposals sent to the Vatican also included questions that the world expected Catholics to answer in preparation for the Council. A need to analyze them is the first reason behind this paper, as the results of such an analysis could not only outline the

1   We use the term "Catholic Church" for the Catholic communities which accept the papal jurisdiction.

sociocultural context of the middle of the 20th century but may also help in an accurate assessment of the documents of Vaticanum II and their later reception.

The second reason is connected with *status quaestionis*. The issue mentioned in the title touches upon ecumenism and, to be more precise, refers to the Decree on ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio* announced by the Second Vatican Council on November 21, 1964. Although there are some profound commentaries on this document,[2] none includes a complex analysis of the *vota* submitted in the preparations for the Council. We have filled this lack in source literature with our monograph *Unitatis redintegratio: Sobór Watykański II o ekumenizmie* (Wąsek, Gilski, and Kałużny 2024). However, in that paper, all *vota* referring to ecumenism are presented geographically or institutionally without a division into systematic categories, which would allow for answering more detailed questions.

This article aims to present the most significant challenges resulting from divisions in Christianity, which people and institutions formulating *vota* saw as tasks for the Council Fathers. The problem is comprised of the following question: What key difficulties did the Catholics, experiencing the tragedy of schisms and heresies, face before the Council? Although the presentation sometimes includes potential solutions, we do not focus on their analysis but rather on the areas generating challenges for Vaticanum II. Therefore, we chose only these *vota* that provide such a diagnosis.

The methodology applied is adjusted to the research steps. First, we identified all the spots in the *vota* referring to the problems of divided Christianity. It required a theological and linguistic analysis of texts included in twelve books of *Acta et documenta Concilio Oecumenico Vaticano II apparando*. Then, using the comparative method, we created categories that allowed for systematizing selected source material according to the observed similarities. The last step was to formulate conclusions allowing for a better understanding of the pre-Council Church that might also help in a detailed reading of the Decree on ecumenism *Unitatis redintegratio* and its reception.

1. Sociopolitical Problems

A few *vota* mention the involvement of the Catholic Church in solving complicated international social problems. Alfred-Jean-Félix Ancel, auxiliary bishop of Lyon (France), pointed to the need to unify Christians in order to act more effectively in this field (*CVE* Pars 1, 520). Paolo Carta, bishop of Foggia-Bovino (Italy), presented

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2   The most important commentaries are Becker 1968, 1–56; Feiner 1968, 57–158; Cassidy 2005; Hilberath 2005, 69–223; Gilski and Adam 2013, 105–17; Maffeis 2019, 165–414; Kijas 2023, 339–62; Vázquez Jiménez 2024, 63–388.

a similar view. He observed that while the whole world strives for unity, divided Christianity plays an ever smaller role despite having great human potential (*CVE* Pars 3, 289–92). Another Italian hierarch, the archbishop of Naples, Alfonso Castaldo, called for prayer for unity in the context of advanced works on nuclear weapons of devastating potential. Unity in Truth and Love is a chance to save the world from destruction (*CVE* Pars 3, 417–18). Antonio Santin, bishop of Trieste and Koper (Italy), wrote, "The more terrifying the conditions in which mankind is currently leading an uncertain and dangerous life, the stronger the sense of need and desire for the unity of those who proudly bear the Christian name in the Christian world." The unification movement, therefore, has the potential to overcome and conquer fears and mistrust (*CVE* Pars 3, 697). Apostolic vicar for the Diocese of Zamora (Ecuador) Jorge Francisco Mosquera Barreiro called for the building of Christian unity in response to social problems in Latin America. According to him, this is so vital and pressing that much attention should not be paid to ritual differences but rather to agreement on fundamental dogmas in the unifying process (*CVE* Pars 7, 36).

On a side note, the potential conditions for such unification are worth noting, as they indirectly point to the problems the Catholic Church was struggling with. Archbishop Marcel-Marie Dubois of Besançon (France) pointed out that it will be hard to achieve this goal if we do not take care of unity within the Church itself (*oportet unitatem internam Ecclesiae ipsius facere*) (*CVE* Pars 1, 227). Similarly, the Algerian archbishop Léon-Etienne Duval suggested that better internal cooperation among Catholics would be the most attractive invitation for other Christian denominations to build unity. He also postulated joint initiatives with other Christians and adherents of different religions to promote peace and protect human dignity. Justice, ethics, works of mercy, and belief in God are the fields in which, in his opinion, such cooperation is possible (*CVE* Pars 5, 101–2). As we can see, not only the division into different Christian denominations but also a lack of unity within the Catholic Church itself was a problem.

Some *vota* also referred to specific local issues. One of the more interesting opinions referred to the participation of Catholic officials in non-Catholic religious ceremonies related to significant state events in the British Isles. According to the canon law of that time, the presence of Catholics in Anglican churches was not permitted. According to the bishop of Lancaster (England), Thomas Edward Flynn, Catholic mayors should not be required to refrain from participating in Protestant ceremonies, as this would prevent them from fulfilling their official duties (*CVE* Pars 1, 16).

Concluding this thread, it is worth noting that not all authors of the *vota* saw value in the Catholic Church imitating international unification movements. The bishop of Campos in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil), Antônio de Castro Mayer, presented a different point of view. In the unifying efforts of various organizations, he saw

the blurring of all differences in order to ensure happiness resulting from living in one great nation and culture. In his view, acting in this spirit in the realm of religion would lead to syncretism, which would be detrimental to the salvation of non-Catholics (*CVE* Pars 7, 156–58).

2. Problem with Fulfilling the Will of Christ (John 17:21)

Many bishops and theologians expected the Second Vatican Council to implement reforms that would make the Catholic Church more evangelical. In the context of the division among Christians, a credible interpretation of a passage from Jesus' High Priestly Prayer in the Gospel of John was particularly problematic: ". . .that they may all be one, just as you, Father, are in me, and I in you, that they also may be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21). In *vota*, we can find a few voices calling for unity, as their authors see Catholicism moving away from the quoted words of Jesus.

Archbishop Hermann Josef Schäufele of Freiburg im Breisgau (Germany) called the cited appeal of Jesus His greatest wish (*summum votum*). He postulated rejecting imprudent irenicism and seeking means that would help fulfill the Lord's desire (*CVE* Pars 1, 603).

The aforementioned bishop of Strasbourg (France), Jean-Julien Weber, emphasized that even non-Catholics, of whom there are 250,000 in his diocese, recognize that Jesus' appeal is urgent. They hoped the Council would respond to it and bring Christians closer to unity, though they knew it would not solve all problems. As he pointed out, he counted on the Council's courage in fulfilling the unifying mission entrusted to the Church by Christ (*CVE* Pars 1, 409–11).

Bishop Joseph Schröffer of Eichstätt (Germany) described Jesus' expressed desire for unity as imperative. In this context, he shared his hope that Protestants would soon return to the Church, healing the wound of division and removing scandal. However, he was aware that among dissenters, there were many prejudices and hostilities toward the Roman Church, which they regarded as having deviated from the authentic spirit of Christ. At the same time, he observed trends that softened this perception and created a growing expectation of unity (*CVE* Pars 1, 595–96). A similar issue regarding conflicts among Christians of different denominations was highlighted by the bishop of Sanyuan (China), Ferdinando Fulgencio Pasini. He noted that mutual animosity was marginal among the laity, but inflexibility and stubbornness were often prevalent among the clergy, sometimes reaching outright hostility. In his view, the greatest obstacle to unity was, therefore, the clergy, and it was their minds that required transformation. Otherwise, unity would remain fictitious and unstable (*unio ficta et instabilis*).

He also shared a rumor that some clergy and patriarchs were members of Freemasonry, though he admitted that he had no further knowledge on the matter. He called for systematic and fervent prayer from Catholics for dissenters so that they might convert and return to the Church, fulfilling Jesus' desire (*CVE* Pars 4, 546–47).

Michael Buchberger, bishop of Regensburg (Germany), stressed that the evangelical ideal is one Church that gathers all people, forming a single flock around one Shepherd. However, the current state of division should not lead to complaints but rather motivate efforts to realize Jesus' vision. The path to this should be a mutual confession of faults (*CVE* Pars 1, 656).

The fervent desire of Christ, expressed at the beginning of His redemptive passion in the words "that they may be one," should, according to Bishop Luciano Marcante of Valva e Sulmona (Italy), increasingly move and inspire the hearts of Christians. The return to unity is so crucial that it must be achieved even at the cost of concessions to dissenters (*CVE* Pars 3, 712). A similar longing was expressed by Bishop Marian Jankowski of Siedlce (Poland), who expected strong and effective action from the Council to fulfill the desire of the Heart of Jesus (*CVE* Pars 2, 702).

3. Problems in Missionary and Apologetic Work

One of the more serious problems of divided Christianity is the reduced effectiveness of missionary efforts. The bishop of Seckau (Austria), Josef Schoiswohl, pointed out that division undermines the credibility of the evangelical message (*CVE* Pars 1, 68–69).

The auxiliary bishop of Mainz (Germany), Joseph Maria Reuss, suggested that due to the lack of Christian unity, even atheists, capable of acting together, sometimes achieve greater success in persuading others to their views than the preachers of the Gospel. The condition for success in missionary work is the unification of all Christians (*successus plenus operae missionariae Unionem omnium Christianorum supponit*). To achieve this goal, if unity requires it, Catholics may even renounce certain matters (*CVE* Pars 1, 724–25). Similar diagnoses and suggestions can be found in the remarks of Maurus Valiyaparampil, Superior General of the Carmelites of Mary Immaculate (*CVE* Pars 8, 260).

The ordinary of the diocese of Mandalay (Myanmar), Albert-Pierre Falière, and the local auxiliary bishop, John Joseph U Win, emphasized the issue described here even more strongly. In their opinion, the division of Christians is such a great scandal that reconciliation should be a prerequisite for undertaking any missionary activity (*CVE* Pars 4, 22–23).

The specific dimension of Christian division characteristic of the Eastern Churches was present in the suggestion of the Coptic patriarch of Alexandria (Egypt),

Stephanos I Sidarouss. He pointed to the mutual slandering and competition between representatives of the Orthodox and Catholic hierarchies, which causes such great scandal that it prevents effective apostolate. (*CVE* Pars 5, 375–80). The Coptic bishop of Assiut (Egypt), Alexandros Scandar (*CVE* Pars 5, 380–383), highlighted a similar issue in the confrontation with Islam. The Brazilian bishop José Romão Martenetz, appointed for the faithful of the Eastern rite, also wrote about the scandal of divisions in Christianity, which disedifies pagans (*CVE* Pars 7, 333).

An interesting observation was made by Marius M. Zanelli, the administrator of the Apostolic Vicariate of Aysén (Chile). He pointed out that Catholics and Protestants, carrying out missionary work, accuse each other of unjustified use of the same Gospel, which causes confusion among those being evangelized (*CVE* Pars 7, 387).

Among the *vota* submitted by higher education institutions, this topic is addressed by St. Patrick's University. It states that as human civilization progresses and means of communication improve, the level of unity in political, economic, and social matters increases. Against this backdrop, divided Christianity appears increasingly scandalous, significantly hindering the spread of the Gospel (*SVU* Pars 2, 443–45).

Apart from strictly evangelizing activities, the problem of division is also evident in the confrontation between Catholics and heretical movements or hostile ideologies. The bishop of Dijon (France), Guillaume-Marius Sembel, saw the division of Christians as the main reason for the ineffectiveness of countering doctrines contrary to the faith (*CVE* Pars 1, 283).

In the context of the necessity to defend Christianity, communism is often mentioned as an enemy. Bishop Pablo Barrachina Estevan of the diocese of Orihuela (Spain) warned against excessive leniency toward communism, which, in his view, could be observed in certain circles of the faithful. The lack of unity in this area can be highly destructive both socially and spiritually (*CVE* Pars 2, 243). The pursuit of unity as a means of defense against modern materialism and the communist occupation (*obsidio*) was also present in the *vota* of Guido Maria Mazzocco, bishop of Adria (Italy) (*CVE* Pars 3, 25). Ralph Leo Hayes, the ordinary of the diocese of Davenport (USA), stressed that in the face of attacks from a common communist enemy, the Catholic Church could serve as a refuge for some Christians from the Eastern Churches, should they choose to unite (*CVE* Pars 6, 307–8).

The bishop of Castellammare di Stabia (Italy), Agostino D'Arco, pointed out that the fight against Marxist atheism should unite all those who call themselves Christians. If they stand together under the banner of Christ, they have a chance to defeat the system that he called the modern Antichrist (*CVE* Pars 3, 173–74). Similarly, the apostolic administrator in Nicotera and Tropea (Italy), Vincenzo De Chiara, added nationalism to the list of anti-Christian ideological currents (*CVE* Pars 3, 382).

Numerous *vota* concerned the need for the unification of Christians in the face of atheism in general. The necessity of creating a common bastion of Christians

against such currents was emphasized by the archbishop of Tortona (Italy), Egisto Domenico Melchiori (*CVE* Pars 3, 679–80). Similarly, a group of nine Indian bishops, led by Archbishop Joseph Attipetty, called on Catholics to cooperate with non-Catholics in this field of apologetics (*CVE* Pars 4, 217). The same approach in response to this threat was proposed by the Pontifical Gregorian University (*SVU* Pars 1.1, 16).

Venezuelan archbishop Rafael Ignacio Arias Blanco of the diocese of Caracas noted that modern atheism fights not only against religion but also against civil society and Western institutions. Therefore, the legitimacy of the Church's efforts toward unity in the face of this threat should raise no doubts (*CVE* Pars 7, 555).

The archbishop of Belgrade (Yugoslavia), Josip Antun Ujčić, wrote about many Orthodox clergy who were open to a path on which the Church could join hands (*manus iungere possent*) in defense of Christian principles against the atheist movement (*CVE* Pars 2, 533).

4. The Problem of Marriages Between People of Different Religious Affiliations

The authors of the *vota* saw not only the problems of the Church as a whole but also devoted considerable attention to marriages and families. Within the thematic scope of our interest, the issue of marriages between people of different religious affiliations—referred to by the Council Fathers as mixed marriages—came to the forefront. Some voices merely indicated that problems existed in this area and suggested that the Council should address this issue. This was recommended, among others, by the bishop of Austin, Louis Joseph Reicher (*CVE* Pars 6, 272). The ordinary of the diocese of Yakima (USA), Joseph Patrick Dougherty, observing the current difficulties in the legal approach, wanted to link the sacramentality of marriage with the validity of baptism (*CVE* Pars 6, 469). There were also *vota* that analyzed the discussed problem in more detail and several aspects.

The first dimension concerned the rituals and laws related to the solemnization of such marriages. The archbishop of Nice (France), Paul-Jules-Narcisse Rémond, saw the cause of numerous problems and scandals in the fact that, in the absence of a dispensation, the marriage ceremonies of persons of different religious affiliations could only be celebrated by non-Catholic ministers. As a result, Catholic priests, although they do not administer the sacrament, sometimes bless the wedding rings and even celebrate Mass, which causes much confusion. Rectifying the situation requires changes in law and liturgical rites (*CVE* Pars 1, 348). A similar concern and a call for easing the rigor regarding the celebration of marriages between people of different religious affiliations can also be found in the statement of the archbishop

of Reims (France), Louis-Augustin Marmottin (*CVE* Pars 1, 379). The ordinary of the diocese of Strasbourg (France), Weber, wrote that the prohibition of celebrating Mass at the marriage of persons of different religious affiliations is repulsive (*odibilis*) to the spouse who professes the Catholic faith and does not want to lose the spiritual benefits of the Church (*CVE* Pars 1, 419).

Another issue was the invalidity of marriages contracted before non-Catholic clergy. This matter was analyzed in general terms by Bishop Vincent Gelat of Palestine, although he did not offer any constructive solutions (*CVE* Pars 4, 443). A more detailed contribution came from the bishop of Rottenburg (Germany), Carl Joseph Leiprecht. He provided statistics showing that in his diocese, nearly 4,000 such unions are contracted annually with a dispensation from the impediment of mixed religion; another 4,000 ignore the canonical form and are contracted before a non-Catholic minister; and yet another 4,000 are contracted solely in a civil court. According to canon law, only the marriages in the first group are considered sacramental, which means that spouses in the other two categories are, after divorce, free to enter into new marriages. Therefore, he proposed resigning from the canonical form for every interdenominational marriage (*CVE* Pars 1, 661). According to Bishop John Michael O'Neill of Harbour Grace (Canada), maintaining the current canonical status quo fosters religious indifference among Catholics entering such unions (*CVE* Pars 6, 31). Another Canadian clergyman, auxiliary bishop Laurent Morin of Montréal, criticized the increasingly stringent legal changes. He noted that the need to obtain dispensations and other formal impediments had made the process of entering into interdenominational marriages so long and complicated that many couples abandoned the Catholic path and turned to non-Catholic clergy for the ceremony, resulting in serious spiritual harm. In this context, he proposed granting greater authority to local ordinaries (*CVE* Pars 6, 71–72). Simplification of procedures was also called for by John Hubert Macey Rodgers, apostolic vicar of the Tonga Islands (Oceania) (*CVE* Pars 7, 661–62), as well as by Cardinal Paul-Émile Léger of the diocese of Montréal (Canada), who wrote that the current regulations humiliate non-Catholics and therefore require modification (*CVE* Pars 6, 43–48). Among the *vota* are also voices recognizing institutional shortcomings in the Catholic Church at the time. The ordinary of the diocese of Duluth (USA), Thomas Anthony Welch, along with Laurence Alexander Glenn, auxiliary bishop, suggested that the creation of a papal tribunal for interdenominational marriages could improve the efficiency of the process and relieve the burden on diocesan courts (*CVE* Pars 6, 319).

The validity of marriages between Catholics and Orthodox Christians was addressed primarily by hierarchs from regions where such unions are most common. Bishop Scandar of the Coptic diocese of Assiut (Egypt) emphasized that the current canon law—which considers all marriages contracted before non-Catholic clergy invalid—is one of the most serious problems his local Church needs to face. He noted that Egypt is home to 80,000 Coptic Catholics and three million dissenters. In the

existing regulations, he saw no fostering of an atmosphere of love with non-Catholics, expressing hope that the Council would become an occasion for emphasizing mercy (*CVE* Pars 5, 380–383). The same issue was raised by Bishop Paul Nousseir of the Coptic diocese of Minya (Egypt). In his view, recognizing the validity of interdenominational marriages contracted outside of Catholic churches would have evangelizing potential. Referring to a historical argument, he stated that in the past, when such unions were considered valid, there were more conversions to Catholicism, and children raised in these marriages often grew up to be devout Catholics. At present, Catholics who chose this path rebel against the invalidation of their marriages and leave the Church (*CVE* Pars 5, 384–86). Hope for a return to the regulations recognizing the validity of interdenominational marriages blessed by non-Catholic clergy was also expressed by Youhanna Kabes, auxiliary bishop of the Coptic diocese of Alexandria (Egypt). He viewed the most recent change in these regulations as an attempt to reinforce Roman tendencies to dominate the Eastern Churches and to Latinize the Copts (*CVE* Pars 5, 400–401). A more general statement came from Iraqi bishop Raphaël I Bidawid (*CVE* Pars 4, 361) and Maronite archbishop François Ayoub in Syria, both of whom called for seeking a solution to the validity of at least those marriages contracted in Orthodox churches (*CVE* Pars 4, 450). Similarly, recognition of interdenominational marriages celebrated before Orthodox clergy was proposed by Melkite Greek Catholic Patriarch Maximos IV Saigh (Syria), along with 19 other bishops from the region (*CVE* Pars 4, 456–57).

Bishop Joseph Grueter of the diocese of Umata (South Africa) drew attention to a specific issue related to interdenominational marriages. He proposed that the Council examine the obligation of abstaining from meat, as it often causes tension in such unions due to the different traditions of the spouses (*CVE* Pars 5, 561).

Some *vota* also highlighted problems requiring a more straightforward process for declaring the sacramental nullity of interdenominational marriages. The bishop of Fort Wayne (USA) suggested that a difference in religious affiliation should be considered a diriment impediment to marriage since it is often the case that the non-Catholic spouse had no intention of fulfilling the promises and obligations made during the wedding ceremony (*CVE* Pars 6, 325). A slightly different problem was raised by Bishop John Patrick Kavanagh of Dunedin (New Zealand). He advocated for the efficient declaration of nullity for marriages between baptized non-Catholics. He observed that, after divorce, when such a person converts to Catholicism and wishes to marry a Catholic, current law prevents it. He emphasized that these initial marriages were often contracted without an intention of permanence and with limited consent, so their nullity should be declared promptly (*CVE* Pars 7, 652). A similar concern was voiced by Richard Henry Ackerman, auxiliary bishop of San Diego (USA). He noted that many non-Catholics are turned away when seeking to convert to Catholicism because of divorce and remarriage. He proposed that the Church recognize the validity of the new

marriage when welcoming converts, as those individuals, when contracting their first marriage within their own Christian community, were unaware of its true nature (*CVE* Pars 6, 503–4).

Conclusions and Perspectives

In the introduction to this article, we defined its central issue with the question: What key difficulties did the Catholics, experiencing the tragedy of schisms and heresies, face before the Council? The analysis of the *vota* revealed an extensive range of problems.

Firstly, these are theological issues, such as the lack of credibility in the proclaimed Gospel, which weakens faith and hinders missionary and apologetic efforts. However, social arguments are cited much more frequently. These emerge when comparing the state of Christianity to unifying movements in the secular sphere or when analyzing the Church's influence on international political and ideological discourse.

Secondly, we see some voices addressing the Church on a macro scale, but much more frequently, the issues raised concern local contexts. Most of the *vota* from our category of interest focus on the difficulties related to interdenominational marriages.

Thirdly, in some of the submitted diagnoses, we observe a connection between the return to Christian unity and the internal situation of the Catholic Church itself. The authors not only recognize intra-Catholic conflicts but also propose abandoning some aspects of Catholic teaching. In doing so, they implicitly suggest that not all doctrinal beliefs should be considered untouchable. A significant element of the discussion is the call for mutual confession of guilt, which was not a commonly held conviction within the Catholic Church.

It is worth stressing once again that, in portraying the problems of a divided Christianity, the Catholic hierarchs submitting the *vota* most often addressed social and juridical issues, while strictly theological themes remained on the margins of their reflection. Their approach in this area can be regarded as mainly pragmatic and pastoral. The diagnoses presented were primarily concerned with problems arising in regions with a significant population of non-Catholic Christians and, to a lesser extent, with the unifying mission of the universal Church. Taking this into account, one may hypothesize that the *vota* reflect more the personal experiences of their authors than a thorough study of theological matters.

An interesting conclusion from the analysis of the source material is the observation of elements that one might expect to find but which were absent from the submitted proposals. The first of these is the accusation of non-Catholics for causing divisions. It appears that in most local Churches, there was a desire to seek

common ground among Christians without pointing out erroneous views or making accusations of heresy. In this context, it is worth noting that the authors rarely referred to the history of divisions, the search for those to blame, or the complexity of the religious and social circumstances at the time of the schisms. These themes occasionally appear in the debates surrounding the drafts of *Unitatis redintegratio*. Still, they become most prominent only in the documents of joint ecumenical commissions produced after the Second Vatican Council. It is likely that the pastoral and pragmatic attitude of those writing the *vota* also contributed to the absence of theological characterizations of separated Christians in the submitted reports.

On the basis of the presented diagnoses of divided Christianity, several perspectives and open questions can be formulated.

Firstly, although both the *vota* and the conciliar debates—as well as the initial phase of the reception of the Decree on Ecumenism—expressed hope for rapid unification, this process has not yet been successfully completed. One of the reasons for this is a shift in the Catholic Church's approach to ecumenism: from a primarily pragmatic stance, open to far-reaching compromises, toward more in-depth theological analyses that highlight doctrinal differences and diverse approaches to many moral issues.

Secondly, in close reference to the first point, the reception of *Unitatis redintegratio* was expressed primarily through the establishment of commissions in which representatives of various Christian denominations analyzed key areas of disagreement. It appears that, at the level of the submitted *vota*, the authors were not fully aware of many significant issues that hinder full unification. Only the detailed analysis of specific matters revealed the true extent of the discrepancies. Another problem was the Council's failure to define a clear framework for the model of future unity. The general statement that unity should not be uniformity but rather unity in diversity proved insufficient.

Thirdly, a key factor in the later successes of unity was the change in the language used to speak about non-Catholics, both in the *vota* and during the conciliar debates. Moving away from accusations of heresy and the shift in terminology toward emphasizing brotherhood not only helped soften the image of other Christians among Catholics but, more importantly, opened the door to dialogue.

Translated by Marta Pająk-Szewczyk

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William of Ware's Arguments in Defense of Mary's Immaculate Conception

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Abstract: The current article aims to shed light on the reasoning used by the 13th century English Franciscan master William of Ware to defend the belief in the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary. To do so, this English theologian begins by dismantling the alleged reasons of those who opposed such belief. He then examines the numerous proofs that, in his opinion, confirm the truth of the thesis under study. As a methodological strategy, the author of this article sets out step by step and in detail the interrelated arguments of William of Ware to rationally support his defense of the immaculate conception thesis. The results of this research highlight the courageous and innovative pro-immaculate stance of William of Ware in the face of the then dominant current of deniers of the belief in the immaculate conception of Mary.

Keywords: Mariology, original sin, human conception, purification, Franciscan School, William of Ware, immaculate conception

It is well known that from the very early times the Christian Church had to defend orthodoxy by facing heated doctrinal debates against Docetists, Arians, Nestorians, and various other heretical currents. These debates reached their high and decisive points in the Ecumenical Councils of Nicaea (325), Ephesus (431), Chalcedon (451) and Constantinople II (553), where the Christological and two Mariological dogmas were definitively established. These Christological dogmas define Christ as true God the Son (of the same substance as the Father) and as true man; furthermore, the two Christ's natures, divine and human, are essentially and indissolubly united in the unique person of Christ. As necessary correlates of these Christological dogmas, these first Ecumenical Councils also established the principal Mariological dogmas, namely, the virginal divine motherhood of Mary (the Virgin is the true Mother of Christ) and, secondly, her perpetual virginity, since she was a virgin before childbirth, a virgin during childbirth and a virgin after childbirth.

However, despite the relatively early establishment of these two fundamental Mariological dogmas, two other important Mariological theses, that of the Immaculate Conception of Mary and that of her Assumption body and soul into heaven, far from achieving clear unanimity among the Fathers and theologians at that time (from the 6th-7th centuries), would be heatedly debated within Christianity for almost a millennium and a half. In fact, although both theses were admitted as pious beliefs since ancient times, and even as liturgical feasts, in numerous regions of the

Christian universe, it was only at a very late date that they became dogmas accepted by the whole Church: that of the Immaculate Conception in 1854, proclaimed by Pope Pius IX with the bull *Ineffabilis Deus* (De Fiores 1986, 613–19; Serra 1986, 619–25); and that of the Assumption in 1950, proclaimed by Pope Pius XII with the bull *Munificentissimus Deus* (Cecchin 2003; Piacentini 2004).

These last two Mariological beliefs were progressively affirmed and consolidated on the basis of a growing number of favorable opinions from some masters of Christian doctrine and fervent devotional practices on the part of the faithful. As in this article we will restrict ourselves only to the thesis of the Immaculate Conception, as argued by William of Ware, a Franciscan thinker of the 13th century, I will mention in passing some of the precursor positions of this thesis. Pierre Pauwels, in a pioneering monograph on the Franciscan contributions to the Immaculate dogma—published in 1904, on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the proclamation of the dogma (Pauwels 1904, 611–17)—mentions some antecedents of this belief in the immaculate conception of Mary (Pauwels 1904, 23; see also De Fiores 1986, 613–17): among them he includes the early declarations of some Greek Church Fathers on the role of the Virgin, essentially united to her son Jesus in the work of salvation of humanity, when Mary, as the new Eve and mother of the living, obtained full victory over the devil/sin (Pauwels 1904, 614). Stefano M. Cecchin, for his part, cites other Immaculate antecedents coming from Pope Honorius I (died in 638) and the Lateran Synod, both in the 7th century. According to Cecchin, Pope Honorius I wrote in a letter to Sergius, Patriarch of Constantinople, the following assertion: "Christ, effectively conceived without sin by the work of the Holy Spirit, was also born without sin of the Immaculate Virgin Mary."[1]

Thus, in this environment of progressive Marian interest, in the 8th century the belief in Mary's exceptional freedom from sin was gradually strengthened. In that century, the conviction that Mary received "sanctification" in the body and a sanctification in the soul, with the purpose of becoming a worthy mother of God, spread in Eastern and Western Churches. According to the most common belief of the Church, represented, among others, by St. John Damascene, this sanctification or purification of Mary occurred at the Annunciation (Cecchin 2003, 12). Now, in this context of intense debates for and against the belief in Mary's immaculate conception, the great doctrinal rivalry became apparent from the 13th century onwards between the philosophical-theological schools of the Dominicans and the Franciscans (Cecchin 2003, 39–74; 2021, 1–2). Based on the negative opinion of Bernard of Clairvaux on immaculate conception and his important impact on subsequent thinkers, especially on Thomas Aquinas, and then on the whole maculist

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1   "Christus . . . sine peccato conceptus de Spiritu sancto, etiam absque peccato est partus de sancta et immaculata virgine Dei genitrice." (Honorius I, *Epistola IV ad Sergium Constantinopolitaneum Episcopum* [PL 80, 472] as cited in Cecchin 2003, 13)

movement, the Dominican School, mostly opposed to this belief; the Franciscan School,[2] divided between a group of convinced adversaries and another group of enthusiastic defenders of the immaculist thesis, the latter thesis being the one that, in the end, would prevail.

In this sense, as Cecchin notes, the antagonism between the Dominican and Franciscan schools in the second half of the13th century on the belief in the immaculate conception notably benefited the theology and Mariology of the whole Church, as it increasingly illuminated the mystery of Christ and his Virgin Mother. Cecchin adds that in this matter the Franciscan masters of that century went from an initial denial of the immaculate belief to an unconditional defense of that belief, in whose dogmatic proclamation in 1854 the Franciscan Mariological School would play a decisive role throughout the 13th and 19th centuries.[3]

In the context of the antithetical Mariological positions of the Franciscan School's thinkers on the subject under scrutiny, I will study in this article the pro-immaculist position of only one of these 13th-century Franciscan masters: William of Ware (1260–1305), who, together with Robert Grosseteste and John Duns Scotus (Salvador-González 2024, 215–38), is part of the trio of 13th-century Franciscan masters who defend the immaculist thesis.

William of Ware, by systematically addressing this ardent Mariological problem in his *Disputed Question Concerning the Immaculate Conception of Mary,*[4] becomes the initiator of the immaculist movement at the University of Oxford, as Marielle Lamy (2000), Cecchin (2003, 58–61) and Maria Gabriella Iannelli (2010, 380) point out.[5]

Like some of his Franciscan colleagues of that period, this English teacher also tackles the controversial problem of Mary's Immaculate Conception with the traditional methodology of Scholasticism: he first analyzes the evidence that contradicts

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2   On this subject Cecchin points out: "Generalmente per 'Scuola' si intende l'insieme di pensatori, scrittori, scienziati, ecc., che seguono e sviluppano le teorie, i metodi, lo stile, il pensiero, ecc. d'un maestro, o che seguono comunque un medesimo metodo o indirizzo. Così che per 'Scuola francescana' si potrebbe intende l'insieme dei vari autori, maestri, teologi, filosofi, predicatori e santi dell'Ordine francescano, che si sono occupati in modo speciale della Vergine Madre, e che hanno costituito una linea di pensiero, definita da san Massimiliano M. Kolbe un 'filo d'oro,' che, iniziata con l'intuizione mistica di Francesco d'Assisi e fondatasi sulla teologia di Antonio, Bonaventura, Giovanni Duns Scoto, ecc., ha costituito una corrente di pensiero giunta sino ai nostri giorni e che ha accomunato tutti gli autori francescani in un unico metodo di indagine intorno al mistero di Maria, la donna attraverso cui si è realizzato il meraviglioso evento dell'Incarnazione." (Cecchin 2021, 1–2)

3   On this respect, Cecchin manifests: "Per la sua originalità e per l'enorme produzione teologica, omiletica, liturgica, devozionale e letteraria in onore della Vergine Maria, si può dare a questa speciale corrente di pensiero il nome di 'Scuola mariologica francescana.' Essa si fonda sulle intuizioni teologiche di Francesco d'Assisi e si sviluppa nella storia con vari e diversi autori che apportano diversità e originalità di vedute sul mistero mariano. L'apice del cammino si è parzialmente raggiunto con la proclamazione dei dogmi dell'Immacolata Concezione e dell'assunzione di Maria in cielo." (Cecchin 2021, 2)

4   William of Ware 1904, 1–11.

5   For a minimal bibliography on William of Ware, see Longpré 1922, 71–82; Glorieux 1933, 144–45; Gál 1954, 155–80; Höld 1990, 96–141.

this thesis, then unravels the arguments that would certify its validity and, finally, argues in detail and rigor his personal position on the matter.

1. Evaluating the Arguments Against the Immaculist Thesis

In trying to answer the question of whether the Virgin Mary was conceived in original sin, William of Ware begins by presenting the five arguments that would confirm such a hypothesis. The first three are opinions of the Church Fathers: one is from St. John Damascene, who says that if the Holy Spirit intervened to purify Mary, this means that she had something sinful that needed to be purified. The other two arguments are from St. Augustine, who in both cases maintains that only Christ was born without sin.[6]

The fourth argument against the immaculist thesis assumes that sin is the obstacle that prevented human beings from entering heaven, the door which was opened only by the Passion of Christ. Taking this into account—the opponents of the immaculate belief argue—if the Virgin had been conceived without sin and had died before the Passion of Christ, she would have entered heaven without the need of the redemption produced by her Son Jesus; and that is something totally inconvenient, because no one can be saved if Christ does not redeem him.[7]

As a fifth argument against Mary's immaculate conception, the English author presents a quotation from a certain work *De consecratione*, that is the third part of *Decretum Gratiani*,[8] which, in announcing the liturgical solemnities of the Church, states that nothing is said about the feast of the conception of the Virgin, because it should not be celebrated, since Mary was conceived in original sin.

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[6] "Quaeritur utrum beata Virgo concepta fuerit in originali peccato.
Quod sic:
1. Damascenus libro III c. 2: *Spiritus Sanctus supervenit purgans ipsam*: ergo aliquid habuit, quod purgandum fuit; hoc non est nisi peccatum; non actuale: ergo originale.
2. Item, Augustinus libro 1 *De baptismo parvulorum* dicit, quod solus Christus sine peccato natus fuit.
3. Item, idem dicit libro II *De baptismo parvulorum*." (William of Ware 1904, 1)

[7] "4. Item, peccatum fuit obstaculum, propter quod excludebantur homines ab ingressu caelestis patriae, quae quidem ianua aperta fuit per passionem: ergo, si beata Virgo fuisset sine omni peccato et mortua fuisset ante passionem, intrasset in caelum, et ita non omnibus fuisset ianua aperta per passionem Christi, nec beata Virgo indiguisset redemptione Filii sui; quod est inconveniens." (William of Ware 1904, 1)

[8] "*De consecratione* is the third part of the *Decretum Gratiani*, an important source of canon law. This information is given in the notes to the cited edition. The *apparatus* is a commentary in the form of glosses. This source is important in the line of argument: not only are the Church Fathers against the Immaculate Conception, but so are the jurists." (I sincerely thank one of the reviewers of my article for this important information, which I have placed in quotation marks, since it is his/her own wording.)

2. Presenting Two External Arguments in Favour of the Immaculate Belief

William of Ware then presents two brief and inconsistent reasons that other thinkers adduced in favour of the thesis of Mary's immaculate conception. According to the first, St. Paul says in his Epistle to the Romans that "If the root is holy, the branches are also holy" (Rom 11:16) (New International Version–NIV); therefore, as the parents of the Virgin were saints, she was also holy. The second reason is that, if Mary in the act of conception had not been holy, the liturgical feast of her conception could not be celebrated, since there can be no relationship between sin and holiness.[9] Our author does not grant greater validity to these two alleged proofs in favor of the immaculate thesis.

3. Arguing His Own Opinion on the Subject

After having presented the reasons for and against the immaculate belief, William of Ware argues in detail his personal position on the matter. To do this, he begins by analyzing one by one the different possibilities in which Mary's conception and birth could have occurred.

3.1. Analyzing Two Possibilities in the Conception of Mary

3.1.1. On the Possibility that Mary Contracted Original Sin and Was Purified at the Same Instant

The first opinion put forward by some is that Mary was conceived in original sin and at the same instant was purified and sanctified, although according to two different aspects of the same instant, so that it can be said that in one and the same instant one can be one way under one aspect, and in another different way under another aspect. According to the defenders of this possibility, an example of this apparent contradiction is the fact that, when a form of fire must be introduced into an aeriform matter, at the same instant the corruption of the aeriform matter and the introduction of the flaming form occur, according to a different aspect of the same instant. In this

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9   "Contra:

   1. Ad Rom. 11: *Si radix sancta, et rami*; sed parentes beatae Virginis fuerunt sancti: ergo et ipsa.

   2. Item, aliter festum Conceptionis non posset convenienter celebrari, quia quae connexio peccati ad sanctitatem? Quare etc." (William of Ware 1904, 1)

way it is admitted that two contradictory things can be present at the same instant, although under two different aspects.[10]

William of Ware rejects this contradictory possibility outright, giving two cuases, and the second in the form of an *ad hominem* argument. The first proof, based on logics, shows that if we were to admit the contradictory possibility that we are analyzing, we would be admitting the absurdity of two contradictory things being true at the same time and in the same indivisible measure in reality. In fact, the multiplication of instants is a rational multiplication; but rational diversity cannot be made in such a way that completely contradictory things exist in a being at the same instant. For this reason—the English master concludes—Mary could not have been infected by original sin and at the same time be purified.[11]

Our author then proposes as an "*ad hominem* argument" (as he calls it) that those who affirm the stated above deny it on a similar occasion, when they say that the angel could not sin in the first instant of his creation, because in that first instant he performed his first good act. But to do a good act and a bad act (sin) at the same instant, even if they were under different aspects of the same instant, is totally impossible.[12] William justifies the comparison between the sinless creation of the angels and the immaculate conception of the Virgin Mary with this reasoning: it is contradictory to affirm that the angels, in the first instant of their creation, in which they already perform a good act, can commit some sin, because it is contradictory that the good act (grace) and sin coexist in the same instant; in the same way, there is no reason to doubt that the Virgin Mary was, like the angels and by special privilege of God, in grace and without sin from the very instant of her conception.

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10   "Respondeo:
      Una opinio dicit, quod concepta fuit in originali peccato, et quod in eodem instanti fuit purgata et sanctificata, in alio tamen et ali signo eiusdem instantis.
      Unde ponunt, quod unum possit esse in uno instanti ratione unius signi et aliud in eodem ratione alterius. Quod autem sit in eodem instant accipere plura signa, hoc probant per exemplum . . . : quando in materiam aeris debet induci forma ignis, in eodem instanti est corruptio formae aeris et inductio formae ignis, pro alio et alio signo eiusdem instantis. Et sic ponunt, contradictoria posse esse in diversis signis eiusdem instantis." (William of Ware 1904, 2)

11   "Contra hoc arguitur sic: Istud non intelligo propter duplicem causam: una est reaIis, et alia est contra hominem. Causa realis est, quia tunc contradictoria essent simul vera in eadem mensura indivisibili realiter; multiplicatio enim instantium est multiplicatio secundum rationem; diversitas autem secundum rationem non potest facere contradictoria esse in eodem instanti realiter: ergo beata Virgo non potuit simul in eodem instanti esse infecta peccato reatus originalis et sanctificata." (William of Ware 1904, 2)

12   "Alia causa est ad hominem. Ipsi enim, qui hoc dicunt, negant hoc in consimili. Dicunt enim, quod angelus non potuerit peccare in primo instanti suae creationis, quia in primo instanti habuit primum actum bonum; si autem in eodem instanti peccasset, habuisset actum malum, et ita habuisset actum bonum et actum malum in eodem instanti; quod est impossibile. Et tamen secundum eos hoc fuisset possibile secundum diversa signa eiusdem instantis." (William of Ware 1904, 2)

William then complements his reasoning on this example, which he considers invalid,[13] because, in his opinion, the generation of fire and the corruption of air are not two opposite phenomena, and therefore they can coincide at the same instant; on the contrary, the generation of fire and its corruption are opposites, for which reason these last two phenomena could not coexist at the same instant in a being.[14]

3.1.2. On the Possibility that Mary Contracted Original Sin and Was Purified Shortly Afterwards

William of Ware then examines the ten arguments that would support, as a second opinion, that the Virgin Mary was conceived in original sin, before being purified shortly afterwards: this is the maculistposition. The first is provided by St. Bernard, when in a writing against the feast of Mary's Conception, he says that the Virgin does not want to receive an honour that harms her Son.[15]

The second proof is offered by St. Anselm, when in *Cur Deus homo* he says categorically that Mary, mother of Christ, was conceived in iniquity and, therefore, was born with original sin.[16]

As a third argument, the English thinker offers another argument from St. Anselm, when in *De conceptu virginali* he says that the semen received by the Virgin in her conception by Anne, although pure and holy, comes from the sinful mass of the human race.[17]

William takes the fourth argument from St. Augustine, who in *De nuptiis et concupiscentia* asserts without hesitation that no one is conceived by a man and a woman without contracting original sin.[18]

According to the fifth demonstration, the axiom that every effect requires a cause allows us to infer that, since sin is the cause of death, from the mere fact that the

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[13] This concept is that of Henry of Ghent. See Lamy 2000, 306–23. I am grateful to the reviewer of my article for providing this important information.

[14] "Quidquid sit de primo exemplo, alias erit sermo de hoc. Secundum exemplum non est ad propositum, quia generatio ignis et corruptio aeris non sunt opposita, et ideo possunt stare simul in eodem instanti; sed generatio ignis et corruptio ignis sunt opposita." (William of Ware 1904, 2)

[15] "Alia est opinio, quod in originali sit concepta et non in eodem instanti mundata.
1. Et haec est intentio Bernardi in quodam libello *De festo conceptionis B. Mariae Virginis*; et ibi dicit, quod non vult Beata talem honorem, per quem fit derogatio Filio suo." (William of Ware 1904, 3)

[16] "2. Item, Anselmus libro II *Cur Deus homo* c. 16: 'Virgo ipsa, unde assumtus est Christus, in iniquitatibus concepta est, et in peccatis concepit eam mater eius, et cum originali peccato nata est.'" (William of Ware 1904, 3)

[17] "3. Item, Anselmus, *De conceptu virginali* c. 14: 'Hoc autem nullatenus refragatur rationi nostrae, quae semen de Virgine sumtum asserit esse mundum, quamvis sit de massa peccatrice.'" (William of Ware 1904, 3)

[18] "4. Item, Augustinus, *De nuptiis et concupiscentia*: 'Nullus concipitur ex mare et femina, nisi contrahat originale.'" (William of Ware 1904, 3)

Virgin died it is inferred that she committed sin, not actual sin (for she was exempt from all mortal and venial sin), but original sin.[19]

In the sixth argument, Ware's thinker analyses three possibilities: that Mary was sanctified before her conception, or in the moment of her conception, or after her conception. In this regard, he rules out the first two alternatives: she could not have been sanctified before her conception, because she did not yet exist; nor could she have been sanctified at her conception, because at that very moment the libidinal pleasure of her parents was active and, therefore, so was original sin. As a consequence, according to the third possibility, Mary was sanctified after her conception, after contracting original sin.[20]

As a seventh proof against the immaculate belief, our author assumes the phrase of St. Augustine, when he says "He firmly believes that anyone who is born among a man and a woman contracts original sin."[21]

In the eighth argument against Mary's immaculate conception, William combines several sentences of St. Augustine and St. Paul. Augustine says that between God and men there is only one mediator, who is Christ, without whom no one can be freed from sin; and whoever thinks that there is someone who does not need the remission of sins, because he believes himself to be outside our universal mediator before God, is opposed to the Holy Scriptures, when St. Paul says in his Epistle to the Romans that through one man (Adam) sin entered the world, and through sin death entered, through whom all have sinned.[22] Therefore, the English Franciscan concludes that it would be impious to maintain that there are men free from sin, without the mediator Christ needing to come to free them from it and to save them.[23]

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19 "5. Item, effectus alicuius existens in aliquo, arguit causam illius effectus: peccatum autem est causa mortis; beata autem Virgo mortua fuit: ergo habuit peccatum; non actuale: ergo originale." (William of Ware 1904, 3)

20 "6. Item, aut fuit sanctificata ante conceptionem aut in conceptione aut post conceptionem. Non ante, quia ante non fuit; nec in, quia tunc fuit libido parentum actualis, et simul fuissent contradictoria: ergo sanctificata fuit post conceptionem, et ita contraxit originale." (William of Ware 1904, 3)

21 "7. Item, Augustinus, *De fide ad Petrum*: 'Firmissime tene, quod omnis, qui inter hominem et mulierem nascitur, contrahit originale.'" (William of Ware 1904, 3)

22 "8. Item, si non contraxisset originale, non indiguisset morte Christi, quod est contra Augustinum, *De perfectione iustitiae*: '*Unus est Deus et unus mediator Dei et hominum, Christus Iesus*, sine quo nemo a condemnatione liberatur, sive quam traxit ex illo, *in quo omnes peccaverant*, sive quam postea suis iniquitatibus addidit'. Et post: 'Quisquis ergo fuisse vel esse aliquem hominem vel aliquos homines putat, excepto uno *mediatore Dei et hominum*, quibus necessaria non fuerit peccatorum remissio, contrarius est divinae scripturae, ut apostolus dicit *per unum hominem peccatum intrasse in mundum, et per peccatam mortem, et ita in omnes homines pertransisse, in quo omnes peccaverunt*.'" (William of Ware 1904, 3–4) William of Ware takes this text from Rom 5:12: "Therefore, just as sin entered the world through one man, and death through sin, and in this way death came to all people, because all sinned" (Rom 5:12) (New International Version–NIV).

23 "et necesse est, ut impia contentione asserat, esse posse homines, qui sine mediatore Christo liberante atque salvante sint liberi salvique a peccato, cum Iesus dixerit: 'Non est opus sanis medicus, sed male habentibus. Non veni vocare iustos, sed peccatores.' Et loquitur ibi de peccato originali, sicut patet expresse." (William of Ware 1904, 4)

William explains that the defenders of the maculist thesis, following the Apostle Paul and Augustine, affirm that all human beings are born in sin, except Christ, who is also the only intermediary between God and humanity capable of freeing them from sin. In this sense, the maculists maintain that the Virgin Mary was not an exception to the general rule, and, therefore, having been conceived in sin, she also needed the intermediation of Christ to be redeemed from original sin.

As a ninth proof against the immaculate thesis, William refers to a sentence of St. Jerome, who comments on a verse of the Psalms to the effect that Christ says of himself that his soul is unique, because it was the only one without sin.[24]

As a tenth and final argument against immaculist belief, our author quotes St. Augustine, when he speaks of the concupiscence from which the Virgin's body came and which her Son could not contract: here concupiscence is either original sin or its consequence, from which it follows that the Virgin contracted original sin.[25]

3.2. Presentation and Justification of His Personal Position on Mary's Immaculate Conception

After evoking the first two opposing opinions, William of Ware presents the third opinion, according to which the Virgin Mary did not contract original sin when she was conceived. Our author enthusiastically defends the thesis of the Virgin's Immaculate Conception, asserting that he prefers to err by excess in attributing this prerogative to Mary, even though she did not have it, rather than to err by default, denying her this privilege received by her, considering the power of her divine Son.[26]

Regarding such an exclusive privilege, the English theologian proposes to examine in the following paragraphs its possibility, its convenience, its current nature, the multiplicity of power, the need to celebrate the feast of the Conception, and the obligation to celebrate this feast even in the case that the Virgin was conceived in original sin.[27] This is how Sarah Jane Boss has been able to convincingly explain it.[28]

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[24] "9. Item, Hieronymus super illud Psalmi: *De manu canis unicam meam*, dicit, quod unicam meam nominet Christus animam suam, quae sola fuit sino peccato." (William of Ware 1904, 4)

[25] "10. Item, Augustinus libro X *Contra Iulianum* dicit: 'Concupiscentiam, ex qua trahebatur corpus Virginis, quam non potuit contrahere Filius Virginis'; sed constat, quod concupiscentia vel est peccatum originale vel consequitur ipsum: ergo." (William of Ware 1904, 4)

[26] "Alia est opinio, quod non contraxit originale. Quam volo tenere, quia, si debeam deficere, cum non sim certus de altera parte, magis volo deficere per superabundantiam, dando Mariae aliquam praerogativam, quam per defectum, diminuendo vel subtrahendo ab ea aliquam praerogativam, quam habuit; sicut in quaestione, qua quaeritur de potentia Filii sui." (William of Ware 1904, 4–5)

[27] "Inde primo volo ostendere *possibilitatem*, secundo *congruentiam*, tertio quarto *potentiae multiplicitatem*, quinto, quod *festum conceptionis* est *celebrandum*, et sexto, quod *festum esset celebrandum, etiamsi esset concepta in originali*." (William of Ware 1904, 4–5)

[28] In this regard Boss expresses: "William of Ware, for instance, argued that the feast of Mary's Conception should be celebrated even if she contracted original sin, because her flesh is the 'original principle' of the body of Christ. Now, if William had held a 'high' doctrine of original sin—that is, if he had placed

William of Ware begins by demonstrating the possibility of the prerogative of Mary's Immaculate Conception, first reasoning it and then confirming it with various examples. So he argues that way: although the condition of illness (sin) of the offspring's body is derived from the paternal semen, nevertheless, before the mass of the flesh of the Virgin Mary was formed, it (the flesh) was purified, not sanctified, because only that which is susceptible to sin and grace can be sanctified, that is, only the soul, not the body.[29] This bodily mass of the Virgin, derived from the paternal semen, inherited from it a condition of illness or contamination, which in other human beings causes them to contract original sin, when their soul unites with that mass of sick flesh. But—our author infers—since this condition of illness does not coincide with the substance of the flesh (the body), but is its fault, God was able to preserve the mass of Mary's flesh from the contamination derived from the condition of illness: this is because with this mass of flesh the body of the Virgin had to be formed, so that her mass of flesh would not be contaminated by her parents when providing the semen.[30]

This reasoning of William is related to the medieval belief that the moment of biological conception of the body and its animation by the soul are different. William stresses that, even if the conception of Mary's body was derived from the paternal semen, it was preserved by God from the contamination by her parents when providing the semen.

To confirm this reasoning, William of Ware uses two examples, one taken from St. Augustine, the other from St. Anselm. St. Augustine, in his letter to Elvidius, says that even if the soul of Christ had come from someone who had transmitted it to him, it would not necessarily have had original sin, since it could have been sanctified at the very moment of its transmission. Similarly—the thinker from Ware adds—although the Virgin's flesh was transmitted by her parents, and, therefore, was

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great emphasis on its severity—then the fact of original sin would have made it improper to celebrate Mary's conception, as St. Bernard and others had already argued was the case. The fact that William is willing to promote the feast regardless of whether or not Mary's conception was sinless indicates that he takes a relatively light view of original sin. Yet the argument just cited follows on immediately from arguments in favour of the immaculate conception." (Boss 2007, 217)

29   "1. Possibilitatem ostendo sic: primo narrando, secundo exempla adducendo.
Primo narrando sic: Illa massa carnis, ex qua corpus Virginis fuit formatum, simul fuit seminata et mundata. Ex parte autem seminantis fuit in ea qualitas morbida: sed ea tenus, qua fuit inde formandum corpus Virginis, fuit mundata, non dico sanctificata, quia sanctificari non potest, nisi quod est susceptivum peccati et gratiae, cuiusmodi est sola anima." (William of Ware 1904, 5)

30   "In massa, inquam, illa fuit ratione parentum seminantium qualitas morbida, ratione cuius qualitatis ex unione animae ad carnem talem in aliis hominibus contrahitur originale. Cum igitur infectio ista sive qualitas morbida non sit substantia carnis, sed reatus differens ab ea, possibile fuit Deo praeservare illam massam ab infectione vel qualitate morbida, in quantum ex ea debuit formari corpus Virginis, quamvis infecta fuerit illa massa a parte seminantium." (William of Ware 1904, 5)

infected, nevertheless, it could have been purified at the very moment of paternal transmission.[31]

As a second example confirming his argument, the English theologian presents the opinion of St. Anselm, who in his *De veritate* proposes the following reasoning: when a sinner is punished by someone who does not have such a competence, as, on the one hand, he should be punished, but, on the other hand, it is not for the other to punish him, the punishment should and should not be given, and furthermore it cannot be denied that it is just or unjust.[32] From such an anomalous example offered by Anselm, William deduces that it was analogously possible for the mass of the Virgin's flesh to have been contaminated by her parents and, therefore, to have been affected by an injustice; however, even granting this to the Virgin, it does not mean that such a circumstance harmed the prerogative of the virginal conception of her Son, because He was conceived pure of a pure mother (the Virgin Mary, who conceived Christ supernaturally, without human mediation, by the direct intervention of God); on the other hand, the Virgin was conceived pure from impure parents, as opposed to other human beings, who are conceived impure from impure parents. From this William infers the possibility of Mary's immaculate conception.[33]

The theologian of Ware then goes on to demonstrate the convenience of the Virgin's immaculate conception, based on the assumption that, since her Son is purity itself, it was just that he should form for himself a mother as pure as possible, so that he would not limit himself to purifying her, but to preserve her from all impurity. Our author reinforces his argument by accepting two passages from St. Anselm in *De conceptu virginali*. In the first of these, Anselm says that it was fitting that Christ's conception should take place in a most pure mother, so that it was fitting that this Virgin should shine with such purity that there was no greater below God; because God the Father was preparing to entrust his only Son, whom he loved as himself,

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[31] "Ad hoc potest adduci illud exemplum Augustini in *Epistola ad Elvidium*, ubi dicit, quod, si anima Christi fuisset ex traduce, non fuisset necesse habuisse originale, quia in eodem instanti fuisset sanctificata, quo fuisset traducta: ergo similiter, quamvis caro beatae Virginis fuerit traducta et sic infecta, potuit tamen in eodem instanti mundari." (William of Ware 1904, 5)

[32] "Aliud exemplum est, quod dicit Anselmus, c. 7 sive 8 *De veritate*, ubi dicit: 'Cum peccans ab eo, ad quem non pertinet, percutitur, quoniam et ipse percuti debet, et ille non debet percutere, debet et non debet esse percussio, et ideo recta et non recta negari non potest'. Ex hoc habetur, quod eadem res propter diversam relationem dici potest recta et non recta." (William of Ware 1904, 5–6)

[33] "Igitur similiter in proposito massa ista a parte parentum beatae Virginis possibilis fuit habere infectionem sive non rectitudinem et a parte sui, in quantum ex ea debuit corpus beatae Virginis formari, possibile fuit, quod haberet munditiam et rectitudinem. Et tamen istud dando beatae Virgini non est contra praerogativam conceptionis Filii, quia Filius suus conceptus est mundus et de munda, beata autem Virgo concepta est munda, sed de immundis, ceteri autem homines concepti sunt immundi et de immundis. Sic patet possibilitas." (William of Ware 1904, 6)

so that the Son of God the Father and the Son of the Virgin were the same and unique person.[34]

As a complement to these disquisitions, the English Franciscan immediately takes up the second (analogous) passage from St. Anselm, who argues that God could have created a human being without the slightest sin, and that this person would then have been purer than Mary, if she had contracted original sin; however, this would not have been appropriate, because a son must honour his mother as much as possible, and so Christ had to do everything possible to honour his mother by granting her to be conceived without original sin.[35] And in this way, Anselm's authority, which was invoked to support the maculist thesis, is used by Wilhelm to support the immaculist thesis.[36]

William of Ware then asserts that Mary's immaculate conception became a reality, as several authorities affirm. According to him, the Lincolnian (Robert Grosseteste) affirms it, and, for his part, Alexander Neckam interprets the verse from Song of Songs "You are all beautiful, my love, and there is no spot in you" to mean that there is no actual or original sin in the Virgin. This is also affirmed by St. Anselm and Richard of St. Victor, in a sermon on the Virgin's conception.[37] As the final authority that allows him to confirm the truth of the immaculate thesis, William turns to St. Augustine, who in *De natura et gratia* asserts that the Virgin Mary constitutes an exception with respect to sin, since we know that she was granted a superior grace to overcome any kind of sin, having deserved to conceive and give birth to one who had never had any sin.[38] Just as earlier William used the authority of Anselm to defend the

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34 "2. Congruentia autem patet, quia, postquam Filius eius est ipsa munditia, congruum fuit, ut faceret Matrem suam ita mundam, sicut potuit, et sic non solum mundaret, sed ab omni immunditia praeservaret; et hoc dicit Anselmus, *De conceptu virginali* c. 18: 'Decebat, ut istius hominis conceptio de matre purissima fieret; nempe decens erat, ut ea puritate, qua maior sub Deo nequit intelligi, Virgo illa niteret, cui Deus Pater unicum Filium, quem de corde suo aequalem sibi genitum tanquam se ipsum diligebat, ita dare disponebat, ut naturaliter unus esset idemque communis Dei Patris et Virginis Filius, et quam ipse Filius facere sibi matrem substantialiter eligebat, et de qua Spiritus sanctus volebat et operaturus erat, ut conciperetur et nasceretur ille, de quo ipse procedebat.'" (William of Ware 1904, 6)

35 "Item, Anselmus, c. 13 et 15 *De conceptu* ostendit, quod Deus potuit fecisse unum hominem sine omni peccato; si ergo Virgo Maria traxisset originale, talis fuisset mundior Virgine; quod est inconveniens, quia decet filium matrem summe honorare; et quod potuit, congruum fuit, quod fecerit; et ex hoc sequitur, quod ita fecerit, cum filius debeat matrem honorare." (William of Ware 1904, 6)

36 I sincerely thank the reviewer of my article for this valuable information.

37 "3. Quod sic factum sit, sunt auctoritates. Lincolniensis, ut dicitur, hoc posuit. Et Alexander Nequam in ultimo vitae suae exposuit illud Canticorum: *Tota pulchra es, amica mea, et macula non est in te*, neque actualis neque originalis de beata Virgine.
Item, Anselmus hoc videtur dicere quem condidit de ista materia.
Item, Richardus de S. Victore in *beatae Virginis*." (William of Ware 1904, 6–7)

38 "Item, Augustinus in libro *De natura et gratia* circa medium dicit: 'Excepta itaque sancta Virgine Maria, de qua propter honorem Domini nullam prorsus, cum de peccato agitur, volo haberi quaestionem; unum enim scimus, quod ei plus gratiae collatum fuerit ad vincendum omni ex parte peccatum, quae concipere ac parere meruit quem constat, nullum habere peccatum.' Hac igitur Virgine excepta etc. Haec Augustinus." (William of Ware 1904, 7)

immaculist thesis so now he uses the authority of Augustine, even though the starting point for this argument was William's fellow theologians.[39]

Ware's writer then analyses the multiple possibilities of grace, in which he sees a double power, one natural and the other the obedience power. In his opinion, the quasi-natural power of grace is the one which is acted upon in correspondence with the elicited act of power: such is the case of the angels, who received grace with elicited acts according to their effort and merit.[40] On the contrary—our author assures—the obedience power is threefold: one is that which can be actualised unconditionally with respect to nature in the subject itself; the second is that which can be actualised not unconditionally, but in relation to the nature present in the subject itself, as when the subject is the Mother of God; the third obedience power is that of created grace, which cannot be actualised in the subject itself, but only in a divine subject.[41]

In the English thinker's opinion, the second power of obedience to grace has not been realized in any nature, except in the Virgin Mary, and it is only possible for it to be fulfilled in a creature destined to be the Mother of God; and he does not believe that any pure creature, except the Virgin, is filled with as much grace as it could receive according to the power of obedience.[42] For this reason—William infers—Mary has been filled with grace according to both obedience powers, to the point of surpassing in grace every pure creature according to the double degree of grace; and, therefore, the grace of God and God himself are present in the Virgin by a special privilege.[43]

The Franciscan of Ware considers that the third grace cannot be received by a pure creature until it remains in the subject itself, which is the case of Christ. But it would not have been possible for that grace to have remained in the soul of Christ, if it had been separated from the Word.[44] Thus—the author concludes—the grace

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39   I wish to thank the reviewer of my article for this valuable information.

40   "4. Quarto ostenditur multiplicitas potentiae ad gratiam. Est enim duplex potentia ad gratiam, scilicet naturalis et obedientialis. Potentia quasi naturalis ad gratiam est illa, quae impletur secundum correspondentiam ad actum elicitum a potentia; et sic angeli receperunt gratiam per comparationem ad actus elicitos, quia secundum conatum suum et meritum." (William of Ware 1904, 7)

41   "Potentia autem obedientialis est triplex: una, quae potest repleri, natura stante in proprio supposito absolute; alia est potentia ad gratiam, quae potest repleri, natura stante in proprio supposito non absolute, sed in relatione, ut suppositum illud sit Mater Dei: tertia potentia obedientialis est ad gratiam creatam, quae non potest repleri natura stante in proprio supposito, sed solum in supposito divino." (William of Ware 1904, 7)

42   "Credo, quod in nulla natura sit impleta potentia obedientialis secunda ad gratiam, nisi in sola beata Virgine; nec esset possibile impleri, nisi creatura illa fieret Mater Dei; nec credo, quod aliqua pura creatura repleta sit tanta gratia, quantam posset habere de potentia obedientiali primo modo dicta, nisi beata Virgo." (William of Ware 1904, 7)

43   "Unde beata Virgo impleta est gratia secundum utramque potentiam obedientialem: et ita excellit omnem puram creaturam in gratia secundum duplicem gradum gratiae; et ideo gratia et Deus est in ipsa per quendam specialem illapsum." (William of Ware 1904, 7)

44   "Tertiam vero gratiam non potest pura creatura accipere manens in proprio supposito; et hanc habuit Christus. Nec fuisset possibile, quod tanta gratia remansisset in anima Christi, si per impossibile fuisset anima Christi separata a Verbo." (William of Ware 1904, 8)

of the soul of Christ surpasses the soul of the Virgin by only one step, which, in any case, makes the distance in excellence between the grace of the soul of Christ and that of the soul of Mary greater than the two steps with which the Virgin excels above the grace of other human beings.[45]

Our author adds that Mary in her first sanctification in the moment of conception was filled with as much grace as a creature could receive; and in her second sanctification in the moment of annunciation she was so confirmed in grace that she could not sin venially or mortally. In such circumstances Mary received such great grace that a pure creature could not receive it, unless she were the Mother of God.[46] William then argues about the need to celebrate the feast of the Conception, because everything related to the Virgin is pure, as confirmed by St. Anselm when he writes to the bishops of England that he does not believe that anyone who refuses to celebrate the feast of her Conception is a true lover of the Virgin.[47] It should be noted that William of Ware relies on the English tradition of celebrating the conception of Mary, in frank opposition to the strong reluctance of Bernard of Clairvaux and the Parisian theologians in this regard: in fact, Bernard and the latter considered it was inappropriate to celebrate such a feast without being absolutely certain that Mary had been conceived without original sin.

To conclude his reasoning in defense of the immaculate belief, William of Ware says that the feast of the Conception can be celebrated even in the case that if Mary had been conceived in original sin, because her corporal matter had to be the principle from which the body of Christ was engendered. In his opinion, it is not necessary for holiness to be formally present in the one whose feast is being celebrated, since it is enough that there be holiness in relation to another person, in this case, his Son Christ.[48]

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[45] "Et sic gratia animae Christi excedit gratiam animae beatae Virginis per unum gradum; qui tamen gradus facit plus distare gratiam animae Christi a gratia beatae Virginis in excellentia quam duo gradus, in quibus excellit beata Virgo omnem puram creaturam, faciunt gratiam beatae Virginis distare in esse a gratia aliorum hominum." (William of Ware 1904, 8)

[46] "Sciendum est etiam, quod beata Virgo fuit repleta tanta gratia in prima sanctificatione, quantam potuit pura creatura habere, stans in proprio supposito absolute. In secunda fuit confirmata, quod nec venialiter nec mortaliter postea potuit peccare, in qua recepit tantam gratiam, quantam non potest pura creatura recipere, nisi fieret Mater Dei." (William of Ware 1904, 8)

[47] "5. Et ex hoc sequitur quintum, quod, ex quo totum mundum est quod est a parte Virginis in conceptione, festum conceptionis est celebrandum; et ideo dicit Anselmus in *Epistola ad episcopos Angliae*: 'Non credo, esse verum amatorem beatae Virginis, qui respuit celebrare festum conceptionis.'" (William of Ware 1904, 8)

[48] "6. Et supposito, quod contraxisset originale, adhuc posset celebrari, in quantum illa massa debuit esse originale principium corporis Christi, non in quantum vitiata. Sic in ortu filiorum regis fit solemne festum; sic cathedra S. Petri celebratur, in quantum ibi incipiebat futura ecclesiae dignitas. Nec oportet, quod sanctitas formaliter insit illi, de quo festum celebratur, ut patet in festo dedicationis ecclesiae, vel in festo S. Crucis, sed sufficit, quod sit sanctitas in relatione ad aliud." (William of Ware 1904, 8–9)

3.3. Refuting the Objections Against Mary's Immaculate Conception

Next, William of Ware presents ten responses against those who object to the puri-fication of Mary at her conception. To the first objection, deduced from St. Bernard, the English Franciscan replies that Bernard does not go so far as to deny altogether the purification of the Virgin at her conception, since at the end of his letter he re-fers the question to the judgment of the Pope; and, in any case, even if Bernard had denied the immaculate conception of Mary, there are many other saints and Doctors of the Church who affirm it, and, therefore, one should piously believe them, rather than Bernard. Moreover—the English Mariologist goes on—what Bernard affirmed during his lifetime he retracted in the visions after his death. In fact, in a posthumous vision to a monk of Clairvaux, he appeared to him all luminous, although with a spot on his chest, which, as Bernard himself explained to the monk who received the vi-sion, was a spot he had received for having said that the Virgin Mary contracted orig-inal sin when she was conceived. Therefore—William concludes—what St. Bernard did not retract in life he retracted after death in a vision granted to a monk.[49] We cannot certify the sources of this posthumous vision or the alleged Immaculate "re-traction" of St. Bernard. William undoubtedly accepts this account without further ado, considering the ratifying power that the prestigious Bernard would give to the Immaculist thesis.

To the second and third objections, presumably raised by St. Anselm, the master of Ware responds that these objections, not exhaustive, but interrogative, are from Anselm's disciple; and the fact that Anselm did not answer them does not mean that he approves them; all the more so since in a later pamphlet Anselm affirmed the truth that Mary did not contract original sin.[50]

Concerning a fourth objection, derived from St. Augustine, William says that the fact of not having any impurity either personal or derived from the parents is an ex-clusive prerogative of the Son of God, while possessing personal purity and impurity from the parents can be a prerogative of Mary.[51]

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[49] "Vel dic, quod id, quod dixit in vita, retractavit per visiones; apparuit enim beatus Bernardus uni monacho de Claravalle desideranti ipsum videre totus lucidus, excepto pectore, in quo fuit quaedam macula; et cum quaesivisset, unde haberet illam maculam, cum totum residuum esset lucidum, respondit, quod talem maculam habuit, quia dixit de beata Virgine, quod originale contraxit; et ita quod non retractavit vivendo, retractavit mortuus per somnia." (William of Ware 1904, 9)

[50] "2. et 3. Ad aliud de Anselmo dico, quod sunt verba discipuli, et ideo non dicuntur determinative, sed inquisitive. Si dicas, quod Anselmus hoc videtur approbare, ex quo non reprehendit eum, dico, quod, quamvis ibi non reprehendatur, tamen postea in quodam libello dixit veritatem illam, scilicet, quod beata Virgo non contraxit originale." (William of Ware 1904, 9)

[51] "4. Ad aliud de Augustino dico, quod non habere immunditiam, nec a se nec ex parte parentum, praerogati-va solius Filii sui est; habere tamen munditiam in se et immunditiam a parentibus potest esse praerogativa beatae Virginis." (William of Ware 1904, 9)

To the fifth objection our author replies that, even if a man had uninfected natural qualities, but did not have the gratuitous habit that prevents him from dying, he would die naturally; therefore St. Augustine says that Christ would have died of old age, had he lived, which would not have happened to Adam (if he had not sinned), because death is not always the consequence of sin.[52]

To the sixth objection, which asks whether Mary was sanctified before, during, or after conception, our author replies that the question is wrongly put, because Mary's flesh was cleansed (purified) at conception, but was not sanctified; and the reasoning is based on the false assumption that sanctification and purification are the same. In this case, the flesh and the irrational nature (the body) of the Virgin are susceptible of purification, but not of sanctification.[53] It should not be forgotten that for medieval people the conception of a human being (that is, the engendering of his body or flesh) was not identified with body's animation by the soul. In fact, it was thought that the animation of the body by the soul could happen long after the conception of the body. That is why, according to William, the body of the Virgin Mary could have been purified at its conception, before her soul was sanctified in the animation of the body by the soul.

On the seventh objection, based on a passage from St. Augustine's *De fide ad Petrum*, William alleges that the saint speaks of the impurity of the parents.[54]

To the eighth objection of those who say that Mary, if she had been conceived without sin, would not have needed to be redeemed by the passion of Christ, our author answers that this is true, because the purity of the Virgin Mother proceeded from her Son. In this order of ideas, William bases himself on a sentence of St. Anselm, when, to a disciple who asked him how Christ could be pure by himself, if he had received purity from his Mother, he answers that the purity of the Mother, thanks to which Christ was pure, comes only from Christ himself, for which reason he was pure by means of himself and by himself, not by means of his mother.[55] Therefore—the English thinker deduces—all the filth was granted to Mother Mary through her

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[52] "5. Ad aliud dico, quod, si unus homo haberet pura naturalia non infecta et non haberet habitum gratuitum, qui probiteret eum mori, moreretur naturaliter; et ideo dicit Augustinus, II *De baptismo parvulorum*, quod Christus defecisset si vixisset et tamen Adam non; hoc dixit proper hoc, quod mors non est semper propter peccatum." (William of Ware 1904, 9–10)

[53] "6. Ad aliud, cum quaeritur: vel fuit sanctificata ante conceptionem vel in vel post, dico, quod argumentum procedit ex falsa imaginatione; quia ipsa caro mundata fuit in ipsa conceptione, non tamen sanctificata. Caro enim et natura irrationalis bene est susceptibilis mundationis, licet non sanctificationis: argumentum autem procedit, ac si idem esset sanctificatio et mundatio." (William of Ware 1904, 10)

[54] "7. Ad aliud Augustini. *De fide ad Petram*, dico, quod loquitur de immunditia ex parte parentum." (William of Ware 1904, 10)

[55] "8. Ad aliud, cum dicitur: si fuisset sine peccato, non indiguisset redimi per passionem Christi, dico, quod sic: quia tota munditia Matris Virginis fuit a Filio; dicit enim Anselmus II *Cur Deus homo* c. 16. ubi quaerit discipulus, quomodo Christus fuit mundus per se, si accepit munditiam a matre, et respondet Anselmus: 'Quoniam Matris munditia, per quam mundus est, non fuit nisi ab illo: ipse ergo per se ipsum et a se mundus fuit.'" (William of Ware 1904, 10)

Son, and that is why she needed the passion of Christ, not because of sin, which did not exist in her, but which would have existed in her, if her Son had not preserved her from contracting it.[56]

To the ninth objection, taken from the statement of St. Jerome, when he says in his Gloss that only the soul of Christ was without sin, William replies that the term "only" does not exclude the soul of Mary, which must necessarily be clean, as clean must also be her flesh, from which the body of her Son would be assumed in all purity.[57]

To the tenth and last objection coming from a phrase of St. Augustine, the English Franciscan replies that the bishop of Hippo speaks of the concupiscence of the parents.[58]

Finally, William of Ware refutes the five main objections that oppose the thesis of the immaculate conception of Mary. To the first of these, derived from a statement of St. John Damascene about "purifying" Mary, our author replies that the purification of something can be understood in two ways: either as something impure being eliminated, or as some perfection being added to it. In his opinion, the Damascene speaks of purification in the second sense of the term, that is, in that Mary was not purified from a sin that she did not have, but that she would have had, had she not been preserved from it.[59]

To the second and third objections, William asserts that the objector is speaking of the Virgin's parents.[60]

To the fourth objection, according to which the gate of heaven would not have been opened to Mary because of the death of Christ, some say that it is not inappropriate to attribute this prerogative to the Mother of God, while others say that the precise cause of the closing of heaven's gate is not sin, but the divine decree, as is shown by the fact that many saints remained in limbo before the passion of Christ. Therefore—our writer concludes—if the Virgin Mary had died before the passion of

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[56] "Unde tota munditia Matris fuit ei per Filium suum: unde indiguit passione Christi non propter peccatum, quod infuit, sed quod infuisset, nisi ipsemet Filius eam per fidem praeservasset. Et ideo dicit Augustinus in sermone *De Magdalena*, quod duplex est debitum, scilicet vel commissum et dimissum, vel non commissum, sed possibile committi: 'nullum enim peccatum facit unus homo, quod non posset facere alius homo, nisi praeservaretur a Deo.'" (William of Ware 1904, 10)

[57] "9. Ad aliud de Hieronymo, cum dicit in glossa, quod sola anima Christi fuit sine peccato, dico, quod *sola* non excludit animam Matris, quam oportebat mundam esse, sicut et carnem, de qua corpus Filii debuit assumi in omni munditia." (William of Ware 1904, 10)

[58] "10. Ad aliud Augustini dicitur, quod loquitur de concupiscentia a parte parentum." (William of Ware 1904, 11)

[59] "1. Ad primum principale in quaestione, cum dicit: 'Dicit Damascenus: purgans etc.,' dico, quod aliquid purgari potest dupliciter. scilicet quod aliquid immundum auferatur, vel quod aliqua perfectio superaddatur; primo modo non intendit de purgatione, sed secundo; vel purgans non a peccato, quod infuit, sed quod infuisset, nisi praeservata fuisset; sicut matrimonium excusat a peccato, non quod inest, sed quod inesset, nisi bonum matrimonii excusaret." (William of Ware 1904, 11)

[60] "2. e 3. Ad secundum et tertium dico, quod loquitur ex parte parentum." (William of Ware 1904, 11)

her Son, perhaps she would not have ascended to heaven, but not because of any impediment of sin, but because of the validity of the divine decree.[61] It is interesting to note that William did not wish to attribute to the Virgin Mary unfounded privileges. This is evident when he states that, if Mary had died before Christ died on the cross, she too, like the other saints in Limbo, would in all probability have had to wait for the redemptive Passion of her Son before being able to ascend to heaven.

Finally, the English theologian answers the fifth objection, according to which a Gloss on the consecration states that nothing is said about the feast of the Conception, because it is not obligatory to celebrate it; and the reason is that Mary remained in sin like the other saints, except for Christ, the only exception in this regard. William of Ware answers this objection by specifying that these are the words of the Gloss, but nothing of the sort is said in the text. Our author even ends with the surprising statement that this celebration should not be maintained, because it is contrary to the saints.[62]

Conclusions

William of Ware demonstrates the possibility of the prerogative of Mary's immaculate conception through several arguments. In his opinion, even though the Virgin's body mass, derived from the paternal semen, inherited from it a condition of contamination—which in other human beings causes them to contract original sin, when their soul unites with that mass of contaminated flesh—God was able to preserve the mass of Mary's flesh from the contamination derived from the condition of illness, since this condition of illness does not coincide with the substance of the flesh (the body), but is its guilt. This is explained because with that mass of flesh coming from Joachim and Anna the body of the Virgin had to be formed, so that her mass of flesh would not be contaminated by her parents when providing and receiving the semen.

William of Ware also justifies the appropriateness of the Virgin's immaculate conception based on the assumption—taken from St. Anselm—that, since her Son is purity itself, it was appropriate that he should form for himself a mother as pure

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61 "4. Ad aliud, cum dicitur, quod tunc non fuisset sibi ianua aperta per mortem Christi, dicunt aliqui, quod non est inconveniens attribuere hanc praerogativam Matri Dei. Aliter dicitur, quod peccatum non est causa praecisa clausionis ianuae nisi meritoria, sed divinum decretum; sicut patet in sanctis, qui fuerant in limbo ante passionem. Unde, si fuisset beata Virgo mortua ante passionem Filii, forte non evdasset, non propter Impedimentum a parte peccati, sed propter stabilitatem divini decreti." (William of Ware 1904, 11)

62 "5. Ad aliud, cum dicitur sic: 'In quadam glossa *De consecratione* d. III c. 1: De festo conceptionis nihil hic dictur, quia celebrandum non est, sicut in multis regionibus fit et maxime in Anglia: et haec est ratio, quia in peccatis fuit sicut ceteri sancti, excepta unica persona Christi,' haec sunt verba glossae, quia in textu nil dicitur de hoc. Adhuc dico, quod iste apparatus non est tenendus, quia est contra sanctos." (William of Ware 1904, 11)

as possible, so that he would not limit himself to purifying her, but to preserve her from all impurity.

To conclude his reasoning in defense of the immaculate belief, William of Ware—in a position contrary to that of Bernard of Clairvaux—presents as proof of Mary's immaculate conception the fact that the Church celebrates the liturgical feast of the birth of Mary, which would be improper if she had been conceived in original sin. Our author even goes so far as to assert that the feast of Mary's Immaculate Conception should be celebrated even in the case that Mary had been conceived in original sin, because her corporal matter should be the principle from which the purest body of Christ was engendered. William's reasoning is pivotal in the history of the theology of the immaculate conception, and it's what allowed another English Franciscan theologian, John Duns Scotus, to think about the possibility of Mary's immaculate conception.

Finally, it is important to note that, as some specialists have pointed out, William of Ware had a notable influence with his arguments on his Franciscan colleague John Duns Scotus. The latter, in turn, was a decisive protagonist in the triumph of the Immaculate thesis, which, after long centuries of heated debate, ended up being defined in 1854 as an official dogma of the Catholic Church by Pope Pius IX.

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Directions and Foundations of Pope Francis' Approach to Ecumenism

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Abstract: The article presents an analysis of Francis' numerous statements on the topic of ecumenism and attempts to synthesise papal thought in the key of directions, foundations and practical guidelines for the search for unity by contemporary Christians. The study of the source texts first helps to demonstrate the main areas of Francis' ecumenism (including the motivation for a common path and theological dialogue, the focus on spiritual life and service to the world). The theological foundations of this service will then be recognised, above all the gift of grace, the ecclesiology of unity, starting from the source of baptism, the profession of faith and the perspective of holiness. Finally, the third part of the article is an attempt to synthesise Francis' practical orientations and indications for ecumenism, including openness to the word of God and the Holy Spirit, evangelisation, awareness of imperfect unity, moving from the logic of "what I can teach" to "what I can learn," response to the challenges of the world.

Keywords: Francis, ecumenism, ecclesiology, unity, the common way, contemporary problems

One of the defining aspects of Francis' ministry was his commitment to Christian unity. While continuing the Church's ongoing ecumenical efforts, he has infused this journey with fresh energy, hope, and new initiatives, breaking through the sense of stagnation or fatigue that has settled in many circles today. At the same time, the new prospects for ecumenism are shaped by the challenges that all communities and denominations have been struggling with to a lesser or greater extent. This is why Pope Francis urged the Church to more actively engage in a common journey with other Christians, despite the differences, difficulties and burdens that may exist between them. With a focus on Christ's message of unity, he called on everyone to boldly move forward together and look beyond the fixed patterns, habits and personal viewpoints. This voice is especially valuable given that Jorge Mario Bergoglio himself gradually discovered ecumenism during his time in Argentina[1] and his views developed through his own spiritual experiences and personal relationships with people of different denominations, especially Anglicans,[2]

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[1] His first lesson in ecumenism was a childhood event: "I went out with my grandmother. In that time, it was thought that all Protestants went to hell. On the other side of the sidewalk there were two women of The Salvation Army. . . . I said to my grandmother: 'Who are they? Nuns?' And my grandmother said: 'No, they are Protestants, but they are good.'" (Francis 2014b)

[2] Bergoglio's particular commitment to ecumenism started only during his ministry as archbishop. In Buenos Aires, he continued the interfaith dialogue pursued by his predecessor Cardinal Antonio Quarracino.

Lutherans,[3] and Eastern Christians.[4] While he initially had limited contact with evangelical communities, his openness to the Catholic Charismatic Renewal[5] eventually led to creative relations with evangelicals, especially Pentecostals.[6] It must

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In that period, the ties with representatives of the Protestant historic Churches and the Orthodox Church were particularly strong. For example, Bergoglio had personal relationship with Gregory Venables, Anglican bishop of Buenos Aires, and engaged in a practical Catholic-Anglican ecumenism among the Aborigines: "the Anglican Bishop and the Catholic Bishop work there together and teach. When the people cannot go to the Catholic celebration on Sunday, they go to the Anglican celebration, and the Anglicans go to the Catholic one, because they do not want a Sunday to go by without a celebration." (Francis 2017k) Bergoglio's relationship with Bishop Tony Palmer within the Communion of Episcopal Evangelical Churches was also valuable in the ecumenical journey. Palmer was in Buenos Aires plenty of times and had many conversations with the archbishop of the Argentinian capital, especially about the spirituality of mixed marriages and the difficulties stemming from lack of possibility to receive Holy Communion in the Church of one's spouse.

[3] Particularly important were Bergoglio's relations with Dr. Anders Ruuth of the Church of Sweden, who spent some time in Argentina (Francis 2015b). For more on Dr. Ruuth, see Parkman 2011.

[4] For example, Cardinal Bergoglio attended the Orthodox Christmas liturgy in the Orthodox Cathedral of Buenos Aires every year. At the same time, he had cordial relations with the Greek Catholics, including a friendship with Sviatoslav Shevchuk, the current major archbishop of Kiev-Halych, head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church. Cf. *OrthCh*.

[5] As for Bergoglio's relations with evangelical Christians, there were initially none, but this began to change under the influence of contacts with Catholic Charismatics, although Bergoglio's openness to this mode of spirituality was not obvious at the beginning. It is important to note that in the 1970s Bergoglio was rather sceptical of the charismatic movement—as a provincial, he forbid Fr. Alberto Ibañez Padilla from getting involved in the emerging charismatic renewal in Argentina. However, during his episcopal ministry things began to change gradually. At first, he thought of the charismatic prayer as a "school of samba," but in 1999, during an annual Mass for Catholic renewal groups, he understood the holiness and depth of the path. One of Bergoglio's associates confessed: "He said: 'When I hear the voices of praise, I walk to the altar. I can feel my heart being filled.' As a man of deep prayer, he recognised that it was the Holy Spirit. They asked him if when he lifted the Host and the chalice he would allow them 15 seconds of prayer in tongues, and he agreed." (Ivereigh 2015, 343) He also gradually discovered charismatic prayer and joyful songs of praise, and eventually, shortly before his election as pope, he was appointed national assistant of the Charismatic Renewal by the Argentine bishops. Years later, he confessed: "Someone must have told today's organizers that I really like the hymn: 'Jesus the Lord lives.' When I would celebrate Mass in the cathedral in Buenos Aires with the charismatic renewal, after the consecration and a few moments of adoration in tongues, we would sing this hymn with great joy and fervour, as you have today. Thank you! I felt at home!" (Francis 2014i)

[6] In 2000, Bergoglio began to have classes in the formation school of Catholic Charismatics and gradually changed his understanding of the Church, especially regarding the responsibility of the laity for the work of evangelization and taking the Gospel to the streets (outbound Church). Later, on the initiative of evangelical pastors and leaders of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, the Renewed Communion of Evangelicals and Catholics in the Spirit was founded in Buenos Aires and in 2003 began preparing prayer meetings. In 2004 and 2005, Bergoglio attended these meetings without speaking, like any faithful. These meetings were crucial for entering into the heart of prayer in tongues and for healing.
A particularly meaningful experience in the life of Bergoglio was the prayer for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in June 2006. He had already started opening up to the reality of the Charismatic Renewal, and the baptism in the Holy Spirit was central to the prayer of praise, glossolalia, and the expectation of miracles and signs, like in the early Church. One of the guest speakers at the meeting was Fr. Raniero Cantalamessa, OFMCap, who was involved in the Charismatic Renewal. Bergoglio actively participated in the event—he organised the Estadio Luna Park Hall. During the meeting, Pastor Marcos Witt encouraged the participants to pray for each other. Then 24-year-old Edgardo Brezovec, from the evangelical

therefore be said that this vibrant coexistence and collaboration of Christians is one of the keys to understanding Francis' pontificate.

To explore the ecumenical dimension of Francis' ministry we can consider several key research questions: What were the main directions of his ecumenical work? What theological and pastoral foundations underlie his approach to ecumenism? And what new paths for unity did his pontificate highlight? Answers to these questions can be found by analysing the Pope's speeches, homilies, messages, and letters and by synthesising this material. It must also be noted that due to its expected size and because of the wealth of source material, the article needs to focus on the key documents only and texts containing repeated statements from various meetings may need to be omitted or only briefly mentioned. This article aims to present Pope Francis' perspective on ecumenism, as well as give practical insights and indicate areas for further research.

This article was written in the context of research on ecumenism conducted by scholars from various theological centres around the world. Therefore, Pope Francis' introduction to ecumenism *"L'unità prevale sul conflitto": Papa Francesco e l'ecumenismo* (Terraraz 2017), in a series of La Teologia di Papa Francesco. One should also bear in mind various studies addressing different aspects of Francis' ecumenism.[7]

1. The Ecumenical Perspective and Forms of the Pontificate of Pope Francis

Pope Francis' commitment to ecumenism was a central aspect of his papacy. By analysing Pope's texts and actions, we may identify the dimensions of the ecumenical dialogue, discover new opportunities for ecumenical rapprochement and appreciate the importance of interfaith encounters during his meetings and travels.

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community, prayed over the cardinal. Later Bergoglio was asked to speak, but first asked the people to pray for him. The preachers present put their hands on him and everyone in the stands enthusiastically prayed for the archbishop. Then, Bergoglio spoke enthusiastically of reconciled diversity and of a common path. He experienced an inner renewal: he preached with passion, clarity, and great power. Evangelina Himitian described what happened as follows: "He began to feel much freer. The key was his openness to the Spirit, his letting himself be guided by a new experience . . ." (Ivereigh 2015, 291–93) Another important experience was Bergoglio's proposal to meet with evangelical pastors once a month (since 2006) for a common prayer. During one of these meetings, the idea of a joint evangelical-Catholic retreat for clergy was put forward. Despite certain objections on both sides, such retreats took place in 2010 and 2012 and the Catholic priests participating in them were delighted with the ministry of the evangelical pastors.

[7] See, e.g., Boudway and Gallicho 2014; Bräuer 2017; Carter 2020; Faggioli 2016; Halík 2020; Mayer 2017; Pérez 2020; Scerri 2013, 2018; Wood 2018; Xavier 2017. The following Polish authors can be mentioned: Błasiak 2010, 2023; Glaeser 2018; Kałużny 2021.

1.1. Continuation of Decree on Ecumenism *Unitatis Redintegratio*

Francis' pontificate had a number of levels. Theological dialogue (see *UR* 4, 9) is steadily conducted through the Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity and various commissions. This dialogue extends to the Orthodox Churches of the Byzantine tradition, the Oriental Orthodox Churches and the Assyrian Church of the East, as well as with Western Churches and communities: the International Conference of the Old Catholic Union of Utrecht, the Anglican Communion, the Lutheran World Federation, the World Methodist Council, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, the Baptist World Alliance, the Disciples of Christ, the Pentecostal Churches and new Charismatic Churches, the Evangelical Churches, the Mennonite World Conference, the Salvation Army. Additionally, there is multilateral dialogue within the World Council of Churches, the Global Christian Forum and with the community of Protestant Churches in Europe (Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity 2020, Appendix). A key role in this ongoing ecumenical work is played by theologians and official representatives of the denominations.

A second key dimension is spiritual ecumenism, which the Second Vatican Council defines as follows: "This change of heart and holiness of life, along with public and private prayer for the unity of Christians, should be regarded as the soul of the whole ecumenical movement." (*UR* 8; *UUS* 28) This practice is an expression of the shared Christian journey, a deepening sense of baptismal identity and a focus on the Lord. Prayer also fosters daily communion among Christians and creates a real hope for celebrating the Eucharist together in the future (Francis 2013f).[8] A special form of prayer is praise, which draws participants into God's heart, purifies them, and awakens the joy of the Spirit and the desire to be with others, thus leading them to the source of unity. This is often expressed through the praying and sharing of worship spaces with Christians of other denominations (Francis 2022a; cf. 2014g). Intercessory prayer for the communities where Christians live is also important (Francis 2023a; cf. *EG* 281, 283).

The third dimension of ecumenism is service to the world (*UR* 12), mainly by offering hope to people. Helping migrants, the excluded, the needy, and the persecuted is essential. Equally important is inter-confessional and inter-religious cooperation in environmental challenges. The spirit of collaboration is reflected in joint pilgrimages with heads of other churches and the mutual inspiration drawn from confronting

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8   Noteworthy is the recognition in 2001 by the Holy See of the ancient anaphora of Addai and Mari, which, in some circumstances, made possible an eucharistic hospitality between the faithful of the Assyrian Church of the East and the Chaldean (Catholic) Church. Equally important was the declaration published in 2017 on sacramental life in the Catholic and Assyrian traditions. See Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity 2001b, 4; 2001a, 3; CCACE; Francis 2022b.

issues of global importance.[9] Such cooperation extends beyond Christianity and takes place also in inter-religious dialogue (*FT* 5; Francis and Al-Tayyeb 2019).

1.2. Apostolic Journeys

Francis' ministry for unity was deeply practical and pastoral. This is demonstrated by his apostolic journeys with an ecumenical focus. Some of the most significant include: the visit to Lampedusa (July 8, 2013); the meeting with the Patriarch Kirill of Moscow and All Russia at Havana Airport, Cuba (February 12, 2016); the trip to the island of Lesbos with Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople and Archbishop Ieronymos II of Athens and All Greece (April 16, 2016); the prayer meeting for South Sudan's civil and political authorities at the Vatican with Archbishop Justin Welby (April 11, 2019); the visit to the World Council of Churches in Geneva (June 21, 2018); the trips to Orthodox-majority countries: Bulgaria and North Macedonia (May 5–7, 2019), Romania (May 31–June 2, 2019), Cyprus and Greece (December 2–6, 2021); the trip to South Sudan with Welby, archbishop of Canterbury, and Iain Greenshields, Church of Scotland Moderator (February 3–5, 2023); the trip to Marseille (September 22–23, 2023). Another journey of major significance was the trip to Sweden, where Pope participated in the ceremony marking the start of preparation for the 500th anniversary of the Reformation at the Lutheran Cathedral in Lund on October 31, 2016. A pilgrimage in the footsteps of St. Paul with Patriarch Bartholomew I was planned for 2020, but it had to be cancelled due to the pandemic. Each of these events was an opportunity to highlight unity and provide further motivation for the journey ahead. Similarly, significant apostolic journeys with an inter-religious focus should me mentioned here, namely the trip to the United Arab Emirates on February 3–5, 2019, to Kazakhstan in September 2022, to Bahrain on November 3–6, 2022, to Mongolia on August 31–September 4, 2023, and to Indonesia, East Timor, Papua New Guinea and Singapore on September 2–13, 2024.

1.3. New Face of Ecumenism

In addition to the official dialogues and ecumenical meetings, Pope Francis was directly engaged in promoting unity. A specific feature of Bergoglio's pontificate was his spontaneous remarks and messages to Christians of different denominations. For him, the key thing was walking together and accompanying one another on the journey, even when no spiritual effects of the journey can be immediately seen: "To walk together, to work together, to love one another, and together to seek to explain our differences, to come to agreement, but as we keep walking!" (Francis 2017a;

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9   A good example is what Patriarch Bartholomew I said on climate protection. See *LS* 8–9. "All of us, and we Christians in particular, are responsible for protecting creation." (Francis 2016a)

cf. Francis 2018g, 2017k) He believed that Christians should not wait for full theological reconciliation to act; instead, they should walk together, showing as much unity as possible now. This does not mean compromising on core beliefs or focusing solely on theology, nor does it involve proselytism. Dialogue and encounter alone are not sufficient either. It is still a challenge of today to work together in different areas, to help each other and to bear witness to the faith (evangelization). In this context, it must be remembered that according to Francis, divisions between Christians "do not prevent us from working together, walking together, and washing each other's feet." (Francis 2021h)

Various informal meetings between Pope Francis and representatives of different denominations contributed to building closer relationships and thus gradual openness of the communities. This is of particular importance for the dialogue between the Roman Catholic Church and evangelical communities, which tend to be rather distanced from official ecumenical efforts. Such encounters fostered mutual understanding, cooperation, and theological and pastoral work. These relations and cooperation create space for God to lead the people to unity, a gift of the Holy Spirit, and prevent discouragement in the face of still incomplete communion of Christians (Francis 2014d; cf. *UR* 24).

Finally, Francis also placed great emphasis on symbolic gestures, such as his ecumenical journeys and his joint responses with other religious leaders to global challenges. One of the clear signals for joint evangelization, which is the mission of the Church, was the blessing and sending of 50 Catholic and Anglican bishops by Pope Francis and Archbishop Welby and urging them to "be for the world a foretaste of the reconciling of all Christians in the unity of the one and only Church of Christ." (Francis 2024e)

An important example of the cooperation is also the prefaces written by Christian leaders for Francis' books: Patriarch Bartholomew I wrote the preface for *Our Mother Earth: A Christian Reading of the Challenge of the Environment*, Patriarch Kirill of Moscow for *Prayer: The Breath of New Life*, and Welby, archbishop of Canterbury for *Diverse Yet United: Communicating Truth in Charity*.

1.4. Ecumenism and the Pentecostal and Charismatic Experience

On June 3, 2017, during the celebration of the Jubilee of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, Francis said: "... the flood of grace of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal. ... It was born ecumenical because it is the Holy Spirit who creates unity, and the same Spirit who granted the inspiration for this. . . . A flood of grace of the Spirit! Why a flood of grace? Because it has no founder, no bylaws, no structure of governance." (Francis 2017a)

The Charismatic Renewal should therefore be understood broadly as a diverse movement in which the Holy Spirit inspires the baptised to deepen their spiritual

lives, engage in evangelization and contribute to building a living Church—the People of God (communal dimension). To further this mission, Pope Francis has established the International Service of Communion *Charis* (Francis 2019d, 2023e). This structure replaced various entities which existed before and was assigned the task of coordinating, inspiring and supporting the diverse expressions of Catholic charismatic spirituality, which Cardinal Léon-Joseph Suenens once described as "a flow of grace" (Francis 2015g). Among the tasks that Francis set for CHARIS were: to promote the ecumenical dimension of the Catholic Charismatic Renewal, support the work for the unity of all Christians, and foster communion between people involved in the various realities within the Charismatic Renewal as well as communion with other ecclesial movements and other Christian Churches and Communities, especially those drawing on the experience of the Pentecost. Service to the poor is also a critical focus (CHARIS, art. 3). This resonates with the increasingly common experience of Catholic and Pentecostal charismatic communities meeting and working together, which is facilitated by the similar forms of spirituality (e.g., reliance on the Bible, prayer of worship, praying in tongues, practising charismatic gifts). While doctrinal differences remain, members of these communities can come together to worship, serve one another with their spiritual gifts and undertake missions together, although joint evangelization is still a real and controversial challenge. Emphasising the importance of baptism in the Holy Spirit and renewal opens the door to ecumenism within the rapidly growing Pentecostal line of Christianity.

2. Theological Foundations of Pope Francis' Ecumenical Programme

Francis' pontificate was rooted in the Church's ecumenical journey, as outlined by the Second Vatican Council and the post-conciliar magisterium (see Francis 2014r). Among its theological foundations were ecumenism as a gift of grace, ecclesiology of unity and spiritual unity rooted in baptism.

2.1. Ecumenism as a Gift of Grace

The pursuit of Christian unity is not a merely human and pragmatic activity but is grounded in God—it is a "journey of grace," meaning it depends on God's grace (Francis 2021e). Despite various concerns raised, it has nothing to do with irenicism, theological compromises or syncretism. Because ecumenism is the work of God, Christians should accept this gift and, according to the logic of faith, cultivate it. This requires a spiritual basis for the being, praying and working together, namely the gift of baptism and fundamental truths of the Christian faith. Only then can coexistence,

cooperation and a new understanding of the divisions in the shared history become possible (see Francis 2013a).

2.2. Ecclesiology of Unity

The dogmatic basis for ecumenism lies in the truth that the Church is a community called to build visible unity through listening, dialogue and conversion of hearts, since "the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race." (*LG* 1) This insight was emphasised by Pope John XXIII (1962) at the Council's opening: since the visible unity of Christians is not yet complete, the Catholic Church must actively pursue the unity for which Jesus prayed. This is the deepest motivation behind efforts towards unity. The bishop of Rome should serve as a sign of this unity, despite the challenges posed by existing divisions. Recognizing these difficulties, Pope John Paul II invited other Christians to consider the form of the papal office (*UUS* 95; John Paul II 1987; cf. Francis 2021b) and Pope Francis has spoken of the need for a conversion of the papacy, so that the task entrusted to Peter by Jesus can be fulfilled in the context of evangelization (*EG* 32). Francis' great openness to Christians of different traditions has made this quest for unity more achievable.

It also has to do with the coexistence of unity and diversity within the Church as not mutually exclusive realities. It is therefore a mistake to equate unity with uniformity and diversity with division. The two have their source in the Holy Spirit. Francis reminded of that when he said: "Catholic unity is different but it is one: this is curious! The cause of diversity is also the cause of unity: the Holy Spirit." (Francis 2014g; cf. Francis 2017j) At the same time, this unity does not require always doing everything together; rather, it means recognising and accepting the gifts of others, listening to one another, and respecting different perspectives. Therefore, according to Francis, the best symbols of unity are an orchestra, a symphony (Francis 2013h) and a polyhedron, as they ensure preservation of each component's distinctiveness (*EG* 236).

According to Francis, monastic life can serve as a model for building unity, showing how unity in diversity is possible. It also shows that unity is always a gift of the Holy Spirit for those walking together in brotherhood, service and acceptance. At the same time, it illustrates that conversion (the attempt to see each other in God), prayer and holiness of life are essential to growing in mutual love (Francis 2015d).

Bishops have an important role to play in the search for such unity as their mission goes beyond safeguarding faith and worship; they must encourage the faithful to be open to others. This was echoed in Francis' words to Archbishop Welby: "the mission of shepherds is to help the sheep entrusted to them to go forth and actively

proclaim the joy of the Gospel, not to remain huddled in closed circles, in ecclesial 'micro-climates.'" (Francis 2016f)

2.3. Six Theological Principles

Firstly, ecumenism is rooted in the faith in Jesus Christ and a relationship with Him: "The closer we are to Christ, the more united we are among ourselves." (Francis 2015e) The Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed and the teaching of the Council of Chalcedon are also essential, as they address the key issues concerning the Holy Trinity, the identity of the Son of God, and redemption (see United States Conference of Catholic Bishops 1965; LWFDPCU). Proclaiming Christ as the sole mediator of salvation by grace is a shared mission for all Christians, involving bearing witness to God's mercy (Francis 2024a; cf. LWFCC 8–44; EK-DB 39–52). This common profession of faith is a powerful sign of the unity and hope on the journey of faith. At the same time, the doctrine, the journey bringing communities closer and the dialogue underpin the joint efforts to tackle challenges facing people in need. In this way, faith and action help to overcome mutual prejudices (Francis 2021a). Thus, ecumenism is not an option, but a duty for Christians: "We too are being asked to leave behind our past misunderstandings . . . and to take the path that leads towards God's promise of peace." (Francis 2021d)

Secondly, unity among the baptised can only be built through faith, which allows them to open up to the power of the Holy Spirit and see other Christians according to God's will. This perspective makes the shared path of Christians clearer and cooperation easier. Ecumenism involves a participation in God's vision, known as *scientia Dei*. To do this, we need a theology "on our knees" (Francis 2014l)—a theology grounded in prayer and connected to works of charity.[10] Thus, the dialogue cannot be confined to intellectual pursuits. It is necessary to go beyond academic and historical disputes, to listen to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit and to bring the fruits of dialogues into communities (Francis 2024c, 2021g).

Thirdly, the pursuit of unity must take into account the evangelical model of discipleship: living in community. This is why, when speaking in the Orthodox Cathedral in Bucharest, Pope Francis said that the calling of one brother is incomplete without the other. This shared path is also reflected in the Lord's Prayer (Francis 2019h).

Fourthly, the common journey means seeking ways to achieve holiness, as all Christians are called to holiness through baptism. It is worth quoting here *The Call to Holiness: From Glory to Glory*, a report of the International Commission for Dialogue between the World Methodist Council and the Roman Catholic Church, published

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10 "Certainly, theologians are necessary: they need to study, to speak, to discuss; but, in the meantime, let us carry on, praying together and with works of charity." (Francis 2023d)

during the present pontificate (Francis 2016d). The authors highlight that holiness means a relationship with God, with others and with creation (WMCRCC 17–22).[11] It is rooted in the grace and action of Christ, in whom all aspects of human existence have been created anew, and true freedom is possible through the Holy Spirit. The primacy of grace, or God's free and unmerited favour, is key. It enables (God calls and gives help in response), justifies (faith justifies and actions are its consequence; it is an active, working faith) and sanctifies (deepening of sanctifying grace; growth in relationship with God; with the help of actions) (WMCRCC 39–41, 45–48, 53–56, 58–67). The goal of the life of every baptised person cooperating with grace is holiness.[12] This universal call (*LG* 39–42) involves living the Gospel and fulfilling the mission of the Church, i.e. bearing witness, and as part of this mission each person should discern their unique path (*EG* 14, 23). The primacy of grace is essential, for it is always through grace that a baptised person grows in holiness (*GE* 18). It is of course important to perform spiritual practices conducive to holiness, such as prayer, reading the Word of God, receiving the sacraments, developing virtues and practising deeds of love. While Christians from different denominations may sometimes use different theological language, they share an emphasis on the importance of human commitment.

Fifthly, unity in the fundamental beliefs does not automatically erase differences in how denominations view certain practices, such as outward signs of devotion, the cult of the Virgin Mary, veneration of relics, or Eucharistic adoration. Still, these differences do not have to hinder the search for unity. What is important is to ensure that all forms of Catholic worship remain clearly Christ-centred and do not obscure the message of the Gospel. Christians of other denominations on the other hand can find inspiration in the spirituality and practices of the Roman Catholic Church. For example, there has been a gradual openness to prayer for the dead in some Protestant circles. However, the practice of invocation of the saints, so natural to Catholics, Old Catholics, Orthodox and Orientals, remains a challenge for Protestants (WMCRCC 123–31, 189–92).[13]

Sixthly, it is important to be aware of the spiritual warfare. The lack of unity and even conflicts are often fuelled by the evil spirit, whose strategy, the Pope says, thrives on Christians' neglecting personal prayer for unity, focusing on particularisms, fostering division, exaggerating the mistakes and faults of others,

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[11]   "The Gospel of Christ knows of no Religion, but Social; no Holiness but Social Holiness." (Wesley and Wesley 1743, v)

[12]   "The moment of justification is the beginning of a wonderful journey with Jesus toward holiness of heart and life. As we participate in God's work in the world through acts of piety . . . and acts of mercy . . . , we make ourselves available to God who forms us into the likeness of Jesus." (United Methodist Church 2024)

[13]   "Some Methodist liturgical rites acknowledge the place of the faithful departed within the communion of saints. . . . Methodist funeral liturgies sometimes refer to the communion of saints, especially at the commendation of the dead." (WMCRCC 155)

disagreement, stirring up criticism, creating factions, and gossiping or speaking ill of others (Francis 2021f).

3. Practical Guidelines in Francis' Ecumenical Programme

In outlining his ecumenical programme, Pope Francis highlighted practical attitudes that should shape the life of the Churches and ecclesial communities. His message can be summarised as follows: Christians are called to be servants of the Word and the Spirit through shared prayer, evangelization and witness; they are to be aware of what unites and what divides them, open up to each other's gifts and join in a common search for answers to the challenges of the present time.

3.1. Servants of the Word and the Spirit

Ecumenism grows out of the Word of God, and all Christians have the identity of disciples of Christ and servants of the Word. Despite differences in how biblical texts are interpreted, the Scripture is a unifying source. In the first place, Christians should submit themselves to the transforming power of God's Word, by reading, reflecting on and studying it and then bearing witness to it in their lives. Secondly, the Word of God fosters reconciliation among believers. Thirdly, by following God's Word people are led to unity grounded in truth. Fourthly, the Word of God encourages evangelization, bringing the message that enlightens, protects, heals and liberates (Francis 2017e)[14] to all peripheries, because every part of human life is fertile ground for the Word (Francis 2017f). Above all, the Word of God enables Christians to truly receive Jesus in the Holy Spirit (Francis 2018i). It is fitting, then, that the Roman Catholic Church celebrates the Sunday of the Word of God during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity, highlighting the Bible as a source of unity (*AI* 3).

While reading and preaching the Word are vital, so too is celebrating it through the sacraments. Though there is much agreement on the former, full participation in the sacraments together is not generally possible, with few exceptions.[15] Intersacramentality would, in fact, enhance the effectiveness of

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[14] "It is my hope that you will always receive the Bible . . . as a word that, imbued with the Holy Spirit the Giver of life, communicates to us Jesus, who is life . . . , and thus makes our lives fruitful." (Francis 2018i)

[15] Non-Catholics can receive Communion in the Catholic Church under certain conditions, one of them being acceptance of the Catholic belief in the Eucharist. A permission to receive Holy Communion in such situations can be granted by the diocese bishop (Francis 2018j). Differences in the theology of the Eucharist and in the sacramental discipline of other churches must be taken into account. The participation of non-Catholics in the Catholic Communion and of Catholics in the Eucharist of Eastern

evangelization (Francis 2014h). It is worth emphasising that participation in Holy Communion in one's community does not only mean unity with members of one's own Church, but also with other Christians (Francis 2014n; cf. 2014c). This kind of spiritual practice deepens the bonds of unity.

Finally, it is important to be open to the Holy Spirit, who enables people to abide in the apostolic tradition and guides believers into deeper truth. On the one hand, He reminds Christians of the Word of God and strengthens their faith in it, motivating people to persist in their rebirth and love of neighbour. On the other hand, He is the guide who leads the Church toward perfect union with Christ, working through both hierarchical gifts (office) and charismatic gifts, but also through the pursuit of truth and constant encouragement for mission. In this way He protects people against discouragement and external religious gestures devoid of God (Francis 2023d; see *LG* 4; *EG* 97).[16] At the same time, He helps Christians not to succumb to consumerism or the worldly thinking and mentality but enter into continuous conversion, which may also mean letting go of what does not lead to God. This has individual and communal dimensions, also in the context of relationships between church communities (Francis 2018b; cf. 2014o).

The Holy Spirit also fosters bonds of communion and ensures that differences between Christians do not become sources of division, since He instills in everyone a desire for dialogue, mutual respect and fraternity. Finally, the Holy Spirit equips Christian communities for mission, breaking down harmful patterns and strengthening creativity. This, too, has an ecumenical dimension (Francis 2018a; *EG* 11, 74). Francis emphasised that evangelization will lead to a new phase in the search for unity (Francis 2018d), especially when accompanied by the sharing of the experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit (Francis 2014g).

3.2. Christian Spirituality

The Second Vatican Council emphasised that a key aspect of ecumenism is growing in one's call to faith, respecting different manifestations of the life of the Church, being open to inner transformation and conversion of heart and striving for holiness (*UR* 6–8; Francis 2014m). This leads to what is known as spiritual ecumenism (*UR* 8), which manifests itself in, among other things, shared prayer—"Such prayers in common are certainly an effective means of obtaining the grace of unity, and they are a true expression of the ties which still bind Catholics to their separated brethren." (*UR* 8) This dimension of ecumenism is crucial, because unity can only be given

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Churches is only permitted in special circumstances (necessity), with respect for the faith and avoiding any form of indifferentism. See Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity 1993, 122–36.

16   "The spiritual life is fed, nourished, by prayer and is expressed outwardly through mission . . . . When we inhale, by prayer, we receive the fresh air of the Holy Spirit. When exhaling this air, we announce Jesus Christ risen by the same Spirit." (Francis 2014g)

by the Holy Spirit. For this reason, Pope Francis emphasized the importance of invoking the Holy Spirit to ensure that we do not act according to human strategies only, but fulfil God's plan. This can only be achieved through prayer (Francis 2018f), which plants the seeds of unity and mutual love in the hearts of the participants, helping them to move forward together. In this way, Christians experience mutual brotherhood in the Holy Spirit and God purifies the memory of past conflicts and prejudices, opening hearts to the future and enabling believers to see one another through God's eyes (Francis 2017b, 2017d). Prayer also helps to overcome discouragement in the face of difficulties on the ecumenical journey and to maintain a long-term perspective, with proper discernment and motivation to serve those in need (Francis 2014c).

Finally, an essential element of an ecumenically oriented spirituality is the capacity for forgiveness, which opens the way for God's healing mercy. Forgiveness also serves as a powerful witness, as mutual forgiveness is the key to the coexistence and cooperation of ecclesial communities. It is showing the gentle face of Christ to the world (Francis 2017i).

3.3. The Perspective of Witness and Evangelisation

Another important context and motive for ecumenism is its connection to evangelization. Evangelization is characterized by free, joyful, and courageous witness, offering hope to the world. This is particularly important in the face of the divisions and conflicts between people. Evangelization becomes an urgent task to guide people toward the truth and the Gospel (Francis 2013e). This is particularly important as secularization grows. In the face of a crisis of religiosity, what is needed is proclamation of the kerygma, especially the love of God the Father revealed in Jesus Christ.[17] By focusing on this core message of the faith one can grow in ecumenical closeness with other Christians (Francis 2014p).[18] Although divisions, excommunications and other tensions between the Churches are undeniable, what is most important is to remember the roots of the faith (Francis 2021c) and to proclaim the Gospel with parrhesia, mindful of the witness of martyrs, confessors, and Fathers. Ultimately, it is about focusing on what God has done and continues to do among his people and listening to the Lord together (Francis 2019c). Recognising the inadequacy of a mere communication of rules and norms, one needs to proclaim the Gospel in a way that responds to people's deepest needs. Evangelization, then, takes on a personal dimension. It requires listening, openness to questions, and sharing.

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[17] Speaking to representatives of the Neocatechumenal Way, Francis said: "Tell all those you meet . . . that God loves man as he is, even with his limitations, with his mistakes, even with his sins. . . . May you be messengers and witnesses of the infinite goodness and inexhaustible mercy of the Father." (Francis 2014j)

[18] It must not be forgotten that the Catholic Church and the Orthodox Churches have more in common than that which divides them. See Francis 2016g.

Pope Francis highlighted this during his meeting with the bishops of the Church of Cyprus (Francis 2021b). However, many, especially young people, have become disinterested in the Church and its message. This is not only a challenge for the Catholic Church, but for other denominations as well. Scandals—whether related to sexual abuse, finances, or lack of transparency—along with the perception that Churches have nothing relevant to say about modern life, are some of the reasons for this disinterest. It is therefore necessary to rediscover fraternity, with its openness to others. It is a duty of Christians to participate in people's lives. Francis speaks of reaching out to where humanity is most wounded. One cannot limit their efforts in this respect to abstract ideas. Christians must live out the meaning of life and go out to the peripheries (Francis 2018c). This can be expressed simply as being witnesses to life and true love towards people.[19] As Pope Francis put it, "the word of God thus enables us to become in turn 'open books,' living reflections of the saving word, witnesses of Jesus and proclaimers of his newness." (Francis 2018i)

Opposition to ecumenism is, therefore, opposition to evangelization. Only by working more closely together can Christians convince others to embrace the message of the Gospel. It was with this conviction that Cardinal Bergoglio left the 2007 Aparecida Conference (synod), at which the bishops of Latin America and the Caribbean defined the main pillars of the missionary disciple concept. Regarding ecumenism, the Aparecida Document asserts that divisions between Christians hinder evangelization because they obscure the witness of faith, and only the witness of faith of reconciled Christians becomes a clear sign of the evangelical message (Francis 2015f). This shows that the rationale for working for the unity of the baptised is not merely pragmatic.[20]

A particular area of witness is the love of neighbour. It is also a space for ecumenical engagement. In this context, Francis also saw his role as bishop of Rome as one of leading in love. In a meeting with representatives of organisations supporting Eastern Churches, he said: "I ask you to accompany me in the task of combining faith with charity, which is inherent in the Petrine Service." (Francis 2013d)

When discussing evangelization, we must also acknowledge the shifting landscape of religiosity. Although there is a visible decline in the number of people practising existing forms of religiosity or religiosity in general in the Euro-Atlantic zone,[21]

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19 Francis pointed to John Wesley as an ecumenical example of encouraging witness: "His example and his words encouraged many to devote themselves to reading the Bible and to prayer, and in this way to come to a knowledge of Jesus Christ. When we see others living a holy life, when we recognize the working of the Holy Spirit in other Christian confessions, we cannot fail to rejoice." (Francis 2017c)

20 "The relationship with baptize communities is a path that the disciple and missionary cannot relinquish, for lack of unity represents a scandal, a sin, and a setback in fulfilling Christ's desire . . . . The justification for ecumenism is not merely sociological, but evangelical, trinitarian, and baptismal." (Aparecida, 227–28)

21 "In some places a spiritual 'desertification' has evidently come about, as the result of attempts by some societies to build without God or to eliminate their Christian roots. . . . In these situations we are called to be living sources of water from which others can drink." (*EG* 86)

this is not necessarily tantamount to a crisis of spirituality, because new forms are gaining popularity. Francis pointed to the need of a spiritual renewal of Christians to meet these new spiritual needs. Although some sort of consumerist approach can often be seen in spirituality today, the witness to God's love, to human hope rooted in Him and to God's opening grace remains as vital as ever (Francis 2016e; cf. 2020a). In response to these challenges, it is important to show openness to contemplation, which, according to Francis, is a particular heritage of the Slavic peoples, expressed in the adoration of God (Francis 2021a).[22]

One of the most profound forms of witness is the ecumenism of blood. Persecutors do not ask about denominational affiliation. "They ask if they are Christians, and when they say yes, they immediately slit their throats. Today there are more martyrs than in the early times." (Francis 2017a; cf. Francis 2015f, 2015a) Thus, ecumenism is also built on martyrdom. This is a powerful testimony in an age of secularisation. Bearing witness to the faith and unity in suffering is essential. It is not surprising that Pope Francis said to Karekin II Catholicos of All Armenians: "The ecumenism of suffering and of the martyrdom of blood are a powerful summons to walk the long path of reconciliation between the Churches . . ." (Francis 2014f)[23] Christians should therefore strengthen the persecuted and uphold the legacy of suffering for the faith. This is an area of unity with Christ and among the baptised (Francis 2019c).

3.4. Awareness of Imperfect Unity and Existing Differences

Unity is essential for Christianity. Pope John Paul II said: "Christ calls everyone to renew their commitment to work for full and visible communion." (*UUS* 100) And while unity among Christians is not yet perfect, it is already a reality. Also, it cannot be forgotten that its ultimate expression will be in the shared celebration of the Eucharist (*UR* 22). In the meantime, the absence of full unity does not prevent Christians from working together, praying together, showing kindness, and collaborating with one another.

Finally, ecumenism calls for openness and genuine dialogue. John Paul II asked: "Could not the real but imperfect communion existing between us persuade Church leaders and their theologians to engage with me in a patient and fraternal dialogue . . . in which . . . we could listen to one another, keeping before us only the will of Christ

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22 "I ask you, brothers and sisters, to continue to serve the Church in this, especially by promoting the prayer of *adoration*. An adoration in which silence is predominant, in which the Word of God prevails over our words . . ." (Francis 2024d)

23 The painful history of suffering by members of the Armenian people as a whole is particularly meaningful. Cf. Francis 2014e. Testimonies from the past strengthen those persecuted today: "I believe that these witnesses of Easter, brothers and sisters of different confessions united in heaven by divine charity, now look to us as seeds planted in the earth and meant to bear fruit. While so many other brothers and sisters of ours throughout the world continue to suffer for their faith, they ask us not to remain closed, but to open . . ." (Francis 2019f).

for his Church . . . ?" (*UUS* 96) There is no doubt that Pope Francis continued to build on this vision, not only by encouraging a formal dialogue, but also by building fraternity with Christians from different denominations. As he put it: "An authentic dialogue is, in every case, an encounter between persons with a name, a face, a past, and not merely a meeting of ideas." (Francis 2014a)[24]

Speaking of dialogue, Francis made one more conclusion: a dialogue is not just talking or studying together, but sharing the aspirations, the fatigue, the service, and the gifts of the Holy Spirit that He places in the baptised, regardless of denomination (Francis 2022d). This can be summarised as follows: ecumenism means living together, truly sharing and walking together in the fulfillment of the Christian calling.

At this stage of ecumenical progress, walking together does not mean ignoring the differences that still exist. The theological differences must not discourage us from journeying together, even if these are not only historical divergences, but also differences emerging today, as can be seen particularly clearly in the dialogue with the denominations of the Protestant tradition;[25] it should be noted that the Vatican Declaration *Fiducia Supplinas* has caused ecumenical difficulties—some conservative Christian communities have raised objections, and liberal communities, on the other hand, expressed disappointment with the solution applied by the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith; in contrast, The Coptic Orthodox Church has suspended theological dialogue with the Catholic Church (Coptic Orthodox Church 2024).

Still, the historical issues need to be re-examined in their proper context, including a contemporary one. A good example of this may be the need for a renewed reflection on the life and work of Jan Hus, whom John Paul II referred to as "a reformer of the Church" (Francis 2015c).[26] After all, differences need not be obstacles to the pursuit of unity. Christians should focus more on what unites them rather than what divides them. This was aptly said by John Wesley in his *Letter to a Roman Catholic*:

> Let us thank God for this and receive it as a fresh token of His love. But if God still loveth us, we ought also to love one another. We ought, without this endless jangling about opinions, to provoke one another to love and to good works. Let the points wherein we differ

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24 This is clearly seen in the dialogue between the Catholic Church and Oriental Churches—the openness and dialogue led to the signing in 1973 of the Christological declaration between the Catholic Church and the Coptic Orthodox Church, and later other Oriental Churches. Cf. Francis 2023b.

25 ". . . new circumstances have presented new disagreements among us, particularly regarding the ordination of women and more recent questions regarding human sexuality. Behind these differences lies a perennial question about how authority is exercised in the Christian community. . . . These differences we have named cannot prevent us from recognizing one another as brothers and sisters in Christ by reason of our common baptism." (Francis and Welby 2016)

26 "I am particularly grateful to all of you who have contributed to the work of the ecumenical Commission 'Husovská' established . . . in order to identify more precisely the place that Jan Hus occupies among those who sought a reform of the Church. . . . The writing of history is sometimes beset by ideological, political or economic pressures, so that the truth is obscured and history itself becomes a prisoner of the powerful." (John Paul II 1999)

stand aside: here are enough wherein we agree enough to be the ground of every Christian temper and of every Christian action. (Wesley 1749; cf. Francis 2016d)

In this context, Pope Francis emphasized the need for mutual trust, an openness of heart to our fellow travellers in faith, and a shared focus on the peaceful face of God (*EG* 244).

3.5. Shifting from "What Can I Teach?" to "What Can I Learn?"

Another important issue is receptive ecumenism, where the question shifts from "What can they learn from us?" to "What can we learn from them?" The way to achieve it is to focus on what is shared by Christians, because only then can common forms of the evangelistic service be undertaken.[27] Ecumenism then becomes a genuine exchange of gifts (e.g., liturgy, synodality, the Bible, Eastern and Oriental spiritual traditions). This aligns with the guidelines from the Second Vatican Council, which recognized the presence of the Word of God, life in grace, faith, virtues, gifts of the Holy Spirit, and salvation in the Churches and ecclesial communities (*UR* 3).[28] The long ecumenical experience have made it possible to recognise the fruits of grace in Christians from different denominations. However, Francis saw further—"the certainty has deepened that what the Spirit has sown in the other yields a common harvest." (Francis 2016c) To foster this spiritual exchange, a transformation of inter-church relations is necessary: we need to move from a "culture of clash" to a "culture of encounter and learning." This is possible through prayer and the ongoing hope for full unity.[29] This journey is not only spiritual and theological but also deeply rooted in everyday life, as it involves sharing of life, with its joys, hopes, sorrows, and difficulties. It therefore calls for certainty, patience, trust, humility without fear or discouragement, as well as recognition of each other's gifts and mutual learning (Francis 2023c; cf. 2017h).

However, for this to happen, believers need proper formation and a change of mentality. The life of the Churches, the various ecclesial activities and the daily lives of believers should be permeated by an ecumenical mentality leading to a commitment to making Jesus' call for unity a reality (Francis 2014s), so that His desire for oneness becomes a desire of all the baptised (Francis 2015h).

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[27] "If we concentrate on the convictions we share, and if we keep in mind the principle of the hierarchy of truths, we will be able to progress decidedly towards common expressions of proclamation, service and witness." (*EG* 246)

[28] A liturgical, spiritual and cultural legacy is a gift from local churches to all Christians. Cf. Francis 2016b.

[29] Speaking to Catholicos Baselios Marthoma Paulose II, Francis said: "Your Holiness, let us walk this path together, looking with trust towards that day in which, with the help of God, we will be united at the altar of Christ's sacrifice . . ." (Francis 2013b)

3.6.   Ecumenism in Service to the World

Finally, ecumenism must not remain merely an idea or a spiritual endeavour. It requires practical cooperation among Christians. The Second Vatican Council pointed out that collaboration shows the real relationship between the Churches and should be continuously developed. It should focus on promoting human dignity and addressing human needs (*UR* 112). This is not enough, though. After fostering mutual respect, engaging in prayer, getting to know one another and working together on various social issues, joint evangelisation projects are still a challenge. Pope Francis said: "As we move towards full communion, we can already develop many forms of collaboration, to go together and collaborate in order to foster the spread of the Gospel." (Francis 2016h; cf. Francis 2017g)

A particular area of cooperation among Christians is the pursuit of peace. At the very beginning of his pontificate, Francis called for cooperation in helping people suffering because of the war in Syria, and he saw contemplation of the suffering, poor and exiled Jesus as the primary reason for such efforts (Francis 2013c). Besides, walking the path of unity helps nations recognise the true value of fraternity and reconciliation among peoples, as well as of conversion, mercy, justice, and solidarity. In this way, the Churches can contribute to a better world, motivating greater commitment to the Gospel of peace. What is needed for that is both courage and the power of the Holy Spirit, known as *parresia* (Francis 2022c; cf. 2014b). On the human level, it is especially important that church leaders are committed to helping people work for the common good and to safeguarding human dignity. This is true for all denominations (Francis 2018e). Every opportunity, even in arenas like sports, is a chance to promote peace and reconciliation (Francis 2014k).

Churches joining forces to address the challenges facing the world is of key importance for their message to be heard clearly. Environmental issues and all climate-related problems, concern for integral human development, opposition to the dehumanisation, indifference, and marginalisation of the vulnerable, violence (sometimes justified by religion), respect for life, and access to education are just some of the concerns that the world has been struggling with and that Churches could help address (Francis and Welby 2016).[30] These challenges can be responded to only if the Churches enter into dialogue with societies, listening and responding even in places where Christians are a minority. Francis even referred to it as the "sacrament of dialogue," through which God seeks a relationship with every person (Francis 2019b). This thought resonates with the teaching of Pope Paul VI and, above all, with the vision of the Church–world relationship contained in the teaching of the Second Vatican Council.[31]

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[30]   Francis (2019a) believed that Christians cannot stop dreaming together of a world united in brotherhood.

[31]   "The Church must enter into dialogue with the world . . . . It has something to say, . . . a communication to make." (*ES* 65) Pope Paul VI sought to lead the Church in such a way that it would be in

However, the role Christians are to play cannot be reduced to the horizontal dimension only. The world needs Jesus, who transforms lives. It is the Church's essential mission to make Jesus known and to proclaim His kingdom. Concentration on Him liberates in Christians a mutual love, which gradually leads them to unity (Francis 2024b).

Conclusions

1) Francis' papacy continued the multifaceted tradition of dialogue between the Catholic Church and other Churches and ecclesial communities. The Pope was deeply committed to fostering unity. Many speeches on unity, plenty of formal and informal meetings, openness to other Christians, apostolic journeys and numerous joint initiatives are just some landmarks of his service.

2) Francis' programme for unity was based on the belief that ecumenism is a gift of grace and can only be achieved through the Holy Spirit. Theologically, this path is rooted in the ecclesiology of unity, which assumes unity in diversity. The focus on the kerygma (the love of the Father, the truth about Jesus Christ and the doctrine of justification by grace) strengthens the deepest bonds of unity not only among members of one community, but among all Christians. The call to holiness is also a vital element in this vision. At the same time, as André Cox, General of the Salvation Army, said, "holiness transcends denominational boundaries." (Francis 2019g)

3) Ecumenism also has pastoral orientations. They manifest themselves in the fulfilment of the identity of Christians as servants of the Word and the Spirit. This can be done through immersion in Scripture and both individual and communal prayer (spiritual ecumenism). The evangelizing context is also indispensable, seen in the proclamation of the Gospel, personal witness and acts of love. Today, it is still a challenge to convince Christians to involve in solving the challenges the world is facing, particular in promoting peace, fraternity and service to those in need.

4) While Christian unity as it is now is not perfect, it is nevertheless real. What is needed is a patient journey together, with an awareness of the hardships and burdens along the way. Still, by being open to others we may move closer to the unity Jesus desires. This process demands openness, mutual learning, focusing on what unites, mutual respect and cooperation. Ecumenism thus lived is a prophetic sign to the world (Francis 2023f).

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a sincere and open dialogue with the world, the aim of which being mutual friendship and cooperation. Cf. *GS* 1, 40–43.

5) Francis' ecumenical programme can be summarised in the following triad: to walk together, to pray together, and to work (act) together. This shared journey should not be content with past achievements but must continuously strive for deeper unity (Francis 2020c).

Translated by Szymon Bukal

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"The War at the Gates" by Shelomo ben Aharon of Poswol: Issues of Text Reading and Interpretation

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Abstract: The article presents—using the Karaite work "The War at the Gates" by Shelomo ben Aharon (17th/18th century; a polemic with rabbinic Judaism)—three common issues related to the analysis of Hebrew manuscripts written before the 19th century. These issues include: (1) determining the fundamental meaning of individual parts of the work; (2) analyzing the argumentative structure of the work's narrative in relation to its biblical interpretation, which seeks to justify specific religious laws established within the religious community of the tradition/author; (3) verifying certain commonly accepted scholarly assumptions. I demonstrate how I addressed these challenges while working on the aforementioned treatise and attempt to draw generalized, practical conclusions.

Keywords: studies in Karaite literature (Hebrew texts), Karaite religious law (halakha), Shelomo ben Aharon, methodological challenges

The aim of this article is to present selected research problems related to the reading and analysis of "The War at the Gates" by Shelomo ben Aharon.[1] It is a Karaite polemic against Rabbinic Judaism. The text originates from the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries in the Lithuanian territories of the Polish–Lithuanian Commonwealth.

The analyzed polemic presents selected religious laws of Rabbinic and Karaite Judaism, particularly those that distinguish the two religious denominations. In this

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[1] Shelomo ben Aharon, born before 1665 in Pozvol, Lithuania, and died in 1745 in Trakai, was a Karaite scholar and clergyman. He was the author of piyyutim (liturgical poems) and larger analytical texts, including polemics against Rabbinic Judaism such as "He made for himself a litter" (ול השע ווירפא), polemics against Christianity titled "Tower of Strength" (מגדל עוז), a book on Hebrew grammar called "Fine and Tender" (רך וטוב), and a text on the education of youth named "Instruct the Youth" (חנוך לנער). For more information about him and his works, see Gottlober 1865; Sulimierski, Chlebowski, and Walewski 1887, 854–55; Mann 1935, 1971; Elgamil 1979, 1999; Corinaldi 1984; Astren 2003a, 2003b, 2004; Berti 2005; Akhiezer and Lasker 2011; Muchowski 2013, 2014; Tuori 2013; Akhiezer 2016, 2018. It is worth familiarizing oneself with two Karaite sources that mention this Karaite scholar: Lutsky 2002; Yehuda ben David of Kukizov's "History of Karaite Scholars" (edition: Elgamil 2015).

ISSN 1644-8561 | e-ISSN 2451-280X | DOI: https://doi.org/10.31743/vv.17720   495

literary theological dispute, various methods of legal-religious argumentation were employed by both religious communities. The work also showcases brilliant literary and theological analyses of biblical texts, occasionally revealing the emotions of the interlocutors who are convinced of their own beliefs. The work also does not lack poetic elements, especially in the "Introduction," which is composed in the form of a prophecy or divine revelation that explains the reasons for the conflict between the two faiths (this section is written in verse, occasionally rhymed, featuring poetic imagery and biblical expressions that appear in a new context).

"The War at the Gates," like any other theological, or philosophical work in the field of Jewish studies, poses significant methodological challenges for researchers of Jewish culture, primarily due to the following three difficulties: (1) the challenge of determining the meaning of certain passages in the work—this may result from incorrect Hebrew syntax (including the grammatical inconsistency of individual sentence parts), from errors in the spelling of individual words, from careless transcription of the text by copyists, or from weaving into the text fragments of other works without adjusting them to the syntactic and content structure of one's own statement; (2) the issue of incomplete argumentation—in the literary analysis of the Hebrew Bible, Karaite scholars accasionally apply a given method inconsistently; this lack of methodological rigor results in conclusions that are partial and, consequently, insufficient for a comprehensive interpretation of the analyzed biblical passage; (3) falsification or verification of accepted scholarly claims—the difficulty associated with the vagueness of the content as well as the argumentation of the work causes it to be understood in entirely different ways by various researchers, hence, with a better understanding of the text, it becomes necessary to simultaneously eliminate research statements that do not withstand the scrutiny of established facts.

Each of the challenges mentioned above will be separately addressed in this work. However, due to the limitation in the text size of the article, I will limit myself to providing one example for each of them.

In this paper, I base my research on the oldest known manuscript of "The War at the Gates," dating back to the year 1730. Its original is housed in the Bodleian Library in Oxford.[2] Although the manuscript was transcribed during the lifetime of Shelomo ben Aharon, he is not its author. The copyist is Mordechai ben Shemuel (מרדכי בן שמואל), the son of Shelomo ben Aharon's sister, as he refers to the author of "The War at the Gates" as *mᵊsarep̄* (מסרף), "maternal uncle."[3] The manuscript was transcribed in Kukizov in order to be sent to Constantinople.

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2 Heb.e.12 2/2777 (microfilm signature in the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem: F21357).
3 Cf. Mann 1935, 1285, as well as footnote 730, where it is mentioned that Mordechai ben Shemuel's mother was said to be a cousin of Shelomo ben Aharon.

1. The Problem of Determining the Meaning (of Certain Passages) of the Work

When reading for the first time any Hebrew-language halakhic text of the Polish-Lithuanian Karaites from the period up to the 19th century, scholars of Judaism face a significant intellectual challenge. Firstly, because the Karaites rarely published their works in print in this region, and they exist in manuscripts where various errors in transcription are more common than in printed texts. Secondly, the handwritten nature of the script (and this particularly applies to careless handwriting) often hinders the proper reading of words, disrupting the process of understanding the basic meaning of sentences, expressions, and consequently, the entire text. Thirdly, during this period, the Karaites had not yet developed a consistent, comprehensive and current system of punctuation marks, often using various graphical symbols (which may vary from text to text or scribe to scribe), the use and meaning of which is not entirely always clear and certain. Fourthly, Karaites—like Rabbanite Jews—made extensive use of the literary tradition of earlier generations, except that they drew on both Karaite and Rabbanite works. A characteristic feature of Karaite literature in connection with intertextuality is that they did not always quote someone else's words in accordance with the spirit of the original text.[4] Fifthly, the Hebrew of Karaite scribes—from various lands—up to the 19th century deviates sometimes from the rules of the Hebrew language as we know it today. Their Hebrew is rich in expressions, linguistic rules, syntax characteristic of vernacular languages they used in everyday life, which obviously complicates the process of perceiving their works.

All of this makes the legal-religious texts of the Karaites of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth challenging to comprehend, and only a few scholars thoroughly analyze them, with even fewer producing critical editions of them with translations.

In this subsection, a fragment of "The War at the Gates" is presented, which will undergo such analysis aiming to precisely determine its meaning, along with a discussion of the problems that arise in it, with particular emphasis on intertextual references. The following excerpt from Shelomo ben Aharon's work was chosen because it reflects all those problems mentioned above. And here it is (fol. 126r)[5]:

וממה שכתוב בעל ספר [...] 10

צדה לדרך במאמר ד' פרק ח' נראה שגם אתם אוכלים בלא בדיקה כמו שאמר שם 11

וזֹ'ל בהמה מסוכנת ואכל כבר שאין צריך לה אסור לשחיטה אלא אֹכ יש שהות 12

ביום לאכול ממנה כזית ואם אין שהות לבדיקה ולנתחת יכול לאכול בלֹא בדיקה 13

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[4] The characteristic feature of Karaite literature mentioned above does not imply that it is distinctive trait, but rather that it is one of its properties. In Rabbinic literature, one can also encounter instances of a more flexible or less literal approach to sources.

[5] All translations (concerning "The War at the Gates") from Hebrew to English presented in this article are my own, unless otherwise noted.

14 ואם שחטה כשרה לא יביאנה במוט ויביאנה בידו אברים אברים עוף שדרס

15 בהמה שצריך שהייה מעת אל עת ובדיקה אחר שחיטה יכול לשחטו ביום טוב ולא

16 נחוש אם ימצא טרפה עֹכֹל [...]

I would like to clarify the arising doubts when attempting to understand the pre-sented Hebrew fragment: it is impossible to comprehend it without both the con-text in which it appears in Shelomo's work and without knowledge of the issue of kashrut (dietary laws) in Jewish culture in general. Furthermore, even being aware of both contexts and despite a good understanding of the issue addressed by the fragment, without delving into specific Jewish texts, it is not possible for anyone to read that fragment correctly in Hebrew and fully understand it. So, let's start from the beginning.

The presented fragment appears in "The War at the Gates" in the context of the issue of the kosher status of meat from an animal known to be about to die (e.g., due to illness, old age, or an accident). According to Rabbinic halakha, the meat of an an-imal with serious physical defects (such as a perforated alimentary canal—נקובת וושט, *nᵊqubaṯ vešeṯ*; a cut throat—פסוקת הגרגרת, *pᵊsuqaṯ gargereṯ*; a perforated brain mem-brane—ניקב קרום של המוח, *niqqab qᵊrum šel ham-moaḥ*; a broken spine, including a severed spinal cord—נשברה השדרה ונפסק החוט שלה, *nišbᵊra haš-šiḏra ve-nip̄saq ha-ḥuṭ šela*; or carrying a serious illness is not fit for consumption) (Bab. Talmud: Chullin 31a–b, 42a–43a). Therefore, to determine whether an animal is healthy, rab-binic authorities conduct the appropriate inspection of the animal (both before and after slaughter), called בדיקת טרפות (*bᵊḏiqaṯ ṭarp̄uṯ*). If such an examination is not performed, the meat of the animal is non-kosher.

In Karaite halakha, the fundamental issue being checked is essentially whether the animal belongs to the "clean" (*ṭahor*, טהור) or "unclean" (*ṭameʾ*, טמא) category, based on the guidelines found in the Torah (Lev 11:3–19; 20:24–25; Deut 14:4–19). Of course, Karaites also assess the fitness of an animal for consumption, but before slaughter and not as strictly as Rabbanites. They do so on the basis of how the animal in question behaves (how it eats, drinks, moves), assuring that this is how things were done "in Biblical times." Karaites cite biblical examples related to offering thousands of animal sacrifices at once, where the Bible does not mention the requirement for a detailed examination of animals, nor does it require an examination of the slaugh-tered animal afterward (i.e.: 1 Kgs 8:63; 2 Chr 7:5; 15:11; 29:33; 30:24; 35:7).[6]

And it is at this point in Shelomo ben Aharon's polemic that the passage from "The War at the Gates" quoted earlier appears. Aware of the differences that divide adherents of Rabbinic and Karaite halakha in this matter, the defender of Karaite

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6   As indicated by the Karaite's response to the fourth question of the Talmudist in the work "The War at the Gates." It is worth noting that the Karaites base their religious law not only on the analysis of the Torah, but also on the remaining books of the Hebrew Bible.

Judaism decides to attack Rabbinism due to its inconsistency with biblical commandments. Namely, he rhetorically asks whether it is permissible to slaughter an animal that is close to death, and whether the meat of that animal will be kosher. The Karaite scholar is disturbed by the fact that, according to Rabbinic halakha, this can be done, and to support his words, he cites the statement of Rabbinic scholar Menachem ben Aharon ben Zerach (14th century) "The provisions for Journey" (צדה לדרך).[7]

The difficulty in understanding Shelomo's citation makes it necessary to contrast it with the wording of the original. Such a comparison shows that some of the expressions changed by Shelomo (or the copyist)—such as לשחיטה, לבדקה, שדרס, שהיה or לשחטו—still fit the sense of their original context, and however, on the other hand, he (or the copyists), makes the kind of changes that alter this original statement, like the words: כשרה (instead of the original בשדה),[8] or ואם (instead of ואפילו). Below is the already quoted excerpt along with highlighted differences in relation to "The provisions for Journey" (curly brackets {} indicate that in Shelomo's quote the word was replaced with another; the equality sign signifies a similar meaning, whereas the inequality sign denotes a different meaning):

10   [...] וממה שכתוב בעל ספר
11   צדה לדרך במאמר ד' פרק ח' נראה שגם אתם אוכלים בלא בדיקה כמו שאמר שם
12   וז"ל בהמה מסוכנת ואכל כבר שאין צריך לה אסור לשחיטה{=לשוחטה} אלא א"כ יש שהות
13   ביום לאכול ממנה כזית ואם{≠ואפילו} אין שהות לבדקה{=לבודקה} ולנתחת{=ולנתחה} יכול לאכול בלא בדיקה
14   ואם שחטה כשרה{≠בשדה} לא יביאנה במוט ויביאנה בידו אברים אברים עוף שדרס{=שדרסו}
15   בהמה שצריך שהייה{=שהיה} מעת אל עת ובדיקה אחר שחיטה יכול לשחטו{=לשוחטו} ביום טוב ולא
16   נחוש אם ימצא טרפה ע"כל [...]

Despite the fact that the quotation has been located and corrected in terms of the source text, it is still not entirely comprehensible (sentence structure errors, the use of certain mental shortcuts, the presence of unclear legal-religious terms). How to methodically approach solving such problems?

It is best to start with issues that seem easiest to resolve, and in our case, these are terminological issues. Therefore, I suggest focusing on identifying key expressions in the quotation and then searching for their literary sources. In the case of rabbinic halakhic literature, such searches should always begin with the Mishnah and Talmud

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7   I depend on the version of the text from 1567 (place of publication: סביוניטה) available online: https://beta.hebrewbooks.org/45948 (see Menachem ben Aharon ben Zerach, n.d.). The quote's page on the website follows the original pagination: קצג verso. An older version (the place of publication פיראריא, albeit with some differences) from 1554 is also available at: https://beta.hebrewbooks.org/44488 (no pagination in the manuscript, in the PDF file, it is page 443).

8   This word appears in several different manuscripts, and the reasons for its misreading should not be sought in the similarity of the letters ד to ר, as well as ב to כ.

since they, along with the Torah, form the basis of Jewish legal-religious reflection. For example, the term בהמה מסוכנת appears in Beitzah 3:3, in a similar sentence structure and context as in Menachem's text. This passage reads as follows:

בהמה מסוכנת לא ישחוט. אלא אם כן יש שהות ביום לאכול ממנה כזית צלי. רבי עקיבא אומר אפילו כזית חי מבית טביחתה. שחטה בשדה. לא יביאנה במוט. ובמוטה. אבל מביא בידו אברים אברים:⁹

Based on the clear similarities between this Mishnah fragment and the treatise of Menachem, one can hypothesize that the rabbinic scholar incorporates elements of the Mishnah into his discourse. He does the same with the passage concerning poultry, which, in turn, appears in the Talmudic text Beitzah 34a:

דרסה או שטרפה בכותל, או שרצצתה בהמה ומפרכסת, ושהתה מעת לעת ושחטה – כשרה. אמר רבי אלעזר בר ינאי משום רבי אלעזר בן אנטיגנוס: צריכה בדיקה.¹⁰

In the above examples, one can observe the pattern that Menachem begins his statement with the first words of a given Mishnaic or Talmudic fragment and then, in his own words, explains how one should behave in that situation. Such a way of quoting source texts is characteristic of Jewish commentators and codifiers of religious law, who assume that the reader is familiar enough with the Mishnah and Talmud to infer the specific fragment based on a few initial words. Of course, our current knowledge, even that of specialists and researchers, deviates from the familiarity possessed by the average scholar or rabbinic clergy in the 14th century when entire passages were memorized. Therefore, it is quite natural that today we rely on various computer programs and search engines with databases of Jewish texts.

Regardless, the quoted passages from the Mishnah and Talmud shed light on many aspects of Menachem's citation, but do not resolve the issue of the peculiar expression: בהמה מסוכנת ואכל כבר. However, it turns out that there is a text in which the concept of בהמה מסוכנת and the words אכל כבר appear in the same paragraph, and it is

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9   Based on: www.sefaria.org/Mishnah_Beitzah.3.3?vhe=Mishnah,_ed._Romm,_Vilna_1913&lang=bi, accessed May 8, 2025. In the following English translation, I am heavily guided by *The William Davidson Talmud* (n.d.): "If an animal is in danger of dying one may not slaughter it unless there is still time in the day for him to eat an olive-bulk of roasted meat from the animal. Rabbi Akiva says: even if there is only time to eat an olive-bulk of raw meat from the place where the animal is slaughtered. If one slaughtered an animal in the field, he may not bring it on a pole or on a set of poles—he must bring it by hand, limb by limb."

10 The fragment—and this is also relevant for us here—is a commentary on Mishnah, Chullin 3:3. I am using: https://www.sefaria.org/Beitzah.34a.2?lang=bi, accessed May 8, 2025. Here is the English translation (*The William Davidson Talmud*, n.d.) along with my modifications: "If one trampled [fowl] with his foot, or threw it against a wall, or if an animal crushed it, and it is twitching; and if the animal remained alive for 24 hours and one subsequently slaughtered it—it is kosher. Rabbi Elazar bar Yannai said in the name of Rabbi Elazar ben Antigonus: It requires examination."

to this text that Menachem may have been referring.[11] In the well-known "Four Columns" (ארבעה טורים), authored by Jacob ben Asher (13/14th century), in the chapter *Orach Chaim* (498, אורח חיים), we read:

[...] וכ"כ א"א הרא"ש ז"ל דלא שייך הכנה בלידת העגל בהמה מסוכנת שירא שמא תמות והוא אכל כבר וא"צ לה אסור לשחוטה אלא א"כ יש שהות ביום לאכול כזית ממנה מבע"י ואפילו אין שהות ביום לבודקה ולנתחה יכול לאכול בלא בדיקה ואם שחטה בשדה לא יביאנה לעיר במוט או במוטה כדרך שעושה בחול אלא יביאנה בידו איברים איברים: עוף שנדרס שצריך שהייה מעת לעת ובדיקה אחר שחיטה משום חשש טריפות יכול לשחוטו בי"ט ולא חיישינן שמא ימצא טרפה [...][12]

The mere cursory reading of this paragraph already shows that Menachem essentially quotes the statement of Yacob ben Asher, who, in turn, commented on both the Mishnah and the Talmud. Now it is clear that the words ואכל כבר refer to עגל, a newborn animal strong enough to eat, a term that is absent in both Menachem's text and, let alone, Shelomo's text. The absence of this concept greatly complicated our understanding of the meaning of Menachem's statement in Shelomo's text.

So, after locating all the intertexts occurring in the discussed fragment of "The War at the Gates," it turns out that it is composed of six different texts, not just two, as it might seem based on Shelomo ben Aharon's word (meaning that the text comprises Shelomo's and Menachem's contributions). Thus, Shelomo quotes Menachem, who quotes the words of Yacob ben Asher, who analyzes a fragment from the Mishnah and another fragment from the Talmud, with the latter still quoting from another Mishnaic passage. Ultimately, this is how the Hebrew text without punctuation from Shelomo's work looks like, with a graphical indication of quotes, paraphrases, or allusions to various intertexts mentioned here, which originally made it so difficult to read and understand the presented part of "The War at the Gates":

10 וממה שכתוב בעל ספר [...]
11 **צדה לדרך** במאמר ד' פרק ח' נראה שגם אתם אוכלים בלא בדיקה כמו שאמר שם
12 וז"ל "«**בהמה מסוכנת ואכל כבר שאין צריך לה אסור** לשחיטה **אלא א"כ יש שהות**
13 **ביום לאכול** ממנה כזית ואם אין **שהות** לבדקה ולנתחת **יכול לאכול בלא בדיקה**
14 **ואם שחטה** כשרה לא יביאנה במוט וי בא נה **בידו אברים אברים** עוף שדרס
15 בהמה **שצריך** שהייה מעת אל עת ובדיקה אחר **שחיטה** יכול לשחטו ביום טוב ולא
16 נחוש אם ימצא טרפה»" עכ"ל [...]

It should be noted that each of the hypotexts in Shelomo's work (> **"The provisions for Journey"** > «**Four Columns**»[13] > Mishnah, Beitzah 3:3 + Talmud, Beitzah 34a > Mishnah, Chullin 3:3) is invoked by subsequent commentators with changes in both vocabulary and syntax, as well as modifications to the content. As mentioned earlier, this makes it extremely challenging to correctly understand certain sections of the whole utterance. Furthermore, the passage is basically impossible to interpret correctly without referencing all the hypotexts (a text that serves as a source or reference for another text) since its meaning inherently resides in the meanings of these intertexts.

Needless to say, translating this part of "The War at the Gates" into any modern language is an extremely challenging task, since—as I said—the full meaning of the passage does not directly follow from Shelomo's citation, which also disrupts the syntax of the statement and causes additional textual problems that I haven't detailed here. Shelomo's dialogue has a legal character and, therefore, naturally features a "legal-religious" style typical of Jewish halakhic texts, such as quoting incomplete fragments of the discussed text with the assumption that a logical whole is implied, or using established halakhic expressions and terms. Regarding translation techniques, there seems to be no one-size-fits-all approach, as they largely depend on the purpose for which the decision was made to translate this particular text. Below is my translation of the aforementioned excerpt:

10 [...] [Also], from what the author of the book has written,

11 [I mean] "The provisions for Journey", in Article 4, Chapter 8, it follows that you also eat [meat] without [conducting animal] inspections, according to what he said there,

12 quote: "«**The animal that is in danger** – **has already eaten** – **the prohibition related to** slaughter **is unnecessary unless there is a sufficient amount of time**

13 **on that day to consume** from it [a piece of meat the size of] **an olive** – but if **there is not enough time** to inspect and examine it – **it is permitted to consume it without** [conducting] **an inspection [of the animal]** –

14 **if it was slaughtered** [in the field] – **it shall not be brought on a rod**, but shall be brought **in his hands, piece by piece** – **poultry** that has been trampled

15 **by cattle** – **requires a 24-hour** stand-off [aside] – **and inspection** after **slaughter** – **it can be** slaughtered **on a feast day** – **and [then] we don't**

16 **seek whether there is any defect [in it]**»" – end of quote. [...]

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13   The quotations from Menachem's and Yacob ben Asher's works are marked the same way because Menachem quotes his illustrious predecessor generally in full, and in Shelomo's text, they are indistinguishable from each other. For this reason, I have added various quotation marks to at least visually indicate the boundaries of the hypotexts, thus presenting the English reader with how complex texts Jewish cultural scholars are dealing with.

In the above translation—which concludes this section of the article—I aimed to render the discussed fragment of Shelomo's work in a way that is faithful both in terms of content and form to the original text, without taking into account the content that a thorough analysis of individual intertexts can bring to this part of "The War at the Gates" (there will probably be time for that in the future). In the translation, I intentionally used graphic and punctuation elements (mainly hyphens) to emphasize the fragmented and vaguely uncertain sense of this linguistic statement. The translation I have presented highlights the complex translational process of the syntactically "fragmented" passage from Shelomo's text. A correct analysis, and subsequently a translation, require the identification of all intertexts (which in Shelomo ben Aharon's work are cited fragmentarily and without source attribution), and further, their integration into the discourse of the Karaite scholar in a manner that ensures its meaning aligns with the argumentative logic of the passage from "The War at the Gates." The juxtaposition of the original Hebrew source text, which does not clearly reveal this meaning, with my final English translation—which, as I believe, more clearly reflects the author's intent—demonstrates the extensive process involved in text analysis (primarily the localization of all intertexts, but not exclusively) in order to reach its underlying meaning.

2. Analysis of the Religious Dispute in Terms of Internal Analytical Consistency[14]

In this subsection of the article, an analysis of the reasoning and drawing of conclusions in the religious dispute between Karaism and Rabbanism, as described by Shelomo ben Aharon in "The War at the Gates," will be conducted. In the first analytical step, the Karaite-Rabbinic conflict related to the issue of counting of the Omer (ספירת העומר)[15] will be briefly summarized. Subsequently, I will present the logical inclinations arising from an internal analysis of the arguments presented by both sides in this literary-theological dialogue.

Theological disputes between the Rabbanites and the Karaites regarding the precise terms of the Omer period have essentially been ongoing since the inception of the Karaite movement, roughly from the 9th century. The positions of both sides, as well as the manner of argumentation on this issue, fundamentally remain unchanged

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[14] This subsection is partially based on my previous article (Kubicki 2022).

[15] The issue of determining the beginning and end of the Omer period did not, of course, arise with the emergence of the Karaite movement. Within Judaism, this topic constitutes an important halakhic problem for various groups such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, Samaritans, and the Qumran community, making it known for at least a thousand years before the appearance of the Karaites in the 9th century, and possibly as early as the 4th century BCE (Morgenstern 1968, 81, 84, 89).

over the centuries and persist at the same level of substance, dating back to the time of Saadia Gaon (9th/10th centuries).[16] In practice, the dispute between the parties involved in the halakhic conflict in later centuries mainly revolves around invoking the same arguments put forth by Rabbinic and Karaite scholars of Saadia Gaon's era, although both groups also differ in the literary sources upon which these scholars rely. In the case of Shelomo ben Aharon, a key work is the writings of the Karaite scholar Elijah Bashyazi (15th century), titled "The Mantle of Elijah" (אדרת אליהו), from which the author of "The War at the Gates" drew both the accusations of the Karaite side against the Rabbanites regarding the issue of counting the Omer, and the arguments justifying the prevailing position within his own religious group, namely among the Polish-Lithuanian Karaites.

According to Rabbinic and Karaite Judaism, the commandment found in Lev 23:15–16[17] is associated with counting a specific number of weeks and days from the festival of Passover to the Feast of Weeks. Both groups refer to this period as the Omer, as well as the counting of the Omer.[18] The differences between the two denominations revolve around the interpretation of the expression found in both specified biblical verses, namely *mim-moḥoraṯ haš-šabbaṯ* (ממחרת השבת). Let us examine how this issue is presented in the work of Shelomo ben Aharon.

In "The War at the Gates," the first to speak on the discussed matter is a defender of Rabbinic halakha. According to him, the Hebrew expression *mim-moḥoraṯ haš-šabbaṯ* should be understood as "from the day after this holiday," and in the context of the mentioned biblical verse, simply as "from the day after Passover." In his opinion, the term *šabbaṯ* does not appear in this biblical commandment in its most common meaning, i.e. as "the seventh day of the week; the Sabbath," but rather as "a festival, a holiday." Since this expression was used in Lev 23:15 in the context of the festival of Pesach, the word *šabbaṯ* obviously refers to that very holiday. Therefore, in practice, as he continues, the counting of the Omer always begins on the 16th day of the month of Nissan, and thus "from the day after this holiday," namely after Passover, which falls on the 15th day of the month of Nissan.

His opponent, a proponent of Karaite halakha, disagrees with the judgment that it is clear from the biblical text that the beginning of counting the Omer should always fall on the 16th day of the month of Nisan. He is also unconvinced by arguments

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16   See Ben-Shammai 1985:56. The first known Karaite anti-Rabbanite work is the composition of Elijah ben Abraham (12th century) known by the title חלוק הקראים והרבנים ("The division between the Karaites and the Rabbanites").

17   The Masoretic version of these verses:

15 וּסְפַרְתֶּם לָכֶם מִמׇּחֳרַת הַשַּׁבָּת מִיּוֹם הֲבִיאֲכֶם אֶת־עֹמֶר הַתְּנוּפָה שֶׁבַע שַׁבָּתוֹת תְּמִימֹת תִּהְיֶינָה׃

16 עַד מִמׇּחֳרַת הַשַּׁבָּת הַשְּׁבִיעִת תִּסְפְּרוּ⊙חֲמִשִּׁים יוֹם וְהִקְרַבְתֶּם מִנְחָה חֲדָשָׁה לַיהוָה׃

18   The Hebrew term *ʿomer* (עומר) can mean "sheaves of harvested grain" (Deut 24:19; Ruth 2:7), or "the first fruits offered to the priest" (*Midrash Rabbah Leviticus* 28:1; although it's possible that this specifically refers to barley, as mentioned in *Midrash Rabbah Leviticus* 28:3), and the beginning of the harvest season (Ramban, n.d., 16:9); for more information, see Erder 2003, 124–25; Morgenstern 1968, 84–85.

meant to justify that in the specified biblical commandment (i.e. Lev 23:15), the term *šabbaṯ* appears in the sense of "this festival." He points out that in the analyzed biblical commandment, alongside the noun שבת (*šabbaṯ*), there is the determiner ה (*ha*), indicating that it refers to a known and familiar thing. According to him, this determiner clearly refers to the meaning of the term *šabbaṯ* from the story of the creation of the world (Gen 2:1 ff.),[19] when this concept was first introduced in the Torah. Therefore, its meaning in Lev 23:15 is the same as in the Book of Genesis, namely "the seventh day of the week; Saturday."

Another clear indication supporting this assumption, as the Karaite scholar continues, can be found in Lev 23:2, just before the introduction of the commandment to count the Omer. In this verse, God defines the meaning of the term *šabbaṯ* used in Lev 23:15 and 23:16, so as to leave no room for doubt. The verse explicitly states: "Six days shall work be done, but on the seventh day is a Sabbath . . ." (Lev 23:3)[20] Therefore, these words, along with the determiner *ha* (in the expression *mim-moḥoraṯ haš-šabbaṯ*), are intended to unequivocally specify the meaning of the concept of *šabbaṯ*, which appears in the verse introducing the moment of the beginning Omer period. This term signifies, as in the story of the creation of the world, "Saturday; Sabbath."

In his response, the defender of Rabbinic Judaism acknowledges that the argumentation upon which he relies is not drawn from the Bible but rather from tradition (i.e., from the Mishnah and Talmud).[21] However, he also points out that the position of the Karaites is not entirely certain either. If, as he argues, the meaning of the word *šabbaṯ* in Lev 23:15 is limited to "the seventh day of the week," namely "Saturday; Sabbath," as the Karaites maintain, then the question arises as to how one can determine which of the Sabbaths during the festival of Pesach is referred to and from which one should commence counting the Omer. This is because every few years, during the 8-day festival of Pesach, two Sabbaths may occur.

However, the Karaite protagonist of the dispute also makes a similar allegation. Since the Rabbinic authorities maintain that the counting of the Omer begins "the day after this holiday," on what basis is it assumed that the commandment refers to the first day and not the last day of the festival of Pesach. After all, even the last day of Pesach, i.e. the eighth day, is also celebrated solemnly.

Interestingly, in "The War at the Gates" both questions remain unanswered. The summary of the ongoing discussion between the scholars is as follows: both sides—regardless of the adopted interpretation of the term *šabbaṯ*—encounter

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[19]   However, it should be emphasized that the word שבת (as the proper name for the day of the week) does not appear in the Genesis narrative mentioned by Shelomo. Instead, the expression "seventh day" (יום השביעי) is used in that context (see: Gen 2:2–3).

[20]   The Masoretic version of the verse:
שֵׁשֶׁת יָמִים תֵּעָשֶׂה מְלָאכָה וּבַיּוֹם הַשְּׁבִיעִי שַׁבַּת שַׁבָּתוֹן מִקְרָא-קֹדֶשׁ כָּל-מְלָאכָה לֹא תַעֲשׂוּ שַׁבָּת הִוא לַיהוָה בְּכֹל מוֹשְׁבֹתֵיכֶם.

[21]   See Rashi on Leviticus 23:16.

a similar kind of problem related to justifying their position concerning the ambiguous biblical text. Specifically, Rabbinic authorities must prove that the biblical commandment refers to the first day after Passover, while the Karaites must argue that it refers to the Sabbath falling within the 8-day period of the festival of Passover.[22]

As known from the history of Jewish literature, attempts were made to address these issues in various ways. However, Shelomo ben Aharon unfortunately does not introduce detailed considerations in his work, leaving the reader without explanations. Therefore, neither the Karaite nor the Rabbinic protagonist of the dialogue further clarifies these doubts or presents solutions proposed, e.g., in Talmudic literature by Rabbi Akiva.[23]

Just like the first day, the last day of the counting of the Omer also sparks heated debates between Rabbinic Judaism and Karaism. In "The War at the Gates" Shelomo ben Aharon extensively addresses this issue as well. The arguments of both sides of the religious dispute can be summarized as follows: According to the Karaite interpretation of Lev 23:16, during the counting of the Omer, one should count 50 days and on the next day, i.e. on the 51st day, present the appropriate offerings for the Feast of Weeks. On the other hand, the Rabbinic authorities hold that it is Rashi who advocates not counting exactly 50 days because the 50th day corresponds to the day of offering sacrifices.[24] Thus, according to the Rabbanites, the Omer period comprises 49 days.

The Karaite position is based on the assumption that since there is an accent mark *ʾeṯnaḥ* (אֶתְנָח) under the word יום in the verse from Lev 23:16 (תספרו חמשים יום, *tispᵊru ḥamišim yom*, "you shall count fifty days"), indicating the end of the statement, it means that the subsequent part of the biblical command (related to the offering of sacrifices) must refer to the next day. In this part of their argument, the Karaite scholar criticizes Rashi for connecting (by shifting the punctuation-accent mark *ʾeṯnaḥ* from the word יום to תספרו) the phrase "fifty days" with the ext sentence, i.e., והקרבתם מנחה חדשה ליהוה (*ve-hiqraḇtem minḥa ḥadaša la-ʾadonay*, "and you shall offer a new sacrifice to the LORD"), thus creating a sentence that suggests that the offering should be made on the 50th day, meaning that, in essence, only 49 days are counted. However, according to the Karaite, such changes in the Bible are not allowed, making Rashi's interpretation unacceptable.

To put it more simply, according to the Karaite reading of the Hebrew text of Lev 23:16, the content of the verse in question in English would look more or less like this:

> [15] You shall count off seven equal weeks. [16] On the day after the seventh Sabbath, you shall count fifty days. [And then you] shall present offerings to the LORD.

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22 In this work, the issue of why the Karaites do not commence the counting of the Omer from the Sabbath that occurs after the eight-day period of the festival of Pesach is left aside (for more details, see Naeh 1992).

23 See Naeh 1992, 428–30.

24 The Karaites refer here to Rashi's commentary on the Book of Leviticus 23:16.

The Rabbinic version of the Hebrew text in English translation, on the other hand, would be as follows:

[15] You shall count off seven equal weeks. [16] Until the day after the seventh Sabbath you shall count. [And then] you shall count off the fiftieth day and present offerings to the LORD.[25]

According to the Karaite scholar, the very fact of the use of the Hebrew verb לספור ("to count; to count off") in the Torah indicates the necessity of counting (i.e., separating) 50 days, with the actual presentation of the offerings occurring on the subsequent day (i.e., the 51st day) to mark the beginning of the Feast of Weeks. If, indeed, Lev 23:16 intended the offering to be made on the 50th day, there would be no need to formulate the command in the form of a deduction, a separation of these 50 days. It would suffice to stop at the first part of the verse, i.e., the instruction to present an offering to God on the day after the seventh Sabbath (which is after 49 days). In that case, the command to count 50 days would essentially repeat the same information within the same verse. It is self-evident that the day after seven Sabbaths is the 50th day, so there is no need for an additional "counting (off)." However, since the verb "to count" is used in this command, it serves as a clear indication that these 50 days should be treated separately as the entirety of the Omer period, and only after completing it—on the 51st day—should the required offerings be presented.

In addition to the above, the solution to the puzzle related to the meaning of the word שבת lies in the phrase *mim-moḥoraṯ ha-šabbaṯ*. As the Karaite explains, the term cannot have the meaning of "week" in this expression (it is another meaning, in addition to those previously mentioned in the article), because there are no phrases in Hebrew like "tomorrow of the week" or "tomorrow of the month."[26] From this, it follows that the Biblical expression can only mean "the day after this Sabbath" (literally "tomorrow of this Sabbath"—in English it is not a correct expression, but in Hebrew it is), thus "the day after Saturday," essentially referring to Sunday.

It is worth noting in this context that the Karaite could not present the above argument when discussing the meaning of the expression *mim-moḥoraṯ ha-šabbaṯ* in relation to the first day of counting the Omer. This is because both the Karaites and the Rabbinites assigned the lexeme שבת the meaning of "one day" at that time (rather than the meaning of "week"). Thus, if the Karaites were of the opinion that at that time the reference was to "the Sabbath" (thus: "the day after this Sabbath," literally:

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25 In both examples, the expressions that bear accent mark ʾeṯnaḥ—according to the respective traditions— have been bolded.

26 The linguistic construction that Shelomo has in mind is difficult to render in English because it does not have the expression מחרת, which always occurs in Hebrew in the context of one day, not several. It means precisely "the next day" or "the day after." This is the reason why my English translation of this linguistic argument raised by a Karaite scholar may be incomprehensible to the English reader.

"tomorrow of this Sabbath"), while the Rabbanites were of the opinion that the reference was to "the feast day" (thus: "the day after this feast," literally: "tomorrow of this feast"), then on the grounds of linguistic correctness the dispute between the parties could not be resolved, for both propositions are grammatically correct in Hebrew (i.e., למחרת השבת, למחרת החג etc.). However, a different situation arises in the case of the disagreement arising from the controversy over choosing between the possibility of "the day after this Sabbath" (literally "tomorrow of this Sabbath" [Karaites]) and "the day after this week" (literally "tomorrow of this week" [Rabbanites]), which occurs in the context of determining the last day of the Omer period. In this case, on the same grounds of linguistic correctness, there can only be one winner in the dispute over the validity of the interpretation of the phrase *mim-moḥoraṯ ha-šabbaṯ*, namely, the Karaite scholar, because in Hebrew, expressions like "tomorrow of the week" or "tomorrow of the month" are not correct.

Roughly, this outlines the essence of the Karaite-Rabbinic dispute regarding the determination of the framework dates of the Omer period, as presented by Shelomo ben Aharon in "The War at the Gates." What, then, are the analytical conclusions that emerge from the intra-textual analysis of the religious dispute presented in the intellectual dialogue?

The juxtaposition of considerations related to both issues, i.e., the beginning and the end of the Omer period, leads to interesting insights in the realm of internal textual analysis of "The War at the Gates" dialogue. It is immediately noticeable that the phrase *mim-moḥoraṯ ha-šabbaṯ*, used both in Lev 23:15 and in the next verse, in the Karaite interpretation, each time (i.e., in relation to the first and last day of counting of the Omer) has exactly the same meaning, namely: "the next day after this Sabbath."[27]

In Rabbinic interpretation, however, it is explained in two different ways: the first time, in connection with Lev 23:15, as "the next day after the Passover," the second time—in connection with 23:16—already as "the next day after this week."

Considering the fact that the discussed Torah text also has legal character, one might expect that the meanings of the same terms, especially when they appear in two consecutive verses with a similar grammatical structure, will be the same. The Karaim interpretation corresponds to this intuition[28] (although it has a certain problem). According to the Rabbinic way of reading Lev 23:16, the counting of

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27   Avraham ibn Ezra was also said to be in favor of this solution, see Weis 1946, 130–131.

28   However, this does not necessarily imply that the Karaites are correct. The Karaim interpretation agrees only and exclusively with a certain philosophy of law, according to which the same terms should always be used in the same sense. The fulfillment of the requirement of consistency in the use of technical terms does not automatically mean being correct, as it is still necessary to prove—and here we return to our case—that the meanings attributed to these terms are correct. Secondly, it is difficult to say to what extent legal biblical texts can be expected to meet the criteria of correctness in legal formulations that are imposed on lawmakers in present times.

50 days is divided into two periods, namely seven weeks (49 days) of the Omer and a period referred to as the "day after" (*mim-moḥorat̲*) that period (i.e., the 50th day), which is the day when the Festival of Weeks was supposed to begin. This interpretation shows that the Rabbanites are consistent in interpreting the time adverb "the day after": for just as the beginning of the counting of the Omer occurs on "the day after" the first day of Passover (Lev 23:15), so too the Festival of Weeks begins on "the day after" the seven-week counting period (Lev 23:16).

On the other hand, the Karaites do start counting the Omer on "the day after" the Sabbath; however, they commence the Feast of Weeks not on "the day after" seven complete weeks (עד ממחרת השבת השביעת) but on the following day. In essence, this means that the 51st day, the first day of the Feast of Weeks, falls not on "the day after" the period of seven weeks of the Omer but two days later, which is the next day after *"the day after" seven full weeks*.

In light of the analysis presented here, the question arises as to whether, in both Torah verses, an important element in defining the beginnings of subsequent religious periods (i.e., the Omer and the Feast of Weeks) is essentially not only the way the term *šabbat̲* is understood but also *moḥorat̲* ("the next day; the day after") which in legal text, or at least in consecutive sentences, should serve the same function. So, if the expression ממחרת השבת in Lev 23:15 signified—for both the Karaites and the Rabbanites—the first day of the Omer, should it not also, analogously to its role in the previous case, be the marker for the beginning of the next period—the Feast of Weeks?

As can be seen, each of the positions presented by Shelomo ben Aharon— i.e., the Karaite and Rabbanite perspectives—has, from the standpoint of internal analytical-argumentative coherence, its unique way of proving its case, in which analytical consistency, especially in the explanation of the same legal-religious concepts, does not always have to play a significant role. Without delving into the broader context of Jewish and Karaite literature, it is challenging to understand the development of religious law among both Rabbinic and Karaite Jews and how it reached its current state.

While the history of Karaite-Rabbanite polemics demonstrates even greater richness in this area, due to which both communities showed not only an excellent knowledge of the Hebrew Bible in general but also exceptional exegetical skills, especially concerning literary analysis, in this particular matter, Shelomo ben Aharon decided to present the differences between the conflicting denominations only to a limited extent, and not always fully exhausting substantively all possible analytical threads.

3. Falsification and Verification of Scientific Claims

The researcher delving into Shelomo ben Aharon's Hebrew-language polemic, titled לחם שערים, encounters an initial serious dilemma: how to interpret its title. Based on the Hebrew Bible, from which Karaites, like other Jewish writers, drew inspiration for titling their philosophical-religious treatises, the above phrase—written with consonantal characters only—can be read in two ways. It can be interpreted either as *leḥem śəʿorim*, לֶחֶם שְׂעֹרִים, meaning "barley bread" (Judg 7:13; 2 Kgs 4:42), or as *laḥem śəʿarim*, לָחֶם שְׁעָרִים, which translates to "conflict at the gates; gate skirmish; war at the gates" (Judg 5:8). Almost all contemporary scholars who have encountered the intellectual legacy of the scholar from Poswol advocate for the first interpretation of the title, pointing, among other things, to the similarity with titles of rabbinic halakhic texts.[29] On the other hand, upon closer examination of the work's content, especially its "Introduction," it becomes untenable to maintain that the polemic's title refers to "barley bread."

In the first part of this subsection, I will endeavor to demonstrate that the title "Barley Bread" is invalid, and subsequently, I will provide evidence that the expression "The War at the Gates" is the correct way to read the words לחם שערים.

The first argument supporting the notion that the titular words לחם שערים should not be interpreted as "barley bread" is the fact that Shelomo ben Aharon never uses this phrase in that sense throughout his polemic. In the poetic introduction to his work, the author at most speaks of "defiled bread, (ritually) impure," clearly referring the reader to the expression לחם מגאל (*leḥem məgoʾal*) taken from Mal 1:7. The mentioned biblical passage criticizes priests who offer blemished and dishonest sacrifices on God's altar, such as those from defective animals (Mal 1:8), and which Malachi specifically terms as לחם מגאל.

In his poetic introduction to the polemic, Shelomo, using these biblical passages metaphorically, vividly criticizes Rabbinic halakha, considering it incorrect. According to Shelomo, in the context of the temple's destruction, religious laws (*halakha*) have taken the place of sacrifices. Thus, Shelomo compares the improper observance of Mosaic law by the Rabbanites to unworthy sacrifices offered by priests during Malachi's time. The expression לחם מגאל signifies the erroneous halakha of the Rabbanites in Shelomo ben Aharon's polemic.

However, does this automatically imply that, according to Shelomo ben Aharon, the correct Karaite halakha could be metaphorically termed as "barley bread," לחם שערים, in opposition to לחם מגואל? It is worth noting that in the context of Shelomo ben Aharon's treatise (discussing incorrect rabbinic religious law) and in the context of the quoted words from the Book of Malachi ("unworthy sacrifices"), the term "barley bread" would have to be attributed, precisely based on a clear opposition,

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29   See Akhiezer and Lasker 2011, 101–2, also note 27; Lasker 2014, 411, with note 42 as well.

the meaning of "worthy sacrifice" and further, "correct observance of religious law." From the point of view of literary analysis, one might find such a proof convincing, since it is internally consistent and logical. However, the problem lies in the fact that this explanation finds no confirmation either in the biblical text or in Shelomo's text. Firstly, Shelomo, in his work, never uses the phrase לחם שערים in reference to acceptable Karaite halakha—whether directly or indirectly. Secondly, even in the Hebrew Bible, the expression "barley bread" (see Judg 7:13; 2 Kgs 4:42) is not used in the sense of correct and worthy offerings presented in the temple. And only such a meaning of this biblical expression could provide Shelomo ben Aharon with a solid basis for generalizing that the biblical "barley bread" is, in his contemporary reality, "correct observance of the religious law."

Thus, in the Hebrew Bible, there is no clear opposition between *leḥem śᵊʿorim* and *leḥem mᵊgoʾal* (especially in the sense of offerings made to God) that Shelomo ben Aharon could use in his work as an intellectual-poetic weapon for a sarcastic attack on rabbinic halakha on the one hand and the defense of Karaite halakha on the other.[30] Moreover, even in Shelomo ben Aharon's polemical work itself, he does not use the expression "barley bread" in the sense of the Karaite halakha that he accepts and approves. In other words, he does not, for his literary purposes, create an opposition between לחם שערים and לחם מגאל that would relate to the realm of religious law, or to good and evil deeds.

Another argument put forward to defend the position that the expression "barley bread" does indeed constitute the title of the Karaite scholar's work is the fact that there are quite a few rabbinic works in the field of religious law titled לחם שערים and read precisely as "barley bread."[31] Without delving into the issue of the relationship between the titles of these works and their content, I will only note that Shelomo ben Aharon, in his work, does not refer to these texts, either explicitly or allusively. The only argument that could lead to the assertion that Shelomo ben Aharon interpreted the title of his work as "barley bread" would be the fact that these rabbinic works titled לחם שערים constitute the name of a genre of a certain type of texts in the

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30 The lexeme *śeʿorim* (in the singular form: *śeʿora*) signifies "barley," which is one of the fundamental grains in the "biblical" period (see, e.g.: Joel 1:11; Judg 31:40; Lev 27:16; Judg 7:13, as well as 2 Sam 14:30; 2 Kgs 4:42; 2 Kgs 7:1, 16, 18, etc.). Barley ripens first of all grains, hence it was offered in the temple at Passover as a sacrifice of the firstfruits of the soil. Additionally, in the Hebrew Bible, barley flour appears as one of the ingredients in the ordeal of the suspected unfaithful wife, accused by her husband (Num 5:15). In another instance, there is a mention of a large barley bread loaf in the dream of a certain man, which, rolling into the camp of the Midianites, overturns and destroys a military tent (Judg 7:13). In this latter case, "barley bread" serves as a literary metaphor for the army chosen by God, and at the same time, a relatively small army of Israel (300 warriors), which triumphs over a much larger enemy (the Midianites).

31 For example: (a) ספר לחם שערים ,יחיאל מיכל בהרב זרח אבדק׳׳ק טרעסטינא; (b) שאול בן משה, ספר לחם שערים; (c) משה ליב בלאאמ׳׳ו מו׳׳ה יוסף שמואל כ׳׳ץ דיין שק׳׳ק ניקאלסבורג, ספר לחם שערים. The texts listed here were written after the death of the Karaite scholar, so it is impossible to speak of their influence on this cleric. I have not been able to find any earlier works of this title that the author of "War at the Gates" might have known, albeit purely hypothetically.

field of religious law (similar to texts of the type שאלות ותשובות, *šᵊʾelo̱t ve-t̠ᵊšub̠o̱t*). My current knowledge of these mentioned rabbinic texts does not allow for a definitive statement that such a genre developed and that both rabbinic scholars and Shelomo ben Aharon were aware of its existence.

These are roughly the arguments that refute the claim that the title words of Shelomo ben Aharon's work should not be interpreted as "barley bread." Let's now turn to the arguments that support the idea that it indeed refers to a meaning like "war at the gates."

The strongest argument supporting the interpretation that the discussed consonantal title of Shelomo ben Aharon's work should be read as *laḥem šᵊʿarim* ("war at the gates; skirmish at the gates; conflict at the gates" and similar) is the fact that the author of the polemic, in the poetic introduction (in which the words לחם שערים appear the only time in the entire work), quotes a biblical verse containing precisely this expression (Judg 5:8). Furthermore, before the sequence of these words in the poetic prelude, the word אז (then) is also present, and these words in the Hebrew Bible appear together solely in the Song of Deborah (Judg 5:8). It is worth noting that the theme of the biblical passage includes conflict, which is particularly important in the context of Shelomo ben Aharon's prelude.

As I have already noted, the title phrase לחם שערים appears only once in Shelomo's work, indicating that the significance of the title should be especially sought in this exact place. And what is mentioned in it?

Firstly, the mentioned "Introduction" serves as a poetic reflection on the causes of the theological conflict between brothers, namely the Rabbanites and the Karaites. In this section, the author employs a style reminiscent of prophetic books from the Bible, skillfully using various quotations from the Scriptures. However, it should be noted that these quotations do not appear in their biblical context and meaning; instead, the author uses them to construct a new narrative, symbolically depicting the conflicted relations between Rabbanites and Karaites at the turn of the 17th and 18th centuries. Shelomo ben Aharon, in his poetic prelude, conceals himself under the guise of a modest scholar who seeks to understand the reason for the schism between Rabbanites and Karaites, as well as whose religious law aligns with God's Law expressed in the Hebrew Bible. The protagonist's questions are answered by God through a prophetic vision, an inspired revelation. In this vision, the main character witnesses many deviations and sins committed by the believers during the Second Temple period. At the same time, God shows him a small group of individuals who faithfully adhered to God's laws in those distant times, a group that the protagonist identifies with the spiritual forebears of his contemporary Karaites. In subsequent scenes of the vision, a conflict arises between representatives of both groups, the brothers, over which of them promotes laws in line with God's will. It is in this context that the mentioned sage comments on the tense situation with the words (fol. 3v):

[31] [...] על כן התגוללו על לחם שערים³² : ודבתה³³
[32] בהם הפלוגה מחמת שיוצא לפני השליט בשגגה³⁴ : ואשר עמהם רבתי עם³⁵

[31] [. . .] Therefore, they engage in *war at the gates*,[36] and there is a tremendous
[32] division among them, all due to *the misguided rule of a leader*[37] supported by *a numerous people*.[38]

It is evident, therefore, that the words לחם שערים in this poetic description carry the meaning of a conflict related to a dispute between brothers. Thus, they have the same significance as in the biblical text from which they were drawn (which is additionally supported—though in only some manuscripts—by the preceding word אז).

Regardless, the content of the poetic introduction aligns with the content of the main parts of the work, which seriously address specific differences in religious law between the Rabbanites and the Karaites. While the title of the work, i.e. לחם שערים, in the poetic prelude alludes to the conflict between fictional brothers, which in the poetic description almost escalates into a fratricidal struggle, in the main part of the work it straightforwardly relates to polemics. This involves a debate between serious scholars defending the righteousness of the religious law of their faith and critiquing the opponent's halakha.

In conclusion, in both cases, that is, concerning the content of the "Introduction" as well as the content of the polemical part of the work, the vocalization of Shelomo ben Aharon's polemic title should indeed be *laḥem šᵊʿarim*, meaning "the war at the gates." This is because meaning of this expression in the "Introduction" is directly associated with a physical conflict and dispute between brothers. However, in the main part of the work, it symbolically alludes to a form of spiritual-intellectual warfare, meaning debate and polemics.

On this occasion, it is worth emphasizing and sensitizing particularly the younger generations of researchers and students to the importance of a thorough reading of the content of the examined text. This is to avoid inadvertently succumbing to the influence of research traditions that transmit established variants of perceiving

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32   The second על is incorrect, as other versions of the text (Elgamil's edition and F8293), along with the corresponding biblical fragment (Judg 5:8), demonstrate that instead of it the word אז should be used. In many manuscripts, these two words are graphically emphasized, precisely because they constitute the title of the work.

33   Should be ורבתה, probably in the sense of the Aramaic ורבתא. See, e.g., another manuscript (microfilm F53068 from the National Library of Israel in Jerusalem): ורבתה.

34   Eccl 10:5.

35   Lam 1:1.

36   Judg 5:8.

37   Eccl 10:5. In Shelomo's metaphorical language, the word "leader" should be understood as a "spiritual or religious leader."

38   Lam 1:1.

a given issue through generations or the influence of scientific authorities who, after all, may make errors here and there. As Karl Popper used to say, practicing science largely involves an approximate movement toward the truth, which means constant verification or falsification of accepted scientific statements. I quietly hope that with this small correction concerning the issue discussed in this part of the article has brought me a bit closer to understanding what Shelomo ben Aharon intended when he decided to title his polemic לחם שערים.

Conclusions

The aim of this article was to present selected research problems related to the reading and analysis of "The War at the Gates" by Shelomo ben Aharon. Additionally, I sought to demonstrate the diversity and complexity of research problems faced by researchers of any Hebrew texts who seek to understand the intellectual reality that shaped the daily lives of millions of Jews in the past. The article briefly focused on a cross-sectional analysis of a Karaite literary document, examining its content and structure (the issue of intertextuality layering leading to the distortion of the meaning of a given statement), argumentation (presenting the linguistic and logical consequences of both sides of the theological dispute alongside a legal analysis of the biblical text), and research methodology (adopting a new interpretation of the title's meaning and rejecting the previous proposition of its translation). The conclusions drawn while addressing these issues are as follows:

1) The content of "The War at the Gates" by Shelomo ben Aharon is, in many of its aspects, incomprehensible, and it is worthwhile to make researchers aware that this is also a characteristic feature of many other Hebrew Jewish texts. An honest researcher, in the process of analyzing a literary text and its translation, should be able to admit that there are places in the work where, at a given stage of knowledge about it, a credible interpretation or translation is not possible. They should be able to identify these unclear elements in the work and then put forth cautious hypotheses—along with appropriate argumentation—regarding their potential explanation.

2) Given that the Jewish works that we analyze are not always semantically unambiguous, it is crucial to carefully consider the interpretations of other scholars, regardless of their authority. This is not about a matter of unduly challenging recognized scientific truths, but about rationally verifying claims that, in the past, were indeed correctly derived but in a different, incomplete set of empirical data. When new data emerges, such statements should be updated.

3) It is worth keeping in mind, therefore, that many scientific claims—including those in the field of Jewish studies—are of a temporary rather than definitive

nature. This phenomenon does not indicate a weakness of the scientific field being practiced, but rather its strength, as it highlights the need to continue practicing it in order to deepen knowledge and achieve a better understanding of human civilization and culture on one hand, and to improve research methods on the other.

4) The laborious task of working with hypotexts (as demonstrated in the article, even with multiple intertexts at a time), which are also highly ambiguous and enigmatic even for professional researchers, in effort to understand the meaning of the text that relies on them, always yields positive results. A vast amount of Jewish texts, especially in the realm of halakha, but also in biblical analysis, cannot be properly understood without engaging with potential hypotexts. Therefore, it is crucial to educate future researchers on how to use them correctly.

I believe that these few observations, arising from the analysis of such an inconspicuous text by a Karaite scholar from times long past are enough to encourage a new generation of Hebraists to embark on serious studies of the rich and diverse Jewish culture, both in terms of ideas and as an intellectual challenge.

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Theological Hermeneutics and Discourse About God as Seen by Juan José Tamayo-Acosta

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Abstract: One of the important tasks and at the same time challenges facing theology of all times is how to speak about God in an understandable way. This is due to the fact that God is an incomprehensible mystery that exceeds human cognitive abilities. As well as with the multiplicity of existing concepts and images of God not only in different religions, but also often within the same religion. The task of theology is to help us understand both how God reveals himself to us and what he communicates to us about himself in his word, especially in the person of Jesus Christ. The purpose of this article is to show how God can and should be spoken of in theology today according to Spanish theologian Juan José Tamayo-Acosta. The first point presents theological hermeneutics as an essential tool in rethinking in a new way God's self-revelation in history, as well as in understanding dogmas. The second point discusses the need to include language in discourse about God, which refers to symbols and metaphors as means that express meaning better than concepts alone the mystery of God. In the third point, Christian mysticism is shown as an example of a metaphorical way of talking about God.
Keywords: theological hermeneutics, God, Mystery, metaphorical theology, Christian mysticism

The proper subject and focus of theology is God. He is at the same time the main subject of theology, because He speaks to man in Scripture, which is the word of God. Therefore, "only Scripture is <theology> in the fullest sense of the word, because its real subject is God."[1] (Ratzinger 1982, 337)[2] In order for God's speech to be heard and understood by man, God uses the human word. For this purpose He chooses people, biblical authors, through whom He Himself speaks and history, making it the place of His self-revelation and encounter with man. The fact that God enters history and reveals Himself in it—which is accomplished most fully in Jesus Christ, since He is the incarnate Son of God—does not mean that God loses something of His divinity and incomprehensibility, and ceases to be a Mystery to man.

Therefore, one of the important tasks facing theology today is to make an effort to clarify that this Mystery, which is God, is not at all "irrational, but is a superabundance of meanings made available to reason so that it can set out to find what is always beyond and above what is attainable, verifiable and definable." (Staglianò 2023, 68)

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[1]   All translations are the author's own.
[2]   God is, as writes Adolphe Gesché, "essentially His own theologian, *noesis noeseos*, the thought of thought, the theologian of the Thought that He is." (2001, 33–34)

It is also to show that the Mystery is a "paradox," which does not mean that it exempts from or suspends or even excludes thinking, but only that the Mystery is that which precedes, sustains and at the same time transcends human thinking and the associated understanding of reality (cf. Gonzàlez de Cardedal 2006, 959). The task of theology, therefore, is to help us understand both the way God reveals and manifests Himself to us, and what He communicates to us about Himself in His word. Always being aware that the better we understand God's self-revelation, the more obvious it becomes to us how much still remains hidden from us (cf. Wierciński 2021, 187).

One of the signs of the times that characterizes modernity and shapes human experience today is multiculturalism and the associated religious pluralism. This presents theology with a challenge and at the same time an incentive to seek and find "new signs, new symbols, new ways of communicating the Word, new forms of beauty emerging in different cultural circles, including unconventional forms of beauty that may be of little interest to evangelizers, but have become particularly attractive to other people." (Francis 2013) It also challenges and encourages the search for appropriate language and ways of speaking and presenting God today.

One theologian who has taken on this task is Spanish theologian Juan José Tamayo-Acosta.[3] He has included his proposal in a book entitled *Nuevo paradigma teológico*. Its goal is to present a new theological paradigm that, on the one hand, could serve as a bridge and meeting place between the theology developed by theologians coming from the so-called First and Third World. On the other hand, it would take into account the different contexts and sensitivities and the type of hermeneutics these theologies refer to in their reflection. In this paradigm, the question of discourse about God occupies an important place. Therefore, what will interest us in this article is first and foremost the search for an answer to the question of how one can and should talk about God, according to Tamayo-Acosta, in theology today. Indeed, this question is an important part of the new theological paradigm he proposes. Moreover, it touches the very essence and purpose of theology, which is that theology wants to be man's study of God (cf. Dufour 1970, xv). A systematic reflection that seeks to know and understand God and what He has revealed about Himself both in His word and, above all, in the person of Jesus Christ.

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[3]   Juan José Tamayo-Acosta (born 1946) is a Spanish theologian. He holds a doctorate in theology, philosophy and literature. He is a full professor at the Charles III University in Madrid, where he heads the Ignacio Ellacuria Chair of Theology and Religious Studies. Co-founder and secretary general of the John XXIII Association of Theologians. He is a member of the Spanish Society for Religious Studies, the International Committee of the World Forum for Theology and Liberation, and the Board of Directors of the Ibn Arabi Forum. He teaches theology at universities in Spain, South America and North America. He contributes to numerous Spanish and international journals in philosophy, theology, social sciences and religious studies. He is the author of more than fifty books, among which we can mention the six-volume work *Hacia la comunidad* (1998–2005), *Fundamentalismos y dialogo entre religions* (2009), *Iglesia y sociedad en España* (2005). The book he wrote entitled. *Islam: Cultura, religíon y política* (2009) was awarded the World Prize of the President of the Republic of Tunisia in Islamic Studies.

The first point of the article will present the validity and importance of theological hermeneutics as an essential tool in rethinking in a new way the self-revelation of God in history, as well as in understanding dogmas. The second point will address the need to include in discourse about God a language that appeals to symbols and metaphors as means that express the mystery of God and His divine nature better than concepts alone. An example of this type of speaking about God is Christian mysticism. The discussion of this issue is devoted to the last section of this article. In the summary, we present the conclusions that result from our analysis of Tamayo-Acosta's proposed way of presenting and talking about God in theology today.

1. Hermeneutic Horizon of Theology

Hermeneutics is the art of interpreting literary texts. It is defined in a general sense as the ability to interpret literary texts and historical sources, and in a broader sense, also any symbolic content. Its goal is to help discover the meanings hidden in the texts, symbols and works of art being interpreted, as well as to communicate those meanings (cf. Bronk 1993, 770–774). At the core of hermeneutics is the belief in the unity of reality and that man, as a thinking being, seeks to understand the world and himself, and that he captures this understanding in interpretation through the symbols of a culture, as well as by referring to the testimonies of history that have been passed down through tradition (cf. International Theological Commission 1989, A.I/1). Hermeneutics is also used in theology, especially in biblical studies, to understand and interpret and assimilate what God says to people. Scripture itself is nothing but an interpretation of God's revelation of Himself in history. The same is true of theology, which is an actualizing interpretation of God's word and a creative interpretation of the Christian message. Theological hermeneutics is therefore inseparable from the interpretation of the word of God and human existence (cf. Geffré 1984, 39; Tamayo-Acosta 2000, 71–73).

It is needed due to the fact that God speaks to man using human language. Hence comes the need to find an appropriate hermeneutic, i.e., one that is helpful in understanding and interpreting, as well as in rethinking in a new way God's self-revelation in all its richness in human history. This understanding, however, must not be limited to the interpretation of the past alone, but must also be open to reading this past in light of the demands of the present day and current human experience. Thanks to this opening, it becomes possible to discover what is new, unexpected and unpredictable in the word of God, as well as to overcome all kinds of religious fundamentalism, one of the characteristics of which is the abandonment of hermeneutics as an important mediation between the foundational texts of a religion and the cultural context in which they are read (cf. Tamayo-Acosta 2009, 181–85). Without the mediation

offered by hermeneutics, theological discourse is limited to repeating texts from the past and uncritically submits to the pronouncements of the magisterium, which then become the only hermeneutical principle. This is why hermeneutics, as Tamayo-Acosta (2004, 65–66) rightly points out, is the best answer to the fundamentalism present in religions, because it is something fundamental to any theology.[4] It also provides assistance "in seeing the subjective and objective element in one reality of faith in parallel." (Krupka 2020, 151)

Therefore, we can say that the importance and value of hermeneutic mediation in theological discourse lies in the fact that it makes possible to overcome the distance that exists between the source texts that speak about God and our lives. It also allows us to recognize in history the voice of God speaking to us (cf. Pontificia Commissione Biblica 1993, 68). In a word, hermeneutics helps theology, which by its very nature is "an infinite movement of interpretation in which the novelty of the questions asked of the text entails the risk of unpredictable answers," (Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 78) to discover ever new possibilities for understanding the word of God today.[5] This understanding is always an interpretation, which, because it is a human understanding of the word of God, must always be regarded as provisional and temporary. Therefore, it is open to new understandings and further interpretations based on emerging new questions and new challenges to which answers need to be sought in God's revelation as conveyed through Scripture.

Hence, the mission of theology, understood as hermeneutical writing, is, according to Tamayo-Acosta, "to create new interpretations of Christianity and promote meaningful Christian practices according to the specific situation, time and place." (2004, 78) This understanding of theology entails, according to the Spanish theologian, a significant change in the understanding of truth itself, for henceforth truth is no longer seen as "*adaequatio intellectus cum re*, but as that which is constantly happening, and subject to development." (Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 78) It also has an impact on the understanding of the interpretation of biblical texts, since it is seen as a continuous process that leads to new interpretations due to the changes that are constantly taking place in our reality both individually and socially (cf. Segundo 1975, 12).

Speaking of theological hermeneutics, Tamayo-Acosta finally draws attention to the need to create and use today a hermeneutic of solidarity, which is an important corrective to existential theological interpretation, because unlike the latter, which is individualistic in nature, a hermeneutic of solidarity values the communitarian and ethical dimensions of faith. It is based "on dialogue, interaction, intersubjectivity and on horizontal communicative action." (Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 79; cf. also

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4   Hermeneutics also protects theology itself from the danger of fundamentalism, which would consist in "equating the word of God and Scripture, truth and formulation historically located." (Winling 1983, 317–18)

5   The encounter with the Gospel itself, at least at some stage, contributes to the loss of the obvious, since it often shocks and leads to the shattering of old, established patterns (cf. Werbick 2010, 179–82).

Tamayo-Acosta 2000, 80–82) It also takes into account, on the one hand, the fact that man does not remain at the level of what is found, but seeks always to improve, which makes it possible for there to be interaction between sacred texts and the actual lives of men and women. On the other hand, this type of hermeneutics values and takes into account the lives of marginalized groups. The aforementioned dialogue and interaction that takes place between Scripture and life leads, according to the Spanish theologian, "to the discovery of the historical and therefore adventurous character of Scripture," (Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 79) which points to the need for constant reinterpretation, i.e. moving in a hermeneutical circle that presupposes the process of understanding itself. This process has a circular structure, because as such, it is a dynamic happening between questions and answers. This makes it possible to better understand the text and, based on it, to correct old answers. The process of understanding also has a circular structure because it requires relating parts of a given text to the whole. In the light of what has been said, we see that theological hermeneutics presupposes, according to the Spanish theologian, a permanent interpretation. It also avoids any possible ideologization, which can take place when the authority of texts considered sacred is attempted to be uncritically imposed on other people in order to have authority over them and their lives.

Therefore, according to Tamayo-Acosta, theological hermeneutics should adopt, although not uncritically, the perspective of the hermeneutic model of critical theory applied to tradition. This is because it helps "to free ourselves from the authoritarian impositions of tradition, which once subordinated Christianity to an anachronistic conception of faith and theology to a hermeneutical model devoid of creative imagination." (Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 74) At the same time, the Spanish theologian adds that "critique of certain religious-theological traditions and of tradition itself does not at all mean breaking with tradition, since it is a constitutive element of Christianity and religion. Nor does it require abandoning memory, which is the inner moment of Christian critical cognition." (Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 74)

An example of such a hermeneutic, according to the Spanish theologian, is feminist hermeneutics, which uses a hermeneutic of suspicion. This is because this type of hermeneutics makes one think about all kinds of assumptions and conditions that may have influenced both the creation of texts and their current understanding and interpretation. It also reveals the danger that always exists, which concerns the possibility of subordinating the interpretation of revealed texts to the interests of specific individuals or social groups. In other words, the hermeneutics of suspicion does not allow the interpretation of revealed texts to serve anyone's interests or any ideology. Finally, it realizes that certain religious theories or doctrines can also be used to belittle other religious concepts and sensibilities, or even to attack them (cf. Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 81).

Understanding theology as hermeneutics ultimately contributed, according to Tamayo-Acosta, to the discovery of a new approach to the relationship that exists

between Scripture and the Church's dogmas. Specifically, it made it possible to see that between Scripture and dogmas there is a relationship of complementarity, not sameness, since dogmas are, first, human pronouncements on the word of God. Second, they refer to that which is beyond grasp and goes beyond the formulations through which the intangible is expressed. Third, they have a dimension that announces and anticipates the future without closing history (cf. Tamayo-Acosta 2011, 325–26). Therefore, one should avoid equating dogmas with the word of God. This is because they are ecclesial formulations by means of which is expressed in a solemn way what is commonly believed. For this reason, dogmas are "partly dependent on the expressive specificity of the language used in a certain era and under certain circumstances." (International Theological Commission 1989, B.II/2) Therefore, in order to be able to understand dogma, one needs to accept the limits and constraints of our understanding, because dogma ultimately refers to a mystery that cannot be grasped objectively and that transcends the formulations in which it is expressed. It is therefore necessary to see and interpret dogma in its historical location in order to distinguish between the truth it seeks to convey to us and which can no longer be dispensed with, and the specific formulations and concepts by which this truth has been expressed and which are typical of a particular era and time.

Therefore, dogmas are statements that are subject to certain conditions, such as language, the horizon of view, the situation, the accepted models of interpretation and understanding, and the philosophical categories through which the truths of faith are thought and expressed. However, this does not at all imply a relativization that would allow the rejection of dogmas. The important issue, therefore, is to "preserve" dogma, while at the same time showing its openness to living Tradition and its impact on the present and people's lives here and now. The aforementioned "preservation" of dogma also takes place when it is transferred to other planes and subjected to new interpretations in order to rediscover its meaning for a given era. Thus, it is not a matter of overcoming or rejecting Tradition, but of embracing it in a creative way, which is an expression of understanding and appreciation of Tradition. In this sense, hermeneutics can contribute to the renewal of theology, since it "urges one to return to the original thinking about God's relationship with His people, and thus to the constant effort of thinking about the beginning anew." (Wierciński 2021, 204) Thus, it urges the search for the most adequate language in discourse about God and in presenting Him. For language is the tool and means of expression through which the truth that is discovered is described. At the same time, this truth always exceeds what language tries to describe and express (cf. Krupka 2020, 154).

2. The Symbolic and Metaphorical Nature of Talking About God

One of the most important challenges facing theology today, according to Tamayo-Acosta, is the multiculturalism of modern societies, which implies cultural and worldview pluralism, including religious pluralism, which often leads to the fragmentation of truth. Such a challenge is also what the Spanish theologian refers to as intellectual uncertainty, which characterizes modernity and promotes questioning of what was previously considered the truth and constituted a certain point of support. All this also has its impact on the understanding of theology, as it does not allow it to be conceived as an indivisible whole and a closed system that has definitive answers and thus possesses the truth that it wants to impose on others in an authoritarian manner. It also shows that it is difficult to create theology today based on what has been considered unquestionable and definitive until now, and this puts it in the position of a defenseless David. At the same time, it requires those who practice theology to be able to recognize with humility that they do not have ready answers to all questions (cf. Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 15–16). Therefore, theology created today, must be questioning and creative. Seeking, and at the same time suspicious of itself, and open to permanent self-criticism. For theology cannot, as Karl Barth (cf. 1965, 152–53), quoted by our Author, stated, be content with what it has already achieved, but must constantly start from the beginning and from scratch, lest it fall into routine and automatism. She should also seek answers to the question of what is the most appropriate way to talk about God today, and pay attention to images that represent God.

What can help accomplish this task, among other things, according to the Spanish theologian, is "awakening the symbolic imagination." Specifically, it is a matter of valuing and restoring the proper place and meaning of symbols, which has already been initiated in modern philosophy.[6] Indeed, today's world seems to be oriented "toward a new era of symbolism, in which symbols gain anew aesthetic and ontological primacy." (Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 164) This is also perceptible in many religions, including Christianity, especially in a popular religiosity, where symbols and images play an important role. The aforementioned awakening of the symbolic imagination should also take place in theology, since it is, as Karl Rahner (cf. 2002, 278) stated, essentially a theology of the symbol, the best example of which is the theology of the Logos. Moreover, the symbol of God is the basic symbol of any religious system and the essential point of reference for believers in their understanding of the world and life. In turn, the language about God, which is in reality a symbolic language, is what shapes the identity of believers and influences their lives and conduct.

Therefore, according to Tamayo-Acosta, what is needed in theology today is a return to the best tradition of symbolic theology, one of the main representatives of

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6   An example of this is the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur (cf. 1970, 254–64), in which symbolic thinking has an important place.

which is Pseudo-Dionysius Aeropagite. He distinguishes two ways of knowing God: symbolic and philosophical. The former has the character of initiation, while the latter has the character of proving. However, they should not be contrasted with each other. What's more, the symbolic way should be regarded as an equal and important tool in arriving at the mystery of God. It is also necessary, in speaking of God, to refer, according to Dionysius, to the model of analogy, which presupposes a great similarity on the one hand, and an even greater dissimilarity on the other. This model ultimately points to the need to undergo a process of purification of the symbols applied to God, so that it becomes possible to discover the transcendent dimension of divinity, which surpasses the materiality of the symbols we use in representing God. The key of symbolic theology is the symbolism of dissimilarity, which finds its point of support in Scripture, where God is presented as completely Other and without any comparison with any earthly reality, including man.

The importance of a symbol lies in the fact that, first, it reveals certain aspects of reality that are inaccessible to other kinds of cognition. Second, the symbol is a kind of bridge connecting the literal meaning with what it refers to and points to. This is because there is an intrinsic connection between the symbol and the object that is evoked through the symbol. Third, the symbol "makes the absence present and actualizes something that cannot be reached. It cannot be perceived and is unknown." (Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 170) Therefore, the symbol is, on the one hand, an epiphany of mystery and a manifestation of the unspeakable. On the other hand, it is what covers this mystery, thus protecting and emphasizing its transcendent nature. Fourth, the symbol has a utopian-anticipatory function, since it directs the gaze toward the ideal future toward which all of humanity is moving, i.e., free from all oppression and that which does not allow man to be fully himself. Fifth, the symbol has a communal character, since it is not the product of an individual, but is born in the community and in it acquires meaning. At the same time, it invites man to engage with his whole self and to undertake a journey together with others in learning about and opening up to the unspeakable, yet present in the form of a mystery that exceeds and expands man's cognitive capacity. Therefore, reason should not seek to eliminate the symbol, because the symbol does not fight reason at all. On the contrary, it helps restore the proper balance between the order of reason and the order of emotions. It values man's suggestive and imaginative abilities, showing that human cognition is not limited to purely theoretical cognition (cf. Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 164–71).

Hence, one of the tasks and at the same time challenges facing theology today, according to Tamayo-Acosta, is to take into account what metaphorical theology proposes, which is a relatively new paradigm and an original theological project that represents a corrective to the purely conceptual approach. For metaphorical theology draws attention to the inadequacy of human language about God. Therefore, it takes as its main premise that all theological discourse about God should be metaphorical. It also values the role of imagination as that factor responsible for the creation of new

images and ideas in theology, and thus opens theology to new perspectives. Finally, metaphorical theology is a pluralistic theology, since it believes that only a multiplicity of images is able to approximate and express the richness of religious experience. "The language of religious experience is the language of images." (Zink 2001, 29) This statement also applies to the images of God functioning in various religions, which, according to the type of theology under discussion, should be treated exclusively as partial for the reason that they are unable to exhaust the mystery of God. Finally, metaphorical theology points out that theology is only one form of reflecting and speaking about God (cf. Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 15–16).

Adopting the discussed assumptions of metaphorical theology, leads the Spanish theologian to formulate the following conclusions about God and the discourse about Him. First, that the God of Revelation is a hidden God. Second, that in talking about God today, there is a need to return anew to biblical concepts such as Wisdom, Spirit and Word, since they express and emphasize the mystery of the Divine nature, the understanding of which exceeds the capacity of human reason. They also point to the inner dynamism that is present in God. Third, those images of God that have to do with authority, submission and dependence and are the result of a patriarchal interpretation of Scripture should be eliminated. Instead, it is necessary to value those images of God that fit into and refer to the best mystical tradition, which says nothing about submission to the whole, but only oneness with the whole. Such images may include those related to nature, such as: "Source of All Goods," "Light," "Invigorating Wind," or "Water of Life." Also those images that refer to love and point to God as Love, Bridegroom and Friend, which finds its point of support in Scripture, especially in the prophetic and wisdom writings. Another image of God that should be taken into account in theological reflection today is to see the world as "the body of God," and thus as a place of encounter with God, as metaphorical theology proposes. This is because this image is closely related to the creation of the world and points to a God who, although transcendent, at the same time manifest and present and acting in the world. It also allows us to understand the Trinity as the Mystery of the Tri-personal community, which is in relationship with the world and communicates with humanity. Finally, it emphasizes the truth that a constitutive element of the divine nature is being in relationship (cf. Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 17–20).

The most appropriate way to speak of God, therefore, according to Tamayo-Acosta, is the symbolic way.[7] At the same time, no symbol can be ascribed an absolute

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7   According to Tamayo-Acosta, the privileged place for the theology of symbols, and at the same time what restores and shows the importance of symbolic thinking in theology, are the sacraments. In his opinion, the theology of symbols gives priority to symbolic language over discursive language in understanding and explaining the sacraments. It allows us to present the sacraments as a dynamic reality. Finally, it combines symbol and ritual, which constitute and refer to the fundamental aspects of human life, which are religious experience and the celebration of faith (cf. Tamayo-Acosta 1995, 91–113).

character, i.e. claiming the right to capture and express adequately the fullness of the mystery of God. Therefore, divinity should not be understood in exclusive terms, but through the categories of a dynamic and harmonious relationship between what appear to be opposites, such as the fact that God can be simultaneously omnipotent and weak, present and hidden, suffering and comforting. These categories lead to a change in the understanding of God's power, which is not oppressive and does not resort to violence, but remains in a relationship that offers life to man and makes God not only God above us, but also God in us and for us (cf. Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 20; cf. Werbick 2022, 301).

Therefore, an important task facing theology today, according to the Spanish theologian, is the search for an inclusive language and an inductive model of God. The proposal of such a language and model of God has been proposed, among others, by feminist biblical and theological hermeneutics, one of whose leading representatives is Elizabeth Johnson. This theologian points out that, first, the mystery of God transcends all human conceptions, and thus cannot be described and expressed adequately through specific concepts or single theological concepts. Secondly, that the very language on the subject of God has been and is constantly evolving, and is dependent on social and cultural conditions. This can be seen, among other things, in the dominant not only in the past, but also at present, image and way of depicting God, in which man becomes, in an almost literal sense, "<paradigm of the symbol of God>, and masculinity is recognized as a category constituting the essence of divinity." (Johnson 2002, 20–21) Accordingly, feminist theology postulates that language about God should be inclusive, so-called open to different conceptions of God, including those that come from outside Scripture.[8] It also points to the need to take into account the truth that not only man, but also woman is the image of God. Therefore, feminist theology, on the one hand, deconstructs the patriarchal language that influences the representation of God, and on the other hand, seeks new images that can enrich the discourse about God and are born, as it were, from below, i.e., from the experience of women and their way of experiencing faith.

An example of this is Johnson's proposed translation of the name of God revealed to Moses, "I am who I am" (Exod 3:14), having an androcentric character, as "She who is." This translation, she considers "linguistically possible, theologically sound, existentially and religiously necessary." (Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 95)[9] Its advantage, according to Johnson, is that it evokes through the feminine metaphor "all the power present in the ontological symbol of absolute and relational vitality that gives

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[8] For more on the assumptions of feminist theology see Johnson 2003, 115–20.

[9] German theologian Jörg Zink takes a similar view, believing that "we might as well say of God 'Our Mother,' because we cannot think otherwise than by using images. Also, the image of 'father' is a symbol we have created to better understand what we are thinking about . . . The word, however, is only an image, taken from our interpersonal relationships. And there is a danger, . . . that the comparison itself will take precedence over the content it should convey to us." (2001, 98–99)

energy to the world" (Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 95) and affirms the value and dignity of every woman. It reveals that "divine nature is the relational mystery of life," (Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 96) which bestows life and wants all creatures without exception to enjoy the fullness of life and be able to enjoy the goods offered to them by the world, which is the common home of all people. This translation finally reveals the truth that, since God is the source of life, He is at the same time the only foundation of hope for new lives not only in the future, but also right now, in a history marked by suffering and death (cf. Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 96). It finally enriches the language about God by introducing feminine symbolism into it, so that it becomes possible to emphasize and show in a new way the depth of the Divine mystery.

At the same time, the use of feminine symbolism in discourse about God cannot be about, according to Tamayo-Acosta, simply attributing to God the qualities that are traditionally associated with women and the functions they perform, because in this way one remains at the level of using stereotypes relating to what is understood by masculinity and femininity, according to the model designed by the patriarchal world. This leads, on the one hand, not only to the preservation, but also to the reinforcement of the adrocentric model that feminist theology is trying to overcome. On the other hand, it does not serve at all to speak of God in a more inclusive way and in a more liberating direction (cf. Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 96–97).

3. Mysticism as an Example of Talking About God Today

It has been said that, according to the new paradigm proposed by Tamayo-Acosta, an important role in the modern discourse on God should be played, recourse to symbols, images and metaphors. This is because they affect the human imagination and are the "means" by which the incomprehensible mystery of God, which cannot be adequately captured in any concepts or terms, is best expressed. They help to experience God as completely Other and Unknowable. They thus evoke the best mystical tradition, which is the highest possible degree of religious experience and a bridge between different religions, since these at the doctrinal level not infrequently present completely different and even mutually exclusive concepts and images of God. This is unfortunately also the case within Christianity itself. An example of this is, on the one hand, the image of God that Pinochet has of Him, whose God condones persecution and the resort to violence. On the other hand, the image of God presented by Martin Luther King, who defends the equality of all people. He treats them as his children and does not allow any discrimination based on gender or skin color (cf. Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 207–8). Such an example is also the fact that religions not infrequently use God to justify war and thus prove that it is by all means right. Therefore, what provides help in overcoming such extreme concepts and images of God

not only within one religion, but also at the interreligious level, is mysticism and the mystical experience associated with it, according to the Spanish theologian.

The importance and significance of the phenomenon of mysticism is also indicated contemporary interdisciplinary studies, which note that mysticism harmoniously combines "intellect and affectivity, spirituality and theology, experience and reflection, the ability to think and love." (Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 213) Carmelite Cristina Kaufmann, on the other hand, looking at mysticism from a religious perspective, notes that it is an inner dynamism that enables, empowers and stimulates Christians to be open and in solidarity with others and to all creative activity. This is because it teaches an attitude of sacrifice and dedication to the selfless service to others. It transforms the human heart, and thus influences and shapes human relationships in a new way. Finally, it unites man with God, which enriches his cognitive and emotional authorities (cf. Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 213–14). Mysticism ultimately points to the goal of spiritual life, which is man's union with God and finding Him in his soul.

What deserves to be noted, finally, is that the God of the mystics is situated above all human conceptions of Him. For, according to the mystics, we are more able to say what God is not than what He actually is. Therefore, talking about God can only be symbolic, according to Tamayo-Acosta. And although symbols point to God, they are never identical with Him, nor are they able to exhaust His mystery. Nevertheless, they bring one closer to God and allow one to experience Him as an incomprehensible Mystery that transcends all human conceptions of God and what man can express about Him through language (cf. Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 217–18).

This is evidenced, e.g., by the fact that the God of whom the mystics speak has nothing of omnipotence on the model of the mighty and rulers of this world. On the contrary, He reveals Himself as "Nothing," that is, as pure and radical Otherness. As the God who is weak, suffering and crucified. As the One who allows Himself to be removed from the world, and yet, as God with us and helping us, because He listens to the voice of the oppressed and takes their side. He defends life and is merciful. He desires justice and to do good. He calls us to look with confidence and hope into the future, when there will be a new earth and a new heaven on the one hand, and on the other, to be involved in the transformation of this world right now.

According to Tamayo-Acosta, a similar vision of God to the mystics is presented today by liberation theology, among others. What connects it to mysticism, in addition to the image of God discussed above, is also its attention to the fact that both contemplation and practice play an important role in knowing and approaching God. For God can be reached, as Jon Sobrino states, by way of "contemplation and action" (1994, 39), or as Leonardo Boff writes of being a person "contemplative in liberation" (*contemplativus in liberatione)* (1984, 203–9; cf. also Gutiérrez 1971, 166–70). Knowing God is therefore possible, according to liberation theologians, only through prayer, contemplation, which, however, must find its realization and extension in the practice of life. In other words, it is a matter of contemplating who God is and how

He acts toward us that shapes our attitude toward our neighbors. For faith finds its fulfillment in the realization of the commandment to love God and neighbor.

Therefore, according to Tamayo-Acosta (cf. 1998, 210–211), the God who has a future is not an all-powerful God at all, but paradoxically a suffering and crucified God. A God who surrenders himself into the hands of men and allows himself to be disposed of. A God who "does not care for himself and is ready to accept any form and shape of dispossession of himself . . . . He walks with divine consistency on the path of weakness and on the path of love that is ready for anything," (Szymik 2004, 27) who does not retreat from anything, even from accepting the cross and submitting to death. Such a God is the God revealed by Jesus Christ, who is the true *locus theologicus* of knowing God as He wanted to make Himself known. He exceeds all human expectations and ideas about Him. For He reveals Himself in a way that we do not expect (cf. Castillo 2019, 55–57). This means, according to the Spanish theologian, that the God revealed by Jesus is situated above what both political theism and theological theism say about Him. It also means that talking about God must free itself from the understanding of divinity drawn from Greek philosophy, according to which the essence of divinity includes impatience and immutability (cf. Tamayo-Acosta 1998, 218–23; cf. also Kasper 1984, 189–97; Castillo 2019, 51–54; Gonzàlez de Cardedal 2006, 361). Moreover, the God of Greek philosophy, which was often referred to in the past and on which the theological discourse about God was based, was "more the God of the cosmos than of man." (Gesché 2001, 19) This often constituted one of the causes leading to unbelief and atheism, because man in contact with the Absolute thus conceived, as Maurice Merleau-Ponty expressed it, dies. Also because man today, as in every other epoch, "cannot bear, can no longer bear a God who is impatient and beyond history." (Gesché 2001, 18)[10]

Therefore, there is a need to abandon the theistic God that has weighed so heavily on us, and reinvent the unknown God. It is also necessary, according to Tamayo-Acosta, to return to the God of the mystics, who present Him as the incomprehensible Mystery, "Source of all goods," "Water of life." Thus, to restore the validity and importance of symbolic language in discourse about God. "For all knowledge of God is ultimately symbolic knowledge. And every confession of faith in God is nothing but a symbol of faith." (Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 218)

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10 "We must overcome the God of theological theism, which is an entity separate from other entities and a part, admittedly the most important part of the whole reality, but ultimately subordinated to the whole. This God deprives man of his subjectivity and does not allow for the development of human freedom." (Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 217–18)

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Conclusions

The Spanish theologian's proposal on how we can and should speak about God today raises an issue that is constantly relevant. It also refers to the different images of God that are present and functioning not only within different religions, but often also within the same religion. The topicality of this issue is further indicated, on the one hand, by the religious pluralism present in modern societies, which raises the question of whether there is only one God and whether He is ultimately the God of all people? As well as the question of which religious conception of God is true? On the other hand, the fact that the word "God," however it is understood, is and will always be the primary point of reference and orientation for man to understand himself and the world (cf. Rahner 1976, 57–59). Therefore, one of the important tasks facing theology is to attempt to approximate God, who, although He has revealed Himself in history, as the Christian faith professes, still remains the Unspeakable Mystery.

The witness that conveys the truth of this revelation is the Holy Scripture. Its author is God, for in it is contained His word addressed to man, which was written down under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit by men chosen by God, whom He used and used their abilities to "act in and through them, all and only what He Himself willed, to convey in writing as true authors." (*DV* 11) The fact that God spoke through people and in human ways requires knowing what He actually wanted to communicate to us, in which hermeneutics, which is the art of interpretation and understanding, plays an important role. It has its basis in Scripture itself and in the history of its interpretation over the centuries. The question of interpreting Scripture is also given great importance today, which has been fostered by the development of philosophical hermeneutics, which proposes a multiplicity of hermeneutical methods. As a result, the question arises as to which of these methods makes it possible to correctly understand the profound reality about which Scripture speaks, and at the same time is able to grasp and show in an appropriate way its relevance for modern man (cf. Pontificia Commissione Biblica 1993, 68–69). Such a hermeneutic, according to Tamayo-Acosta, is the hermeneutic of solidarity and feminist hermeneutics, among others. This is because the former values the ethical and communal nature of faith and takes into account the lives of marginalized groups today. The second, on the other hand, using the assumptions developed by the hermeneutics of suspicion, makes it possible to protect the interpretation of revealed texts from being subordinated to anyone's interests or any ideology.

At this point, it is worth noting that the problem that feminist hermeneutics brings with it is that the exegesis proposed by it, due to the fact that it is based on biases, can and often does lead to a very biased interpretation of biblical texts and the creation of a hypothetical reconstruction that finds no basis in the biblical texts (cf. Pontificia Commissione Biblica 1993, 62). For the rest, the Spanish theologian himself, as has been said, sees the fundamental problem of feminist theology in the

simple attribution of feminine qualities to God, since this does not lead at all to freedom from the androcentric model, which is what this type of theology seeks and sets as its essential goal. Nor does it serve to speak of God in a more inclusive way. Moreover, it "continues to foster the subordination of women, making the patriarchal symbol merely something less dangerous." (Tamayo-Acosta 2004, 97)

Tamayo-Acosta, while stressing the importance and relevance of hermeneutics in theology, advocates the uninterrupted necessity of interpretation, i.e., one that moves in a hermeneutical circle that exists between subject and object and "knows only interpretations of interpretations that, for their part, lead to new interpretations." (International Theological Commission 1989, A.I/1) Such an understanding of hermeneutics loses sight of what should be the goal of its search. That goal is the attempt to reach an objective and unchanging truth, that is, one that obliges in every historical situation and in every culture (cf. International Theological Commission 1988, III/I–III). It is not surprising, therefore, that the Spanish theologian, states that truth is no longer to be seen, according to the understanding of hermeneutics he proposes, as *an adaequatio intellectus cum re*, but as something that is constantly occurring and subject to constant interpretation. Thus, he comes close to the postmodern understanding of truth, which undermines and denies the existence of a single and objective truth.

This has practical consequences in Tamayo-Acosta's proposed understanding of discourse about God, in which he advocates speaking and representing God only in metaphorical and symbolic ways. At the same time, he adds, with which it is difficult not to agree, that none of the symbols applied to God can be ascribed an absolute character, i.e. claiming the right to capture and express adequately the fullness of the mystery of God. The advantage of this proposition is that, first, speaking symbolically about God affects the imagination and serves to emphasize that God is an incomprehensible Mystery. Second, it also takes into account what modern philosophy says about the meaning and importance of symbol and symbolic thinking.

The Spanish theologian also advocates for an interpretation of theological language so that it reflects God's universal love and solidarity with all people, regardless of gender, race or social status. He therefore insists on the need to use inclusive language in relation to God, arguing that traditional patriarchal images of God exclude the experience and perspective of women and other marginalized groups (cf. Tamayo-Acosta 2011, 310–311). In this regard, it is worth noting that inclusive language is not essentially a language that contests classic images of God, but rather an attempt to supplement and enrich them with new aspects. There is, however, a risk that this type of language can be used to combat traditional images of God and traditional ways of speaking about God, if it is subordinated to some kind of ideology and its intended goals. In this case, instead of uniting, inclusive language can become a cause of division and exclusion within religious communities of people who are attached to the traditional language of faith. This occurs when attempts are made

to impose this type of language on everyone as the only valid and most appropriate one. The excessive inclusiveness of the language about God can finally lead to the loss of specific features and nuances proper to individual religious traditions in their descriptions of God.

One of the weaknesses of the proposal presented by the Spanish theologian is that he says nothing about the fact that in Christian understanding there is a concrete reality behind the symbol, or speech using symbolic language. In other words, a truth that cannot be exchanged for other symbols and that can be put into a transmittable conceptual system (cf. Wagner 2003, 27–29). This is because the Christian faith is "the confession of truths that have a definite content, which cannot be freely interpreted, because it is unchangeable," (Ratzinger 1982, 343) which also applies to the question of God and talking about Him. It also presupposes a community of faith, which was first the environment for the creation of the New Testament biblical texts, and then for their understanding and interpretation. Therefore, what distinguishes biblical hermeneutics from other types of hermeneutics is its particular subject matter, as well as the specific interpretive assumptions it makes (cf. Pontificia Commissione Biblica 1993, 70).

Another weakness is that the Spanish theologian, in his proposal, does not explicitly consider the Christological criterion, which is the decisive criterion in what concerns the interpretation of biblical texts. This is because this criterion lends concreteness to the professed faith, since it links the faith to an event and to the story of Jesus of Nazareth, who lived and died at a specific time and rose from the dead. It also indicates that the Christian faith goes beyond purely symbolic cognition, which does not at all mean that it negates its value and significance. What is critical to the Christian faith and its understanding is what it recognizes as truth, which cannot be exchanged for or replaced by other symbols.

Finally, the aforementioned Christological criterion fulfills an important function in what concerns understanding, presenting and speaking of the God of revelation, which is taken into account this time by Tamayo-Acosta. The fact that God has revealed Himself in a unique way in the person of Jesus Christ, who, because He is the incarnate Son of God and thus also the most perfect interpreter of God, does not at all mean that God ceases to be a hidden God. With this nevertheless Jesus Christ reveals to us the unknowable mystery, namely that God is the Father and therefore directs us to God as our Father (cf. Dupuis 1993, 9–10). Therefore, the Christian understanding and speaking of God is based on what His Son has revealed and communicated to us, which does not mean, as has been said, that God ceases to be an incomprehensible Mystery for us. However, in Christ this Mystery has become infinitely closer to us (cf. Rahner 1962, 11–13).

Such a God is spoken of, as the Spanish theologian rightly points out, by Christian mysticism, which situates God above all human conceptions of Him. Mysticism thus accentuates God's Otherness, His unknowability and transcendence. For it is

easier to say of God what He is not than what He is, since He is "an Infinity always prior to the act of cognition, an Incomprehensibility always above all that is and can be conceived apart from Him." (Winling 1983, 322) Mysticism, therefore, directs people back to the realm of *the sacred*, which, according to Tamayo-Acosta, should also become the primary task of theology today. For this reason, he sees mysticism as a bridge that can connect different religions and the differing concepts of God present in them. And thus as a starting point in interreligious dialogue. Finally, mysticism may be the most appropriate response to both the contemporary crisis of religiosity and the spread of atheism, since it is not uncommon for different competing and even opposing visions and images of God to be at their root. Finally, mysticism performs an important function, as it awakens and preserves people's sensitivity to God. Therefore, the future of God from a strictly religious point of view depends, according to the Spanish theologian, on the ability of believers to present and speak properly about God, and to justify this both within their own religious denomination and through the witness of their lives in accordance with their professed faith. It depends on people who have been touched by God, as is the case with mystics, whose spiritual experience and testimony of life make God present in our world.

The Spanish theologian's proposal ultimately has the advantage of drawing attention to the language, metaphors and images we use in our discourse about God. For his point is that with these means of expression at our disposal, we should never lose sight of the fact that our presentation and speech about God is always limited, since God is and will remain an incomprehensible Mystery. Therefore, it seems right to formulate his postulate that divinity should not be understood in exclusive terms, but by means of the category of the dynamic and harmonious relationship that exists between what appear to be opposites, such as that God can be simultaneously omnipotent and weak, present and hidden, suffering and compassionate. This postulate directs us to the God revealed by Jesus Christ, on whom, by looking at him, it only becomes clear what can be said about God. An example of this is the understanding of "the <omnipotence>, <sovereignty> of God, which only becomes clear at the manger and at the foot of the cross. Here, where God, the Lord of the universe, dies as a sacrifice given to the most miserable creature, it is only here that the concept of God's omnipotence can truly be formulated. This is also the place where a new concept of power is born, a new concept of dominion and greatness," (Ratzinger 1968, 114) which has nothing to do with violence, but with love that knows no bounds.

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REVIEW/RECENZJA

Andrzej Napiórkowski, *O większy skandal chrześcijaństwa. Postulaty dekonstruktywizmu Kościoła i świata* (Pelplin: Bernardinum, 2024). Ss. 158. 49,90 PLN. ISBN: 978-83-8333-282-6

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Monografia o. prof. Andrzeja Napiórkowskiego OSPPE *O większy skandal chrześcijaństwa. Postulaty dekonstruktywizmu Kościoła i świata* nie tylko wprowadza w kluczowe problemy, z jakimi zmagają się współcześni chrześcijanie, ale również wskazuje istotne kierunki refleksji filozoficzno-teologicznej, aby przeciwdziałać ich marginalizacji w postnowoczesnym społeczeństwie. Głoszenie Ewangelii było, jest i będzie skandalem oraz aporycznym paradoksem przekraczającym granice ludzkiej racjonalności. Jest to heroiczne zadanie, które wymaga czerpania ze skarbca doktrynalno-liturgiczno-duchowej Tradycji Kościoła oraz uwzględnienia różnego rodzaju aktualnych kontekstów i perspektyw społeczno-kulturowych. Zaproponowana przez Autora dekonstruktywistyczna analiza sytuacji Kościoła i świata stanowi zaproszenie skierowane do czytelników, aby w perspektywie trynitarnej pogłębiali swoją chrześcijańską tożsamość oraz z mocą dawali świadectwo o Bogu, który jest Miłością.

We wprowadzeniu Autor wyjaśnia, że „tytuł książki, jak i jej struktura i treść, są w pewnym sensie prowokacją, ukazującą paradoksy chrześcijaństwa, które wielu odczytuje jako skandale" (s. 7). Pierwsza część tytułu, a mianowicie „O większy skandal chrześcijaństwa", zdaje się mieć przede wszystkim odniesienie do podwójnego paradoksu: krzyża i zmartwychwstania. Do wspólnoty chrześcijan w Koryncie św. Paweł pisał:

> Nauka bowiem krzyża głupstwem jest dla tych, co idą na zatracenie, mocą Bożą zaś dla nas, którzy dostępujemy zbawienia. [. . .] Tak więc, gdy Żydzi żądają znaków, a Grecy szukają mądrości, my głosimy Chrystusa ukrzyżowanego, który jest zgorszeniem dla Żydów, a głupstwem dla pogan, dla tych zaś, którzy są powołani, tak spośród Żydów, jak i spośród Greków, Chrystusem, mocą Bożą i mądrością Bożą. To bowiem, co jest głupstwem u Boga, przewyższa mądrością ludzi, a co jest słabe u Boga, przewyższa mocą ludzi (1 Kor 1,18.22–25).

Krzyż jest paradoksem, gdyż to narzędzie kaźni jest równocześnie narzędziem zwycięstwa i zbawienia. Zmartwychwstanie Chrystusa ma decydujące znaczenie

o istnieniu lub nieistnieniu wiary chrześcijańskiej oraz Kościoła. Przesłanie o znaczeniu zmartwychwstania Chrystusa stanowi zwieńczenie świadectwa wiary św. Pawła skierowanego do wspólnoty korynckiej: „Jeżeli Chrystus nie zmartwychwstał, daremne jest nasze nauczanie, próżna jest także wasza wiara" (1 Kor 15,14). Paradoks krzyża i zmartwychwstania jest podstawą wiary w Jezusa Chrystusa jako Syna Bożego oraz odważnego świadczenia o tym, że Chrystus prawdziwie zmartwychwstał. Paradoks krzyża i zmartwychwstania to najważniejsze przesłanie Dobrej Nowiny. Każdy chrześcijanin powinien być świadomy tej szczególnej powinności i wraz ze św. Pawłem wyznawać: „Biada mi, gdybym nie głosił Ewangelii" (1 Kor 9,16). Głoszenie Ewangelii jest ponadczasową misją Kościoła jako wspólnoty wierzących i misją każdego włączonego w Ciało Chrystusa. Współcześnie jest to bardzo trudne zadanie ze względu na kryzys wynikający z wielu „patologicznych przejawów tak w łonie samego chrześcijaństwa, jak i w środowiskach poza nim" (s. 12). Dobrze się zatem stało, że Napiórkowski odważył się „podnieść głos krytyki wobec późnokapitalistycznej laickiej kultury, tak w wydaniu prawicowym, jak i lewicowym", nie godząc się na akceptację „miejsca i roli chrześcijan – a zwłaszcza hierarchów – w konformistycznym aliansie z tymi formami cywilizacji, w których doszło do wyobcowania z wartości chrześcijańskich" (s. 13).

Druga część tytułu recenzowanej monografii „Postulaty dekonstruktywizmu Kościoła i świata" jest bardziej zagadkowa. Autor użył pojęcia „dekonstruktywizm", które przede wszystkim oznacza nurt architektoniczny popularny w latach 80. XX wieku, cechujący się rozdrobnieniem, brakiem symetrii, harmonii i ciągłości w opozycji do zasad geometrii eklidesowej. Architektura dekonstruktywistyczna wyraża kontrolowany chaos zarówno w formach zewnętrznych, jak i w estetyce wnętrza. Teoretyczne podstawy ruchu dekonstruktywistycznego zostały opracowane przez francusko- -algierskiego filozofa Jacques'a Derridy, który miał na celu podważenie z góry założonych przekonań opartych na rozumie i logice, poprzez „złamanie hierarchii opozycji" i krytykę podejścia „logocentrycznego", „preferującego mowę przed pismem oraz obecność nad nieobecnością". Derrida postulował relatywizację klasycznych założeń filozoficznych, tzw. opozycji binarnych (fr. *oppositions binaires*): prawda – kłamstwo, obecność – brak czy męskość – żeńskość (por. s. 19), co doprowadziło do „rozwoju nowych koncepcji i podejść w naukach humanistycznych" (s. 19). O ile dekonstruktywizm w znaczeniu filozoficznym i społeczno-kulturowym ma znaczenie negatywne, to zdecydowanie pozytywnie pojęcie to zostało potraktowane przez Napiórkowskiego w podtytule monografii. Autor bowiem jest przekonany, że „chrześcijańska dekonstrukcja tak religijności, jak i świata rozpoczęła się już z Osobą i orędziem Jezusa z Nazaretu" (s. 19). Zdaniem Autora „w świetle dekonstrukcyjnej perspektywy, ale czynionej w przestrzeni wiary Kościoła, łatwiej będzie dostrzec, że szerzące się (neo)marksistowskie ujęcie Ewangelii w niektórych kręgach chrześcijan skupia się na aspektach odnoszących się bardziej do spraw społecznych niż do wyzwolenia człowieka z grzechu" (s. 16). Tego rodzaju dekonstrukcja ma być „czyniona

w kościelnej przestrzeni, gdzie zmysł wiary ludu Bożego nie dopuści do zafałszowań" (s. 20), „które weszły do naszego postrzegania i opisywania kościelnej i pozakościelnej rzeczywistości" (s. 21). Chrześcijańska dekonstrukcja „jest [. . .] wezwaniem do porzucenia integrystycznej i tradycyjnej postaci chrześcijaństwa, aby ewolucyjnie przejść do tworzenia jego wersji postmodernistycznej" (s. 143). Według Napiórkowskiego proces ten może zostać urzeczywistniony, gdyż „samym sercem potencjału dekonstrukcji jest Jezus Chrystus, który zawiera w swojej Osobie i czynach prawdziwy i największy paradoks" (s. 143). W zakończeniu swego dzieła Napiórkowski podkreśla, że

> w skandalu chrześcijaństwa znajduje się niewyczerpany potencjał dekonstrukcji nie tylko otaczającego go świata, ale zmiany w nim samym. Już ze swej istoty Objawienie chrześcijańskie [. . .] nieustannie przynosi rozdarcie i domaga się wciąż od nowa rewizji zastanej rzeczywistości. Element rozkładu i zmiany znajduje się bowiem w samym sercu tajemnicy Królestwa Bożego, które głosił na ziemi Boski Nazarejczyk (s. 144).

Przedstawienie istoty chrześcijańskiej dekonstrukcji, będące przedmiotem rozważań pierwszej części książki, stanowi zasadne wprowadzenie w jej tematykę, zarówno w wymiarze historycznym, jak i teologicznym. Autor, odwołując się do Świętej Tradycji, nauczania ojców Kościoła i wpływowych teologów, w drugiej i trzeciej części swego dzieła przeprowadza czytelnika od pierwszych pisarzy chrześcijańskich i ich nowatorskiego mówienia o Bogu do pochwały postmodernistycznych paradoksów. W odniesieniu do akapitu o „świętych pisarzach lub tych, którzy poprawnie mówili o Boskości Chrystusa" (s. 26) należy skorygować, że spośród wymienionych przez Napiórkowskiego „Teologów", czyli św. Jana Ewangelisty, św. Atanazego Aleksandryjskiego oraz św. Grzegorza z Nazjanzu, jedynie pierwszego i trzeciego chrześcijański Wschód obdarzył tym tytułem. Do wschodniochrześcijańskiej trójcy teologów zalicza się jeszcze św. Symeona Nowego Teologa – wielkiego mistyka, który w poetycki sposób opisywał swe doświadczenie Boga. Ważnym przypomnieniem dla współczesnych chrześcijan jest nauczanie Pseudo-Dionizego Areopagity o poznaniu jednego Boga w Trójcy Przenajświętszych Osób oraz rozróżnieniu pomiędzy teologią afirmatywną (katafatyczną) a teologią negatywną (apofatyczną), dzięki któremu możliwe staje się uniknięcie Jego urzeczowiającej antropomorfizacji (por. s. 30–32).

Od początku chrześcijaństwa problem pojmowania i znaczenia Tradycji ma wielkie znaczenie i niejednokrotnie stanowił przyczynę sporów i kontrowersji. Postulat Autora zawarty w tytule trzeciej części recenzowanej książki – „Ponowne odczytywanie dylematów Tradycji" – został osadzony w analizach odnoszących się do źródeł chrześcijańskiej wiary. Zdaniem Napiórkowskiego „Ewangeliczne rozumienie dekonstrukcji to wzywanie Ducha Świętego, aby odnowił nasze myślenie i działanie, gdyż chodzi o to, aby pozwolić Tradycji być kreatywną i odnawiającą" (s. 33). Weryfikacja Tradycji podlegała zmianom na przestrzeni wieków. Trzy kryteria jej

weryfikacji, czyli reguła wiary (łac. *regula fidei*), kanon i sukcesja apostolska wyrażająca się w urzędzie biskupim (por. s. 44), po Soborze Trydenckim zostały zasadniczo zredukowane do „miejsca i funkcji Urzędu Nauczycielskiego", co sprawiło, że „urząd hierarchiczny zaczął być pojmowany jako przedmiot i organ Tradycji, a z czasem nawet z nią utożsamiany" (s. 48). Dopiero w konstytucji dogmatycznej Soboru Watykańskiego II o Bożym Objawieniu zostało „zaprezentowane sakramentalno--pneumatologiczne rozumienie Tradycji" (s. 49) w połączeniu z myślą patrystyczną. W swym teologicznym namyśle nad Tradycją Napiórkowski zauważa, że jej treścią „jest interpretacja historii jako dziejów zbawienia" (s. 50), a jej integralności „strzeże Duch Święty" (s. 51), stąd też „nie wolno jej rozumieć jako czegoś niezmiennego czy skostniałego" (s. 51). Choć szokujące może się wydawać sformułowanie tytułu punktu 3.6, a mianowicie „Pochwała postmodernistycznych paradoksów", to po dogłębnym zapoznaniu się z jego treścią można zgodzić się z tezami w nim zawartymi. Faktycznie, jeśli przyjmie się, że „zmiany przynależą do rozwoju cywilizacyjnego ludzkości" (s. 58), to nie ma innej drogi, jak rozumieć Tradycję jako „żywą Ewangelię" (s. 59) i w tym celu konieczne są „dalsze prace nad objaśnianiem i pogłębianiem Tradycji" (s. 60), gdyż „obecnie nie wystarcza obalać błędne stanowiska przez przytaczanie znanych formuł, lecz należy wypracować odpowiedzi na nowe pytania w dobie postmodernistycznych przemian" (s. 62). Tego rodzaju strategię mieli już ojcowie Kościoła, którzy poszukiwali odpowiedzi na pytania, jak skutecznie głosić Dobrą Nowinę oraz jak odnosić się do ówczesnych problemów filozoficznych, społecznych czy kulturowych. Georges Florovsky, jeden z najwybitniejszych teologów prawosławnych XX wieku, był zdania, że należy osiągać „ducha Ojców" (gr. *phronema ton Patron*), czyli z ich odwagą i z wykorzystaniem dostępnej mądrości i wiedzy zwiastować Ewangelię oraz reagować na dylematy współczesności.

Misterium Kościoła stanowi treść części czwartej zatytułowanej „Ku skandalowi ludzkiego Kościoła Trójosobowego Boga". W pełni można się zgodzić z konstatacją, że „nie jest łatwo odkrywać prawdziwe misterium eklezjalne" (s. 64). Podstawą do tego, aby nie redukować rzeczywistości Kościoła do „treści Objawienia czy też do prawd wiary" zawartych w Tradycji i Biblii jest pojmowanie Kościoła jako wspólnoty Bosko-ludzkiej, czyli przestrzeni, „gdzie ma miejsce nieustanne uwielbienie Trójosobowego Boga" (s. 65). Znana od starożytności zasada *Ecclesia semper reformanda* nie powinna być odnoszona jedynie do przemian instytucjonalnych, lecz współcześnie należy ją traktować jako zadanie polegające na „zmianie mentalności wierzącego", „jego nawrócenie i większe przylgnięcie do Chrystusa", a także niesienie „autentycznej Ewangelii całemu światu" (s. 71). To bowiem „dzięki Trójcy Świętej w Kościele jest niewyczerpana moc do jego nieustannej odnowy" (s. 74). Skoro „Kościół jest przede wszystkim rzeczywistością trynitarną", to w pełni zasadna jest konkluzja Autora, że „Kościół ciągle jeszcze się staje" (s. 80).

W części piątej Napiórkowski wyjaśnia istotę „skandalu" w odniesieniu do chrześcijaństwa. Stwierdzenie, że „galopujące procesy sekularyzacji, a nade wszystko

agresywnego sekularyzmu i wrogiego ateizmu, już spowodowały wyraźne rozluźnienie więzów wielu ochrzczonych z rzeczywistością kościelną" (s. 84), jest punktem wyjścia do wyjaśnienia, że nie ma on na myśli różnego rodzaju skandalów moralnych, finansowych czy politycznych, lecz zauważalne powszechnie „odrzucanie lub połowiczne przyjmowanie idei ewangelicznych, ujawniających i sprzeciwiających się pogańskiej mentalności" (s. 85). W kolejnych punktach tej części książki Autor przedstawia dekodery skandalu (wiarę i rozum), znaczenie dogmatu trynitarnego dla tożsamości chrześcijańskiej, nieracjonalność Wcielenia Syna Bożego, prawdę o dziewictwie Bożej Rodzicielki, wezwanie Chrystusa do miłości nieprzyjaciół, skandal krzyża, skandal powstania Jezusa z martwych oraz udzielanie się Boga jako pokarm w sakramencie Eucharystii. Zgodnie z kilkuwiekową tradycją dogmatyczną chrześcijaństwa zachodniego Napiórkowski stoi na stanowisku, że „kluczem do zrozumienia skandalu chrześcijaństwa w jego różnych odsłonach jest dar wiary oczyszczanej przez rozum" (s. 89). W teologii chrześcijaństwa wschodniego podkreśla się bardziej związek wiary z umysłem (gr. *nous*, łac. *mens*) niż z rozumem (gr. *dianoia*, łac. *ratio*). Umysł bowiem pojmowany jest jako duchowe centrum człowieka, które ma decydujące znaczenie w relacji do Boga i demonów, co znalazło swoje odzwierciedlenie we wschodniochrześcijańskiej soteriologii. Autor recenzowanej monografii nie podejmuje refleksji nad pochodzeniem Ducha Świętego (łac. *Filioque*), chociaż powołuje się na najważniejszych ojców Kościoła wschodniego, którzy mieli istotny wpływ na dogmatyczne dookreślenie relacji wewnątrztrynitarnych (por. s. 93). Jest to nie do końca zrozumiałe w kontekście ekumenicznego charakteru całej monografii. Należy docenić przedstawienie w książce siedmiu skutków zmartwychwstania Jezusa Chrystusa (por. s. 110–113), gdyż mają one ogromne znaczenie dla wszystkich chrześcijan, zarówno w perspektywie duchowej, jak i soteriologicznej.

Logicznym następstwem części piątej monografii jest jej część szósta, której tytuł został sformułowany imperatywnie: „Rozwijać duchowość". Trzeba koncentrować się na rozwijaniu duchowości chrześcijańskiej opartej na zasadach Ewangelii, aby nie poddawać się „rosnącemu otumanieniu nauką sprowadzoną zaledwie do *empirical sciences*, której zasięg i założenia bez przerwy się zmieniają" (s. 119). Zdaniem paulińskiego teologa z Krakowa rozwijanie duchowości powinno dokonywać się przede wszystkim poprzez praktykowanie modlitwy prywatnej oraz uczestnictwo we wspólnotowej Świętej Liturgii. Istotne są również badania naukowe odnoszące się do teologii duchowości, gdyż są pomocne w lepszym zrozumieniu życia duchowego człowieka oraz praktyk pobożnościowych, które pomagają w modlitwie do Boga. Ważnym podsumowaniem rozważań na temat znaczenia teologii duchowości jest teza, że „teologia duchowości nie może nie być trynitarna, gdyż takie odniesienie zapewnia jej potencjał dekonstrukcyjny niezbędny do demaskowania fałszywych wizjonerów, histeryków, ekscentryków czy osób z psychicznymi urojeniami" (s. 128). Autor słusznie podkreśla, iż „takie zmiany społeczne, jak postęp technologiczny, globalizacja, kwestia demografii, stawiają przed Kościołem w Europie pytania dotyczące

adaptacji do nowych realiów społecznych i kulturowych oraz redefinicji jego roli społecznej" (s. 130). Stąd też ważnym zadaniem, zarówno dla hierarchii kościelnej, jak i wiernych świeckich, jest dostrzeganie różnego rodzaju „przemian natury duchowej, religijnej, społecznej, kulturowej, gospodarczej i politycznej" (s. 130), które wpływają na zanikanie ludowej i tradycyjnej pobożności (por. s. 130).

Dialog chrześcijański i dialog międzyreligijny stanowią treść ostatniej siódmej części recenzowanej monografii. Wgląd w dzieje Kościoła w pełni potwierdza zdanie Napiórkowskiego, że „jedność i podziały wśród chrześcijan jawią się jako pewien paradoks, który towarzyszy wyznawcom Chrystusa od samego początku" (s. 133). Warunkiem autentycznego dialogu jest pokora i odwaga, aby uznać własne winy oraz nie zdradzić swej tożsamości (por. 134). W punkcie zatytułowanym „Ekumeniczny skandal" Autor przytacza znamienne przekonanie kard. Kurta Kocha wskazującego, że „ekumenizm to nie tylko wymiana idei, ale to wymiana darów, gdyż prowadzi do wzajemnego ubogacenia" (s. 136). Nie jest to zadanie łatwe, gdyż Kościoły chrześcijańskie oprócz różnic teologicznych naznaczone są bolesnymi doświadczeniami przeszłości, odmiennością kulturową i uwarunkowaniami społeczno-politycznymi. Stąd też wynika, że zauważalny jest swoisty paradoks ekumenizmu. Autor jego istotę wyjaśnia następująco: „Z jednej strony mamy dążyć do promowania jedności i współpracy między różnymi Kościołami chrześcijańskimi, a z drugiej – w tym zbliżeniu różnych denominacji chrześcijańskich mamy odnaleźć i pogłębić swoją własną tożsamość wyznaniową" (s. 139). Działania na rzecz jedności chrześcijan zdecydowanie różnią się od działań nastawionych na „wymianę poglądów i doświadczeń przedstawicieli różnych religii, w celu zrozumienia i uznania różnic oraz poszukiwania wspólnych wartości" (s. 140). Dialog międzyreligijny jest „ważny dla promowania pokoju, właściwie rozumianej tolerancji i wzajemnego szacunku pomiędzy różnymi religiami i tradycjami" (s. 140). Według Napiórkowskiego zasada dekonstruktywizmu może przynieść wielkie korzyści w dialogu międzyreligijnym, gdyż jej zastosowanie prowadzi „do zakwestionowania istniejących struktur wiedzy i władzy" oraz „może prowokować do krytycznej analizy niektórych zbędnych i anachronicznych tradycji religijnych w kontekście ich historii, kontekstu kulturowego i skłonności do dominacji czy wykluczenia" (s. 142).

W zakończeniu podsumowującym chrześcijański potencjał dekonstrukcji Autor podkreśla, że „element rozkładu i zmiany znajduje się [. . .] w samy sercu tajemnicy Królestwa Bożego" (s. 144). Współcześnie coraz bardziej zauważalna jest potrzeba „nie tylko dekonstrukcji samego chrześcijaństwa w obecnej postaci", ale również „poważna konieczność dekonstrukcji świata" (s. 144). W jaki sposób to ma się dokonać? To pytanie pozostaje pytaniem otwartym. Jeszcze trudniejszym pytaniem jest pytanie o to, czy – a jeśli tak, to w jakim stopniu – Kościół ma się dostosować do postmodernistycznych wymagań, czy może raczej to świat, w którym żyjemy, ma się dostosować do Kościoła. Zdaniem Napiórkowskiego należy podążać w kierunku wypracowywania autonomii zarówno Kościoła, jak i świata, z poszanowaniem ich

odrębności (por. s. 144). Kryzys chrześcijaństwa, jakiego doświadczamy w ciągu ostatnich kilkudziesięciu lat, uświadamia, że urzeczywistnianie powyższego postulatu jest zadaniem bardzo trudnym i wymagającym. Nadmierne korzystanie z kategorii egzystencjalnych i fenomenologicznych w dyskursie teologicznym oraz uleganie przez teologów wpływom innych dyscyplin naukowych narzucającym swoje cele i treści często skutkuje relatywizmem i synkretyzmem, co się przekłada na brak radykalizmu w głoszeniu Ewangelii i odchodzeniu od tradycyjnego nauczania Kościoła.

Monografia Napiórkowskiego *O większy skandal chrześcijaństwa. Postulaty dekonstruktywizmu Kościoła i świata* jest ważnym głosem w dyskusji na temat aktualnej kondycji i przyszłości chrześcijaństwa. Można mieć nadzieję, że w kolejnych swych dziełach Autor podejmie jeszcze bardziej wnikliwe refleksje, które będą pomocne zarówno dla młodego pokolenia teologów, jak i dążących do zbawienia wiernych.