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ARTICLES/ARTYKUŁY



Various Methods of Introducing a New Character in Hebrew Bible Stories

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*To Professor Jean-Louis Ska, SJ
with gratitude*

Abstract: The introduction of a character in a biblical narrative is intimately linked to that character's narrative function, a connection that is reflected in the stylistic strategies employed by the biblical authors. This study aims to identify the primary stylistic techniques used by biblical writers to bring new characters onto the "stage" of their narratives. The first part of the study, employing narrative analysis, explores the various modes of introducing the protagonist in relation to the plot structure, the stylistic constructions adopted by the authors, and the presentation, characterization, and narrative function of the protagonist's name at the moment of their entrance into the narrative. The second part of the research focuses on the entrance of secondary characters in relation to the plot, and on how they are presented and characterized at the moment of their appearance into the narrative. The analysis reveals that protagonists are typically introduced at the very beginning of the narrative, generally through one of three principal methods: narration, plot exposition, or *in medias res*. In contrast, secondary characters, as the analysis demonstrates, appear at various points in the narrative, depending on their narrative function. Unlike protagonists, they are not usually given an extensive narrative introduction; rather, they are allotted limited space within the exposition or are inserted directly into the dramatic action through their activity. Their introduction is typically accompanied by minimal descriptive elements and is often connected to an already-present character within the narrative plot.

Keywords: main character, protagonist, secondary character, type scene, exposition, narrative program, stylistic constructions, characterization

A character in a literary work is not given to us in an immediate synchronic totality, as in a painting or a portrait (Vignolo 2003, 21). In fact, each character appears at a precise moment in the storyline; he appears and then disappears, according to his role in the plot. A narrative without characters would be like an empty picture: indeed, "events without existents" (Chatman 2010, 117)—that is, without characters, cannot exist. In the universe of the story, even a biblical story characterized by the "predominance of action and a lack of interest in the psychological evolution of the characters" (Ska 2012, 131), the events are determined by the presence of the characters who act, or are acted upon by others, and thus determine the evolution of

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the plot. In the life of a character, his appearance in the story, that is, his first encounter with the reader, is particularly relevant. It therefore seems legitimate, almost to the point of being “intriguing,” to wonder how a new character is introduced in the plots of biblical stories.

This question is the subject of the present study: it will focus first on some protagonists in the Hebrew Bible stories, primarily on some of the main characters, and secondarily on some of the major characters, whom we will identify as secondary characters, because of their lesser importance with respect to the protagonists (Ska 2012, 136). In analysing the text, we shall attempt to discover the relationship between the entrance of the main character and the plot of the story, by indicating and examining the typology of the introduction of the main character. We shall also examine the different modalities with which the characters are introduced into the story. We shall pay attention to the stylistic constructions used by the biblical authors to introduce the character and characterise him at the moment when he comes on the scene. The goal of the present study is not to examine the introduction of all the Hebrew Bible characters, because the list would be too long, but rather above all to seek to present the principal strategies used by the biblical authors to bring a new character onto the stage of their stories.

1. Introduction of a Main Character in the Plot of a Story

The main character is indispensable to the plot. The entire story revolves around him, and it is he who guides the course of events, often taking on the role of a “hero” (Ska 2012, 136). Our objective, however, is not to examine the whole evolution of the story, but to analyse only the first moment, that is, the protagonist’s entrance on the scene. How does the story of a hero begin in the Bible? What characteristics of the hero emerge at this point?

In biblical stories, the main character is usually introduced at the beginning of the story concerning him,¹ but not always in the same way. From the analyses we can see that sometimes the biblical authors dedicate an entire narrative to the main character, while others give him only a few sentences in the exposition of the plot, and still others introduce him *in medias res*, with a direct discourse that is often a divine order. A synthesis of the analyses is shown in Table 1.

¹ One exception is Esther (Esth 2:5–7), who, as the main character, is introduced when the action is already underway, that is, when Queen Vashti refuses to appear in the presence of Ahasuerus (Esth 1:12).

Table 1. Method of introducing the main character and the plot of the story

Entire narrative	Brief exposition	<i>In medias res</i> (direct discourse)
Isaac (Gen 21:1–3)	Abraham (Gen 11:26–32)	Jonah (Jonah 1:1–2)
Jacob and Esau (Gen 25:19–28)	Noah (Gen 6:8–10)	Joshua (Josh 1:1–9)
Moses (Exod 2:1–10)	Joseph (Gen 37:1–2)	Elijah (1 Kgs 17:1–4)
Samson (Judg 13:3–24)	Jephthah (Judg 11:1–3)	–
Samuel (1 Sam 1:1–20)	Saul (1 Sam 9:1–2)	–
David (1 Sam 16:1–13)	Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1–2)	–
Gideon (Judg 6:1–21)	Ruth (Ruth 1:1–4)	–
Elisha (1 Kgs 19:19–21)	Esther (Esth 2:5–7)	–
–	Job (Job 1:1–5)	–

Source: Author, based on texts of the Hebrew Bible.

The main characters are usually announced, and their entrance into the story is prepared by the narrator. Table 1 shows, however, that the biblical authors do not always follow this pattern. For example, when the main character is introduced *in medias res*, his first appearance is sudden, that is, without any information about the situation or any preparation for the reader. The question therefore arises as to why an entire narrative is dedicated to certain main characters, to others only a brief exposition in the text, while still others are thrown into the story without any specific reference.

1.1. Introduction of the Protagonist by Means of a Narration

Among the main stories in which the protagonist is introduced with a narrative, we can cite the following: in Gen 21:1–3, Isaac is presented with the narrative of his birth; analogous are the cases of Jacob and Esau (Gen 25:19–28), Samuel (1 Sam 1:1–20), Samson (Judg 13:3–24) and Moses (Exod 2:1–10). On the other hand, there are protagonists such as Gideon, David and Elisha, who are introduced with a narrative that is not that of their birth: David is introduced with the story of his anointing as king (1 Sam 16:1–13); Gideon is introduced with the narrative of his vocation as judge in Israel (Judg 6:1–21); Elisha is introduced telling the story of his prophetic vocation (1 Kgs 19:19–21). At this point it is interesting to digress and ask ourselves why the biblical authors do not recount the births of the great king David, of the prophet Elijah or of Gideon, but rather introduce them as adults? We can see that often the life of each of these main characters is introduced at a precise moment in a story that is larger than the individual, and which therefore must include different characters (typically judges, kings or prophets) in their respective functions. What interests the author, however, are the specific conditions

in which the character finds himself when he enters the story and takes on the mission assigned to him by God.² Another question: why are the patriarchs Isaac, Esau and Jacob introduced with a story about their births, while this treatment is denied to the first great patriarch, Abraham? The answer to this question requires an in-depth analysis of the role of the protagonists who have received a divine order, and which we will explore later (see section 1.3.1).

Returning to the case of David (1 Sam 16:1–13), he is introduced with the story of his anointing as king in the place of Saul. It is this fact which is central and which gives the character his importance, as it deals with the history of the monarchy in Israel. After having described some aspects of his physical appearance and thereby creating a pause in the main action, the narrative reaches its climax at the moment of anointing by Samuel and the irruption of the Spirit of God. It is interesting that the name of David is revealed at this moment: “The Spirit of the Lord came upon (‘*el*) David from that day forward” (1 Sam 16:13). The preposition ‘*el* basically introduces the concept of movement, direction or orientation, but it can also indicate a given position, a gesture, a manifestation or a perception (Alonso Schökel 2013, 45). In this stylistic construction we note the principal elements: *verb—subject—preposition ‘el—terminus*, that is, *the new character*. In the sentence “The Spirit of God came upon David” (v. 13), the subject of the verb “came upon” (*wattiṣlah*) is the Spirit of the Lord, who carries out an action directed toward David. We can therefore observe that David appears as the object of the movement expressed by the verb *ṣlh*.

In the case of Gideon, he is introduced with a narrative of vocation, and he is the only judge to be presented in this fashion. The story of Gideon begins with an exposition containing the usual outline of succession of the various judges. Interestingly, the stylistic construction used by the biblical author has Gideon appear for the first time in a secondary position, while carrying out a prolonged action over time (Judg 6:1–21). The author uses the stylistic construction *w^e—X—participle* after a *wayyiqṭōl* that describes the action of another character in the foreground: “The messenger of the Lord came (*wayyābō*) and stopped under the oak tree that was in Ophrah and which belonged to Joash, of the family of Abiezer.” In the meantime, Gideon, son of Joash, was “threshing” (*hōbēt*) wheat in the winepress in order to keep it out of sight of the Midianites. In this narrative, while the messenger carries out a precise action in the foreground (“came,” *wayyiqṭōl*), Gideon comes on stage, “threshing” (*participle*) grain that is, carrying out a prolonged action, but in the

2 The introduction of the judge Samson with the story of the announcement of his birth (Judg 13) could be considered an exception. The narrative of the birth of Samson breaks with the usual pattern with which the other judges are introduced, because “according to the usual pattern of the stories of the various judges, a verse such as Judg 13:1—which denounces the corruption of the Israelites—should be followed by a description of the oppressor, then by the cry of the people and finally by the intervention of God who sends a saviour. Not here. The narrator surprises us with the story of a man, Manoah, whose main characteristic is that he has a barren wife.” (Rzepka 2015, 351)

background. Only later, when entering into dialogue with the messenger of the Lord, does Gideon come into the foreground.³

In the case of the vocation of Elisha, he appears after the introduction of the prophet Elijah, and the tie between Elijah and Elisha is reflected in the stylistic construction used by the author to introduce Elisha. In fact, in 1 Kgs 19:19, Elisha appears as the direct object of the verb *māṣāʾ*, while the subject of this verb is the prophet Elijah: “Elijah departed and found (*māṣāʾ*) Elisha.”⁴ Note that when the direct object is a definite noun or the proper name of a person, it is preceded by the direct object marker *ʿet*. In addition, the vocation of Elisha is accompanied by a symbolic gesture of Elijah, who throws his cloak over Elisha (v. 19).

1.1.1. Stories of the Birth of a Protagonist

In ancient Greek and Latin literature we find numerous stories of the birth and childhood of illustrious men, announcing their future greatness and fame.⁵ In *Parallel Lives*, Plutarch writes, e.g., with regard to Cicero:

It is said that Cicero was born, without travail or pain on the part of his mother, on the third day of the new Calends, the day on which at the present time the magistrates offer sacrifices and prayers for the health of the emperor. It would seem also that a phantom appeared to his nurse and foretold that her charge would be a great blessing to all the Romans. And although these presages were thought to be mere dreams and idle fancies, he soon showed them to be true prophecy; for when he was of an age for taking lessons, his natural talent shone out clear and he won name and fame among the boys, so that their fathers used to visit the schools in order to see Cicero with their own eyes and observe the quickness and intelligence in his studies for which he was extolled, though the ruder ones among them were angry at their sons when they saw them walking with Cicero placed in their midst as a mark of honour. (Plutarch, *Lives* [LCL 99, 85])

An attentive reader can see that in the Hebrew Bible there are a number of narratives concerning the birth of a hero: Isaac (Gen 21:1–3); Jacob and Esau (Gen 25:19–28);

³ Eli is introduced in the same way in 1 Sam 1:9: “Hannah rose after eating and drinking in Shiloh, while the priest Eli was seated was sitting on his seat beside the door of the temple of the Lord.” Hannah’s action is part of the foreground. She rose, while Eli continued to be seated, that is, he remained in the background. He comes into the foreground only afterwards, when he enters into dialog with Hannah (v. 14).

⁴ “Man” is introduced with the same stylistic element in the creation story in Gen 2–3: “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground” (2:7). In this sentence man is the direct object of the verb “formed,” the subject of which is God. Cf. also Esth 2:7.

⁵ The stories of the birth of a future leader and of the trials he must overcome is a common element in ancient literature. Often, the founding hero of a people is abandoned by his parents or relatives, is saved by somebody, becomes the origin of a new dynasty and founds a new city, as e.g., the Assyrian hero Sargon, abandoned on the river Tigris and saved by a farmer.

Moses (Exod 2:1–20); Samson (Judg 13:3–24); and Samuel (1 Sam 1:19–20).⁶ These stories have certain points in common, and can be considered as “twin” passages, because of their resemblance. Therefore particular attention to this group of texts seems justified.

1.1.2. The Use of a Formula for the Birth of a Son

From a stylistic point of view, in the biblical stories of the birth of a protagonist, we note the sequence of information, the principal elements of which are: (a) the news of a marriage; and (b) the following actions, marked by the verbs *wattahar*, *wattēled*, *wattiqrā*’ (“she conceived, bore and called...”). In different stories this formula is applied with variations regarding either the description of the marriage of the couple who afterwards will give birth to the protagonist, or with the distribution within the story of the three verbs “conceived,” “bore” and “called,” which describe the conception, birth and choice of a name for the baby.⁷

The formula appears and is repeated many times in Gen 29:15–30:24, which recounts the birth of the eleven sons of Jacob. The two marriages of Jacob take up several verses (29:15–30), but afterwards the story accelerates in synchrony with a kind of race between the two wives, Leah and Rachel, in bearing sons, so that it seems like a summary. The concise nature of the formula itself adds to the speed of the story, since the three verbs include the long interval from conception to birth, and from the birth of one son to the birth of another. The sequence of the three verbs, *wattahar*, *wattēled*, *wattiqrā*’, appears for the first time with the birth of Reuben, the firstborn son of Jacob, born of Leah (Gen 29:32): “Leah conceived and bore a son and called him Reuben...” The formula recurs ten times in the story with the birth of the other sons of Jacob.

The three verbs of this formula (*wattahar*, *wattēled*, *wattiqrā*’) can also be woven into the development of the action of the story and not listed one after the other as in Gen 29:15–30:24. We find an example of this type in the story of the birth of Moses (Exod 2:1–20). The life of the newborn is threatened from the beginning, but thanks to his mother’s actions, he escapes the danger of death (Czerski 2000, 35).⁸ In this

⁶ The formula of the birth of a son can also be found in Gen 38:3 (Er, son of Judah); in 1 Sam 1:19–20 (Samuel) and 2:21 (sons and daughters of Hannah); in 1 Chr 7:23 (the birth of Beriah, son of Ephraim); and in the prophecy of Isa 7:14.

⁷ The story of Cain also begins with his birth (Gen 4:1), but the verbs that announce it are different: “Adam knew Eve, his wife, who conceived and bore Cain, saying: ‘I have gotten a man from the Lord.’” We note the use of the three verbs, *yd*’, *hrh*, *yld*, in which the subject of the first verb (*yd*’) is Adam, the father of the protagonist, whereas the subject of the other two (*hrh* and *yld*) is his mother, Eve, who conceived and gave birth to Cain. A wordplay links the name of Cain with the verb “acquire.” In recounting the birth of the second son, Abel, only one verb is used *yld*, the subject of which is Eve: “Then she gave birth (*yld*) again to his brother Abel” (v. 2). The same verbs are used to describe the birth of Enoch in Gen 4:17.

⁸ According to the author the stories of the births of illustrious men often have the following pattern: the announcement of the birth (sign, vision or dream); the newborn finds himself in danger; Divine Providence protects the baby. Janusz Czerski maintains that the birth of Moses is presented according to this

story, the formula of the birth of a son creates a kind of inclusion in the story. In fact, one can see that the elements of the formula are distributed throughout the story at strategic points. Verse 1 tells of the marriage of Moses' parents. In the following verse there are two verbs from the formula, *wattahar* and *wattēled*: the woman conceives and bears a son (v. 2); but we need to wait until verse 10 to find the final element of the formula, the verb *wattiqrā'*. In fact, it is only after the description of the rescue of the newborn Hebrew son in verse 10 that Pharaoh's daughter gives the baby, drawn from the water, the name of Moses.⁹ We also note that along with the story of the birth, in which Moses is introduced into the biblical story, we also have the story of his vocation, which begins his true and definitive mission (Exod 3:1–4, 18).

1.1.3. The Use of Type Scenes in the Narratives of the Birth of a Protagonist

The biblical authors use conventions known to the ancient reader, thus providing keys to their interpretation, which, with the distance of time, are no longer part of the cultural baggage of the modern reader.¹⁰ The narratives in which the biblical authors introduce certain protagonists reveal, in fact, the use of so-called "type scenes." These literary conventions were analysed for the first time by Walter Arend (1933) in his study of Homer. He identifies a series of repetitive patterns, which, according to him, are consciously used by the author in the composition of stories that represent the same situation (e.g., arrival, voyage, assembly, hospitality, clothing of the hero). A "type scene," therefore, must contain a certain number of fixed elements arranged in an order that can be changed, but the number of the characteristic elements must be sufficient in order for the "type scene" to be recognizable as such (Ska 2012, 64; Aletti et al. 2006, 82; Britt 2002, 37–59).

pattern (Exod 2:1–20) and, in the intertestamental literature, the same pattern is used to present the births of Noah, Abraham, Samuel and Elijah.

- ⁹ The author of the story of the birth of Isaac uses the same formula in a similar way in Gen 21:1–3. Verse 2 announces that Sarah "conceived and bore" a son, but only afterwards, in verse 3, does it say that Abraham "called" his name Isaac: "And the Lord visited Sarah as he had said, and the Lord did unto Sarah as he had spoken. For Sarah conceived, and bore Abraham a son in his old age, at the set time of which God had spoken to him. And Abraham called the name of his son that was born unto him, whom Sarah bore to him, Isaac." We find another example in Gen 25:19–28, in which Isaac's wife remains pregnant until verse 21; then in verse 24 the time comes for Rebecca to give birth. In verse 25 the first of the twins is born and is given the name Esau, and in verse 26 the second twin is born, and is called Jacob. In this way the three verbs of the formula of the birth of a son are distributed throughout the strategic points of the story in verses 21–26. Similarly, in the story of the birth of Samson, in Judg 13:3–24, the event is announced twice: first by an angel to the mother of Samson (v. 3), and the second time by her to her husband Manoah (v. 7); it is only in the conclusion to the story, in verse 24, that we learn that the woman really gave birth to a son whom she called Samson.
- ¹⁰ The fundamental study of the topic scenes is that of Alter 2011. The author cites typical scenes as examples: the meeting of the future wife next to a well (in Gen 24; 29:1–4; Exod 2:15–22; the announcement of the birth of the hero to a barren woman (Gen 16; 18; 1 Sam 1; Judg 13) and also three stories in Genesis in which the patriarch presents his wife as his sister (Gen 12:10–20; 20; 26:1–12).

An example of a narrative of the birth of a protagonist particularly rich in the diverse elements of type scenes can be found in the story of the birth of Samson, in Judg 13:2–24 (Alter 1983, 115–30; 2011; Ska 2012, 63–68; Rzepka 2015, 351–74; Assis 2014, 1–13). In fact, the story has some very particular traits, because the author uses three type scenes, to wit: “the announcement of the birth of a son,” “the appearance of an angel (announcing) a future saviour,” and “hospitality” (Ska 2013, 38–39; Rzepka 2015, 366). The formula of the birth of a son in this case contains only two verbs: *wattēled*, *wattiqrā* (“the woman bore a son to whom she gave the name Samson,” v. 24). A comparison between Judg 13 and other stories of “the birth of a son” reveals both common elements and differences: Judg 13:2b presents a barren woman, which corresponds to 1 Sam 1:2b.5; in Judg 13:3, the woman receives the announcement of the birth of a special son and of his particular destiny, which corresponds to what is reported in 1 Sam 1:11, 17, as well as in Gen 16:9–11; 17:19; 18:10–14 (Niditch 2008, 142). In Judg 13:24 the woman gives birth and the baby is given a name. This element finds a correspondence in 1 Sam 1:20; Gen 21:1–3; and Exod 2:1–10. In addition, both Samson and Samuel are Nazirites. The originality of the story in Judg 13 is found in the differences present in the narratives: the woman in Judg 13, in contrast with Hannah (1 Sam 1), is not named, but is called “the wife of Manoah”; she doesn’t have a fertile rival as in the other stories; the mother of Samson doesn’t ask God for a son, whereas Hannah prays to God and makes a vow to the Lord (1 Sam 1:11); in Judg 13 the name of the baby is revealed only at the end (v. 24), as in the case of Moses (Exod 2:10) (Rzepka 2015, 364–68; Reinhartz 1992, 25–37; Mollo 2014, 90–91; Exum 1980, 47–48; Crenshaw 1978, 129). The narrator insists on the story of the Nazirite, because it is a means by which the extraordinary physical strength of Samson acquires a religious significance. At the end of Samson’s story, we find out that his only real failing consists in his inability to maintain the obligations of a Nazirite (Judg 16:17) (Rizzi 2012, 365). The scene of “the appearance of the angel of the Lord” in Judg 13:8–25 recalls the narrative of the vocation of Gideon (Judg 6:11–23), while certain traits of the scene of “hospitality” in Judg 13:15–21, are also found in Judg 6:18–19 and in Gen 18:6–8 (Savran 2003, 119–49).

We note that the narrative of the birth of Samson (Judg 13) is particularly elaborated. An analysis of the different type scenes in Judg 13 reveals a particular intention of the author, namely that of creating connections between the person of Samson and other biblical characters. The author presents Samson as a “hero” on a par with the patriarchs Isaac, Esau and Jacob and the judges Samuel and Gideon. The portrait of Samson in Judg 13 contrasts with the picture that emerges from the other stories of the cycle (Judg 14–16). The author, recalling such characters, intends to reinforce the idea that the power of God is also at work in the life of Samson. The result, however, is ambiguous, because in recalling these illustrious figures, Samson’s inglorious end and failure in the role of judge stand out (Rzepka 2015, 368; Blenkinsopp 1963, 65–73; Block 1999, 396).

The analysis of the use of the type scene in narratives of the birth of a protagonist reveals its extraordinary flexibility. It constitutes an exceptional tool both for the construction of the plot and the characterisations of the individuals. The juxtaposition of the protagonists in the stories of their births allows their different personalities to emerge. The similarities between the type scenes create multiple relationships and mutual references, illuminating a number of particular elements, which offer depth and color to the facts and to the protagonists who are introduced into the story with the narrative of their birth. Comparing the texts allows us to discover their singular expressiveness, the play between the fixed elements of a type scene and their variations, and between what they have in common and what is specific to each narrative and each character.

1.2. Introduction of the Protagonist with an Exposition of the Plot

From the analyses of the texts, it is clear that there is a group of protagonists to whom the biblical authors dedicate one or more verses at the beginning of the narrative in order to introduce them. Think e.g., of the introductory formulas in 1 Sam 1:1, where Elkanah is introduced, or 1 Sam 9:1–2 where Saul appears, or the introduction to the Book of Job (Job 1:1–5), which alerts the reader to the fact that the story concerns a righteous man, but that he will suffer. In summary, at the beginning of the storyline constituting the exposition of the plot, the author gives the reader information about the initial situation, indispensable for the full understanding of the story (Ska 2012, 42; Zappella 2010, 52). The information includes the circumstances, the everyday and historic settings of the lives of the main characters, their relationships, and the presentation of the protagonist in the story. In this type of exposition, e.g., we meet for the first time in the story: Abram (Gen 11:26–32), Noah (Gen 6:8–10), Joseph (Gen 37:2), Jephthah (Judg 11:1–5), Saul (1 Sam 9:1–2), Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1–2), Ruth (Ruth 1:1–4), Esther (Esth 2:5–7), and Job (Job 1:1–5).

During the exposition, the author can also give the reader a key to a better understanding of the story; this is true in particular for information that creates a kind of pact between the narrator and the reader and generates a certain atmosphere at the beginning of the story. The expositions, as we have observed above, contain general facts, but also serve to create the context of the situation, which is often static and repetitive. For this reason, we find in the expositions stative verbs, noun phrases or frequentative verb forms, that is, *yiqṭōl* and *w^eqāṭaltî*.

To introduce the protagonist in the exposition of the story, the biblical authors use different stylistic constructions, which are represented in Table 2.

Table 2. Examples of stylistic constructions with which the protagonist is introduced in the exposition of the story

Stylistic construction	Protagonist
$W^e-X-qāṭal$	Noah (Gen 6:8); Jephthah (Judg 11:1); Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1)
The formula $tôl^e dōt$ and the verb $yālad$	Abram (Gen 11:26–27); Noah (Gen 6:9)
$X-hāyāh-participle$	Joseph (Gen 37:2)
The direct object indicator $ʾet$	Esther (Esth 2:7)
The formula of the name: $š^e mō; ūš^e mō; ūš^e māh$	Ruth (Ruth 1:4); Saul (1 Sam 9:1–2); Job (Job 1:1)

Source: Author, based on texts of the Hebrew Bible.

The protagonist of the story of the flood, Noah, enters the scene in Gen 6:8 with information that contrasts with God's perception of the situation in the world that He had created (cf. Gen 1). Indeed, God looks at the earth, sees the wickedness (v. 5), reacts (v. 6), and consequently, although regretful, decides to destroy it (v. 7). Here, the author informs the reader that “nevertheless Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord,” using the construction $we-X-qāṭal$, which often begins a story or a new scene.¹¹ Its usual function is to emphasise the introduction of a new character onto the stage, whose presence will be decisive for the action that follows. In addition, through the use of this construction, the narrator highlights the position of the protagonist. The exposition in which Noah is presented is more complex (Ska 2000, 74–79),¹² because it continues with a second introduction to the story, which begins with the $tôl^e dōt$ ¹³ formula for Noah, followed by information about the human and religious qualities of the protagonist: “These are the generations ($tôl^e dōt$) of Noah. Noah was ($X-qāṭal$) a just man and irreproachable among his contemporaries. Noah walked with God” (v. 9).

The $tôl^e dōt$ formula also begins the story in Gen 37:2: “These are the generations of Jacob.” The protagonist Joseph is introduced right after the formula of the $tôl^e dōt$, together with his brothers: “Joseph, being seventeen years old, was shepherding ($hāyāh rō'eh$) the flock with his brethren” (v. 2). The author uses a stylistic construction, the principal elements of which are: $X-hāyāh-participle$. Here, the verb

¹¹ Other protagonists are introduced into the story in the same way, e.g., the serpent (Gen 3:1), Jephthah (Judg 11:1) or Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1).

¹² The construction is complex because it contains two different introductions of the protagonist. In fact, the story combines two redactional layers.

¹³ The $tôl^e dōt$ formula, which belongs to the priestly source, can introduce either a genealogy (Gen 11:10; 25:12; 36:1) or a narrative section (Gen 6:9; 11:27; 25:19; 37:2).

“to be” (*hāyāh*) followed by the “participle” (*rōʿeh*) expresses with precision that the long-term, habitual action unfolded in the past, i.e. that Joseph “was shepherding” the flock. The new protagonist is therefore introduced into the story with the description of his age, the relationship with his brothers and his habitual work.

A frequent way of introducing the protagonist in relationship with other characters is the formula of the name, *šēm*; *š^emô*; *ûš^emô*; *ûš^emāh*, which we find with respect to Ruth (Ruth 1:4), Saul (1 Sam 9:1–2) and Job (Job 1:1), among others. In the exposition of the Book of Ruth (Ruth 1:1–5), e.g., we glimpse the principal facts: the famine in Israel during the time of the judges; the sojourn of a man of Bethlehem in the land of Moab, together with his wife and his two sons; the revelation of the names of some of the characters: Elimelech, Naomi, Mahlon and Chilion; the death of Elimelech; the marriage of Mahlon and Chilion with two Moabites, Orpah and Ruth; and the death of the two sons of Naomi. The revelation of the names of the characters and their meaning is a frequent element in the exposition. In stories in which the author introduces the names of two characters together, the noun phrase is usually coordinated with a simple *waw*: *šēm ... w^ešēm*, as in the case of Ruth and her sister-in-law: “The name of the one was Orpah, and the name of the other Ruth” (1:4). Other information appears later on, at strategic points, to stimulate the interest of the reader, e.g., the existence of a close relative, Boaz (Ruth 2:1); of another even closer relative (3:12); and also of a field that belonged to Naomi (4:3).

A typical example of an exposition can be found at the beginning of the Book of Job (Job 1:1–5), in which the protagonist is introduced with a formula that contains his name:

There was in the land of Uz a man named (*ûš^emô*) Job; and that man was perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil. And there were born to him seven sons and three daughters. His substance also was seven thousand sheep, and three thousand camels, and five hundred yoke of oxen, and five hundred she-asses, and a very great household; so that this man was the greatest of all the men of the east. And his sons went and feasted in their houses, every one his day; and sent and called for their three sisters to eat and drink with them. And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all; for Job said, “It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts.” Thus did Job continually.

In this exposition, the narrator does not simply let the reader know the name of the protagonist, but tells him who Job was, where he lived and the composition of his family; he speaks of his possessions and his usual behaviours, but above all, he reveals his moral qualities. In this way, before the action even begins, the reader has a very positive image of this fully righteous man, who soon will lose everything and will have to endure extreme suffering.

In conclusion, we can observe that the protagonist introduced in the exposition occupies an important space, because in addition to his name, the authors from the beginning of the action provide the reader with more complete information, necessary for understanding the story.

1.3. Introduction of the Protagonist in *Medias Res*

From the analyses of the biblical stories, we can see that some authors decide to introduce the protagonist *in medias res*, without any exposition of the facts or circumstances. In this case, the hero appears all of a sudden, called by God, who gives him a very specific order. Once the protagonist is introduced, the author places a few elements of the exposition at strategic points in the story, thus arousing the curiosity of the reader. Characters introduced in this way include Jonah (Jonah 1:1–2), Joshua (Josh 1:1–9), and Elijah (1 Kgs 17:1–4). The practice of beginning the story with the entrance of the protagonist *in medias res* and its variations is analysed in Table 3.

Table 3. Introduction of the protagonist *in medias res*

Stylistic construction: the verb <i>wayyiqṭōl</i> ; preposition <i>ʿel</i>	Protagonist
“The word of the Lord came to (<i>ʿel</i>) Jonah”	Jonah (Jonah 1:1–2)
“After the death of Moses, the servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke (<i>wayyōʿmer</i>) to (<i>ʿel</i>) Joshua”	Joshua (Josh 1:1–9) ¹⁴
“Elijah the Tishbite, of the inhabitants of Gilead, said (<i>wayyōʿmer</i>) to Ahab, ‘As the Lord God of Israel lives, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.’ And the word of the Lord came to (<i>ʿel</i>) him saying...”	Elijah (1 Kgs 17:1–2)

Source: Author, based on texts of the Hebrew Bible.

It is worth focusing on the examples shown in Table 3, because they present a few interesting variations worth exploring. The classic example of a story that begins *in medias res* is the Book of Jonah: “The word of the Lord came to Jonah, the son of Amittai, saying: Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it; for their

¹⁴ It is worth noting that Joshua is introduced in the same way when he appears in the story about the fight against Amalek in Exod 17:9: “Moses said to Joshua...” Joshua appears in the story for the first time as the interlocutor of Moses, who speaks to him with the order to choose men and go out to fight Amalek. It is only afterwards that the reader discovers that Joshua was able to conquer the enemy thanks to the prayer of Moses. We must point out, however, that the protagonist of the story in Exodus is Moses; Joshua, on the other hand, is introduced as one of the secondary characters.

wickedness is come up before me” (Jonah 1:1–2).¹⁵ The story begins with the phrase in which the subject, that is, “the word of the Lord” came to (‘*el*) Jonah. The protagonist of the story appears for the first time in the story as the interlocutor of God, with an indirect presentation that emerges from the action: God gives Jonah the order to go preach to Nineveh and Jonah gets up, but instead of going to Nineveh, he goes in the opposite direction, to Tarshish. This introduces an element of surprise for the reader. Other information about Jonah and about his being sent to Nineveh are scattered throughout the narrative in exposition form: the religious beliefs of Jonah (1:9); the description of Nineveh (3:3b); the nature of God according to Jonah (4:2); and other details about Nineveh (4:11). “These different elements of the exposition appear in dramatic moments, allowing them to have a major impact on the action and to reveal new aspects of the relationships between the three principal characters: God, Jonah and Nineveh.” (Ska 2012, 48) Note that the preposition ‘*el* introduces the name of the protagonist in close relationship with God. In oral expression, the preposition ‘*el* is normally used to indicate the interlocutor. In this case, the stylistic construction is as follows: *verbum dicendi* or the noun “word” with the verb *wayhî—subject—preposition ‘el—interlocutor*, that is, the name of the new character, in this case, Jonah.

In Josh 1:1, Joshua enters on the scene, taking the place of Moses, and in introducing him, the author uses the same stylistic device, that is, the preposition ‘*el*. From the point of view of analysis of the plot, however, his appearance differs slightly from that of Jonah. Indeed, in Josh 1:1 we read: “After the death of Moses, servant of the Lord, the Lord spoke to Joshua...” We observe that the introduction of Joshua, whom God is addressing, is preceded by a brief element of exposition concerning a circumstance, that is, “the death of Moses, servant of the Lord.” The story presents a variation on the norm, since it does not begin exactly *in medias res*.

Elijah, on the other hand, is introduced rigorously *in medias res* in 1 Kgs 17:1. The text begins with the direct discourse of Elijah: “Elijah the Tishbite from Tishbe in Gilead said (*wayyiqṭōl*) to Ahab...” Elijah thus enters the scene by accomplishing the action expressed by *wayyiqṭōl*. We therefore have two direct discourses: (1) the prophet addresses king Ahab saying: “As the Lord God of Israel lives, whom I serve: there will be neither dew nor rain these coming years unless I give the word” (1 Kgs 17:1); (2) God addresses the prophet: “The word of the Lord came to (‘*el*) him...” In this verse, Elijah is indicated by the pronominal suffix to the preposition ‘*el*. We note that in the first verse there is also a brief element of exposition, that is, the information that he was “the Tishbite” (v. 1).

¹⁵ In the Book of Jonah the protagonist is introduced *in medias res*; one might think, however, that he is somehow already known to the reader, because he is mentioned in 2 Kgs 14:25–27.

1.3.1. The Introduction of the Protagonist in *Medias Res* and the “Narrative Program”

At this point in the analyses of the introduction of a protagonist *in medias res*, we must make a few important observations concerning the literary elements common to the plot of these stories. In the first place, we note that the entrance of the protagonists is accompanied by an order from God: Jonah must get up and go to Nineveh and preach against the wickedness of its inhabitants (Jonah 1:1); Joshua receives the order to cross the Jordan and lead the people into the promised land (Josh 1:1); the prophet Elijah on the other hand must go eastward and hide near the river Cherith.

The divine command, with which all the above stories begin, contains a “narrative program.” Its actualisation arouses the interest of the reader, who wonders about the ability of the protagonist, and the manner in which he will accomplish his mission. In this model of the analysis of the plot, the actualisation of the “narrative program” is called a “performance” and closes with a report, called a “sanction” (Ska 2002, 157). It can involve a task, a plan, a mission to accomplish or a conflict to resolve. The model also uses other categories like the “subject,” that is the protagonist, who must possess certain abilities in order to accomplish the “narrative program.” In the “performance,” the “subject” accomplishes the program, or not; the “sanction” follows, which is the final assessment of the accomplishment of the program (Ska 2012, 57).

In the stories that begin *in medias res*, the divine order is usually followed by its execution. Indeed, Joshua immediately carries out the order of God in commanding the people to prepare themselves to cross the Jordan (Josh 1:11). Similarly, Elijah “went and did according to the word of the Lord; for he went and dwelt by the brook Cherith...” (1 Kgs 17:5). This is not, however, the case with Jonah. Jonah is sent on a mission to Nineveh and leaves, but flees to Tarshish; therefore the “narrative program” of the story fails. Not only does he not go to Nineveh; he flees and goes in the opposite direction, “far from the presence of the Lord” (Jonah 1:3). In Jonah 3:1, God entrusts the same mission to Jonah a second time, which he will eventually accomplish successfully.

We can conclude that the decision to introduce the protagonist *in medias res* allows the biblical authors to emphasise the mission entrusted to him, as well as the “narrative program” revealed by the order of God that the protagonist must accomplish. In addition, we note that beginning the story *in medias res* and introducing the protagonist in this way involves the virtual absence of action at the start. This will follow with elements of the exposition, in the strategic moment of the development of the action.

1.3.2. An Intriguing Case of Protagonist Introduction: Abraham and the Divine Command

An interesting case of the introduction of a protagonist to whom God addresses a command is found in the narrative of the patriarch Abraham. In this case, the initial question concerns why the first patriarch is not introduced through a birth narrative, as is the case with his son Isaac, his grandsons Esau and Jacob, or even Moses. It is, in fact, striking that the entrance of the major protagonist Abraham into the biblical narrative is not prepared, but is instead encapsulated within a brief summary (Gen 11:27–32).

In answering this question, we must observe that Abraham's case presents certain peculiarities. Although Abraham first appears within the genealogy (*tôl' dōt*) of Terah (Gen 11:26) and in the exposition of Gen 11:27–32, a closer analysis of the text reveals that this exposition is not dedicated to Abraham as the central protagonist of the narrative, but rather to a group of persons, represented by Terah and his family, of which Abraham is a part. In Terah's genealogy, Abraham is only briefly mentioned alongside his brothers Nahor and Haran, and it is only later, in Gen 12:1, that Abraham clearly emerges as the protagonist of the unfolding narrative.

It is important to recognize that the literary strategy of the author is to place emphasis on Abraham precisely at the point when the action is set in motion (Gen 12:1), preceded by an exposition that does not foreground the protagonist himself, but instead presents the contextual and factual elements that influence the narrative's initial movement. The analysis thus reveals that Abraham's introduction as protagonist bears certain similarities to Jonah's entrance *in medias res*, yet it is in fact preceded by an exposition of the plot. Conversely, the exposition in Gen 11:27–32 does not introduce the protagonist in the manner of the classical example of Job, but rather frames the family from which the protagonist will emerge at the onset of the narrative action.

In conclusion, the distinctive feature of Abraham's introduction into the narrative lies in the combination of two elements: the exposition, in which Abraham is merely one component of the narrative setting, and the sudden divine command—characteristic of narratives that begin *in medias res*—through which Abraham steps onto the scene as the protagonist of the story that follows (Gen 12:4–25:11). In the divine speech addressed to Abraham in Gen 12:1–3, he is presented as God's direct interlocutor and the recipient of divine promises, which in turn elicit in the reader an expectation for their fulfillment. It is precisely this feature that reveals how the divine command contains, as in the case of Jonah, the "narrative program," which consists of two main elements: (a) the command to undertake a journey (Gen 12:1), and (b) the promise of a great posterity that will become a divinely blessed nation (Gen 12:2–3).

The narrative invites the reader to ponder how Abraham will accomplish his mission and how God will fulfill His promises. Immediately afterward, in Gen 12:4–9,

we witness the realization of the first step in the “narrative program”: “So Abram went, as the Lord had told him...” (v. 4). Yet from the very moment of its proclamation, the second part of the “narrative program” faces two significant obstacles: Sarah, Abraham’s wife, is barren (Gen 11:30), and both Abraham and Sarah are advanced in age. Indeed, Abraham enters the narrative scene at 75 years of age (Gen 12:4b). This allows the reader to grasp the magnitude of God’s promise and to wonder how these obstacles might be overcome for the narrative program to reach fulfillment. The birth of Isaac (Gen 21:1–3) constitutes the first step toward this fulfillment, demonstrating that God is capable of overcoming even the most formidable barriers—such as barrenness and old age—in order to realize His promises.

We may thus conclude that the “narrative program” initiating Abraham’s story not only characterizes the protagonist and serves as a narrative thread throughout much of the Abraham cycle, but also introduces from the very outset a dramatic tension that determines the author’s literary strategy.

In final analysis, it becomes evident that the introduction of a new protagonist in biblical narratives is not limited to a single method—such as presentation in the exposition or sudden entrance *in medias res*—but rather involves a functional combination of multiple strategies. These are shaped in accordance with the communicative goals, the theological message, and the literary design of the author.

1.4. The Presentation and the Characterisation of the Protagonist at the Moment When He Enters the Story

A character in a narrative can present himself or be introduced by another character, or by the narrator, or they can be presented in many ways together. From the analyses, it is clear that in the biblical stories the protagonists are always introduced by the narrator himself, independently of the type of stylistic construction and other strategies that the author uses to introduce them. “After his entrance on the scene, the dramatic progression of the character depends on how he acts, reacts and is influenced by events, as well as his ‘name.’” (Ska 2012, 135) We can, however, ask ourselves whether, at the moment of his entry onto the scene, we can already identify some typical traits of his characterisation. In this regard, it seems particularly relevant to observe the relationship between the characterisation of the protagonist and the stratagems that the biblical authors use to introduce him, that is, in beginning the dramatic progression of the story.

The characters can be described directly, that is, with reference to the characteristics and information attributed to them by the narrator, or indirectly, by their speech or actions. From the analysis it appears that both types are present in the biblical stories, as summarised in Table 4.

Table 4. Description of the protagonist and the use of different stylistic constructions to introduce him

Direct description	Indirect description
The formula of the birth of a son: Isaac (Gen 21:1–3); Jacob and Esau (Gen 25:10–28); Moses (Exod 2:1–10); Samson (Judg 13:3–24); Samuel (1 Sam 1:19–20)	–
The formula <i>tôl dôt</i> and the verb <i>yld</i>: Abram (Gen 11:27); Noah (Gen 6:9)	–
The formulas of the name <i>w^ešēm</i>; <i>š^emô</i>; <i>ûš^emô</i>; <i>ûš^emāh</i>: Ruth (Ruth 1:4); Saul (1 Sam 9:1); Job (Job 1:1)	–
–	<i>Wayyiqṭōl</i>: Elijah (1 Kgs 17:1); Joseph (Gen 37:2b)
<i>W^e–X–qāṭal</i>: Noah (Gen 6:8); Jephthah (Judg 11:1); Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1)	–
The direct object marker <i>ʿet</i>: Elisha (1 Kgs 19:19); Esther (Esth 2:7)	–
The preposition <i>ʿel</i>: David (1 Sam 16:13); Jonah (Jonah 1:1); Joshua (Josh 1:1)	–
<i>W^e–X–participle</i>: Gideon (Judg 6:11); or <i>X–hāyāh–participle</i>: Joseph (Gen 37:2a)	–

Source: Author, based on texts of the Hebrew Bible.

From Table 4, it is clear that the biblical stories favor a direct description of the protagonist. Indeed, in the vast majority of cases, the stylistic constructions used to introduce the protagonist give a direct description, and only some employ an indirect modality, e.g., when a new character is introduced performing an action expressed with a *wayyiqṭōl*.

It is worth noting that in some stories the authors combine different stylistic constructions, either direct or indirect. For example, in Gen 37:2, the author combines the stylistic construction *X–hāyāh–participle* with a simple *wayyiqṭōl* (cf. also Exod 3:1). In this mixed description of the character, from the direct characterisation of the narrator, we know that the young Joseph at 17 years of age was a shepherd (*participle*) along with his brothers; on the other hand, from his telling (*wayyiqṭōl*) his father about the bad reputation that was circulating about his brothers, we learn indirectly that he was an informer.

We need to emphasise that from the characterisation of a person and the events in the story, we can distinguish his way of “being” and his “attributes,” the distinctive traits of his “actions,” his “speech,” or of his way of “seeing” reality. The author may delineate the physical, personal, demographic, socioeconomic, ideological or

psychological traits of the character. These last allow the characterisation of the person to be traced back to different typologies, identifying him as someone who is “well-rounded” or “flat,” “kinetic” or “static” (Zappella 2010, 145). The present study, concerned with the analysis of the introduction of a character in the story, does not identify the typology from a psychological point of view, as “well-rounded” or “flat,” etc., because this is fully revealed only at the end of the story.

Descriptions of the physical aspects of the characters in biblical stories are rather rare at the beginning, and when they are present, they are significant. For example, at the moment of the birth of the twins, Esau and Jacob (Gen 25:25), we learn that the first one was “reddish and all over like a hairy garment,” and therefore he was called Esau. Of Moses on the other hand, it is said that he was beautiful at the moment of his birth; therefore his mother hid him for three months. Of David, in the story of his anointing as king, the author says that he was a redhead, with beautiful eyes and a beautiful appearance. The reader can also learn immediately about the social situation of these protagonists, e.g., we learn that Moses was of the tribe of Levi; that David was from Bethlehem, that his father was named Jesse, that he shepherded his flocks, that he had seven brothers and that he was the youngest. Also, with respect to Saul, we find the following description: “Saul, a choice young man, and a goodly: and there was not among the children of Israel a goodlier person than he: from his shoulders and upward he was higher than any of the people” (1 Sam 9:2).

The traits of the protagonists that are described in the exposition can involve not only personal data, as e.g., in the case of Joseph, of whom we learn that he was 17 years old (Gen 37:2), or their character traits, as in the case of Job, a just man, “perfect and upright, and one that feared God and eschewed evil.” The author offers us also various socioeconomic data: we know that Job was the richest of all the men of the east and that he was from Uz, the father of seven sons and three daughters. He is also described from a cultural point of view, revealing his religious habits (Job 1:1–5). Another portrait of a protagonist at the moment of his introduction is that of Naaman. We learn not only about his social position (he was, in fact, the commander of the army of the king of Aram), but also the fact that he was very influential and esteemed by his lord and that he was a brave soldier, so much so that he managed to guarantee the safety of his people. Only later do we learn that he was also a leper (2 Kgs 5:1).

We recall that the protagonists introduced into the story *in medias res* can be characterised either by a direct or an indirect description. In the first case, it is the narrator who describes the protagonist’s response to the order of God, as in the cases of Joshua (Josh 1:11) and Jonah (Jonah 1:1–2). In an indirect description, on the other hand, the biblical authors have their protagonists appear in action, as in the case of Elijah, who addresses King Ahab: “As the Lord God of Israel lives, whom I serve, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, unless I give the word.”

Elijah's words reveal him to be a powerful man, capable of commanding even the rain (1 Kgs 17:1).

In conclusion, while the author has a large space for characterisation when the characters are introduced both with an entire narrative and an exposition of the plot, the entrance of the protagonist *in medias res* limits this space, but emphasises the characterisation of the hero as an interlocutor of God himself and recipient of his orders, thus constituting the pivot of the entire story which follows.

1.5. Ways of Introducing the Protagonist and His Name

One of the “characterising” aspects of a person is his name, which is a summary of his unique character. For this reason, it seems useful to revisit the question in the larger context of the different modalities with which the protagonist is introduced. The name can have a “proleptic” function, as, e.g., in the case of Esau and Jacob (Gen 25:25–26). Indeed, later in the story we will find that the development of their characteristics is already summarised and revealed in their names. The anticipatory function of the name of the person is evident above all in the case of the change of a name, which usually reveals the change in the character's destiny and opens the way to a new orientation of the plot, as e.g., in Gen 17:5, 15 (Abram and Sarai); Gen 32:29 (Jacob); or in Num 13:16 (Joshua) (Ska 2012, 138). The development of the character's story is in some sense determined by his name and anticipated in it. It therefore seems that the moment in the plot in which the name of the protagonist is introduced is of strategic importance. One can also observe that, through the stylistic constructions used in the direct description of the character, the “formula of the name” (*wšēm; šmô; ūšmô; ūšmāh*) occupies a privileged position.

The analysis reveals an element common to all the stories analysed above, i.e. that the character begins to exist only from the moment when his name is revealed. Independently of the modalities by which the protagonist is introduced into the story, he does not exist until his name is revealed, because we do not know about whom the story is talking. For example: we do not know the identity of the newborn around whom the rescue action takes place until the daughter of Pharaoh calls him Moses (cf. Exod 2:1–20). We do not know who the boy is, “ruddy, with beautiful eyes and handsome,” chosen by God as the future king, until his name, David, is introduced by the narrator (cf. 1 Sam 16:1–13). The same can be said of Samson, whose name we learn only at the conclusion of the story of his birth (1 Kgs 19:19–21), or of the prophet Elisha, whose name is introduced, by contrast, with the first words of the story of his vocation (1 Kgs 19:19–21). Similarly, we learn to whom God's order is addressed at the moment when the narrator reveals his name to the reader (e.g., Jonah in Jonah 1:1). This shows the importance of the moment of revelation of the name of the protagonist, which often seems to be thrown into the story like a seed into the ground that conceals the DNA of the life that will develop from it in the

future.¹⁶ From this moment he will bear his name like an “identity card” throughout his existence in the story. Thanks to this element of recognition, the reader is able to attribute to the character the actions that characterise him and the events that concern him.

In the stories of a birth, the name of the protagonist is introduced by the verb *wattiqrāʾ*, which is part of the formula for the birth of a son, that is, the sequence of the three verbs *wattahat*, *wattēled*, *wattiqrāʾ*. It is worth noting that in this case, the revelation of the name of the protagonist constitutes the final element in the formula of the birth of a son. In this context, the name concludes the narrative dedicated to the introduction of the protagonist. We can observe a similar situation in the story of the anointing of David, where the revelation of his name appears as the final element in his introduction. The appearance of this new character can be sensed first with Samuel’s relentless search for him, and then with a description of his youthful nature. Finally his name appears, after the anointing and when he is invested by the Spirit.

When the protagonist is introduced with the exposition of the plot, the revelation of his name is prepared by information that is part of the initial picture. In this case, the biblical authors use the typical stylistic constructions *w^cšēm*; *š^cmô*; *ûš^cmô*; *ûš^cmāh*, as e.g., in the cases of Ruth (Ruth 1:4); Saul (1 Sam 9:1); and Job (Job 1:1). Elsewhere, on the other hand, the name is introduced as the first element of the presentation of the protagonist, so that the stylistic construction can be, e.g., *we—X—qāṭal*, as in the cases of Noah (Gen 6:9); Jephthah (Judg 11:1); and Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1).

The introduction of the name of the protagonist *in medias res* is very interesting. In this case the only information about the protagonist, whose name we will soon learn, is that God addresses his word specifically to him. This stratagem on the part of the author highlights not only the name of the protagonist, but also the fact that he is the interlocutor of God and recipient of his orders, as in the cases of Joshua (Josh 1:1–11), Elijah (1 Kgs 17:1), and Jonah (Jonah 1:1).

1.6. The Specific Effects of the Use of Diverse Stylistic Constructions in the Introduction of a Protagonist

In the course of the analyses we observed that the stylistic constructions allow the author to obtain specific effects in the story. In fact, the way of presenting a character changes according to the type of stylistic construction used by the author. The formula of the birth of a son, e.g., has the new character emerge gradually during the course of the story. From the time of the baby’s conception, to the moment of his birth and up to the giving of his name, time passes, and this allows the introduction

¹⁶ As, e.g., the names of the characters at the beginning of the Book of Ruth, chosen for their meaning: the two sons who die, Mahlon—“sickness” and Chilion—“fragility”; Orpah—“who turns her back”; Naomi—“my sweetness/gracious one” and the protagonist Ruth—“friend.”

of other information about the character, e.g., in the cases of Moses (Exod 2:1–20) and Isaac (Gen 21:1–3). In the latter situation, much time passes and different events occur between the promise of a son given to Abram and its fulfilment, with the announcement of the name of the unborn child, and all of this prepares the entrance of Isaac into the story,¹⁷ thus creating an atmosphere of anticipation. Similarly, in the story of the anointing of David (1 Sam 16:13), the author describes the appearance of the boy before revealing his name, introduced by the preposition *ʿel*, when the Spirit of the Lord descends on David. The same happens with the use of the formula of the name (*šʿmô*), which also introduces the characterising element represented by the name, but must be preceded by other information about the character, in order to be able to say “his name is,” e.g., Job (Job 1:1). On the other hand, some formulas used to introduce the protagonist create in the reader the impression that the new character lands in the story out of nowhere, e.g., Elijah (1 Kgs 17:1), introduced by a simple *wayyiqṭôl*; or Noah (Gen 6:9), Jephthah (Judg 11:1), and Naaman (2 Kgs 5:1), who are introduced with the formula *wʿ—X—qāṭal*.

We can conclude that the use of stylistic constructions in the introduction of a protagonist depends on the type of characterisation of the protagonist (direct or indirect) and appears to have the function of creating a particular effect desired by the author in order to communicate to the reader some essential elements of the story.

2. Introduction of a Secondary Character in a Biblical Story

In general, secondary characters occupy less space in the story, appearing only as they participate in the action of the protagonist, although their role is often essential. The greater or lesser presence of a secondary character in the story depends on his tasks. Once these are achieved, he exists the scene. One example is found in Gen 24, where the servant of Abraham is introduced *in medias res* and receives a precise order from his master (“and Abraham said to his servant...” v. 2). In the cycle of Abraham, this servant appears only in Gen 24. The order of Abraham, confirmed by the swearing of a solemn oath on the part of the servant, involves a journey, which constitutes the “narrative program” in the story. His objective is to find a wife for Isaac, and once the action has been completed, he disappears from the story.

2.1. Introduction of a Secondary Character and the Plot of the Story

While the protagonist is introduced at the beginning of the story, a secondary character can be introduced at different moments of the plot, depending on his function.

¹⁷ Other examples: Jacob and Esau (Gen 25:19–28); Samson (Judg 13:3–24); Samuel (1 Sam 1:19–20).

But the question arises as to the stylistic strategies used by the biblical authors to make a character appear at a given moment in the story. A summary of the treatment of these aspects can be seen in Table 5.

Table 5. Stylistic constructions and the introduction of a secondary character in the plot of the story

Stylistic element	The beginning of the story (cycle, episode, scene)	In the middle of the story
The formulas of the name: <i>w^šēm; šēmō; ūšēmō; ūš^šmāh</i>	Sarai (Gen 11:29); Hagar (Gen 16:1); Goliath (1 Sam 17:4); Nabal and Abigail (1 Sam 25:2–3); Hannah and Peninnah (1 Sam 1:1–7a)	Laban (Gen 24:29); Leah (Gen 29:16); Boaz (Ruth 2:1); Mordechai (Esth 2:5); Shiphrah and Puah (Exod 1:15)
<i>Wayyiqṭōl</i>	Korah (Num 16:1); Balak (Num 22:2)	Miriam (Exod 15:20); Rehoboam (1 Kgs 11:43); Michal (1 Sam 18:20)
<i>W^hinnēh—X—participle</i>	Three men (Gen 18:2)	Rebecca (Gen 24:15); Rachel (Gen 29:6); Aaron (Exod 4:14)
The direct object marker <i>’et</i>	Sarai (Gen 12:5); Joash (2 Kgs 11:2)	Zilpah (Gen 29:24); Jezebel (1 Kgs 16:31)

Source: Author, based on texts of the Hebrew Bible.

From Table 5 one can see that the biblical authors use the same stylistic constructions to introduce a secondary character at the beginning of the plot and in the middle of the dramatic action, indicating their rather universal character. From the standpoint of analysis of the plot, it is interesting to note that, e.g., the revelation of the name of the character, whether at the beginning or in the middle of the story, remains a crucial element of the exposition. More precisely, the introduction of the secondary character at the beginning of the plot with the formula of the name belongs to the classic type of exposition, as in the cases of Sarai (Gen 11:29); Hagar (Gen 16:1); Goliath (1 Sam 17:4); Nabal and Abigail (1 Sam 25:2–3); and Hannah and Peninnah (1 Sam 1:1–7a). For example, in Gen 16:1, Hagar appears for the first time in the story: “Sarai, Abram’s wife, had borne him no children, but she had an Egyptian slave named Hagar.” This sentence creates the framework for the action of the episode that begins in the following verse, in which Sarai proposes to Abram to take her slave as a wife. We note that Hagar is introduced into the story with the formula of the name as part of the exposition, which is usually found before the action and which prepares it.

On the other hand, when the character is introduced with the same formula of the name in the middle of the dramatic action, his entrance creates a pause in the

action, as in the cases of: Laban (Gen 24:29); Boaz (Ruth 2:1); Mordechai (Esth 2:5); and Shiphrah and Puah (Exod 1:15). When, e.g., the author in Gen 24:29 has Laban enter the scene, the dramatic action is in full swing and everything happens with a certain speed. Indeed, the author says that Rebecca “ran to her mother’s house and told them all these things,” namely, what had happened at the well. At this point, the author introduces the element of the exposition in which he has Laban join the action: “Now Rebecca had a brother whose name (*š^cmô*) was Laban.” As we can see, the name of Laban is preceded by another element of the exposition, i.e. the information that he is the brother of Rebecca. After a moment’s pause to update the picture, once Laban is introduced, the action resumes at the same speed and includes him. Indeed, the narrator affirms that “Laban also ran out to that man at the well” (Gen 24:29). Thus we see that the introduction of the secondary character, together with the information about him, creates a pause when they are introduced during the course of the action.

Another way of introducing a new secondary character into the action is the use of a simple *wayyiqṭōl*. The narrator can assign some specific actions that constitute the underlying theme of the story to different characters, including secondary characters. Very often in the Hebrew Bible stories, the action that takes place in the foreground becomes the occasion for a character to appear, who, by his own action, becomes involved in the chain of events. One of the many examples we can cite is found in Exod 15:19–20, when Miriam enters the stage:

For the horse of Pharaoh went in with his chariots and with his horsemen into the sea, and the Lord brought again the waters of the sea upon them; but the children of Israel went on dry land in the midst of the sea. And Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a timbrel in her hand; and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

In the action praising the victory, recounted by the author, Miriam appears, and with her action the celebrations begin (v. 20). The author inserts Miriam into the story *in medias res*, giving her an action to accomplish: “Miriam took... a timbrel in her hand...” (Exod 15:20). In Hebrew the sentence begins with a *wayyiqṭōl* (*wattiqqah*) followed by the name of the character, who is the subject of the verb. The elements of this construction are the following: *wayyiqṭōl*—X—*direct object*. This manner of introducing a character creates an impression of his coming into the story out of the blue, without preparation. In this case, the narrator provides a single element of exposition, that is, the information that Miriam is Aaron’s sister. Characters in other stories are similarly introduced with a simple *wayyiqṭōl*, e.g., Korah (Num 16:1, *wayyiqqah qōrah*); Balak (Num 22:2, *wayyar’ bālāk*); Rehoboam (1 Kgs 11:43, *wayyimlōk reḥab’ām*); and Michal (1 Sam 18:20, *watte’ēḥab mīkal*).

The stylistic construction whose main elements are *w^ehinnēh*—X—*participle* creates an effect of surprise with emphasis. According to Luis Alonso Schökel, the

principal function of the particle *hinnēh* is to draw “attention, with a certain emphasis, to a character, an object or an action. It serves to present and to identify.” (Alonso Schökel 2013, 215) We can easily see that its presence at the moment of introduction of a new character creates an effect of surprise; its precise function depends, however, on the context in which it is used. Rebecca is introduced into the middle of the action with the use of *w^ehinnēh—X—participle* in: “Before he had done speaking, behold, Rebecca came out...” (Gen 24:15). In this case, *w^ehinnēh*, followed by the subject, Rebecca, and the verb *yōšē’i* (*participle*) create an effect of surprise, drawing the attention of the reader to Rebecca, that is, to the fact that at the very moment when the servant finishes speaking, Rebecca comes out.¹⁸

There is another interesting stratagem, namely that of a secondary character who first appears in the background and only afterwards comes into the foreground. This involves the use of a “participle,”¹⁹ as in the case of *w^ehinnēh—X—participle*. For example, when Rebecca appears on the scene she is in the background (Gen 24:1–67), following the action expressed by the “participle,” while in the foreground the servant is still praying.²⁰

The same device is used to introduce Rachel in Gen 29:6; the shepherds, speaking to Jacob, say she is coming.²¹ To obtain the effect of surprise by introducing Rachel, who appears suddenly and in the background, the biblical authors use the construction *w^ehinnēh—X—participle*, in which two elements intersect: *w^ehinnēh*, which produces an effect of surprise, and the *participle*, which expresses the action in the background. It seems evident that the particle *w^ehinnēh* is used as an expression of surprise by the biblical authors to draw the attention of the reader to the new character who enters on the scene.

In Gen 18:2, three men appear in the story in the background, while the foreground is occupied with the specific action of Abraham, who “lifted his eyes and

¹⁸ The effect of surprise, obtained by the use of *w^ehinnēh*, is also evident in the story of the birth of the twins Esau and Jacob in Gen 25:24. The particle *hinnēh*, however, is used here in a different way: “And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb.” Only at the moment of birth does everything become clear, that is, that Rebecca was carrying twins in her womb. One must note, however, that in this case *w^ehinnēh* is not followed by a participle, but introduces a noun phrase. Therefore it does not serve to attract attention to a present action, but to identify that which was unknown up to the moment of birth, that is, the two twins.

¹⁹ Cf. e.g., the case of Elijah in 1 Sam 1:9.

²⁰ In this case we can note that when introducing the heroine Rebecca into the story, the author dedicates an entire narrative (Gen 24), using the type scene of the meeting with the future bride at the well. We can conclude that the introduction of Rebecca with an exceptionally long narrative in which she is the objective of the “narrative program” underlines the importance of her role as heroine in the history of the patriarchs.

²¹ Aaron is introduced in a similar manner in Exod 4:14: here God, speaking with Moses, informs him of the arrival of his brother. In this case the construction is presented differently than in the other cases, because Aaron is named first, while the personal pronoun is used in the announcement of his arrival and the particle *hinnēh* creates an effect of surprise.

looked and lo, three men stood by him...” In this case, however, the use of the construction *w^ehinnēh—X—participle* creates a variation, because it is preceded by the verb of perception *rāā*: “and he looked and lo, three men stood by him”: Here *w^ehinnēh* introduces a sort of object of the verb *rāā*, i.e., “three men.” Indeed, while the reader of Gen 18:2 was expecting the appearance of YHWH, announced in the preceding verse, surprisingly three men appear before Abraham (cf. also Gen 33:1).

From the analysis of the relationship between the introduction of a secondary character and the plot of the story, we can conclude that they appear for the first time at different moments of the plot and that they are introduced both with the elements of exposition and *in medias res*. In the case of a secondary character, contrary to that of a protagonist, the biblical authors do not dedicate much space at the moment of his entry into the story; he is not the subject of an entire narrative and therefore we do not find introduced by the formula of the birth of a son, e.g., which by contrast occurs frequently in the presentation of a protagonist. We can conclude that in the case of both protagonists and secondary characters, the biblical authors use different formulas and stylistic constructions, depending on the effect they wish to achieve.

2.2. The Presentation of a New Secondary Character in a Story

The analysis shows that in the biblical stories, not only the protagonists but also the secondary characters are introduced by the narrator himself at the moment of their entry into the plot. There are, however, some exceptions, e.g., the case of Rachel (Gen 29:6). Her introduction, in fact, occurs in the dialogue between Jacob and the shepherds, whom he questions for information about Laban. By way of an answer, the shepherds announce the arrival of the daughter of Laban, Rachel, who is introduced not through the voice of the narrator, but by other characters, that is, the shepherds. Another exception concerns Aaron’s entrance on the scene (Exod 4:14). God, seeking to convince Moses of his mission in Egypt, announces the arrival of his brother Aaron, who is to accompany the protagonist in his task. In this case also, the new character, Aaron, is presented not with the narrator’s voice, but with that of another character, in this case, God.

2.3. The Characterisation of a New Secondary Character and the Use of Stylistic Constructions

At this point in the analysis, it seems particularly relevant to observe the characterisation of a new secondary person at the moment of his entrance into the story and the stylistic constructions used by the biblical authors to introduce him. These authors have different ways of describing the characters, the most common of which are the revelation of the name of the character; the description at the beginning of or

during course of the story; dialogues with other characters or with God; and oracles, dreams or visions (Ska 2002, 162).

As in the case of the protagonists, the characterisation of a person can be accomplished in two ways: through a direct description, that is, in a narrative mode (“telling”) with the characteristics attributed to him, usually presented by the narrator, or else by an indirect description, that is, in a scenic mode (“showing”), by way of the character’s speech or actions (Sternberg 1985, 101–3, 122), as exemplified in Table 6.

Table 6. Comparison of direct and indirect descriptions of secondary characters and the use of various stylistic constructions

Direct description	Indirect description
Formulas of the name <i>w^ešēm; š^emô; ûš^emô; ûš^emāh:</i> Sarai (Gen 11:29); Hagar (Gen 16:1); Laban (Gen 24:29); Shiphrah and Puah (Exod 1:15); Nabal and Abigail (1 Sam 25: 2–3); Elkanah, Hannah and Peninnah (1 Sam 1:1–2); Goliath (1 Sam 17:4); Boaz (Ruth 2:1); Mordechai (Esth 2:5)	-
-	Wayyiqṭōl: Balak (Num 22:2); Korah (Num 16:1); Miriam (Exod 15:20); Rehoboam (1 Kgs 11:43); Michal (1 Sam 18:20)
<i>W^ehinnēh—X—participle:</i> three men (Gen 18:2); Rachel (Gen 29:6); Aaron (Exod 4:14)	-
The direct object marker <i>’et</i>: Sarai (Gen 12:5); Zilpah (Gen 29:24); Jezebel (1 Kgs 16:31); Joash (2 Kgs 11:2)	-

Source: Author, based on texts of the Hebrew Bible.

From Table 6 it is clear that the authors favor direct description of the character. As we have observed in the study of protagonists, in the case of secondary characters it is the narrator himself who outlines the portrait of the character by attributing some characteristics to him. In fact, the formulas and stylistic constructions used (e.g., *š^emô*; *w^ehinnēh—X—participle*; or *’et*) are elements of the exposition and therefore constitute a direct description of the new character.

It should be noted that the descriptions of secondary characters in the Bible are usually short, and that we rarely find out other information concerning them. For example, when the two midwives commanded by Pharaoh to exterminate all the male Hebrew babies are introduced, we know only their names, that “the name of one was Shiphrah and the name of the other Puah” (*šēm ... w^ešēm*, Exod 1:15); only later do we learn that they feared God. When Bathsheba first appears, we learn that she was “very beautiful to look upon” (2 Sam 11:2). Sometimes the narrator gives additional information about a secondary character, as in the case of Nabal (1 Sam 25:2–3).

Before we learn his name, we are told that he was a Calebite from Maon, but that he had property in Carmel; his socioeconomic status was that of a very rich man, while his psychology was said to be “surly and mean.” His wife was named Abigail, and at the moment when he appears on the scene, he was in Carmel, shearing his numerous sheep. We need to emphasise that the name Nabal, announced in the exposition with the formula *w^ešēm*, has a proleptic character. In fact, *nābāl* means “fool, senseless, idiot, stupid, mean” (Alonso Schökel 2013, 522–23) and later in the story, Nabal will show himself to be exactly what his name says, that is, stupid. The direct description of his personality by the narrator in the exposition finds its confirmation in the indirect description that emerges from his behaviour: the insulting lack of hospitality toward David and his servants. Abigail’s own words describe her husband when she asks David for mercy for him: “Let not my lord, I pray thee, take notice of this wretched man, Nabal: he is just what his name Nabal means: ‘Churl’ is his name and churlish his behaviour” (1 Sam 25:25).

One of the longest physical descriptions of a biblical character is that of Goliath (1 Sam 17). Beyond giving his origin in Gath, the description is totally dedicated to his physical aspect, mostly involving his armour:

A champion came out from the Philistines, a man named Goliath, from Gath; he was over nine feet in height. He had a bronze helmet on his head, and he wore plate armour of bronze, weighing five thousand shekels. On his legs were bronze greaves, and one of his weapons was a bronze dagger. The shaft of his spear was like a weaver’s beam, and its head, which was of iron, weighed six hundred shekels. His shield-bearer marched ahead of him (1 Sam 17:4–7).

Table 6 presents a few cases in which the indirect description occurs only when a secondary character, when coming on stage, accomplishes a specific action, expressed with a *wayyiqṭōl*. For example, Michal is introduced into the story with the news that she “fell in love (*wayyiqṭōl*) with David” (1 Sam 18:20), which at the same time constitutes an indirect description of her personality, that is, that she was a woman in love. The same mode of indirect characterisation at the moment of entrance on the scene, can be seen with other characters such as Balak (Num 22:2); Korah (Num 16:1); Miriam (Exod 15:20); and Rehoboam (1 Kgs 11:43). We note that when a secondary character enters on the scene following an action represented by a *wayyiqṭōl*, his characterisation is very short, because it is expressed in a single action, but as the story unfolds, it can prove essential for understanding the character himself.

Conclusion

To answer the initial question as to how the biblical authors introduce new characters, we have examined a few biblical texts in which different characters appear for the first time on stage from the point of view of analysis of the plot and style. The first part of the study was dedicated to the ways of introducing a protagonist and seeing how he is usually introduced into the biblical story from the beginning of the plot by means of three main modalities:

- 1) Dedicating an entire narrative to the entrance of the protagonist, in which the character appears slowly and is awaited. We have analysed the particular traits and the singular expressiveness of the stories of the birth of a hero which, being type scenes, may seem repetitive on first reading, but which in their most intimate aspects can conceal a unique intensity. A comparison of these type scenes²² reveals both the similarities, that is, the underlying pattern, and the unique elements in the stories of the birth of a protagonist.
- 2) Using the initial part of the plot called “exposition,” with a range of information necessary for the understanding of the action which follows. In this case, the characterisation of the hero is given by the narrator in a direct description and also includes the circumstances in which he appears.
- 3) Introducing the protagonist *in medias res*, in which the hero meets the reader without previous preparation. We note that in all the cases studied, God gives an order to the character that includes a “narrative program.” When the protagonist enters the story, the reader already recognises that he is the interlocutor of God and learns of his reaction to the divine order given to him.

As to the secondary characters, the analysis shows that, in contrast to the protagonists, they appear for the first time in different parts of the plot according to their function. They can be included from the beginning of the story, but ordinarily an entire narrative is not dedicated to them, as in the case of the protagonists. Instead, they are given a limited space in the exposition, or they can be inserted directly into the dramatic action through their actions or brief parts of the narrative picture.

Furthermore, one can see that the introduction of a new character can be made up of different elements. One of these, whether for a protagonist or for a secondary character, is the revelation of the name, which gives the character his identity. His naming can be identified as the moment of his “birth” in the story, independently of the type of character and his role; often this name also has a proleptic value.

During the course of the analysis we have observed that the biblical authors use different stylistic constructions to introduce a new person into the story, constructions

²² For type scenes of the birth of a future hero, see Isaac (Gen 21:1–3); Jacob and Esau (Gen 25:19–28); Moses (Exod 2:1–20); Samson (Judg 13:3–24); Samuel (1 Sam 1:19–20).

that present themselves as real and true formulas or conventions. Generally, the same construction is found in various stories. There is therefore no single stratagem for introducing a new character in the biblical stories; rather, the authors have created a variety of stylistic constructions, formulas and conventions. The study also asked why an author chooses a particular construction to introduce his character. From the in-depth analysis a plurality of reasons emerge: the use of a specific option seems to be determined in part by the moment in the plot and the dramatic action in which the character is introduced; by the role which the character himself plays in the plot; and above all, by the particular effect that the author wants to achieve in presenting the new character to the reader. In each case, the biblical authors seek to guide the reader to identify the essential elements of the character's characterisation, which are instrumental in understanding his role and the construction of the plot.

Translated by Sheila Long

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The “Place of God”: Biblical Exegesis and Spirituality in Evagrius Ponticus

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Abstract: This article examines Evagrius Ponticus’s spirituality, centering on the metaphor of “the place of God” (τόπος Θεοῦ). It argues that Evagrius defines this “place” not as a geographical location but as the “formless state” of the intellect (νοῦς), attainable through practices such as “pure prayer” and the acquisition of impassibility (ἀπάθεια). The analysis employs close textual and biblical exegesis (Exod 24:10–11; Ezek 1:26; 10:1) to demonstrate how Evagrius’s thought highlights the inner transformation of the intellect. This purification, in turn, facilitates a direct, contemplative encounter with God, illustrating the profound integration of lived spiritual experience with his method of interpreting Scripture.

Keywords: Evagrius Ponticus, biblical exegesis, spirituality, divine light, Exod 24:10–11

The purpose of this article is to explore Evagrius Ponticus’s core spiritual concepts, focusing on his complex understanding of the “place of God” (τόπος Θεοῦ), the transformative state of impassibility (ἀπάθεια), and the culminating experience of the vision of “formless” divine light (φῶς/ φέγγος). The primary intention is to provide an in-depth analysis of how these interconnected elements form a coherent spiritual system within Evagrius’s ascetic and contemplative framework, offering a nuanced perspective on the journey of the human intellect (νοῦς) toward union with God.

The article’s methodology involves a comprehensive textual analysis of Evagrius’s works, guided by his definitions and descriptions of these theological concepts. This includes identifying and explaining key Greek terms from Evagrian writings to support the interpretations. The analysis also utilizes scriptural sources, particularly the Septuagint (LXX) and Masoretic Text (MT) (Exod 24:10–11; Ezek 1:26; 10:1), to emphasize Evagrius’s allegorical exegesis and the internalization of biblical topographies. Furthermore, it integrates a comparative and exegetical approach to trace the spiritual understanding of these concepts, along with historical and philosophical contextualization (e.g., Alexandrian tradition, Stoicism).

Through detailed textual analysis, this article aims to significantly enhance the academic understanding of Evagrian spirituality by highlighting the originality of his experiential approach, particularly his direct descriptions of luminous visions. Unlike the veiled accounts provided by other early Christian authors, Evagrius explicitly describes the light observed during prayer, acknowledging its spiritual significance while noting the dangers of demonic delusion and the necessity for discernment.

This unique specificity makes him an exception in the Christian literature of his time, as contemporary ascetic writings often lack such detailed accounts. It also emphasizes his ongoing relevance for early Christian thought and contemporary theological dialogue on spirituality and mysticism.

1. The “Pure Intellect”

Evagrius Ponticus (345-399 AD) is considered one of the notable speculative mystics, viewing the intellect (νοῦς) as an intuitive faculty essential for acquiring divine knowledge and attaining union with the divine (de Andia 2005, 73). The intellect is the core of personal identity (Dysinger 2005, 177–78), the seat of the indelible image of God, and the organ through which humans know God (Tobon 2011, 54). While Evagrius mainly emphasizes the intellect, he consistently regards the whole person, explicitly seen as the “image of God,” as being oriented towards a personal encounter with God through knowledge (γνώσις) (Bunge 2022, 136). For Evagrius, knowing God is not a dialectical process but a direct intuition: “The knowledge of God does not require a dialectical soul, but one who sees.” (*Capita Gnostica* 4.90, S2 [PO 28, 175])¹ In *Capita cognoscitiva* 34, Evagrius states: “The intellect is a temple of the Holy Trinity.” (Νοῦς ἐστὶ ναὸς τῆς ἁγίας Τριάδος) (Muyldermans 1931, 377) It is precisely this intrinsic quality of the intellect that enables it to know God (*Liber practicus* 49 [SC 171, 613]).

Evagrius asserts that God is not a being like other and therefore cannot be examined or defined through philosophical or scientific ways (*Fragmentum ex libro Gnosticus inscripto* 41 [SC 356, 166–67]).² Just as God is “beyond all sensory perception and conception” (ὑπὲρ πᾶσαν αἴσθησιν καὶ ἔννοιαν) (*De oratione* 4 [PG 79, 1168]), being immaterial (ἄυλος) (*De oratione* 67 [PG 79, 1182]), without quantity and shape (ἄποσος καὶ ἀσχημάτιστος) (*De oratione* 68 [PG 79, 1182]), and without form (μορφή) (*De oratione* 114 [PG 79, 1191]), so too, the true nature of the intellect is

¹ In the Platonic tradition, dialectic was regarded as the first and highest expression of philosophy (so that the philosopher had to be διαλεκτικώτατος—“perfect in dialectic”). Nevertheless, the knowledge of God transcends philosophical knowledge, as it represents a mystical vision that occurs in the presence and union with God. See *Capita Gnostica* 4.89, S2 (PO 28, 175); cf. Ramelli 2015, 245.

² “Every proposition has as [its—D.J.] predicate a kind, a difference, a species, a property, an accident, or the compound of those things: but one cannot accept anything that has been said about the Holy Trinity. Let the indescribable be worshipped in silence (Σιωπῇ προσκυνεῖσθω τὸ ἄρρητον).” (Young et al. 2024b, 133) See also *Fragmentum ex libro Gnosticus inscripto* 27 (SC 356, 132–33): “Do not speak about God thoughtlessly, and never define the divine. Definitions, after all, are for things that come into being and are composite”; *Capita cognoscitiva* 20 (Muyldermans 1931, 376): “In what concerns God, this is something evidently impossible—since the knowledge of Being is un-revelatory and has no parallel to knowledge of being.” (Harmless and Fitzgerald 2001b, 525) Cf. Harmless and Fitzgerald 2001a, 524, n. 90.

formless and immaterial (*Kephalaia Gnostika* 3.31, S2 [PO 28, 111]).³ That which was made to receive the immaterial and formless God is, by its very essence, immaterial and formless (Tobon 2011, 50): “Never give a shape (σχηματίσης) to the divine as such when you pray, nor allow your intellect (νοῦς) to be imprinted (τυπώω) by any form (μορφή), but go immaterial to the Immaterial and you will understand (ἄλλ’ αἴλος τῷ αἴλω πρόσιθι, καὶ συνίσσεις).”⁴ (*De oratione* 67 [PG 79, 1182]; cf. Casiday 2006b, 193)

“Having come to be in prayer (προσευχή), [the intellect—D.J.] enters into the formlessness (ἐν ἀνειδέος), which is called the ‘place of God’ (τόπος Θεοῦ).”⁵ (*Capita cognoscitiva* 20 [Muyldermans 1931, 376]; cf. Harmless and Fitzgerald 2001b, 525)

“The place of God” is, by definition, “formless” (ἀνειδέος), which means that the intellect⁶ itself, when it becomes “the place of God,” is freed from any form of self-generated imagery. The term ἀνειδέος also appears associated with γνῶσις (divine knowledge), indicating an immaterial and formless knowledge, in contrast to the false visions induced in the intellect by the demon through phantasms (φαντασία).⁷ Evagrius equates the attainment of the “formless” state with the “place of God.” (*Capita cognoscitiva* 20 [Muyldermans 1931, 376])

In *De malignis cogitationibus* 41 (13–5 [SC 438, 292]), the “pure νοῦς” is called “the throne of God” (διὸ καὶ θρόνος λέγεται θεοῦ νοῦς καθαρός), “since God is said to be ‘seated’ where he is known” (ἐκεῖ γὰρ λέγεται καθέζεσθαι ὁ θεὸς ἔνθα γινώσκεται). Evagrius chooses the opening verse from Isaiah’s vision of God (Isa 6:1: “I saw the Lord”). The key to interpretation should not be literal, because there is no

³ “It is possible to speak of the unity of the intellect; but of its nature one cannot speak, for there is no knowledge of the quality of a thing composed of neither form nor matter.” (Young et al. 2024a, 271)

⁴ See also *De oratione* 114 (PG 79, 1191): “Do not seek at all to receive a form (μορφήν), shape (σχήμα) or colour (χρῶμα) at the time of prayer (τῆς προσευχῆς καιρῷ).” (Casiday 2006b, 198)

⁵ See also *Capita cognoscitiva* 22 (Muyldermans 1931, 376): “The intellect (νοῦς) sometimes goes from one representation (νοήμα) to other representations (νοήματα), sometimes from one contemplation (θεωρήμα) to other contemplations (θεωρήματα), {and again from a representation (νοήμα) to a contemplation (θεωρήμα)} and from a contemplation (θεωρήμα) to representations (νοήματα). But there is a (time) when it runs from an imageless state (ἀνειδέου καταστάσεως) to representations (νοήματα) or to contemplations (θεωρήματα) and back again from these to the formless state (ἀνειδέου καταστάσεως). This thing happens within it in the time of prayer (προσευχῆς).” (Harmless and Fitzgerald 2001b, 525)

⁶ Regarding the concept of the “formless intellect,” in the state of pure prayer, see *Antirrhetikos* 7.31 (Frankenberg 1912a, 535): “Against the thought of vainglory (κενοδοξία) that appears to us in the condition of pure prayer (προσευχῆς καθαρᾶς) and likens the intellect (νοῦς) to the form (μορφή) that it wants, although the intellect (νοῦς) is invisible (ἀόρατος) and formless (ἀειδέος), and depicts it [the intellect—D.J.] praying (προσευχόμενον) to the divine (θεότης).” (Brakke 2009, 154)

⁷ See *De oratione* 69 (PG 79, 1182): “When the envious demon is unable to set the intellect in motion by memory (μνήμη) during prayer (προσευχῆ), then he forces the temperament of the body (σώματος) into making some strange apparition (φαντασίαν) in the intellect and shaping (μορφώσαι) the intellect. And the intellect will bend easily since it has the habit of being linked with representations (νοήμασι), and the intellect that was rushing toward immaterial (αἴλον) and formless (ἀειδέου) knowledge (γνώσιν) is cheated (ἀπατάται), accepting smoke (καπνὸν) instead of light (φωτὸς).” (cf. Casiday 2006b, 193)

physical throne in Isaiah's vision. What Isaiah saw with his "prophetic eye," Evagrius says, was his most authentic self (his "rational nature"), which became "the throne of God" by "receiving in itself the knowledge of God." (Casiday 2006a, 115)⁸ Evagrius writes about the "throne of God" in the same way he writes about the "place of God."

2. The Mental "Representations"

Following the Greek philosophical tradition, Evagrius identifies the intellect (νοῦς) as the seat of "representations" (νοήματα). Spiritual knowledge (γνώσις πνευματική) occurs through the means of "representations." As Antoine Guillaumont points out, the Evagrian term νόημα refers to the image evoked by the perceiving a sensible object (αἰσθητὸν πράγμα), similar to what the Stoics called φαντασία, a term usually translated as "representation." The verb τυποῦν signifies the "imprinting" or "impression" (τύπωσις) left by this image on the intellect, thus echoing the Stoic idea mentioned by Diogenes Laertius (*Vitae philosophorum* 7.45.10–7.46.1 [Hicks 1925, 154–55]).

In Aristotle, νόημα is based on the image produced by perceiving a sensible object (φάντασμα), but it differs from this in that, once received by the intellect, the image is in a sense "conceptualized." (*De anima* III, 431b–436a [Polansky 2007, 481 sq.]) Probably, this conceptual dimension explains Evagrius' preference for the Aristotelian term νόημα over the Stoic one, φαντασία. The Stoics distinguished between φαντασία (the representation resulting from the direct perception of sensible objects) and φάντασμα (the image of an absent object, recalled from memory, or of an unreal object, like one in a dream) (cf. *Vitae philosophorum* 7.50.1–9 [Hicks 1925, 158–59]).

In this context, Evagrius' terminology aligns more with Aristotle's, who used the term φαντασία to refer to imagination. Evagrius uses this term, in the plural, to denote the "imaginings" (φαντασίαι) that occur during sleep (*Liber practicus* 54 [SC 171, 624, 626]), as well as for images of objects stored in memory (*De malignis cogitationibus* 4 [SC 438, 162, 163]; 2 [SC 438, 154, 156]). Evagrius distinguishes between representations that leave an imprint on the intellect and those that do not (Guillaumont 1998, 24–28): "Among representations (νοήματα), some imprint (τυπόω) and shape (σχηματίζω) our governing faculty (τὸ ἡγεμονικόν), and others only provide

⁸ See *Schol 300 ad Prov* 25.5 (SC 340, 392): "... his own intellect (νοῦς), which is said to be the throne of God (θρόνος Θεοῦ). For nowhere else is it natural for wisdom and knowledge and righteousness to dwell, except in a rational nature (φύσει λογικῇ); but all these things are Christ (ταῦτα δὲ πάντα ἐστὶν ὁ Χριστός)." (SC 340, 393)

⁹ Regarding the νοῦς or its contemplative activity understood as the "throne of Christ," see *Schol 1 ad Ps* 9.5 (2); *Schol 4 ad Ps* 46.9 (2); *Schol 1 ad Ps* 88.5 (2); *Schol 8 ad Ps* 131.11 (2). Cf. Stewart 2001, 200, n. 125. For Evagrius, as with other ancient Fathers, the Old Testament theophanies are, in fact, Logophanies. See *Capita Gnostica* 4.41, S2 (PO 28, 155). Cf. Bunge 2022, 164, n. 162.

knowledge (γνώσις), without imprinting (τυπώ) or shaping (σχηματίζω) the intellect (νοῦς).” (*De malignis cogitationibus* 41.1–3 [SC 438, 290]; cf. Casiday 2006c, 115)

In his work *De malignis cogitationibus* 40, Evagrius employs the term “imprinting” in a unique way. He explains that during “pure prayer” (προσευχῆς καθαρᾶς), a divine light (φῶς) appears in the intellect and “imprints” (ἐκτυπώ)¹⁰ “the place of God.” (τόπος τοῦ Θεοῦ) (*De malignis cogitationibus* 40.9 [SC 438, 290])¹¹ The use of the verb ἐκτυπῶν here (*De malignis cogitationibus* 40.9)¹² is especially surprising, considering that in the following chapter, τὸ νόημα τοῦ θεοῦ is listed among the “representations” that leave no form in the intellect (*De malignis cogitationibus* 41.27–9 [SC 438, 294]).¹³

In the phrase τὸ νόημα τοῦ Θεοῦ (*De malignis cogitationibus* 41.17 [SC 438, 292]),¹⁴ the term νόημα no longer means a “representation,” but instead signifies the “idea,” “concept,” or “thought” of God—ἡ μνήμη τοῦ Θεοῦ, “the memory of God” (*Capita cū auctoribus discipulis Evagrii* 61.6 [SC 514, 162])¹⁵—as explained in the *Chapters to Evagrius’ Disciples* (cf. Guillaumont 1998, 21–22).

This divine ray restores the true “state of the intellect” (νοῦ καταστάσις), enabling it to self-contemplate, much “like sapphire or sky-blue—which Scripture also calls ‘the place of God,’ seen on Mt Sinai by the elders.” (σαφείρω ἢ οὐρανίω χρώματι παρεμφερῆ, ἤγτινα καὶ τόπον θεοῦ ἢ γραφῆ ὀνομάζει ὑπὸ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων ὀφθέντα

¹⁰ The verb ἐκτυπῶ (derived from ἔκτυπος) primarily means “worked in high relief.” (Liddell et al. 1996, 524) For another unusual use of the language of “imprinting”: τυπῶ = “form by impress,” “form, mould, model” (Liddell et al. 1996, 1835); see *Capita Gnostica* 5.41 (Hausherr 1939, 231): “The one bearing the intelligible cosmos (νοητὸς κόσμος) imprinted (τυπούμενον) in himself ceases from all corruptible desire (ἐπιθυμία φθαρτή); and he is ashamed at those things he first he enjoyed; his thought (λογισμὸς) frequently reproaches him for his earlier insensibility.” (Young et al. 2024a, 380) Cf. Stewart 2001, 198, n. 118.

¹¹ The final part [from ἐκείνου, line 8: “at the time of prayer which imprints (ἐκτυπῶντος) the place of God (τὸν τόπον τοῦ θεοῦ)”—D.J.] is missing in the parallel text in *Capita cognoscitiva* 23 (Muyldermans 1931, 376).

¹² Which also appears in 25.40 (SC 438, 242): “But, pay attention to yourself (πρόσεχε σεαυτῶ) and see how the intellect (ὁ νοῦς) puts on the form (ἐνδύεται τὴν μορφήν) of its own body without the face, but again imprints (ἐκτυπῶ) the neighbor entirely by means of discursive thinking (κατὰ διάνοιαν), since having grasped beforehand and seen such a one entirely.” (SC 438, 291)

¹³ It is also worth noting that the verb ἐκτυπῶ has no correspondent in the parallel Syriac text. Cf. SC 438, 290–291, n. 6.

¹⁴ The expression τὸ νόημα τοῦ θεοῦ—which appears only here and in the *Schol 1 ad Ps* 140.2(1)—may seem strange: the word νόημα takes on the meaning of “notion,” “idea,” or “concept” here rather than that of “representation.” (SC 438, 293, n. 7)

¹⁵ The formula ἡ μνήμη τοῦ Θεοῦ is another way, biblically inspired, of designating the state of prayer. See *Schol 22 ad Ps* 118.55: “for the evil thought (λογισμὸς), lingering in the reason/discursive thought (τῇ διανοίᾳ), distracts the intellect (τὸν νοῦν) and separates it from the memory of God (τῆς μνήμης τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ).” (SC 514, 162, n. 61) “The memory of God” plays an important role in Evagrian spirituality, as evidenced by *Admonitio paraenetica* 3. This expression stands in opposition to “passion-laden memories” (cf. *Liber practicus* 34.1 [SC 171, 578]): (Ὦν τὰς μνήμας ἔχομεν ἐμπαθεῖς), which include bad thoughts and the distractions arising from people and worldly affairs. Cf. Muyldermans 1952, 87, 126, 157.

ἐπὶ τοῦ ὄρους Σινᾶ) (*De malignis cogitationibus* 39.3–6 [SC 438, 286]; cf. Casiday 2006c, 114) What it perceives possesses brilliance and colour, but lacks form.¹⁶

This “formless light” (Conway-Jones 2018, 271; cf. Guillaumont 1984, 256) through which the intellect perceives itself, is not its own, but the light of God Himself.¹⁷ When it sees itself as light, resembling the sky’s azure, the intellect recognizes its likeness to God. Simultaneously, it perceives and knows—indirectly, as in a mirror—the immaterial, uncreated light that is God (Harmless and Fitzgerald 2001a, 519). However, it does not see God Himself in His essence; what it sees is, like those of ancient Israel, the “place of God”—that is, itself clothed in divine light (cf. Guillaumont 1984, 260).

3. The “Place of God” Metaphor

Evagrius’ use of the metaphor “the place of God”¹⁸ has been interpreted by researchers (Guillaumont 1984, 260; Harmless and Fitzgerald 2001a, 520; Stewart 2001, 195) as stemming from his own mystical experiences and reflections on Holy Scripture. Evagrius’s starting point is Exod 24:10, a verse highlighting the differences between the MT and the LXX. According to the MT, Moses, Aaron, Nadab, Abihu, and the seventy elders “saw the God of Israel” (לֹא רָאוּ אֶת אֱלֹהֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל). In contrast, the LXX translates the text as follows: “And they saw the place where the God of Israel stood” (καὶ εἶδον τὸν τόπον, οὗ εἰστήκει ὁ Θεὸς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ). The LXX translators based their interpretation on the MT’s description of God’s feet, under which “there was

¹⁶ See *Capita cognoscitiva* 2 (Muyldermans 1931, 374): καὶ τότε ὄψεται αὐτὸν σαπφείρω ἢ οὐρανίῳ χρώματι παρεμφερέῃ—“then he will see the intellect appear similar to sapphire or to the color of the sky” (cf. Harmless and Fitzgerald 2001b, 521); 4 (Muyldermans 1931, 374): Νοῦ κατάστασις ἐστὶν ὕψος νοητὸν οὐρανίῳ χρώματι παρεμφερέης—“The state of the intellect is an intelligible height, comparable in colour to the sky.” (cf. Harmless and Fitzgerald 2001b, 521) Cf. also Stewart 2001, 197–98.

¹⁷ Thus, in moments of “pure prayer,” the intellect sees itself because it has become luminous; however, this light that enables it to see itself and perceive its “state” is the divine light that envelops it. This divine light is God Himself, as Evagrius states, adopting the Johannine formula (cf. 1 John 1:5), “God, in his essence, is light.” Cf. *Capita Gnostica* 1.35, S1 (Frankenberg 1912b, 79): “Just as light (φως) itself, while showing everything to us, does not need another light (φωτος) by which to be seen, so also God, although he shows everything, does not need another light (φωτος) by which to be known. For, in his essence (ουσια), ‘He is light (φως).’” (Young et al. 2024a, 169)

¹⁸ For the expression “place of God,” cf. *Capita cognoscitiva* 20 (Muyldermans 1931, 376): “Having come to be in prayer, it enters into the formlessness which is called the ‘place of God (τόπος Θεοῦ)’” (Harmless and Fitzgerald 2001b, 525); 23 (Muyldermans 1931, 376): “The intellect would not see the ‘place of God’ (τὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ τόπον) in itself...” (Harmless and Fitzgerald 2001b, 525); 25 (Muyldermans 1931, 377): “From holy David we have clearly learned what the ‘place of God’ (ὁ τόπος τοῦ Θεοῦ) is” (Harmless and Fitzgerald 2001b, 526); and *De oratione* 58 (PG 79, 1180): “Even if the intellect comes to be above the contemplation of bodily nature, it has not yet contemplated the perfect ‘place of God (τὸν τοῦ θεοῦ τόπον).’” (Casiday 2006b, 192) See also *De malignis cogitationibus* 39, 40 (SC 438, 286–90).

something like of a paved work of sapphire stone, and the like of the very heaven for clearness” (רַגְלָיו, כְּמַעֲשֵׂה לְבַנֵּת הַסַּפִּיר, וּכְעֲצָם הַשְּׁמַיִם, לְטָהָר), transforming it into “and under his feet was as it were a work of sapphire bricks, and as it were the appearance of the firmament of heaven in its purity” (ὡσεὶ ἔργον πλίνθου σαπφείρου καὶ ὡσπερ εἶδος στερεώματος τοῦ οὐρανοῦ τῇ καθαριότητι). The Hebrew word *livnat*, derived from *levenah*, means “brick” and suggests a decorative pavement of bricks or tiles.

Sappir, translated as “sapphire,” does not refer to the modern blue gemstone (corundum), which was unknown in the ancient Near East, but rather to dark blue lapis lazuli, which was often used. In the vision of the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek 1:26; 10:1), God’s throne is made of this material, and the use of lapis lazuli in a palace is mentioned in Ugaritic literature. In Exod 24:11, the MT replaces the general verb “to see” (רָאָה, *ra’ah*) with the stronger verb “to behold” (הִזָּהַר, *hāzāh*), a term from the vocabulary of prophetic vision that suggests much greater intensity and emphasizes that the encounter goes beyond natural eye perception (cf. Sarna 1991, 153). The Septuagint, however, employs the passive form (ὤφθησαν) of the verb “to see” (ὄραω): “they appeared/were seen in the place of God” (ὤφθησαν ἐν τῷ τόπῳ τοῦ θεοῦ). Thus, in the LXX, the “place” no longer represents what is seen but rather indicates the location of those who experienced this vision (cf. Conway-Jones 2018, 267–68).

The Alexandrian translators, to soften the claim of a direct vision of God, replaced the Hebrew phrase “they saw the God of Israel” with “they saw the ‘place’ where the God of Israel stood.” This change is supported by the fact that the Hebrew word *māqôm* (מָקוֹם = “place”) also functions as one of the substitutes for the divine name. Therefore, the term “place of God” arises, playing a key role in Evagrius’s interpretation of Exod 24:10, explaining the vision the intellect has of itself “during prayer”: the intellect then perceives itself as the “place of God.” This shift from a direct vision of God to a vision of the “place” where God is present highlights an important theological subtlety, creating a distance between humanity and divinity while acknowledging divine presence at the centre of the spiritual experience (cf. Guillaumont 1984, 258). Evagrius follows the careful translators of the Septuagint in choosing the euphemism, referring to the “place of God” rather than God. “It is a place of visitation rather than a location of essence.” (Stewart 2001, 198)

The image of the sapphire pavement beneath God’s feet, echoed in the theophanies of the prophet Ezekiel (Ezek 1:26; 10:1), becomes a symbol in Evagrian writings. Evagrius interiorizes this biblical topography, transferring “the place of God” from the geographical space of Sinai into the human intellect (cf. *De malignis cogitationibus* 39 [SC 438, 286–88]; 40 [SC 438, 288–90]; *Capita cognoscitiva* 25 [Muyldermans 1931, 377]), aligned with an exegesis influenced by the Alexandrian tradition. He supports this interpretation linking verses about God’s “place” in Zion¹⁹

¹⁹ For the “place” of God in Zion, cf. Ps 75:3 LXX: “And his place has been in peace, and his dwelling-place in Zion”; cf. *Capita cognoscitiva* 25 (Muyldermans 1931, 376). In *Epistulae* 39.5 (Frankenberg 1912c, 593),

and Jerusalem,²⁰ emphasizing that seeing this “place”²¹ requires going beyond ordinary mental processes and can only be achieved through pure, “imageless prayer.” (cf. Stewart 2001, 196)

Evagrius intentionally combines elements from different scriptural traditions, choosing the “place of God” from the Septuagint (εἶδον τὸν τόπον, οὐ εἰστήκει ἐκεῖ ὁ θεὸς τοῦ Ἰσραήλ), and the “colour” (χρῶμα) (of heaven) from Symmachus’s translation (cf. Wevers 1990, 385–86, n. 10)—where the elders saw “by a vision [ὄραματι] the God of Israel.” By abandoning the “firmament” (στερέωμα) of the sky, which implies a physical image, he prefers “colour” (χρῶμα) (cf. Guillaumont 1984, 258), which more accurately reflects the inner and contemplative aspects of spiritual experience (cf. Conway-Jones 2018, 268–69).

In *De oratione*, Evagrius equates “the place of God” with “the place of prayer” (τόπος προσευχῆς) (cf. Conway-Jones 2018, 269),²² linking it to the vision of divine light. Inspired by the Sinaitic theophany, Evagrius compares human existence to a life spent at the foot of Mount Sinai, where one stays vigilant over their thoughts while

Evagrius calls this “place” also a “vision of peace” (ὄρασις εἰρήνης), in which “one sees (ὄρα τις) in it (ἐν αὐτῷ) that peace which surpasses all understanding and guards our hearts (cf. Phil 4:7). For in a pure heart (καθαροὶ καρδία) another heaven is formed (ἄλλος οὐρανὸς ἐντυπύεται), where the vision is light (οὐ ἡ ὄρασις φῶς ἐστὶ) and the place is spiritual (ὁ τόπος πνευματικός), in which the meanings of beings (αἱ τῶν ὄντων ἐννοιαὶ) are seen (ὁρῶνται).” (cf. Icā Jr. 2022, 275)

²⁰ For the “place” of God in Jerusalem, cf. Ps 134:21 LXX: “Blessed in Sion be the Lord, who dwells in Jerusalem”; Ps 67:30: “Because of thy temple at Jerusalem shall kings bring presents to thee.” For the Evagrian interpretation, see *Scholia* 1, 2 *ad* Ps 75:3 (PG 12, 1536C): “The practical soul is the place of God (Τόπος θεοῦ ψυχῆ πρακτικῆ). The contemplative intellect is the dwelling place of God (Κατοικητήριον θεοῦ νοῦς θεωρητικῶς).” Thus, Ps 75 is read as a commentary on Exod 24. This reading will lead Evagrius to emphasize that the interior Sinai is also an interior Sion. The true “temple” is not in Jerusalem, but in the intellect, cf. *Capita cognoscitiva* 23 (Muyldermans 1931, 376): “The intellect could not see the place of God within itself” (Οὐκ ἂν ἴδοι ὁ νοῦς τὸν τοῦ Θεοῦ τόπον ἐν ἑαυτῷ). In other words, God’s eternal dwelling place is man; the human person is the true place of divine presence and illumination. Cf. Harmless and Fitzgerald 2001a, 519.

²¹ See *De malignis cogitationibus* 39.2–6 (SC 438, 286): “The intellect (ὁ νοῦς) ... will see its own state (ἑαυτοῦ κατάστασιν) in the time of prayer (κατὰ τὸν καιρὸν τῆς προσευχῆς), resembling sapphire or the colour of heaven (οὐρανίῳ χρῶματι); this state scripture (ἡ γραφή) calls the place of God (τόπος θεοῦ), that was seen by the elders (ὑπὸ τῶν πρεσβυτέρων) n Mount Sinai [cf. Exod 24:9–11] (ἐπὶ τοῦ ὄρους Σινᾶ).” (cf. Sinkewicz 2003, 180)

²² See *De oratione* 57 (PG 79, 1180): “Even when the intellect (νοῦς) does not abide among the bare representations of things (νοήμασι τῶν πραγμάτων), it has not *ipso facto* attained the place of prayer”; 72 (PG 79, 1181): “It is not possible for one in chains to run, nor is it possible for an intellect (νοῦς) enslaved to the passions to see the place of spiritual prayer (προσευχῆς πνευματικῆς)”; 102 (PG 79, 1189): “In the holy place of prayer (προσεύχου ἐν τῷ ἱερῷ τόπῳ), pray not as the Pharisee, but as the tax collector, so that you too may be justified by God”; 152 (PG 79, 1200): “In proportion as you are paying attention to the body and your intellect (νοῦς) is busy with the Tabernacle’s delights, you have not yet beheld the place of prayer (τὸν τῆς προσευχῆς ἑώρακας τόπον).” Cf. Casiday 2006b, 192, 193, 201. See also *De oratione* 58 (PG 79, 1180), where the term τόπος Θεοῦ (“place of God”) appears in immediate juxtaposition with τόπος προσευχῆς (“place of prayer”) from chapter 57. Cf. Stewart 2001, 197, n. 114.

waiting for the call to ascend (*De malignis cogitationibus* 17.36–9 [SC 438, 212, 214]).²³ Moses serves as the model of the perfect prayerful person who speaks directly with God²⁴ but must first remove his sandals before approaching the Burning Bush (*De oratione* 4 [PG 79, 1168]).²⁵ To see “the place of God” and to speak with God in “the place of prayer” is equivalent to “ascending” beyond all impassioned thoughts²⁶ and any representation,²⁷ including non-sensory ones.²⁸ Therefore, the “place of God” (τόπος Θεοῦ) is the rational soul (ψυχή λογική), and His dwelling is the “luminous intellect” (νοῦς φωτοειδής), which has given up worldly desires and has been taught to contemplate “the reasons of the soul.” (τοὺς τῆς ψυχῆς λόγους) (*Capita cognoscitiva* 25 [Muyldermans 1931, 376]; cf. Harmless and Fitzgerald 2001b, 526)

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- ²³ “Then once more let us graze the sheep (πρόβατα) on Mount Sinai (Σιναιὸν ὄρος), so that the God of our fathers (θεὸς τῶν πατέρων ἡμῶν) may call us (even us!) from out of the bush (βάτου) and grace us (even us!) (χαρίσῃται) with the reasons of ‘signs’ (σημεῖα) and ‘wonders’ (τέρατα).” (Casiday 2006c, 101)
- ²⁴ See *Epistulae* 27.2 (Frankenberg 1912c, 583): “and ‘he spoke with God face to face’ (πρόσωπον κατὰ πρόσωπον ἐλάλησεν μετὰ τοῦ Θεοῦ; cf. Exod 33:11) and learned the reasons of existing things by sight and not allegorically (ὄψει καὶ οὐκ ἀλληγορικῶς).” (cf. Ică Jr. 2022, 255) According to Bunge, knowledge is a deeply personal act expressing an intimate communion between Creator and creature. Moses is presented as a model of the perfect one, who reached that “face-to-face vision” while still on earth, a vision that St. Paul the Apostle reserves for the eschaton (1 Cor 13:12). Due to his unique gentleness (πραῦς) more than all people, Moses was granted a direct vision in which God made His ways (τὰς ὁδοὺς αὐτοῦ) known to him (τῷ Μωϋσῆι) (Ps 102:7; cf. *Epistulae* 56.3 [Frankenberg 1912c, 605]) and he learned the reasons of existing things (λόγους τῶν ὄντων) by sight (ὄψει), unlike the indirect vision “in a mirror dimly” (δι’ ἐσόπτρου ἐν αἰνίγματι) experienced by others (cf. 1 Cor 13:12). Cf. Bunge 2022, 153.
- ²⁵ “If Moses was turned back when he tried to approach the burning bush (βάτω φλεγόμενη) on earth, until he took the sandals off his feet [Exod 3:5—D.J.], how can you—who wish to see the one who is beyond all perception (τὸν ὑπὲρ πάντων αἰσθησῖν) and conception (ἐννοῖαν) and to be in communion with him—not put off from yourself every impassioned representation (πᾶν νόημα ἐμπαθέος)?” (Casiday 2006b, 188)
- ²⁶ See *De malignis cogitationibus* 40.3–4 (SC 438, 288): “unless it had put off the passions (τὰ πάθη)” (Casiday 2006c, 115); *De oratione* 72 (PG 79, 1181): “nor is it possible for an intellect enslaved to the passions (νοῦς πάθει δουλεύων)” (Casiday 2006b, 193); *Capita cognoscitiva* 25 (Muyldermans 1931, 377): “the luminous intellect, which has renounced the pleasures of the world” (νοῦς φωτοειδής τὰς κοσμικὰς ἐπιθυμίας ἀρνησάμενος) (cf. Harmless and Fitzgerald 2001b, 526); *De oratione* 152 (PG 79, 1200): “In proportion as you are paying attention to the body and your intellect is busy with the Tabernacle’s delights.” (Casiday 2006b, 201)
- ²⁷ See *De malignis cogitationibus* 40.4–5 (SC 438, 288): “that bind it to sensible objects (τοῖς πράγμασι τοῖς αἰσθητοῖς) through representations (διὰ τῶν νοημάτων)” (cf. Casiday 2006c, 115); *Capita cognoscitiva* 23 (Muyldermans 1931, 376): “unless it has been raised higher than all the representations of objects (ἐν τοῖς πράγμασιν νοημάτων)” (Harmless and Fitzgerald 2001b, 525); *De oratione* 57 (PG 79, 1180): “Even when the intellect (ὁ νοῦς) does not abide among the bare representations of things (νοήμασι τῶν πραγμάτων).” (Casiday 2006b, 192)
- ²⁸ See *De oratione* 57 (PG 79, 1180): “for it can still be in contemplation (θεωρία) of things and talk idly about their reasons. Even if they are bare words, insofar as they are contemplations (θεωρήματα) of things, they imprint (τυποῦσι) on and shape (σχηματίζουσι) the intellect (τὸν νοῦν) and place it far from God” (Casiday 2006b, 192); 58 (PG 79, 1180): “Even if the intellect comes to be above the contemplation of bodily nature (ὑπὲρ τὴν θεωρίαν τῆς σωματικῆς φύσεως), it has not yet contemplated the perfect place of God (τὸν τοῦ θεοῦ τόπον); for it can be among the knowledge of representations (ἐν τῇ τῶν νοητῶν εἶναι γνώσει) and can be diversified by that knowledge (ποικίλλεσθαι πρὸς αὐτήν).” (Casiday 2006b, 192) Cf. Stewart 2001, 197.

4. Impassibility

To achieve contemplation, liberation from passions and the attainment of what Evagrius, using a Stoic term (cf. Guillaumont 1972, 36),²⁹ calls ἀπάθεια³⁰ (“impassibility”³¹), are necessary. Impassibility does not mean apathy or a lack of emotions but signifies “a tranquil state (κατάστασις ἡρεμεία) of the rational soul (ψυχῆς λογικῆς), resulting from gentleness (πραΐτης) and self-control (σωφροσύνη).” (*Capita cognoscitiva* 3 [Muyldermans 1931, 374]; cf. Harmless and Fitzgerald 2001b, 521)

Evagrius identifies two levels of impassibility: “imperfect impassibility” (or “little impassibility”—ὀλίγη ἀπαθεία) (*De malignis cogitationibus* 15.2 [SC 438, 202]) and “perfect impassibility.” (Ἡ μὲν τελεία ἀπάθεια) (*Liber practicus* 60.6 [SC 171, 640]) The ascetic reaches the first level by overcoming the passions of the appetitive part. From there, he develops greater impassibility by restraining the impulses of the irascible part.³² Perfect impassibility is only achieved after fully mastering these latter passions. The latter is proper to angels and remains, for man, a supreme limit toward which he ceaselessly strives (Guillaumont 1972, 42–43). Therefore, impassibility restores the natural order of the soul and returns each part to its proper function.³³

²⁹ Richard Sorabji argues that the Hellenistic Jewish philosopher Philo (ca. 20 BC–50 AD) was the first to philosophically engage with Stoic thought in his writings. These writings, in turn, became the primary source of Stoic influence on the spiritual theology of the Early Church Fathers (cf. Sorabji 2010, 343). The Fathers generally defined ἀπάθεια as the soul’s freedom from passions, a perspective closely mirroring that of the Stoics. Cf. Nguyen 2018, 8.

³⁰ According to Guillaumonts, Clement of Alexandria is, in reality, Evagrius’ predecessor and master on this point. Clement was the pioneer who proposed ἀπάθεια as an ideal for the Christian ascetic, thus bringing the Stoic notion into Christianity. Crucially, impassibility occupies an entirely analogous place in both Clement’s ascetic ideal and Evagrius’ system, possessing the same fundamental connections (cf. SC 170, 101–2). In contrast to Clement and the Stoic philosophers, Evagrius does not regard ἀπάθεια as an absolute state. Consequently, Evagrius’ ἀπάθεια begins within terrestrial life and involves numerous stations or grades. This path’s perspective tends towards other-worldly happiness, with its grades being more detailed than those described in Clement’s *Stromateis*. Cf. Somos 1999, 372.

³¹ Evagrius argues, in *Capita cognoscitiva* 2 (Muyldermans 1931, 374), that the intellect cannot contemplate its own state (τὴν τοῦ νοῦ κατάστασιν) unless it is “free from passions”: “But to do that without being passionless is impossible (τοῦτο δὲ ποιῆσαι ἄνευ ἀπαθείας, τῶν ἀδυνάτων ἐστίν).” (Harmless and Fitzgerald 2001b, 521) It is a “state” of perfect simplicity that Evagrius calls “pure prayer” (καθαρά προσευχή), cf. *De malignis cogitationibus* 43.1 (SC 438, 298); *De oratione* 97 (PG 79, 1188–89). In *Capita cognoscitiva* 25 (Muyldermans 1931, 376), he associates this “state” with luminosity, referring to the “luminous intellect” (νοῦς φωτεινός). Cf. Conway-Jones 2018, 269.

³² Impassibility, an expression of the soul’s health, is established gradually within it. The first passions to yield are those related to the appetitive part; in contrast, those from the irascible part are much more difficult and require a long time to be healed, cf. *Liber practicus* 36 (SC 171, 582). On the thoughts (λογισμοί) of the concupiscible and irascible parts of the soul, see Misiarczyk 2021, 127–219.

³³ Once ἀπάθεια is achieved, the soul regains, along with health, its natural functioning across its various parts. In each of these, the virtues proper to it are established: in the rational part—prudence (φρόνησις), understanding (σύνεσις), and wisdom (σοφία); in the concupiscible part (ἐπιθυμητικῶ)—self-control (ἐγκράτεια), love (ἀγάπη), and abstinence (σωφροσύνη); in the irascible part (θυμικῶ)—courage (ἀνδρεία) and perseverance (*Liber practicus* 89 [SC 171, 680 sq.]). Cf. Guillaumont 1972, 41–42.

Reaching impassibility does not mean that the continuous flow of thoughts stops, but only that they lose their ability to undermine self-control.³⁴ Thus, the ascetic lives in a tranquil state of balance during the waking hours: “the ascetical intellect (πρακτικός) is one that always receives passionlessly (ἀπαθῶς) the representations (νοήματα) of this world.” (*Capita cognoscitiva* 16 [Muyldermans 1931, 375]; cf. Harmless and Fitzgerald 2001b, 523) However, impassibility can also extend to the unconscious realm, including experiences during sleep: “The proof of ἀπάθεια is that the νοῦς has begun to see its own light, remaining tranquil in the presence of apparitions (φάσματα) during sleep, and regarding objects (πράγματα) calmly.” (*Liber practicus* 64 [SC 171, 648]; cf. Young et al. 2024c, 77)

For Evagrius, being passionless signifies spiritual progress, but it does not guarantee holiness. He was aware that, although monks faced the risk of falling, they could achieve a genuine state of inner peace and tranquillity through extended ascetic efforts (cf. Harmless and Fitzgerald 2001a, 515–17).

However, impassibility, while representing the ultimate goal of the ascetic life (πρακτική),³⁵ does not constitute an end pursued for its own sake; it is sought only because it signifies the condition for a higher purpose: contemplation (θεωρία)³⁶.

5. The Vision of the Divine Light

In the *Gnosticus* 45, Evagrius states that those who have attained ἀπάθεια “are able to contemplate (θεωρῶ) the light or splendour (φέγγος) (Liddell et al. 1996, 1920)

³⁴ Through the practice of discernment (διάκρισις), the ascetic (or πρακτικός) learns to use two parts of the soul—the concupiscible (ἐπιθυμητικόν) and the irascible (θυμικόν)—in a useful and natural way. These two faculties of the soul are meant to support the rational part, λογιστικόν, cf. *De malignis cogitationibus* 17 (SC 438, 101). When the two “assistants” (θυμικόν and ἐπιθυμητικόν) are misused—that is, when they engage in behaviours that separate them from or oppose λογιστικόν—they overwhelm the soul with passions. Cf. Prassas 2022, 279.

³⁵ For the monk striving to perceive God’s presence and divine light, merely practicing ἀναχώρησις—withdrawing into the desert and severing ties with people and material objects—is insufficient (cf. Misiarczyk 2023, 266–67). Exterior stillness, called ἡσυχία, does not automatically guarantee the interior stillness of ἀπάθεια—the latter being much more difficult to obtain. Between the two is what Evagrius calls πρακτική, a concept he defines (cf. *Liber practicus* 78) as the “spiritual method clearing out the passionate part of the soul.” (Πρακτική ἐστὶ μέθοδος πνευματικὴ τὸ παθητικὸν μέρος τῆς ψυχῆς ἐκκαθαίρουσα) (SC 171, 666; cf. Young et al. 2024c, 84) This involves the acquisition of ἡσυχία and aims ultimately at ἀπάθεια. Cf. Guillaumont 1972, 35–36.

³⁶ In Evagrius Ponticus’ view, ἀπάθεια is intrinsically linked to knowledge and contemplation. This state facilitates undisturbed prayer, leading to contemplation of the Trinity and “formless union” with God. Imperfect ἀπάθεια, furthermore, offers knowledge of created things, an essential tool in the struggle against the demons. However, perfect ἀπάθεια and undisturbed prayer are not the ultimate aims. The true goal is love, deemed the “daughter of ἀπάθεια.” Cf. Bøcher Rasmussen 2005, 147–62.

proper to the intellect (νοῦς) shining upon them during prayer.” (*Fragmentum ex libro Gnosticus inscripto* 45.6–8 [SC 356, 178]; cf. Evagrius of Pontus 2024, 138) Similarly, in the *Liber practicus* 64, he shows that “a sign of ἀπάθεια is the νοῦς beginning to see its own light or splendour (οἰκεῖον φέγγος).” (*Liber practicus* 64.1–3 [SC 171, 648]; cf. Young et al. 2024b, 77)

In other writings, Evagrius emphasizes that this light (φέγγος³⁷) has a divine origin, linked to the Holy Trinity or the Savior.³⁸ Generally, Evagrius describes the knowledge of God as light,³⁹ believing that the intellect, created to know God,⁴⁰ is meant to become like light, “shining like a star.” (νοῦν ἀστεροειδῆ ὄψει) (*De malignis cogitationibus* 43.7 [SC 438, 298]; cf. Stewart 2001, 193–94)

³⁷ The term φέγγος is also used in *Tractatus ad Eulogium* 29.37 (SC 591, 392–93): “and for the light of prayer to shine forth (καὶ ἐλλαμφοῦναι τῆς εὐχῆς τὸ φέγγος).” Other texts employ the more common term for light, φῶς. It is possible that Evagrius’s choice to use the term φέγγος was inspired, at least in part, by the theophany appearances in the Book of the prophet Ezekiel; cf. Ezek 1:4 (καὶ φέγγος ἐν αὐτῷ = “and brightness in it”); 1:13 (καὶ φέγγος τοῦ πυρός = “and the brightness of fire”); 27 (καὶ τὸ φέγγος αὐτοῦ κύκλω = “and the brightness thereof round about”); 1:28 (ἡ στάσις τοῦ φέγγους κυκλόθεν = “form of brightness round about”); 10:4 (τοῦ φέγγους τῆς δόξης Κυρίου = “the brightness of the glory of the Lord”). Cf. Stewart 2001, 193, n. 93.

³⁸ See *De malignis cogitationibus* 15.14–5 (SC 438, 204): “again, being elevated by prayer (κατὰ τὴν προσευχὴν), we may see (ἐποπτεύομεν) the clearer light (τὸ ... φῶς) of Our Saviour (τοῦ σωτῆρος ἡμῶν).” (Casiday 2006c, 100) Light, as a reflection of God’s face, cf. *Schol 6 ad Ps 4.7* (Pitra 1884, 453–54): “men see the light of His face” (οἱ δὲ ἀνθρώποι τὸ φῶς τοῦ προσώπου αὐτοῦ).

³⁹ “Light” is a symbol of God and His knowledge, and the intellect (νοῦς) is receptive by its nature, cf. *Capita Gnostica* 1.74, S1 (PO 28, 52); (Frankenberg 1912b, 113): “The light of the intellect (τὸ τοῦ νοῦς φῶς) is divided (διακρίνεται/μερίζεται) into three: into the knowledge of the Holy and adored Trinity (τὴν γνῶσιν τῆς ἁγίας καὶ προσκυνητῆς Τριάδος); nature (φύσις) incorporeal (ἀσώματων) and corporeal (ἐνώματων); and the understanding of the natures of created things (καὶ εἰς τὴν συνεσιν τῶν φύσεων τῶν κτισμάτων)” (PO 28, 52); 1.81 (Hausherr 1939, 230): “The glory and light of the intellect (Δόξα οὖν καὶ φῶς τοῦ νοῦς), then, is knowledge (ἡ γνῶσις), but the glory and light of life (δόξα δὲ καὶ φῶς ζωῆς) is impassibility” (Young et al. 2024a, 200); *Epistulae* 28.1 (Frankenberg 1912c, 585): “And ‘lamp’ (λαμπαδα) here I call the intellect (τον νουν) made (πεποιημενον) to grasp (καταλαβειν) the blessed light (τὸ μακάριον φῶς)” (Icā Jr. 2022, 257); 30.1 (Frankenberg 1912c, 587): “Sleep of the rational nature (ὑπνον τῆς λογικῆς φύσεως) he calls sin by deed (τὴν δι’ ἔργου ἁμαρτίαν), because it deprives (ἀποστεροῦσαν) the soul (τὴν ψυχὴν) of the holy light (τοῦ ἁγίου φωτός).” (Icā Jr. 2022, 261) See also *Schol 2 ad Ps 12.4* (PG 12, 1204B): “Illumine yourselves with the light of knowledge” (Φωτίσατε ἑαυτοὺς φῶς γνώσεως); *Schol 3 ad Ps 33.6* (PG 12, 1308B): “Draw near to Him and be enlightened” (προσέλθατε πρὸς αὐτὸν καὶ φωτίσθητε); *Schol 3 ad Ps 36.6* (Pitra 1883, 10): “The light of righteousness is knowledge” (Φῶς δικαιοσύνης γνῶσις); *Schol 7 ad Ps 37.11* (Pitra 1883, 23): “The light of the eyes is contemplation” (Τὸ φῶς τῶν ὀφθαλμῶν ἐστὶν ἡ θεωρία); and *Schol 79 ad Prov 6.20* (SC 340, 180): “The light, which is the very knowledge of God.” (τὸ φῶς, ὅπερ ἐστὶ ἡ γνῶσις αὐτοῦ τοῦ Θεοῦ) (SC 340, 181)

⁴⁰ Even though the intellect, in its quality as the image of God, is oriented by creation towards its Prototype, nonetheless, “it is not the intellect (νοῦς) [as such—D.J.] that sees God, but the *pure intellect* (καθαρὸς νοῦς). ...For purity (καθαρότης) is the impassibility of the rational soul (ἀπάθεια λογικῆς ψυχῆς), but the vision of God (ὄψις Θεοῦ) is the true knowledge (ἀληθινὴ ἐπίγνωσις) of the one essence (μίας οὐσίας) of the adorable Trinity, which is seen by those who have perfected their way of life here and have purified their soul (ψυχὴν καθάρισαντες) through commandments.” (*Epistulae* 56.2 [Frankenberg 1912c, 605]) Cf. Bunge 2022, 153–54.

Evagrius was not the only early monk to describe experiencing light during prayer. He explains how he traveled with Ammonius,⁴¹ one of the Origenist “Tall Brothers” from Nitria, to meet John of Lycopolis, “the Seer of the Thebaid,” in Middle Egypt,⁴² to ask whether “the inner light of the νοῦς,” seen during prayer, is a reflection of divine light or if it comes from the inherent brightness of the intellect itself.⁴³ John tells them that the question goes beyond human knowledge⁴⁴ and that “the intellect cannot be illuminated, in prayer, without the grace of God.”⁴⁵

In *Capita cognoscitiva* 2, Evagrius states that anyone wishing to contemplate the “state” (κατάστασις) of his intellect (νοῦς) will need God’s help (χρεία Θεοῦ), which breathes into him (τοῦ ἀναπνέοντος αὐτῷ) the “kindred light” (συγγενὲς φῶς)⁴⁶ (*Capita cognoscitiva* 2 [Muyldermans 1931, 374]; cf. Harmless and Fitzgerald 2001b, 521). The light of the intellect is “kindred” to the light of the Holy Trinity;⁴⁷ however, God is the one who initiates the illumination, and although “kindred,” the two lights are distinct (cf. Tobon 2011, 51).⁴⁸ Thus, “the light of God, like the

41 About Ammonius, Evagrius said: “I have never seen a man more passionless (ἀπαθέστερον) than him.” (Palladius Helenopolitanus, *Historia Lausiaca* 11; 1034B.11–2 [Butler 1904, 34])

42 The journey from Kellia, in Lower Egypt—where Evagrius and Ammonius lived—to Lycopolis (present-day Asyut), the city where the philosopher Plotinus was born a century earlier, was a long one. In *Historia Lausiaca* 35 (Butler 1904, 101), Palladius, who lived alongside Evagrius in Kellia for several years, recounts that he made this journey, which took him eighteen days, sometimes walking and sometimes traveling by boat on the Nile. “It must have been a question of great importance to Evagrius if he undertook such a pilgrimage!” (Guillaumont 1984, 256)

43 Upon reaching John, Evagrius asked him if the light he saw originated from the very nature of the intellect (νοῦς) and emanated from it, or if it was something external that appeared and illuminated it. Cf. *Antirrhethikos* 6.16 (Frankenberg 1912a, 525): “whether it is the nature of the intellect (νοῦς φύσις) to be luminous (φωτεινὴ) and thus it pours forth the light from itself (τὸ φῶς ἐξ αὐτοῦ ἐκδιδῶσιν) or whether it [the light—D.J.] (τὸ φῶς) appears from something else outside (ἔκτοθεν) and illumines it [the intellect—D.J.] (αὐτὸν φωτίζειν).” (Brakke 2009, 137) Cf. Guillaumont 1984, 256.

44 John, likely practicing *synkatabasis* and *epikripsis* did not provide a clear or definitive answer to the question, preferring not to commit to a firm conclusion, cf. Young et al. 2024a, 196.

45 See *Antirrhethikos* 6.16 (Frankenberg 1912a, 525): “No human being is able to explain this, and indeed, apart from the grace of God (θεοῦ χάριτος), the intellect (νοῦς) cannot be illumined (φωτισθῆναι) in prayer (ἐν τῇ προσευχῇ) by being set free (ἀπελευθερωθεῖς) from the many cruel enemies (πολλῶν καὶ δεινῶν ἐχθρῶν) that are endeavoring to destroy it (εἰς τὴν ἀπώλειαν αὐτοῦ σπευδόντων).” (Brakke 2009, 137) Cf. Stewart 2001, 193–94.

46 With whom is this light “kindred,” A. Guillaumont asks: with the intellect or with God? “Evidently, it is the divine light, poured out upon the intellect.” (Guillaumont 1984, 258)

47 If “the intellect (νοῦς) is a temple (ναός) of the Holy Trinity,” cf. *Capita cognoscitiva* 34 (Muyldermans 1931, 377), then the Trinity illuminates the intellect through its presence. The light originating from the Holy Trinity, illuminating the intellect, becomes the “common property of God and the creature.” (Casiday 2013, 183)

48 See *Liber practicus* 64 (SC 171, 648): “an indication of impassibility is that the intellect begins to see its own light (τὸ οἰκεῖον φέγγος).” The stripping away of corporeality by the intellect is a return to its true nature, becoming more aware of its own light in the process. See also *Chapters to Evagrius’s Disciples* 78 (SC 514, 174): “When the intellect progresses in πρακτικῇ, the representations it has of sensible things are light; when it progresses in γνῶσις, the contemplations it will have will be varied; when it progresses in prayer, it will see its own light (τὸ ἴδιον φῶς) becoming brighter and more luminous.” Besides having its

sun, ignites the light of the intellect, just as a mountaintop shines in the sun's rays." (Harmless and Fitzgerald 2001a, 518)

The frequency with which Evagrius mentions the "light" during prayer shows that this kind of spiritual experience was valued by him. However, he also recognized the risk associated with it.⁴⁹ In *De oratione*, Evagrius points out that demons might manipulate the brain to produce an illusion of light,⁵⁰ which can easily be mistaken for the glory of God or "the place" of divine knowledge.⁵¹ Therefore, angelic intervention is needed to restore the proper functioning of the light of the intellect.⁵²

In early Christian writings, veiled references to theophanic experiences involving light are common. However, Evagrius stands out as one of the few authors to describe them directly.⁵³ The ascetic texts related to Egyptian monasticism in the 4th century⁵⁴ reflect Evagrius's connection to this cultural setting; yet, their notable

own light, Evagrius concludes that the intellect can also be illuminated from without. See *Capita cognoscitiva* 2 (Muyldermans 1931, 374). Cf. Tobon 2011, 230, 52.

- ⁴⁹ In *Historia Lausiaca* 73.1–5 (Syriac version), Palladius recounts the story of the monk Eucarpus, who lived in isolation for eighteen years, renouncing communion with the brethren, avoiding the Eucharist, and dedicating himself exclusively to prayer. Due to pride, he came to believe he had attained perfection. One night, Satan appeared to him in the guise of an angel of light, claiming to be Christ and convincing him that he must leave Sketis and introduce monastic reforms. These reforms involved abandoning Scripture, Psalms, and fasting in favour of "superior" forms of prayer. Following these instructions, Eucarpus fell into delusion, and when he bowed down to the false Christ, he lost his judgment, and his mind was disturbed. Cf. Draguet 1978, 239–41.
- ⁵⁰ Regarding the manipulation of light around the intellect, see *De oratione* 74 (PG 79, 1184): "I think that the demon (δαίμονα), by touching the place just mentioned (εἰρημένον τόπου), manipulates the light (φῶς) around the intellect (τὸ περὶ τὸν νοῦν) as he wishes (καθὼς βούλεται) ... and through the brain (διὰ τοῦ ἐγκεφάλου) changes (ἀλλοιοῦντος) the light that is joined to it (τὸ συνεζευγμένον φῶς), and gives it a form (μορφοῦντος αὐτὸν)" (cf. Casiday 2006b, 194); *Capita Gnostica* 6.87, S2 (PO 28, 255): "The intellect, according to Solomon's word, is united with the heart; and the light that appears to it is considered to come from the sensory head." Regarding light as a biblical symbol of rational nature, see *Schol 2 ad Ps* 148.3 (PG 12, 1677D): "Light (τὸ φῶς) now symbolically (συμβολικῶς) signifies a rational nature (λογικὴν φύσιν)."
- ⁵¹ See *De oratione* 73 (PG 79, 1184): "When at length the intellect (ὁ νοῦς) is praying purely and imperturbably (καθαρῶς λοιπὸν καὶ ἀπαθῶς), then the demons (οἱ δαίμονες) ... suggest to it (ὑποτίθενται) the glory of God (δόξαν θεοῦ) and some shape familiar from perception (σχηματισμὸν τινα τῶν τῇ αἰσθήσει φίλων), so that it would seem (ὡς δοκεῖν) to have attained the perfection (τέλεον τετεῦχθαι) of its goal with respect to prayer (τοῦ περὶ προσευχῆς σκοποῦ). This happens (γίνεσθαι) because ... the demon (τοῦ δαίμονος) who, having attached himself to the area around the brain (τοῦ κατὰ τὸν ἐγκέφαλον τόπου), plucks the veins (ἐν ταῖς φλεβί πάλλοντος)." (Casiday 2006b, 194)
- ⁵² See *De oratione* 75 (PG 79, 1184): "God's angel, when he is present, stops with a single word all the opposing activity for us and sets in motion the light of the intellect (τὸ φῶς τοῦ νοῦ) to work unwaveringly." (Casiday 2006b, 194) Regarding authentic and false experiences in prayer, see *De oratione* 67–76 (1181B–1184C). Cf. Stewart 2001, 194.
- ⁵³ The oldest account of a vision of light, prior to Evagrius, appears to be that of St. Paul the Apostle regarding his conversion, found in Acts 9:3: "When Saul had almost reached Damascus, a bright light (φῶς) from heaven suddenly flashed around him."
- ⁵⁴ For example, the *Epistulae Sancti Antonii* (ca. 251–356 AD) (Rubenson 1995), *Vita Antonii* (Gregg 1980), the writings of St. Pachomius (ca. 290–348 AD) (*Pachomiana* [Veilleux 1980; 1981]), and the collection of the *Apophthegmata Patrum* (4th and 5th centuries AD) (Wortley et al. 2019).

lack of descriptions of states of grace sets them apart. This pattern continues in later writings: although some draw on Evagrian themes,⁵⁵ none include detailed accounts of luminous visions,⁵⁶ making Evagrius an exception in Christian literature of that period (cf. Konstantinovskiy 2009, 77–78).

Conclusion

This article examined key aspects of Evagrius Ponticus’s spirituality, focusing on his concept of “the place of God” and the vision of “formless light.” Evagrius states that God, being immaterial and formless, can only be known by an intellect that has also achieved formlessness, especially during “imageless prayer.” The “place of God” symbolizes the highest potential of the intellect for divine contemplation, a state reached through strict ascetic practices that lead to impassibility.

In Evagrius’s teachings, the divine light is a crucial experiential phenomenon linked to a purified intellect. It is seen not just as the light of the intellect but also as sharing in divine illumination—a “kindred light” from God. This vision represents the peak of the contemplative journey. Evagrius’s openness in describing these luminous experiences, despite recognizing the risks of delusion, highlights the deeply personal and experiential nature of spiritual ascent.

In conclusion, Evagrius’s comprehensive approach guides the intellect toward inner transformation, aiming to restore it to its true, formless state. In this state of divine grace, the intellect becomes the receptive “place” for the formless God and experiences His presence. As a result, this journey ends in union with the divine, embodying the ultimate goal and core of Evagrian monastic spirituality.

⁵⁵ For example, the *Conlationes* of St. John Cassian (360–435 AD) (CSEL 13; Luibheid 1985), the *Historia Lausiaca* of Palladius (Butler 1904), the correspondence between Barsanuphius and John of Gaza (6th century AD) (*Epistulae Barsanuphii et Ioannis Gazae* [Chryssavgis 2006]), and the *Scala Paradisi* of John Climacus (ca. 579–ca. 650 AD) (Ioannes Climacus [PG 88, 631–1154]; Luibheid and Russell 1982). Some of these works contain Evagrian reminiscences. Thus, *Liber practicus* 5 and 6 are found in the *Scala Paradisi* of St. John Climacus Ioannes Climacus [PG 88, 744b; 872b–c]. Additionally, *Liber practicus* 6 appears in the *Conlationes* (5.2; CSEL 13, 122) of St. John Cassian and in *De virtutibus et vitiis* of St. John Damascene (Ioannes Damascenus, PG 94, 92c–93a).

⁵⁶ Another important figure of light mysticism, who was a contemporary of Evagrius, is the author of the *Macarian Homilies* (*Homiliae spirituales quinquaginta*, Maloney 1992), whose writings are rich with references to visions of light. See Bitton-Ashkelony 2013, 99–128. Although comparisons have been made between the spiritualities of the two authors, the aspect of the theology of light in Evagrius has not been thoroughly analysed in relation to the Macarian tradition. See Horyacha 2013, 113–47; Golitzin 2002, 129–56.

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Navigating Moral Relativism: The Catholic Church's Response in Contemporary America

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Abstract: The aim of the article is to show how moral relativism has become a defining feature of contemporary American culture, influencing individuals' attitudes toward ethics, marriage, family, and social order. Additionally, the article aims to highlight the challenges facing the Catholic Church in fulfilling its mission in a society immersed in moral relativism. The problem of this study can be expressed through the following questions: What impact does moral relativism have on the moral beliefs of the people of the United States? What challenges does it pose to the Catholic Church in the 21st century? How is the Church to fulfill its mission in American society? The answers to these questions will be based on an analysis of the content of the documents of the universal Church and the Church in the United States, as well as publications by American theologians and sociologists. After a short introduction, the impact of moral relativism in the sphere of sexual ethics will be analyzed. Subsequently, the effects of moral relativism on marriage and family will be examined, along with relativism in the sphere of social order and organization. The final section of the article will analyze proposals for the pastoral activity of the Church in the United States in response to the challenges posed by moral relativism. The conclusion of this study is as follows: the more a society moves away from traditional norms and belief in God, the less happy individuals become. The Church must navigate the moral complexity of modern society while offering a compelling vision of human life rooted in the Truth.

Keywords: moral relativism, Catholic Church, 21st century, ethics of sexual life, marriage, family, organization of social life, common good

Moral relativism is the meta-ethical view that moral principles are shaped by cultural, historical, and individual contexts rather than being universally binding. It asserts that morality is fluid, with no absolute right or wrong, and that ethical beliefs are justified only within specific social frameworks (Gowans 2021). This contrasts sharply with the Catholic Church's teachings, which uphold a universal moral law rooted in divine truth and natural law. The Church affirms that moral principles transcend cultural boundaries, grounded in the eternal wisdom of God as revealed through scripture and tradition.

In contemporary American society—marked by pluralism, individualism, and secularism—moral relativism poses significant challenges to the Church. The rise of postmodern thought and the decline in religious affiliation have led to widespread rejection of objective moral standards. The Church must respond with pastoral strategies that reaffirm universal moral truths and engage a culture increasingly shaped by relativistic narratives.

While relativism acknowledges that values differ across cultures, it does not deny internal consistency within societies. This differs from moral individualism, which centers morality on personal choice. The Church, by contrast, maintains its mission to interpret moral law for all people, beyond cultural and personal preferences (Abun, Galat, and Guzon 2022, 102–11).

This tension is evident in American history. In 1978, Billy Joel's song "Only the Good Die Young" sparked backlash for its portrayal of Catholic sexual ethics. Though Joel later clarified the song was about lust, not anti-Catholic sentiment, it highlighted how Catholics were perceived as morally distinct from mainstream society. Yet over time, even Catholics have felt the influence of moral relativism.

The Church continues to teach that moral truths are objective and unchanging, grounded in natural and divine law. The Catechism emphasizes that moral law presupposes a rational order, guiding individuals toward their final end through God's wisdom (CCC 1951–52). This stands in contrast to a society that increasingly values freedom of thought and moral pluralism. A 12% decline in Christian affiliation and a drop in Catholic identification from 23% to 20% reflect this shift (Pew Research Center 2019).

Pope Benedict XVI identified moral relativism as a defining issue of our time, warning that it reduces morality to opinion and undermines truth (*Civ* 2). Its roots lie in thinkers like Friedrich Nietzsche and Michel Foucault, who rejected universal truth and emphasized the role of power and culture in shaping values. These ideas gained traction in the United States amid cultural revolutions and movements that challenged traditional norms.

This paper explores the challenges moral relativism poses to the Catholic Church in the United States, focusing on three areas: sexual ethics, marriage and family life, and social organization. Through theological, sociological, and philosophical analysis, it examines how relativism contrasts with Church teachings and proposes pastoral strategies to engage the faithful and uphold universal moral truths.

1. Sexual Ethics Under Scrutiny: The Catholic Church's Stand Against Relativism

Sexual ethics have become one of the most contested societal spheres affected by moral relativism, which directly challenges the teachings of the Catholic Church. Moral relativism, rejecting absolute norms, confronts the Church's positions on issues such as premarital sex, contraception, same-sex relationships, and pornography. Over time, human sexuality has come to be viewed through a relativistic lens—considered a personal choice rather than subject to universal moral laws. This marks a significant divergence from Catholic teaching, which upholds sexuality as a sacred

gift intended exclusively within marriage, ordered toward both procreation and the deepening of the marital bond (CCC 2366).

The rise of these relativistic perspectives can be attributed to various social, philosophical, and scientific developments. Modern Western thought, emphasizing individualism and personal autonomy, has fostered the belief that moral decisions—particularly those concerning sexuality—should be left to individual discretion rather than dictated by universal moral principles (Catalano 2000, 217–21). Additionally, advancements in psychology and the social sciences have highlighted the fluidity and complexity of human sexuality, challenging traditional absolutist viewpoints (Hammack and Manago 2025, 375–88).

The expansion of social technologies has further reinforced these shifts by enabling individuals to shape their identities based on personal narratives of authenticity, often prioritizing lived experience over traditional moral frameworks (Hammack and Manago 2025, 375–88).

Relativism has gained traction through cultural movements that emphasize self-authorship and a rejection of rigid moral hierarchies. The legalization of same-sex marriage, the growing recognition of nonbinary gender identities, and the acceptance of diverse forms of intimate relationships—such as polyamory and asexuality—reflect broader societal trends toward sexual and gender diversity (Hammack and Manago 2025, 375–88). While some ethical systems may diverge from Christian perspectives without being strictly relativistic, the prevalence of cultural narratives advocating personal choice over traditional moral constraints underscores the ongoing influence of relativism in contemporary sexual ethics.

The Church considers these views to be rooted historically in civil law and theological principles, which both historically in Western society recognized marriage to be a sacred union between a man and a woman. In more than any other sphere of societal life, this historic definition of sexuality, in the context of marriage, has been challenged. Increasingly theologians, sociologists, psychologists, and other scholars have advocated for an inclusive definition of marriage and, by extension, expansion of the morally accepted boundaries of human sexuality considering modern cultural and social dynamics.

American theologians often engage with the Church's teaching on sexuality and offer critiques based on the cultural changes and the overall rigidity of the Church's stance. One main critique of Catholic teachings is that they are antithetical with the lived experiences of modern Catholics, failing to understand the legitimate need for responsible family planning within the modern world (Curran 2006, 135). The teachings are perceived as rigid and do not take into consideration the complex realities of marital life, including external pressures, such as economic or social, on a couple. Critics further argue that the Church lacks compassion and fails to recognize the dignity and value of committed same-sex unions, overlooking the importance of love, companionship, and mutual support in human relationships offered by these

unions (Gaillardetz 2015, 92). These critiques contrast the Church teachings with the contemporary understanding of marriage, which prioritizes emotional and relational fulfillment.

Responding to this criticism, Catholic thought leaders argue that the ethical framework developed by the Church is not merely a set of rules but a call to live in accordance with God's design for human sexuality, uphold the integrity of the marital act, and be open to life. Contraception, conversely, undermines the unitive and procreative purposes of sexual relations, which distorts the true meaning of marital love (J. E. Smith 1991, 68). Sociologists, on the other end, have explored the ethics under the broader cultural shifts and evolving norms of American society. In fact, a survey of American Catholic teens, age 15–19, conducted from 2006–2010 found that 39% were sexually active, which was similar to other Christian denominations (Ayers 2022). Clearly, this level of sexual activity among Christian denominations, including Catholics, demonstrates a volitional lack of buy-in to the Church's Teaching of ethics in sexual life.

Many American Catholics do not fully adhere to the Church's teaching on human sexuality, reflecting broader shifts toward secularization and evolving moral perspectives within American society. Individuals often prioritize personal conscience and autonomy, challenging the Church's moral authority (Massa 2010, 156). Surveys indicate that approximately 61% of Catholics disagree with the Church's stance on contraception, while 60% believe it is acceptable for teenagers to use contraception, including birth control (Kissling 2004, 12). This divergence of opinion is not necessarily a reflection of moral relativism but rather a considered disagreement with what some believers perceive as an inadequate teaching by the Magisterium.

Similarly, most Catholics in the United States support at least some access to abortion; only 23% agreed with the United States Conference of Catholic Bishops' (USCCB) position that abortion should be made illegal. Regarding restrictions on abortion, 33% felt there should be none, 75% considered it acceptable in cases of rape or incest, and 87% supported it when pregnancy threatens the health of the mother (Kissling 2004, 17). Only 11% believe that the moral authority for practicing birth control rests with Church leaders, while 61% view it as an individual choice. Furthermore, 71% of women agree decisions regarding reproductive health should be between the doctor and the patient, unimpacted by hospital religious affiliation, 64% believe that the teachings of the Church are outdated and 49% believe Church leaders are out of touch (Kissling 2004, 21–23).

Most young adults view sexual decisions as personal and subjective. This shift in attitude is a significant challenge to the Church, as young Americans are increasingly inclined to prioritize personal fulfillment over adherence to the teachings on chastity and marriage (C. Smith and Snell 2010, 183). While the Church's ethics are theoretically coherent, they struggle to resonate with a generation that is shaped by a culture of individualism and self-expression (C. Smith and Snell 2010, 183). In contrast, the

Church's teaching on sexuality offers a countercultural narrative to the permissive norms of contemporary society.

The sexual revolution that was fueled by the widespread availability of contraception led to many social problems, including the breakdown of the family, the rise of single-parent households, and the objectification of women (Eberstadt 2013, 102). Only 47% of all households are made up of married couples, down from 71% 50 years ago (United States Census Bureau 2024). Statistically, the rate of practicing Catholics who marry for life is higher compared to the general public: 74% have never been divorced, 25% have been divorced, and 9% are remarried. In contrast, in the general population, 69% have never been divorced, 30% have been divorced, and 13% are currently remarried (Pew Research Center 2015). These statistics suggest that adherence to the Catholic moral norms regarding marriage, while regarded as outdated by secular society, results in a higher probability of a stable nuclear family.

Psychologists are divided on the Church's sexual ethics, particularly regarding same-sex attraction, gender identity, and psychopathy. Critics argue that the Church's teaching on homosexuality as intrinsically disordered can lead to internalized shame, guilt, and distress. This view holds that sexual preference is an inherent aspect of an individual's personality and suppressing it can have harmful psychological consequences (Greenberg 1990). Similarly, psychologist Gregory M. Herek (2009, 94) argues that condemning same-sex relationships fosters social stigma and discrimination, negatively affecting emotional health. Experiencing prejudicial events, expecting rejection, and hiding one's identity can cause stress and internalized homophobia (Meyer 2003, 674–97). Conversely, some psychologists support the Church's moral teachings on sexuality, arguing that these teachings are critical for promoting psychological well-being by fostering healthy and stable relationships and encouraging individuals to lead lives based on moral convictions. They contend that the Church's teachings promote self-discipline, emotional maturity, and the development of authentic love, which might not be achievable without these teachings (Nzioka 2022, 19–40).

While the Church advocates for a traditional understanding of marriage and sexuality, there is often a lack of clarity in addressing complex moral decisions in contemporary society (Cahill 1996, 125). Critics argue that the blanket condemnation of premarital sex does not consider the social and economic realities that lead couples to cohabit or engage in relationships outside of marriage. Modern ethicists see this not as a rebellion against Christian morality but as a reflection of evolving relationship dynamics in modern society (Cahill 1996, 125).

The Supreme Court decision on same-sex marriage marked a significant cultural shift, with many Americans, including Catholics, supporting same-sex unions as personal freedoms and civil rights. In the United States, nearly 61% accept same-sex marriage, and Pope Francis has voiced a willingness to extend blessings to individuals in same-sex unions (Diamant 2020). Additionally, 76% of Catholics in the

United States support societal acceptance of homosexuality without discrimination (Diamant 2020). Modern Catholic theologians, such as James Martin, SJ, encourage a more compassionate and inclusive approach to human sexuality, focusing on dignity and respect for all individuals (Martin 2017, 52). This approach, while not challenging the Church's doctrinal teachings, calls for introspection and adaptation to cultural shifts.

Another area of crisis is pornography, which the Church considers a grave sin as it violates human dignity, objectifies individuals, and distorts the purpose of human sexuality (CCC 2354). The Church views human sexuality as a sacred gift meant for love, family, and marriage. From a moral relativistic perspective, viewing and producing pornography are seen as personal choices linked to individual freedom. Technological advances have made access to pornography easier. Beyond its spiritual and moral implications, exposure to pornographic material can create guilt, internal conflicts, and psychosocial stress, potentially leading to addiction. Studies show that stressful experiences, anxiety, and depression are strongly related to pornography consumption (Privara and Bob 2023, 641). Christians who use pornography report a worsening relationship with Christ, with 20% of men and 9% of women losing interest in spiritual matters as a result (Rose 2023). These findings indicate that pornography consumption harms individuals emotionally, morally, and spiritually, contradicting the supposed benefits of moral relativism.

Regular churchgoers are less likely to view pornography, but its consumption has been increasing. Approximately 13% of all Christians watch pornography, with the largest demographic being males aged 13–24 at 41% (Rose 2023). Christians generally feel worse and more depressed about viewing pornography compared to others, exacerbating mental health problems, relationship issues, and identity challenges, which some believe is distancing them from the Church (Rose 2023). The psychological impact of pornography includes a decline in healthy relationships as individuals become desensitized to the emotional and relational aspects of human sexuality (Zimbardo and Coulombe 2015, 98). The Church fundamentally critiques moral relativism by arguing that individual choices, detached from moral principles, can have far-reaching negative consequences for both individuals and society.

The Church has been highly critical of moral relativism, aiming to reassert its teachings while reaffirming dignity and respect for all individuals. Efforts to reconnect with disenfranchised Catholics, including divorced and LGBTQ+ individuals, have been made. To counter the challenges of moral relativism, the USCCB has played a crucial role through pastoral letters, conferences, and education programs to address the complex realities faced by American Catholics (Schroeder 2015, 5–26). At the same time, the Church understands the need for pastoral sensitivity. Pope Francis, in *Amoris Laetitia*, called for a compassionate and understanding approach to those struggling with the Church's teachings (O'Collins 2016, 905). He emphasized the need for empathy and love, particularly in a culture promoting relativistic

values. The sphere of sexual ethics presents a significant challenge for the Church in American culture, where there is growing acceptance of premarital sex, contraception, pornography, and same-sex relationships due to a shift towards moral flexibility and personal autonomy. Theologians, sociologists, psychologists, and other scholars provide valuable insights into these broader cultural and social implications.

2. Marriage and Family in Flux: The Role of Moral Relativism in Contemporary Society

The impact of moral relativism on marriage and family structures poses a significant challenge for the Catholic Church. The Church views marriage as a sacramental union ordained by God, rooted in love and procreation. According to the Catechism, marriage is a covenant in which a man and woman establish a lifelong partnership, ordered by nature for the good of the spouses and the procreation and education of children (CCC 1601). This emphasizes the dual purpose of marriage and underscores its indissolubility, meaning it cannot be dissolved except by death. This teaching is grounded in Scripture, specifically Jesus' words: "What therefore God has joined together, let no man separate" (Matt 19:6).

Marriage, as perceived by the Catholic Church, is a spiritual and social institution reflecting Christ's love for His Church. This contrasts with moral relativism, which views marriage as a human construct subject to individual preferences and societal trends. The Church's defense of traditional marriage is countercultural, emphasizing sacramentality and indissolubility, in stark contrast to modern transactional or contractual conceptions of marriage (Cahill 1996, 89).

Moral relativism has led to the deinstitutionalization of marriage, transforming it from a stable social institution and religious obligation to one of many possible lifestyle choices (Cherlin 2004, 848). This trend is evident in the rise of cohabitation and the decline in sacramental marriages. Nearly 44% of United States Catholics have lived with a partner, while 55% have never cohabited. Additionally, 15% of Catholics report being remarried without Declaration of Nullity of Marriage or cohabiting (Pew Research Center 2015). Furthermore, only 68% of Catholics in the United States marry in the Church, and among ex-Catholics, only 15% do so (Pew Research Center 2015).

The understanding of traditional marriage as the foundation for family formation is at risk, with 70% of Catholics and 76% of non-Catholics expressing that it is acceptable for couples to choose not to have children. Additionally, 55% of Catholics believe cohabitation before marriage is acceptable, and 46% accept same-sex relationships. Overall, Catholics are less accepting of non-traditional relationships than non-Catholics. White Catholics and college-educated individuals tend to be more liberal than Hispanics and high school graduates (Pew Research Center 2015).

When it comes to parenting arrangements, 90% of Catholics believe that a mother and father married to each other is ideal, though single parenting is also deemed acceptable. Additionally, 43% believe that homosexual couples should not be precluded from parenting (Pew Research Center 2015). While the traditional nuclear family is still viewed as ideal, these statistics show an increasing openness to non-traditional relationships and family units among Catholics in the United States and American society.

Moral relativism has diminished the role of traditional marriage, but the acceptance and prevalence of non-traditional families do not necessarily serve the best interests of children. Children of divorced parents are more likely to experience emotional, behavioral, and academic challenges (Amato 2010, 653–64). They also tend to face issues like lower educational attainment, higher levels of depression, and difficulties in achieving stable relationships themselves (Amato 2000, 1274). The Church supports traditional families, not out of bigotry, but from the recognition that the traditional nuclear family is in the best interest of children. This moral stance is backed by science. The Church teaches the importance of marital stability for the well-being of spouses and children, though this teaching finds little resonance in a society where divorce is often seen as an acceptable solution to marital differences.

Cohabitation before marriage reflects a broader cultural shift that emphasizes individual autonomy and personal happiness over traditional moral norms. While some argue that cohabitation serves as a trial period to assess compatibility before marriage, research suggests that it may contribute to less stable unions—a phenomenon known as the “Cohabitation Effect” (Woods and Emery 2002, 101). Couples who cohabit before marriage may transition into marriage due to convenience, financial pressures, or emotional attachment rather than a deliberate commitment to its long-term implications (Stanley, Rhoades, and Markman 2006, 499–509). Moreover, cohabitation fosters a sense of impermanence, making dissolution easier and potentially carrying over into marriage, resulting in lower stability. Additionally, individuals who cohabit before marriage tend to be more accepting of divorce as a solution to marital difficulties (Kuperberg 2014, 352–69). While these findings indicate statistical correlations, they do not establish direct causation between cohabitation and marital instability.

Several factors contribute to the argument that cohabitation may reduce the likelihood of a successful marriage. One consideration is the selection effect, where individuals who choose to cohabit often hold more liberal and non-traditional views on marriage, potentially making them more open to divorce and less committed to the notion of a lifelong partnership (Lichter and Zhenchao 2008, 861–78). Additionally, cohabitation can create differing expectations regarding marriage. While one partner might see it as a step toward long-term commitment, the other may view it as a way to delay or avoid marriage, leading to tension and conflict. These mismatched

attitudes can contribute to relationship dissatisfaction and, in some cases, divorce (Manning and Smock 2002, 1065–87).

However, some argue that the presumption of marriage's indissolubility may also foster complacency or diminish mutual respect, as one partner may feel secure in the permanence of marriage regardless of their treatment of the other. Ultimately, the impact of cohabitation on marital success depends on the individuals involved and their shared understanding of commitment and communication.

The decline in marriage rates and the rise in personal freedoms have led to a shift in societal structures, where traditional milestones no longer carry the same weight. While this shift offers greater autonomy, it also coincides with an increase in mental health struggles, exacerbated by the disruptions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic intensified preexisting crises, including youth mental health issues, untreated serious illnesses, and substance use disorders, leaving many Americans feeling isolated and uncertain (Insel 2023). Relativism, with its erosion of shared values and institutions, may further contribute to this disconnection, as individuals grapple with a sense of instability in an increasingly fragmented society. As marriage rates have dropped nearly 60% over the past 50 years, the reduced social pressure to marry has altered perceptions of adulthood and stability (Pandey 2023). To address these challenges, there must be a renewed focus on strengthening social connections, ensuring access to mental health care, and fostering a sense of purpose that extends beyond individual freedoms to collective well-being.

Happiness in the United States has declined markedly over the past 50 years, with sociocultural shifts—particularly the erosion of faith and family structures—playing a significant role. In 1972, data from the General Social Survey indicated that approximately 30% of Americans described themselves as “very happy,” a figure that remained relatively stable through the late 20th century. By contrast, a 2023 Wall Street Journal and NORC at the University of Chicago (2023) poll reveals that only 12% of Americans now identify as “very happy,” representing a dramatic decline in subjective well-being over five decades. Notably, 68% of those who report being “very happy” affirm belief in God, and 67% emphasize the importance of marriage, underscoring the enduring correlation between faith, family, and personal tranquility. While happiness is not reducible to marital status alone, other contributing factors—including economic stability, community cohesion, and existential fulfillment—also shape one's overall sense of well-being. The steep decline in reported happiness reflects not merely economic or demographic shifts, but a deeper cultural transformation in which traditional sources of meaning have been relativized or displaced. This trend suggests that moral relativism, by weakening shared values and communal identity, may be a significant—though often underexamined—driver of diminished happiness in contemporary American life.

In recent years, the Church has softened its stance on the Declaration of Nullity of Marriage, which was previously perceived as a cumbersome process. In *Amoris*

Laetitia, Pope Francis encouraged the Church to show mercy and understanding to divorced and remarried Catholics, though he did not change the fundamental teachings on the Declaration of Nullity of Marriage. Despite this softening, critics argue that the Church's refusal to fully embrace divorce and remarriage continues to alienate many Catholics. Additionally, there has been a decline in religious marriages, troubling for the Catholic Church. Many Catholics perceive the sacramental nature of marriage as diminished, and the need for the Declaration of Nullity of Marriage as too intrusive. Conversely, the Church views the decline in sacramental marriage as detrimental, as it sees the sacrament as a vehicle through which married couples find God's grace.

The Church's teachings are seen as critical in maintaining societal balance and family structures, but moral relativism and individualism have spread with little hindrance. This spread has demonstrably harmed the nuclear family, familial structure, and the stability of society and mental health.

3. Social Life and Order: The Impact of Moral Relativism

The rise of moral relativism in social organization poses a significant challenge for the Catholic Church in the 21st century. The shifting nature of social, political, and economic institutions driven by relativistic attitudes has created growing inconsistencies between the Church and prevailing social ethos. Historically, the Church held moral authority to shape social institutions and promote values based on objective moral truths derived from Natural Law and Divine Revelation. However, with increasing pluralism and democracy, individual autonomy and subjective morality are now central to social organization, often opposing the Church's teaching on the common good.

Modern political systems clearly show the influence of moral relativism. Political pluralism, while fostering dialogue and development, has sometimes eroded traditional values. For example, the legal recognition of same-sex marriage in the United States and other countries symbolizes growing moral relativism in governance. The landmark *Obergefell vs. Hodges* case legalized same-sex marriage, affirming that individuals have a constitutional right to marry regardless of gender (Coker 2018, 35–52). This decision sparked conflicts about its impact on religious liberty in the United States.

In *Burwell v. Hobby Lobby*, the Supreme Court upheld the right to religious liberty for closely held Christian corporations, particularly right to not be forced to comply with laws that contradict their deeply held religious convictions, in this case being compelled to pay for contraception coverage for employees (Corrigan 2016, 138–47).

Following Obergefell, many legal battles have focused on the Religious Freedom Restoration Act and state-level religious freedom bills. Some religious figures argue that the acceptance of same-sex marriage, viewed through a moral relativistic lens, is detrimental to people of faith (Coker 2018, 35–52).

USCCB president Archbishop Joseph Kuntz voiced concerns about the ruling, suggesting it could harm the common good and vulnerable populations (USCCB 2015). While public opinion has shifted in favor of same-sex marriage, the Church continues to uphold its teachings on the indissolubility and complementarity of marriage. This stance diverges from societal values, highlighting the influence of relativism in political life.

The teachings emphasize the importance of the common good and the moral duty of the government to promote justice, peace, and human dignity. In his encyclical *Caritas in Veritate*, Pope Benedict XVI expressed that truth and the search for it are central to human dignity (*CiV* 2). When political systems adopt relativistic stances, they prioritize individual autonomy over universal good or moral principles, undermining the foundation of the common good.

Pope St. John Paul II, in his encyclical *Centesimus annus*, critiqued both communism and unrestrained capitalism for failing to respect human dignity. He warned that moral relativism in political governance could create a culture where radical individualism is prioritized (Abela 2001, 107–16). The Church maintains that democracy and pluralism are not incompatible but should be developed on objective moral truths rather than relativistic ideologies, which can erode the fabric of social life.

Abortion is a stark example of how moral relativism has influenced governance. Since the 1973 Supreme Court ruling in *Roe v. Wade*, which legalized abortion in the United States, the debate over abortion rights has become a contentious political issue. Proponents argue, from a relativistic standpoint, that women should have complete autonomy over their bodies. In contrast, the Church asserts the inviolability of human life from conception to natural death, advocating for the rights of the unborn child. Pope St. John Paul II, in *Evangelium vitae*, stated that abortion is a crime against life and called for society to protect the most vulnerable, especially unborn children (*EV* 58).

Despite a recent ruling that overturned *Roe v. Wade*, returning decisions regarding abortion to individual states, the number of abortions in the United States increased in 2023 (Maddow-Zimet and Gibson 2024). Additionally, 61% of Catholics favor keeping abortion legal (Fahmy 2020). Despite the Church's teaching, a plurality of Catholics in the United States view abortion as an individual woman's autonomous choice. However, among Catholics who attend Mass regularly, 68% say abortion should be illegal in most cases (Pew Research Center 2015).

The influence of relativism extends to legal frameworks, particularly in areas like gender identity, euthanasia, and reproductive rights. Modern legal systems in the West have adopted a relativistic approach, which often conflicts with the Church's

understanding of human dignity and natural law. For example, euthanasia and physician-assisted suicide have been legalized in countries like Belgium, the Netherlands, and Canada, framing it as a matter of individual choice and human dignity (Kortes-Miller and Keri-Lyn 2022).

The Church, however, considers life sacred from conception to natural death. In *Evangelium vitae*, Pope St. John Paul II stated that euthanasia is a direct violation of God's law, emphasizing that true compassion involves caring for those who suffer, not ending their lives (EV 65). This opposition is based on the belief that human dignity is inherent and cannot be diminished by suffering or illness.

Economic systems are also not immune to the influence of moral relativism. The negative effects of these economic policies and practices are shaped by relativist values, which prioritize profit over the common good, thereby increasing inequality and leading to environmental degradation, and exploitation of workers. The Church has been critical of both capitalism and communism, as well as neoliberal economic policies which emphasize the free market, deregulation, and individualism and promote a realistic view of economic justice where success is measured by profit instead of the well-being of all members of society. In the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, Pope Francis critiqued neoliberalism and its impact on the environment as well as on humans, emphasizing the need to stop the pursuit of profit which has led to a throwaway culture where both people and the environment are being treated as disposable (LS 2). The acceleration of wealth inequality in contemporary America cannot be attributed solely to the mechanisms of capitalism or classical liberalism; rather, it reflects a deeper cultural shift marked by moral relativism—a departure from universally binding ethical principles. This relativistic turn has transformed economic discourse by decoupling wealth acquisition from moral responsibility. Unlike capitalism in its regulated or socially-conscious forms, market relativism permits profit-maximization strategies devoid of shared ethical obligations. As normative commitments to fairness, human dignity, and the common good diminish, economic actors increasingly rationalize exploitative practices as ethically neutral or context-dependent. Consequently, the top 1% now own more than double the wealth of 6.9 billion people combined, while the middle class in the United States has shrunk from 62% to 43%, and the top 5% have outpaced others in income growth (Chancel et al. 2022; Horowitz, Igielnik, and Kochhar 2020, 52). These statistics are not causally reducible to relativism, but they are facilitated by a culture where ethical norms no longer exert constraining force on economic behavior. In this context, the Catholic Church's response is not merely corrective but foundational: through the doctrines of solidarity and subsidiarity, it reasserts the primacy of objective moral truths in economic life. These principles challenge the relativistic ethos by insisting that economic systems must serve the human person and the common good, not vice versa.

Moral relativism poses a significant challenge to the Church's understanding of social order. Politics, economics, and family life have been significantly influenced by

relativistic values, which often contrast starkly with the universal absolutism of Christian morality. No institution has defended universal moral laws, rooted in natural law and the common good, more steadfastly than the Catholic Church. The persistent trends toward moral relativism in the United States have proven to be a formidable challenge in this modern era. To maintain its stance as the torchbearer of universal moral laws, the Catholic Church must improve existing strategies and adopt new ones to influence social order rooted in natural law and the common good.

4. Guidelines for Enhancing Pastoral Activities in the Catholic Church

Moral relativism challenges the traditional family values upheld by the Catholic Church by promoting individualism and acceptance of alternative family structures. This trend is particularly evident among infrequent Mass attendees in the United States, contributing to reduced Church attendance and influence. The impact of relativism extends beyond individual choices, affecting broader social structures, especially in politics and economics. The Church must respond with comprehensive and multifaceted efforts to counter this shift and uphold its moral teachings.

The means by which the Church in the United States addresses moral relativism should be both structured and intentional. A feasible proposition could be accomplished by utilizing the existing network of Catholic institutions throughout the United States. Presently, there are more than 220 Catholic universities and over 2000 Catholic campus ministries at non-Catholic universities, known as Newman Centers, across the United States (Newman Ministry, n.d.). Each of these organizations, though supported by local dioceses and religious orders, lacks national-level organization.

The age group most susceptible to change, especially as it pertains to religious beliefs and practices, is late adolescence and early adulthood (Hayward and Kraus 2023, 1480–1489). Furthermore, a large proportion of this age group will become their generation's "domestic church." Because the Church's resources are limited, and this is the age group most vulnerable to the pitfalls of moral relativism, most in need of finding life's meaning and purpose, and most likely to fervently respond to social, moral, and religious causes, this age group and younger must be a primary focus of the Church's time, talent, and treasure to stem the tide of moral relativism (AL 209).

In its current state, the Catholic Church of the United States cannot effectively accomplish this mission. For this reason, in a prescriptive, strategic, and intentional manner, the Catholic Church, on a national level, must target the existing structure for adolescents and young adults at colleges and universities. More than any other parish or site, the Church should assign its most talented and capable ministers

to these existing institutions, evaluate regions in the United States that are devoid of these ministries, and deploy resources accordingly. Furthermore, the Church should learn from those campus ministries which are most successful, for the betterment of those which are not.

The Church, at a national level, should develop a pastoral plan specifically for the youth and young adults, which highlights and provides access to other relevant existing pastoral programs that are likely to foster the greatest interest and combat the expanding tendency toward moral relativism. The following is a representative list of existing programs which should be highlighted as part of a pastoral plan.

One critical initiative is Project Rachel, a post-abortion healing ministry that provides compassionate support and healing for those affected by abortion. To expand its reach and effectiveness, Project Rachel should include more online resources, virtual support groups, and partnerships with mental health professionals. By collaborating with local parishes to offer workshops and retreats focused on healing and reconciliation, the ministry can provide comprehensive care to those in need (USCCB, n.d.).

Inspired by Pope Francis's encyclical *Laudato Si'*, the Laudato Si' Movement urges parishes and schools to implement sustainable practices and educate communities about environmental stewardship not simply as a practical concern, but as a moral imperative grounded in objective truth. Developing a comprehensive environmental education curriculum for Catholic institutions—including hands-on ecological projects and community service activities—reinforces the Church's teaching that care for creation is intrinsically tied to human dignity and intergenerational justice. An online platform to share best practices and success stories enables communities to cultivate shared moral reasoning and collaborative responsibility. In its core ethos, the Laudato Si' Movement directly challenges moral relativism by rejecting the notion that ecological responsibility is contingent on individual preference, local custom, or economic expediency. Instead, it affirms the existence of universal ethical obligations derived from natural law and divine revelation. By rooting environmental action in theological anthropology and the social doctrine of the Church, the movement restores coherence to moral discourse and refutes the relativistic fragmentation that treats creation care as ideologically negotiable rather than a common and objective good (Laudato Si' Movement, n.d.).

Catholic Charities USA is actively involved in disaster relief, poverty reduction, and social services. To address community needs more effectively, the organization should strengthen partnerships with local organizations and implement data-driven approaches to track the impact of various programs. By ensuring resources are allocated efficiently, Catholic Charities can better serve vulnerable populations (Catholic Charities USA, n.d.).

The Given Institute empowers young Catholic women through leadership training, spiritual formation, and mentoring. Expanding this program to include young

men and offering co-ed leadership retreats can foster a new generation of Catholic leaders. Developing online courses and virtual mentoring opportunities will make these resources accessible to a broader audience (The Given Institute, n.d.).

The Fellowship of Catholic University Students (FOCUS) engages college students in faith formation, discipleship, and evangelization. Establishing partnerships with more universities and offering online resources can support students in remote and underserved areas. Creating a mentorship program that connects college students with recent graduates will provide guidance and support in their faith journey (FOCUS, n.d.).

Each initiative mentioned does more than serve a pastoral or pragmatic function—it collectively represents the Church's strategic and incarnational response to the crisis of moral relativism and cultural individualism. Project Rachel, through its emphasis on post-abortion healing, affirms the inviolable dignity of human life and moral accountability, challenging the relativistic view that life's value is contingent upon subjective circumstances. The Catholic Mobilizing Network (n.d.) disrupts the individualistic logic of punitive justice by proposing restorative models rooted in the objective worth of every person, regardless of legal status or social utility. The Laudato Si' Movement counters the relativism of consumerist excess and environmental apathy by restoring a metaphysical understanding of creation as a shared moral responsibility. Catholic Charities USA, in prioritizing the needs of the marginalized, dismantles economic individualism by enacting the principle of solidarity—refusing the relativistic tendency to rank lives by productivity or wealth. The Given Institute reclaims the concept of vocation from the relativistic notion of identity as self-constructed autonomy, replacing it with a Christ-centered understanding of purpose rooted in truth and communion. FOCUS, finally, offers a communal model of evangelization that explicitly rejects the relativistic isolation common to secular academic environments, reorienting the search for meaning toward divine revelation and moral objectivity.

Taken together, these initiatives form a comprehensive pastoral ecosystem aimed at restoring moral coherence and resisting cultural fragmentation. They embody the Church's conviction that objective truth, communal identity, and transcendent purpose are not merely theological ideals, but existential necessities in a world increasingly shaped by relativism and atomized individualism.

A multifaceted strategy remains crucial in addressing the spread of moral relativism and its societal consequences. While pastoral initiatives play a vital role, the Church must also refine its approach to ensure that education, outreach, and community engagement effectively counter relativistic tendencies. *Evangelium vitae* underscores the importance of affirming human dignity and moral values (cf. EV 2), yet systemic organizations must be reassessed to ensure they actively work against relativism rather than inadvertently allowing it to persist. Strengthening catechesis and fostering deeper philosophical discourse within communities

can help reinforce objective moral principles and uphold the Church's mission in an increasingly relativistic world.

Conclusion

In an increasingly pluralistic and secular world, the clash between subjective notions of truth and morality and the teachings of the Catholic Church has never been more evident. The rise of relativistic ideologies has reshaped societal norms, particularly in areas such as sexual ethics, marriage, family structure, and social organization. Yet, has this shift truly enriched human existence? Statistics indicate that Americans are not happier. While the challenges posed by COVID-19 cannot be overlooked, the deeper issue may lie in the erosion of absolute moral truths. As society drifts further from traditional values and a belief in God, the emptiness of moral relativism becomes more apparent. The Catholic Church stands at a crucial crossroads—it must reaffirm its role as a guiding light, offering not just theological doctrine but a compelling vision of human flourishing rooted in Truth. Through new catechesis, meaningful engagement in public discourse, and the strategic use of digital platforms, the Church has the opportunity to counter the tide of relativism and restore a sense of purpose, identity, and lasting fulfillment in human life.

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Bible, Psychology, and Social Studies: Interdisciplinary Project “The Relevance of the Bible for the Development of Religious and Spiritual Resources,” KUL, Lublin

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Abstract: The article reflects on the possible areas of cooperation between the Bible, psychology, and social studies. Introduction presents a methodological basis and a fresh dialog carried on in recent decades between biblical and psychological studies. In addition to the analysis of psychological phenomena in biblical texts from the classical, historical-critical perspective, scholars increasingly turn to positive psychology, neuroscience, and social studies, examining emotions, communication strategies, relationships, values and development of individuals and communities. The authors go on to indicate the topics and biblical texts that open up to a fruitful dialog with diverse psychological approaches. The second part of the paper describes an original project developed at the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (KUL) titled “The Relevance of the Bible for the Development of Religious and Spiritual Resources,” which uses two tools for studying changes in religious and spiritual resources: Religious Resources Scale and Spiritual Resources Scale. They are employed to study the impact of biblical texts on people who differ in terms of developmental conditions (e.g., age) and/or situational factors (including experience of existential emptiness, loneliness, bereavement, migration, and war conditions). The paper describes the methodology and the psychometric indicators of the above-mentioned measurement tools. The Religious Resources Scale and the Spiritual Resources Scale are used to detect religious and spiritual changes under the influence of biblical texts. They constitute the methodological basis for a pioneering interdisciplinary research conducted at KUL, which promotes a cooperation between biblical studies and psychology.

Keywords: biblical studies, biblical texts, psychological approach, spiritual resources, religious resources, psychometric properties, validation

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1. Introduction: A Dialogue Between the Bible and Psychology

The document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1993) states:

In order to communicate itself, the word of God has taken root in the life of human communities (cf. Sir. 24:12), and it has been through the psychological dispositions of the various persons who composed the biblical writings that it has pursued its path. It follows, then, that the human sciences in particular sociology, anthropology and psychology can contribute towards a better understanding of certain aspects of biblical texts. (Pontifical Biblical Commission 1993, I.D [Introduction])

From the nature of inspiration, rooted in human community and culture, comes the imperative to study biblical texts with reference to other disciplines, including psychology. In doing so, the Pontifical Biblical Commission draws attention to the multiplicity of schools, sometimes in dispute, that make up psychological studies. At the same time, it affirms that many exegetes have successfully reaped the considerable benefits of practising this type of interdisciplinary research in recent years (Pontifical Biblical Commission 1993, I.D [Introduction]).

The 1993 document essentially refers to psychology and psychoanalysis, recommending them as a complement to historical-critical studies that “lead to a multidimensional understanding of Scripture and help decode the human language of revelation.” (Pontifical Biblical Commission 1993, I.D.3) Psychology and psychoanalysis can contribute to a better understanding of biblical symbols, but not only. Among the various examples of their use in biblical studies, the Commission mentions: “the meaning of cultic ritual, of sacrifice, of bans, to explain the use of imagery in biblical language, the metaphorical significance of miracle stories, the wellsprings of apocalyptic visual and auditory experiences.” (Pontifical Biblical Commission 1993, I.D.3) This should be done without absolutising any school of thought and with respect for the distinctiveness and methodological differences between biblical and psychological studies.

What the Pontifical Biblical Commission proposed more than 30 years ago has become a reality in the dynamically changing world of biblical studies. Today, no one needs to be convinced of the necessity of interdisciplinary research and the positive effects of the dialogue between the Bible and psychology. The Pontifical Biblical Commission used to describe this dialogue essentially from the perspective of psychoanalysis, but over the past three decades, joint research has become much more diverse both in terms of methodology and content. They cover issues of communication strategies, trauma, emotions, personal development, the pursuit of happiness, relationship building and the strengthening of moral attitudes. In doing so, they draw on neuroscience, behavioural, positive and moral psychology. The dialogue has

become genuinely interdisciplinary, without dogmatising any of the psychological schools, and there is an ongoing call to expand this platform, to which the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin (KUL) project “The Relevance of the Bible for the Development of Religious and Spiritual Resources” can contribute.

The project makes part of a burgeoning body of research that has been developing rapidly for more than two decades, in which biblical scholars have successfully drawn on the psychological resources for a better understanding of the nature and impact of biblical texts. An example of such cooperation is the monograph *The Bible and the Pursuit of Happiness*, edited by Brent A. Strawn (2012a). The project grew out of the seminar “The Bible and the Pursuit of Happiness,” held in Atlanta in 2009, which brought together biblical scholars and theologians, specialists in the Old and New Testament, systematic theology, pastoral theology, and psychology. The common denominator of the conference presentations and the resulting articles is the use of “positive psychology” in the analysis of biblical texts. It covers three issues: positive emotions (contentment, happiness and hope), positive individual traits (capacity for love, work, courage, compassion, resilience, creativity, curiosity, integrity, self-knowledge, moderation, self-control, wisdom), and positive institutions (strengths that foster better communities: justice, responsibility, civility, parenting, nurturance, work ethic, leadership, teamwork, purpose, tolerance). The starting point for positive psychology is not human pathology but goodness, and the aim is to study the strengths and virtues that enable individuals and communities to thrive, lead meaningful and fulfilling lives, cultivate what is best within themselves, and enhance their experience of work, love, and play (Strawn 2012b, 19–20).¹

In addition to analyses of the Old and New Testament texts (Parts I and II), Part III of the monograph is dedicated to a dialogue between theologians and psychologists, reflecting on the use of biblical texts. Of particular interest in this regard is the paper by Steven J. Sandage, arguing that the virtues, spiritual maturity, and the transformed and refocused vision of happiness in the Bible have much to contribute to positive psychology, pointing to places where future research can focus. They can lead the way to an appreciation of the spiritual dimension of life and virtues in psychological studies and to the development of more effective tools for empirical research (Sandage 2012, 263–86).

The texts collected in the monograph are a good example of interdisciplinary research in which, as suggested by the Pontifical Biblical Commission, biblical and psychological disciplines respect their distinctiveness and methodological specificity. The authors refer to ancient history, philosophy, and literature, placing the biblical vision of happiness in its historical context, treating it essentially as a socio-cultural construct, and confronting it with the contemporary understandings of the issue.

¹ On the biblical psychology of happiness, see also Strawn 2012c, 287–322.

This approach will dominate in similar subsequent studies, gradually opening up to neuroscience. Importantly, the dialogue is bi-directional, as representatives of positive psychology show an interest in the understanding of happiness in ancient theories and religions, including the Bible (Haidt 2006; Peterson 2006, 80–88; Snyder and Lopez 2020, 19–35).

The Oxford study, which in many respects can be called an exemplary one, was followed by other scholarly projects, in which biblical studies made use of psychology. It will be impossible to list and describe them all here, so we shall focus only on the most important and representative ones. Let us start with the monograph edited by Renate Egger-Wenzel and Jeremy Corley, *Emotions from Ben Sira to Paul*. Its authors analyse emotions (joy, mourning, sadness, fear, love, anger, rejection, empathy, shame, jealousy) in ancient Near Eastern texts, in the Old and New Testament, in Philo, and in documentary papyri (Egger-Wenzel and Corley 2012b). The studies are marked by a historical-comparative approach, with reference to contemporary psychological theories essentially in the last two papers (Bauer 2012, 491–514; Aichhorn and Kronberger 2012, 515–26).

Besides emotions, another intensely developing field of research is the analysis of trauma in the Bible, with reference to neuroscience and contemporary psychology. David McLain Carr in *Holy Resilience* argues for a “traumatic” environment and motives for the emergence of biblical literature, starting with the narratives on patriarchs, through the story of Moses and the Exodus, the Babylonian exile, the Hellenistic crisis, finishing with the cross of Christ and the parting of ways between Judaism and Christianity (Carr 2014).² In *Trauma and Traumatization in Individual and Collective Dimensions*, edited by Eve-Marie Becker, Jan Dochhorn and Else Kragelund Holt, we find numerous papers on trauma written from the perspective of biomedical, psychological, social, literary and cultural studies, with an emphasis on what they contribute to biblical exegesis and the reading of the Old Testament texts (Becker, Dochhorn, and Holt 2014).³ The Old Testament is also generally the focus of the edited volume *Bible Through the Lens of Trauma*, by Elizabeth Boase and Christopher G. Frechette, analysing the literary construction of trauma in the Prophets, Wisdom Literature, and 2 Corinthians, with reference to their contemporary social correspondents (Boase and Frechette 2016).⁴

Returning to the topic of emotions, the volume edited by Stefan C. Reif and Egger-Wenzel, *Ancient Jewish Prayers and Emotions* examines them in the Old Testament, Jewish literature of the Second Temple period and in the New Testament, paying attention to their divine-human and communal character, somatization,

² See also the earlier article by Birnbaum 2008, 533–46.

³ See especially Becker 2014, 15–29; O'Connor 2014, 210–222; Smith-Christopher 2014, 223–43.

⁴ On trauma in the Bible, see also Römer 2012, 159–78; Garber Jr. 2015, 24–44; Frechette 2015, 20–34; Frechette and Boase 2016, 1–23; Schreiter 2016, 193–208; Frechette 2017, 239–49.

communicative and pedagogical functions (Reif and Egger-Wenzel 2015). The volume is marked by historical-cultural and phenomenological approaches, with particular attention given to emotions and attitudes such as joy, happiness, consolation, sadness, abandonment, panic, and desire. In another volume edited by F. Scott Spencer, *Mixed Feelings and Vexed Passions*, affect theory is combined with a cultural-historical approach to emotions such as anger, fear, grief, disgust, joy, happiness, awe, pride, shame, insatiable desire, compassion, and faith/trust (Spencer 2017a). The authors examine the texts of the Pentateuch, the Prophets, the Gospels and 1 Peter, highlighting the cognitive, motivational and relational aspects of emotions. In a comprehensive introductory article to the volume, Spencer guides readers through the history, taxonomy, textual-generic, cross-cultural, and cross-disciplinary concerns of research linking biblical studies and psychology. The paper explains the nature of the “affective turn” in contemporary science and culture, and the extent to which contemporary biblical studies draw on the developments in philosophy, psychology, classical studies, anthropology, literature, linguistics, affect theory, neuroscience, and cognitive studies (Spencer 2017a, 1–41).⁵

Affect theory is also the focal point of *Reading with Feeling*, by Fiona C. Black and Jennifer L. Koosed, exploring love, desire, trauma, happiness, unhappiness, and depression in the Old Testament texts and in Pauline letters (Black and Koosed 2019). Let us also mention the edited volume on pain in the Old Testament and rabbinic literature, *Pain in Biblical Texts and Other Materials of the Ancient Mediterranean* by Michaela Bauck and Saul M. Olyan (2021), and two studies on trauma: *Trauma Theory, Trauma Story* by Sarah Emanuel (2021), and *Turmoil, Trauma and Tenacity in Early Jewish Literature*, edited by Nicholas Allen and Jacob Doedens (2022). Studies on trauma and tenacity in the Bible, while still in their infancy, have already attracted much attention of scholars and show great potential for generating further research (Becker 2014, 15–29; Allen 2022, 1–16). An overview of the publications from the interface of biblical and psychological studies can be concluded with *A Prototype Approach to Hate and Anger in the Hebrew Bible* by Deena E. Grant (2023) and with *When Psychology Meets the Bible*, an edited volume by Heather A. McKay and Pieter van der Zwan, whose authors apply the theories of trauma, terror management, coping, and acceptance-commitment therapy to read the Old and New Testament texts (H. A. McKay and van der Zwan 2023).

Pauline letters and communities also have an important place in the study of emotions, communication, relationship building and moral attitudes. One can point

⁵ On the affect in the Bible and Jewish literature of the Second Temple period, read essentially from a historical-theological perspective, see von Gemünden 2009a. On the topic of affect in the Bible from a psychological, literary and social perspective, see also the special issues of *Biblical Interpretation* 22, nos. 4–5 (2014).

to Gerd Theissen's pioneering work, *Psychological Aspects of Pauline Theology*, in which the author combines behaviourist, psychodynamic, and cognitive approaches to describe religious experience in Paul (Theissen 1987).⁶ The letters of Paul have long been studied from a rhetorical perspective, pointing to their cognitive and emotive-persuasive character (Kraftchick 2001, 39–68; Thompson 2001, 127–46; Sumney 2001, 147–60). David E. Aune, in a general study of passions in Paul, draws attention to their use in the apostle's rhetoric, descriptions of sufferings, treatment of grief, anxiety, anger, and negative assessment of sexual passions (Aune 2008, 222–31). Coleen Shantz in *Paul in Ecstasy* explores Pauline texts describing ecstatic experiences (2 Cor 3–5; 12:1–4; Rom 8), with the use of cognitive neurology and social anthropology (Shantz 2009).

A new quality in the study of emotions in Paul was undoubtedly brought by John Barton. In an important article that gave impetus to the interdisciplinary approach in the study of emotions in the Bible, the author applied social science, historical, cognitive, and constructivist approaches to the analysis of sorrow in 1 Thess 4:13–18, read through the lens of the Christian “emotional regime.” In a similar way, the author dealt with joy in Philippians and anger in Ephesians (Barton 2011, 571–91; 2013, 171–93; 2015, 21–34). The interdisciplinary approach advocated by Barton can also be appreciated in Shantz. The author, drawing on positive psychology, neuroscience, and the social sciences, explores the issue of “happiness among afflictions” in Paul, which builds up the faith and moral attitudes of his communities through a Christological reading of suffering and the use of positive emotions (Shantz 2012, 187–201). Also referring to positive psychology, Joshua W. Jipp examines the components of Pauline theology aimed at good life and human flourishing (Jipp 2023). More on Pauline letters will be said in the next section. Concluding, we can say that they set interdisciplinary trends in contemporary biblical studies, creating a platform where the Bible, social sciences, anthropology, psychology, and neuroscience meet. Having generally presented the interaction between the Bible and psychology, we now turn to an overview of biblical texts and issues that open up for potential interdisciplinary research.

2. Texts and Areas of Research for Biblical and Psychological Studies

In the previous paragraph, we presented the most representative publications from the last two decades that bear witness to interdisciplinary cooperation between biblical and psychological disciplines. We now turn to the texts and issues that have

⁶ English translation of the original German edition: Theissen 1983.

already been studied or still await deeper, interdisciplinary research. The biblical material is a repository of emotions, but not only. It also describes ways of communication, solving crises, strengthening values, tools for shaping attitudes and recovering from trauma, which can be attractive to contemporary scientific, pastoral, and therapeutic approaches.⁷ In our review of biblical texts, we will follow the division present in the Catholic canon of the Old and New Testaments, necessarily limiting ourselves to the most important publications and topics.

2.1. The Pentateuch

The first five books of the Bible are a veritable mine of universal stories about discovering human identity and place in the universe, the meaning of life, dealing with trauma and relationship building. In the Pentateuch, scholars paid attention to the human quest for happiness embedded in the theology of creation and the role of the Law in this regard (Fretheim 2012, 33–56; MacDonald 2012, 57–76). They also focused on women's emotions and childbirth (von Gemünden 2009d, 149–59; Bauks 2021, 29–49), the trauma of the sterility (Steyn 2022, 227–48), the destructive power of jealousy and anger (Schlimm 2011; von Nordheim-Diehl 2012, 431–50), the trauma of Joseph (Grant 2017, 61–75; Focht 2020, 209–23), emotions in purity laws, especially disgust (Kazen 2011; 2014, 62–92; 2017, 97–115), and love for God in the Deuteronomy (J. W. McKay 1972, 426–35; Lapsley 2003, 350–369; Arnold 2011, 551–69). The proto-history (Gen 1–11) waits for more studies devoted to the human identity, the relationship between man and woman, the meaning of suffering and death, shame and crisis in Gen 3, as well as the trauma of the broken family bonds in Gen 4. The stories of the patriarchs open up to positive psychology in terms of the search for one's own path and meaning of life, the meaning of offspring and hope, the building and maturing of family bonds. The Book of Exodus provides valuable insights concerning recovery from trauma and violence, building community with God and the other, and resilience in the midst of crises that Israel faces in the desert. The Book of Numbers highlights the destructive habits of complaining and lack of gratitude, as well as the pedagogical tools of punishment and forgiveness, while the Deuteronomy points to the value of laws and moral obligations in building lasting relationships. These and other aspects await further examination in the Pentateuch, which can be read through the lens of positive psychology and trauma studies.

⁷ An example of a good collaboration between a psychologist and a biblical scholar are the publications by Kalman J. Kaplan and Matthew B. Schwartz: Kaplan and Schwartz 2008; Schwartz and Kaplan 2004.

2.2. Historical Books

In the Historical Books, the investigated topics comprised the mourning and grief of parents (Bosworth 2011a, 238–55; 2011b, 691–707; Kalmanofsky 2011, 55–74), love and desire in romantic relationships (David and Bathsheba) (Stone 2019, 13–36), the collective experience of trauma (the destruction of Jerusalem) (Janzen 2012, 2019), the communal aspect of joy (the restoration of the temple) (de Troyer 2015, 41–58), and the trauma of rape (Tamar) (Claassens 2016, 177–92). Considerable space has also been devoted to emotions, relationships, and trauma in literary, social, and psychological aspects, in the Book of Esther (Ego 2015, 83–94; Emanuel 2017, 23–42; Efthimiadis-Keith 2022, 79–98), Tobit (Portier-Young 2001, 35–54; Di Lella 2012, 177–88; Egger-Wenzel 2013, 41–76; Miller 2013, 87–106; Egger-Wenzel 2015, 193–220; Ego 2021, 187–98; Macatangay 2022, 117–28), Judith (Egger-Wenzel 2012a, 189–223; Schmitz 2015, 177–92; Hobyane 2022, 145–63), and 1–2 Maccabees (Schmitz 2012, 253–79; Duggan 2015, 95–116; Reiterer 2015, 117–44; Jordaan 2022, 167–86). In 1–2 Samuel and 1–2 Kings, further research is needed on positive and negative forms of attachment, drive for power, collective and individual resilience in critical situations, the role of the temple in building psychological resilience, depression, father-son and master-disciple relations. 1–2 Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah picture an interesting phenomenon of communal joy and sorrow experienced and processed in liturgy and prayer. Ruth, Judith, Esther, and Tobit contain not only the stories of trauma, but also of love, closeness, empathy, sacrifice, selflessness, courage, and crossing ethnic barriers. Finally yet importantly, in 1–2 Maccabees, eschatology and the hope of resurrection can be examined as religious resources that give courage at the time of crisis.

2.3. Wisdom Literature and Psalms

In the realm of Wisdom Literature, the authors devoted a number of studies to Job, exploring its emotions, narrative about suffering, trauma, and relationships with God, relatives, and friends (Kruger 2002, 143–49; Nielsen 2014, 62–70; West 2016, 209–30; Weissenrieder 2021, 167–86; Balla 2022, 99–116). The Book of Wisdom was examined from the point of view of divine and human emotions (anger, mercy, liking, love, understanding, thanksgiving, admiration, shame) and their rhetorical function (Mazzinghi 1995; Bellia and Passaro 2005, 307–28; Reiterer 2012, 281–315; Witte 2015, 161–76; Gericke 2022, 51–75; Zieliński 2020). In Sirach, the scholars paid attention to empathy, the link between emotions and prayer, fear, joy, thanksgiving, the father-son relations, the somatic, communicative, and pedagogical nature of emotions, and the trauma of marginalised persons (Wahl 1998, 271–84; Beentjes 2003, 233–40; Witte 2008, 176–202; Bradley 2012, 103–19; Anderson 2012, 121–31; Urbanz 2012, 133–58; Elssner 2012, 159–76;

Calduch-Benages 2015, 145–60; Reiterer 2022, 19–50). The Book of Proverbs and Qoheleth were studied with reference to the hedonic and eudaimonic vision of happiness (Newsom 2012, 117–36; Browning Helsel 2016, 85–103). Finally, Psalms drew a lot of scholarly attention concerning divine and human emotions, the creative potential of trauma processed in collective prayer, and pain in its bodily, social, and psychological dimensions (Sylva 1993; Swenson 2005; Brown 2012, 95–116; van Grol 2012, 69–102; Frechette 2014, 71–84; Abart 2015, 19–40; Strawn 2016, 143–60; Cottrill 2019, 55–70; Black 2019, 71–94; Gärtner 2021, 85–104; Chwi-Woon 2021, 531–56). In Proverbs, the topics of maturing, discerning the way of living, constructing relationships and learning commend themselves for future studies. The same is true for the themes of love, intimacy, tenderness, attentiveness, emotions in the body, searching and building relationships, and experiencing loss and crises in the Song of Songs.

2.4. Prophets

In the vast corpus of prophetic writings, Isaiah drew researchers' attention with his concepts of happiness, *misterium tremendum* (Isa 6; 28), self-conscious emotions, and the punishment of Babylon (Isa 47), red as a remedy for Israel's trauma, as well as the ritual of fasting interpreted as a social transaction (Lapsley 2012, 75–94; Ben-Dov 2015, 239–45; Prakasam 2017, 177–96; Lambert 2017, 139–60; Frechette 2016, 67–84). In Jeremiah, Baruch, and Lamentations, scholars have generally been interested in shame, God's grief, punishment as a remedy for the trauma of sin, comfort for exiles, communal ruminations and the somatisation of sorrow and trauma (Kruger 1996, 79–88; Bosworth 2013, 24–46; Boase 2014, 193–209; Holt 2014, 162–76; Elßner 2015, 71–82; Stulman 2016, 125–39; Boase 2016a, 49–66; Bosworth 2017, 117–38; Frevel 2021, 61–84; Ngqeza 2024, 1–7). Topics of sorrow, trauma, and depression also dominate in the publications devoted to Ezekiel (Garber Jr. 2004, 215–35; Kelle 2009, 469–90; Daschke 1999, 105–32; Poser 2016, 27–48),⁸ Jonah (Boase 2016b, 4–22; Graybill 2019, 95–112), Nahum (Wessels and Esterhuizen 2020, 1–6), and Micah (Groenewald 2017, 55–65). Let us also mention the study of the moral-relational character of conversion in Hosea (6,1–3; 14,1–7), with reference to affective neuroscience and the cognitive-motivational working of emotions (Olson 2017, 161–76). Missing from the area of prophetic literature are references to positive psychology, analyses of prophetic call (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Amos), the mechanisms of taking decisions, vision of happiness, the maturation of the prophetic personalities (Jeremiah, Jonah), motivations for sacrifice and experiencing crises and rebuilding relationships after betrayal (Hosea).

⁸ See also Poser 2012; Odell 2016, 107–24; Groenewald 2018, 88–102.

2.5. The Gospels and Acts

In the Gospels and Acts, researchers studied Jesus' vision of happiness in the Beatitudes of Matthew (Holladay 2012, 141–68),⁹ as well as joy in the Acts and Luke (Green 2012, 169–86; Wenkel 2015; Dinkler 2017, 265–86).¹⁰ Mark inspired studies concerning faith as a cognitive-motivational act (trust), awe, trauma, and basic emotions (with reference to ancient authors and neuroscience) (Hagedorn and Neyrey 1998, 15–56; Geyer 2002; Kotrosits and Taussig 2013; Spencer 2014b, 107–28; Waller 2014, 450–472; Wischmeyer 2015, 335–50; Whitenton 2016, 272–89; Lawrence 2016, 83–107; Spencer 2017b, 217–41; Vegge 2017, 243–64; Hicks 2021). John provided material for research on Jesus' emotions, fear, aggression, joy, and stability of the disciples (Voorwinde 2005; von Gemünden 2009c, 279–306; Moore 2017, 287–309). Still missing are the studies on the way in which Jesus instills his own habits and mindset in the disciples, prepares them for mission and crises, communicates with them and builds their relationships with and attitudes towards the world.

2.6. Pauline Letters

Regarding the area of Pauline letters, much interest was devoted to Philippians. The letter was studied as an ancient *consolatio*, with a particular focus on the communal, socially generated, and performed joy that occurs here, which allows Paul to survive prison, and which he instills in the community (Holloway 2001; von Gemünden 2015, 223–53; Wright 2015, 39–61; Schellenberg 2021, especially ch. 5). Anke Inselmann presented Paul as a model for believers, a teacher of “Affektlehre,” mature feelings rooted in Christ (Inselmann 2015, 255–88). Philippians also appears in the company of other letters, like Galatians and 1 Corinthians, in the monograph *Defending Shame* by Te-Li Lau, where the author examines shame as a moral emotion, used for the formation of conscience and identity of believers (Lau 2020). Ian Jew in *Paul's Emotional Regime*, explores the different shades of joy in Philippians and 1 Thessalonians, applying the sociological model of “emotional regime” to Paul (Jew 2021).¹¹ Similarly, Ryan S. Schellenberg analyses joy and longing in epistolary prayers in Philippians and 1 Thessalonians (Schellenberg 2022, 79–98). Finally, Julia Fogg, also focusing on Philippians, examines joy through the lens of neuroscience and, referring to “shared emotions,” describes Paul's construction of “emotional habits” in the community (Fogg 2024, 1–18).

⁹ See also von Gemünden 2009e, 163–89.

¹⁰ On the positive qualification of fear in Luke, see also Spencer 2014a, 229–49.

¹¹ Three decades earlier, Abram Malherbe, in his pioneering work, had very generally indicated the use of elements of emotion (longing) to reinforce the hortatory message in the paraenetic letter that is 1 Thessalonians. See Malherbe 1989, 49–66.

An important resource for the study of Paul's emotions, relationship building and crisis management is the Corinthian correspondence. Maia Kotrosits highlights longing and shame, as well as the whole range of affections in Paul's relationship with the community in 1–2 Corinthians (Kotrosits 2010, 134–51). Oda Wischmeyer examines the rhetorical and ethical nature of emotions in 1 Cor 13, relating them to Aristotle's *Rhetoric* (Book II) (Wischmeyer 2012, 343–59). Becker analyses the topos of tears in Paul's "letter of tears" (2 Cor 2:4) and compares it with Greco-Roman literature (Plutarch and Cicero) to note its rhetorical and relational functions (empathy, authentication and proximity-building) (Becker 2012, 361–78). The true mine of Pauline emotions is 2 Cor 7:5–16, where the terms *splanchna* and *anapauo*, emotions such as pity, anger, and zeal, and the therapeutic nature of grief were studied from multiple angles (Clarke 1996, 277–300; Welborn 2001, 31–60; Gavin 2010, 427–42; Welborn 2011, 547–70; Lau 2020, 156–57). Concluding, Peter Y. Clark examines the *persitaseis* catalogues in 2 Corinthians, looking for a Pauline way of dealing with trauma and persecution (Clark 2016, 231–48), while in Petra von Gemünden we find passages devoted to affect and its regulation in Romans, Ephesians, and Colossians (lust, anger, love, the body, the ritual aspect of emotional control) (von Gemünden 2009a, 43–46, 132–37, 207–76). Pauline letters, which have received much attention so far, are still open to psychological research on interpersonal dialogue, building, strengthening, and ending relationships, reinforcing values and developing moral habits, in which emotions, Paul's authority, the Spirit, baptism and the Eucharist play an important role.

2.7. Hebrews, James, 1–2 Peter, 1–2–3 John, Jude, and Revelation

In other New Testament writings, Katharine M. Hockey analyses emotions in 1 Peter (a cognitive approach, combining Greco-Roman philosophy with social science and contemporary psychological theories) (Hockey 2017, 331–53; 2019), and von Gemünden examines frustration, jealousy, self-control and the cultivation of affect in James (von Gemünden 2009b, 190–204). Greg Carey points to Jesus' model that enables his disciples to live happily amidst adversity (apocalyptic literature) (Carey 2012, 203–24), while Stephen D. Moore highlights the role of disgust and loathing in the descriptions of Rome in the Revelation (Moore 2014, 503–28). The New Testament epistles and Revelation are still an open field for research on ecstatic experiences, symbols, rituals and their shaping of believers' moral life, as well as trauma, attitudes toward the world, and the identity of early Christian communities.

The presented outline, given the vastness of the research material, out of necessity remains selective. In addition to the texts indicated, there are many others, opening up to interdisciplinary research. Table 1 captures succinctly the above-presented topics, combining conservation of resources theory by Stevan E. Hobfoll, sets of religious and spiritual resources, and the biblical texts that can be analysed as their repository.

Table 1. Hobfoll's theory, religious and spiritual resources, and the Bible

Research issues	Hofboll's theory	Religious resources	Spiritual resources	Biblical material
Happiness, sense of meaning and purpose in life, decision-making process	Self-esteem, achievement of goals, personal development	Hope for eternal life, sense of being an instrument of divine love, sense of God-given purpose, gift of the Holy Spirit	Responsibility for one's own life, purpose of life, hope, openness to experience, courage, humility	Protohistory (Gen 1–11), stories of the patriarchs (Gen 12–50), David (1–2 Samuel), stories of prophetic vocations (Isaiah; Jeremiah; Ezekiel; Amos), eternal life (1 Thess 4:14–17), heaven (Phil 3), resurrection (1–2 Maccabees; 1 Cor 15); children of God, the Spirit and the glory of heaven (Wis 2–6; John 14; Rom 8:1–39)
Resilience to crisis, trauma	Adaptability, coping with adversity, psychological resilience	Suffering in the context of salvation, the ability to transform the heart through grace, the ability to see the good in difficult situations	Ability to accept change, acceptance of reality, inner stability, peace of mind, perseverance in difficulties, patience	Protohistory (Gen 1–11), stories of the patriarchs (Gen 12–50), Exodus and Israel's journey through the desert (Exodus; Numbers; Deuteronomy), Saul and David (1–2 Samuel), the fall of Israel and the destruction of the temple (1–2 Kings; Lamentations), Tobbit and Sarah, Judith, Esther, Job, the Psalms, Jesus, the hostility of his countrymen and the way of the cross, Paul in prison, catalogues of sufferings (2 Cor 1–2; 4; 6; 11; Phil 1–2; 4), 1–2 Peter, Revelation
Emotions (love, longing, joy, grief, fear, rage, pride, courage, shame, hatred, disgust)	A sense of humor, optimism, self-esteem, a sense of control over one's own life	A sense of peace, even in the midst of chaos, strength to face fears, peace of heart as the fruit of trust in God	Emotional balance, empathy, gratitude, inner peace	The stories of the patriarchs (Gen 12–50), Tobbit, Ruth, Psalms, Jesus' emotions, Paul's emotions (1–2 Corinthians; Philippians; 1 Thessalonians)

Research issues	Hofboll's theory	Religious resources	Spiritual resources	Biblical material
Interpersonal communication	Communication skills, support from coworkers, being well-liked, close relationship with at least one friend	-	-	Jesus and the Samaritan woman (John 4), Jesus, the sick, and the sinners, Paul's dialog with communities (1 Cor 8-11; Philippians; Philemon)
Forgiveness, crisis	Self-identity, the sense of purpose	Forgiveness of sins, the ability to forgive inspired by God's forgiveness	-	Isaac (Gen 26); David and Saul (1 Sam 24; 26), Jesus' parables, Jesus's cross, Paul and his communities (2 Cor 2; 7)
Fatherhood and the crisis of masculinity	Good relationships with children	-	-	Abraham and Isaac (Gen 22); David and his sons (2 Sam 13-19); Paul, the father of the communities
Gender roles, marriage and the family	A happy marriage, a stable family, a close relationship with at least one family member, a close relationship between the spouses, good health of family members	-	-	Adam and Eve (Gen 2-3), the patriarchs and their families, Proverbs 31, women in the Gospels, women in Paul (1 Cor 7; 11:2-16; 14:26; 1 Tim 2:11-14)
Relationships and community	Relationships, community building, belonging to a religious community, loyalty, friendship	Building a close relationship with God, motivation to do good, gift of the Holy Spirit	Sense of responsibility for the world, commitment to the common good, love for others, willingness to help others, ability to share the good, commitment to the common good, social responsibility and empathy	Protohistory (Gen 1-11), the stories of the patriarchs (Gen 12-50), the story of David (1-2 Samuel), Ruth, Jesus and the disciples, Paul and his communities (Romans 8; 1-2 Corinthians; Philippians; Philemon; Gal 5-6), the letters of Peter, James, Jude, John

Source: own research.

In the subsequent parts of the article, we will discuss the Hobfoll's theory, the selection of religious and spiritual resources, as well as the research instruments offered by psychological studies. They will be applied to the pioneering KUL project "The Relevance of the Bible for the Development of Religious and Spiritual Resources." Equipped with the tools of psychology, the project will examine how biblical texts can contribute to human development, relationship building, conflict management, and resilience at the times of crises.

3. The Researching Religious and Spiritual Resources: The Religious Resources Scale and the Spiritual Resources Scale

The second part of the article presents the results concerning the concept and validation of two tools for studying the regulatory functions of personality in the spiritual domain: The Religious Resources Scale and The Spiritual Resources Scale. The development of two independent methods for examining the regulatory functions of the religious-spiritual sphere stems from discussions in the academic literature, which suggest that spirituality should not be equated with religiosity. The spiritual domain encompasses human experiences related, among other things, to harmony with the world, openness, ethical sensitivity, altruism, inner freedom, gratitude, ethical norms, opposition to evil, and forgiveness. Religiosity, on the other hand, pertains to internal psychological processes associated with experiencing a specific relationship with God (Transcendence)—including aspects such as religious awareness and feelings, religious decision-making, bonds with a religious community, religious practices, morality, religious experiences, and forms of religious life. The distinction between these constructs suggests that spirituality, which reflects a person's pursuit of what is most important in life (the meaning, purpose, and values of human existence), is often connected with the concept of religiosity. On the one hand, religiosity manifests itself in the realm of spiritual activity, but on the other, it extends beyond it (e.g., in institutional or doctrinal aspects). Summarizing the discussion in the academic literature, it can be noted that both constructs—spirituality and religiosity—are complex and multidimensional. For this reason, they may overlap or be interrelated. Therefore, these terms should not be treated as synonymous when analysing the functioning of the religious-spiritual dimension of human life (Hill and Pargament 2003, 64–74; Emmons 2005, 731–45; Krok 2015, 196–203; Niewiadomska et al. 2022, 479–99).

An important justification for developing measurement tools such as the Religious Resources Scale and the Spiritual Resources Scale lies in the regulatory

functions of the religious-spiritual dimension in shaping human behaviour. This area of personality is closely linked to an individual's perception of the meaning of their existence and the selection of life goals. This connection is based on the principle that the religious-spiritual dimension of personality mobilizes individuals to engage in intentional behaviours—those that distinguish proactive human actions from merely reactive animal activity. As a result, a mature development of the religious-spiritual sphere leads individuals to maintain hope for solving their problems and/or achieving their intended goals. It also fosters motivation to seek constructive solutions to difficulties and/or increases the readiness to engage in prosocial behaviours, even in highly unfavourable circumstances. Another crucial aspect of the religious-spiritual sphere is its role in shaping internal standards by exerting a strong pressure to embody values and norms of behaviour derived from this dimension of personality. The regulatory mechanisms function in such a way that adhering to religious-spiritual values and norms leads to satisfaction and enhanced self-respect, whereas violating them results in guilt and lowered self-esteem (Milner et al. 2020, 1–10; Coppola et al. 2021, 626944; Jurek, Niewiadomska, and Szot 2023, e0291196).

The theoretical foundation of the developed tools is Stevan Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) (Hobfoll, Lilly, and Jackson 1992, 125–41). Within the framework of this theory, resources refer to factors present in the surrounding environment as well as bio-psycho-spiritual personal elements that play a crucial role in the following processes: (1) adaptation to diverse environmental demands; (2) maintaining a high quality of life, including aspects such as self-esteem, close relationships, and psychophysical health; (3) coping with difficulties and/or their consequences; (4) constructive development in various life conditions; and (5) achieving important life goals (Hobfoll 2002, 307–24; Freund 2008, 94–106).

Cross-cultural research findings indicate that resources have a diverse nature. Based on the cross-culturally validated Hobfoll's Conservation of Resources Questionnaire (developed within COR theory), different resource structures have been identified. Conducted analyses have shown that resources can cluster into the following categories: material resources, personal resources, energetic resources, state resources, which include health-related resources and resources supporting social environment interactions (Hobfoll 2011a, 116–22). Another classification of adaptive and developmental assets, derived using the Conservation of Resources Questionnaire, allowed for the identification of resource structures related to: (a) self-management; (b) social status; (c) psychological resilience; (d) family support; (e) material status; (f) personal growth; and (g) community building (Chwaszcz, Bartczuk, and Niewiadomska 2019, 167–202). Thus, the resource structure identified in Hobfoll's original tool provides a strong rationale for developing methods to study religious and spiritual resources.

3.1. Instrument Development

The Questionnaire for Measuring Spiritual Resources and the Questionnaire for Measuring Religious Resources were developed to assess the significance of an individual's internal resources related to spirituality and religiosity. The development of the questionnaire began with the creation of a preliminary list of resources, which included 48 spiritual resources and 54 religious resources. This list was reviewed and validated by experts in the field. To ensure a comprehensive evaluation, input was gathered from psychologists, sociologists, educators, theologians, and researchers specializing in this subject. In total, 20 competent judges participated in the assessment process. To evaluate the content validity of the measurement tool, the Content Validity Index (CVI) was used. This index is applied to determine the extent to which the test items fully represent the domain or construct being measured. The acceptable CVI threshold should be at least 0.75. Experts were asked to assess the relevance and clarity of each item using a Likert scale: For relevance, a 4-point Likert scale was used: (4) Highly relevant, (3) Moderately relevant, (2) Needs major revision, (1) Not relevant. For clarity, a 3-point Likert scale was used: (3) Very clear, (2) Needs some revision, (1) Unclear. The CVI index for each item was calculated by multiplying the number of expert ratings that assigned a score of 3 or 4 to the item and then dividing the total score by the number of items on the scale. Based on this analysis, 30 spiritual resources and 29 religious resources were selected for further evaluation. The overall CVI scores obtained were: 0.79 for the Spiritual Resources Scale and 0.82 for the Religious Resources Scale.

3.2. Study Design and Participants

A convenience sample of 354 respondents was recruited for the survey. All participants were enrolled in courses organized by KUL Studies for the Polish community and Poles abroad, run by KUL Polonia Center. The courses covered a variety of subjects, including artificial intelligence, speech therapy, mediation and negotiation, effective management, Polish language and culture, history of literature, reportage and interview studies, and Christianity and Judaism. Most of the study participants resided in Europe, specifically in Austria, Spain, England, Belgium, Germany, Norway, Ireland, France, Denmark, Italy, Lithuania, Latvia, Switzerland, Scotland, Ukraine, Belarus, the Netherlands, and Russia. Additionally, some participants were from the United States, Argentina, and India.

Table 2. Characteristics of the study group ($N = 354$)

Variable	Category	N/M	%/SD
Gender	Female	295	83.3
	Male	59	16.7
Age	–	45.24	8.91
Education	Vocational	30	8.5
	Secondary	218	61.6
	Higher	106	29.9
Marital Status	Single	58	16.4
	Married	238	67.2
	Divorced	42	11.9
	Widowed	14	4.0
	Religious Order	2	0.6
Place of Residence	City	302	85.3
	Village	52	14.7
Religion	Catholicism	326	92.1
	Orthodox Christianity	6	1.7
	Other Religion	2	0.6
	Non-Religious (Atheism, Agnosticism)	4	1.1
	Christianity (General)	14	4.0
	Unsure	2	0.6
Religious Belief	Deeply Religious	124	35.0
	Religious	211	59.6
	Rather Non-Religious	15	4.2
	Completely Non-Religious	4	1.1

Source: own research.

3.3. Data Collection

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, and their participation was anonymous and voluntary. The research was supervised by scientists from the Institute of Sociological Sciences and the Institute of Psychology at KUL. The study was conducted electronically using LimeSurvey, an open-source software platform designed for creating and administering online surveys and questionnaires. This tool allowed researchers to customize the study to meet the needs of both researchers

and participants. Before data entry, all collected responses were reviewed for completeness, and incomplete questionnaires were discarded. During the data collection process, a researcher was available to assist participants in case of any questions or concerns. All data were stored in a secure, encrypted database, accessible only to the research team. No personal data were collected. The data presented in this study are available upon request from the corresponding author.

3.4. Statistical Analysis

Exploratory factor analysis (EFA) and confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) were used for the investigation of construct validity. EFA made it possible to check whether there were grounds for extracting latent structures on the basis of observed correlations between observable variables. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity of the correlation matrix, the Kaiser Meyer-Olkin statistic (values between 0.7–0.8 acceptable, and values above 0.9 are excellent) were used to assess the validity of extracting hidden factors. Cronbach's Alpha was used to assess the internal consistency reliability of the scale. Values above 0.7 are considered acceptable. The Pearson correlation coefficient was used to assess the relationship between the results of the scales measuring spiritual and religious resources and the results of the Duke University Religion Index (DUREL) questionnaire. A significance level of $p \leq 0.05$ was considered statistically significant. Analyses were performed using IBM SPSS 29 and IBM SPSS Amos (IBM Corp., Armonk, NY, USA).

3.5. Construct Validity

In the first stage, the assumptions for factor analysis were verified as part of the structural validity assessment. For the Spiritual Resources Scale, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) Measure of Sampling Adequacy was 0.957, indicating an excellent fit for factor analysis. Bartlett's Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$; $\chi^2 = 13,015.693$), confirming that the data were suitable for factor analysis. During the analysis, only factors with an eigenvalue of 1 or higher were retained. This method, commonly used in exploratory factor analysis, is based on the principle that each principal component should explain at least as much variance as one original variable. Using this criterion, two factors were extracted, which together explained 70.05% of the variance. Factor 1 had an eigenvalue of 20.31 and explained 67.69% of the variance. It consisted of 17 items. Factor 2 had an eigenvalue of 1.310 and explained 4.37% of the variance. It consisted of 6 items. The factor loadings for Factor 1 ranged between 0.896 and 0.615, while for Factor 2, they ranged between 0.809 and 0.672. Items with factor loadings below 0.6 or those that had strong cross-loadings on both factors were removed from the scale.

Table 3. Factor analysis results for the Religious Resources Scale

Religious resources	Factor	
	1	2
Eucharist as the source and summit of spiritual life	0.837	–
Living in the state of sanctifying grace	0.835	–
Regular sacramental practice	0.821	–
Hope of eternal life	0.783	–
Forgiveness of sins	0.752	–
Gift of the Holy Spirit	0.717	–
Viewing suffering in the context of salvation	0.715	–
Ability to transform the heart through grace	0.709	–
Remembrance of God's miracles	0.703	–
Fidelity to the teaching of the Church	0.702	–
Faith in God	0.698	–
God's mercy	0.688	–
Trust in God's providence	0.687	–
Confidence that God hears prayers	0.650	–
Ability to perceive the signs of God's providence	0.646	–
Openness to the action of the Holy Spirit in daily life	0.636	0.616
Sense of being instruments of God's love	0.635	0.621
Confidence that God hears prayers	0.634	–
A sense of God-given purpose	0.616	0.601
Ability to grow spiritually in difficult times	0.615	–
The certainty that every situation makes sense in God's eyes	–	–
A sense of peace, even in chaos	–	0.809
Strength to fight temptations	–	0.779
Strength to face fears	–	0.777
Ability to see the good in difficult situations	–	0.765
Awareness of being loved unconditionally by God	–	0.753
Motivation to do good	–	0.672
Peace of heart as the fruit of trust in God	0.626	0.644
The ability to forgive inspired by God's forgiveness	–	–
A sense of God's guidance	–	–

Source: own research.

Based on the results of the factor analysis, two main factors can be distinguished:

- Factor 1—“Rooted in Faith and Sacraments.” This factor encompasses aspects related to the Eucharist, sacraments, faith, hope, God’s mercy, inner transformation, and trust in Divine Providence. It represents a theological dimension, grounded in Church doctrine.
- Factor 2—“Personal Experience of Relationship with God.” This factor includes elements such as a sense of peace, strength to resist temptations, awareness of being loved, the ability to see goodness, motivation to do good, and a sense of divine guidance. This dimension pertains to spiritual resilience and personal experience of a relationship with God.

For the Religious Resources Scale, the KMO value was 0.874, indicating a good fit for factor analysis. Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$; $\chi^2 = 6,832.766$), confirming that the data were suitable for factor analysis. Three factors were extracted, explaining a total of 54.82% of the variance. Factor 1 had an eigenvalue of 11.56 and explained 39.86% of the variance. It consisted of 7 items. Factor 2 had an eigenvalue of 2.778 and explained 9.58% of the variance. It consisted of 4 items. Factor 3 had an eigenvalue of 1.563 and explained 5.389% of the variance. The factor loadings were as follows: Factor 1 ranged from 0.759 to 0.609, Factor 2 from 0.786 to 0.635, and Factor 3 from 0.764 to 0.607.

Table 4. Factor analysis results for the Spiritual Resources Scale

Spiritual resources	Factor		
	1	2	3
Self-acceptance	0.703	–	–
Self-confidence	0.689	–	–
Emotional balance	0.686	–	–
Ability to accept change	0.658	–	–
Acceptance of reality	0.638	–	–
Serenity of mind	0.635	–	–
Openness to experience	0.606	–	–
Perseverance in difficulties	–	–	–
Patience	–	–	–
Courage	–	–	–
Seeking inner peace	–	–	–
Humility	–	0.786	–
Responsibility for one’s own life	–	0.736	–

Spiritual resources	Factor		
	1	2	3
A purpose of living	-	0.642	-
A sense of responsibility for the world	-	0.635	-
Finding beauty in the everyday	-	-	-
Hope	-	-	-
Empathy	-	-	-
Gratitude	-	-	-
Ability to pray or meditate	-	-	-
Commitment to the common good	-	-	0.764
Love for others	-	-	0.688
Willingness to help others	-	-	0.658
Ability to feel gratitude for life	-	-	0.658
Ability to share the good	-	-	0.625
Commitment to the common good	-	-	0.607
A sense of belonging to the community of the Church	-	-	-
Openness to transcendence	-	-	-
Capacity to forgive	-	-	-

Source: own research.

Based on the results of the factor analysis, three main factors can be distinguished:

- Factor 1—“Inner Stability.” This factor includes self-acceptance, emotional balance, peace of mind, self-confidence, adaptability to change, acceptance of reality, patience, and perseverance. These are qualities associated with inner stability, psychological resilience, and the ability to cope with difficulties.
- Factor 2—“Spiritual Responsibility.” This factor includes elements such as gratitude, hope, love for others, spiritual wisdom, humility, a sense of belonging to a community, empathy, and prayer. It reflects attitudes and values related to spiritual growth, interpersonal relationships, and faith as a force that strengthens bonds.
- Factor 3—“Social Responsibility and Empathy.” This factor reflects commitment to the common good, willingness to help others, and a sense of belonging to a community. The resources associated with this factor indicate prosocial attitudes, care for others, and gratitude for life and interpersonal relationships.

3.6. Internal Consistency

For the Spiritual Resources Scale, the overall Cronbach's Alpha was 0.975. At the factor level, Factor 1 demonstrated a Cronbach's Alpha of 0.975, while Factor 2 had a reliability coefficient of 0.920. For the Religious Resources Scale, the overall Cronbach's Alpha was 0.903. The internal consistency for Factor 1 was 0.831, for Factor 2 it was 0.823, and for Factor 3 it was 0.856.

Table 5. Reliability analysis for the Religious Resources Scale

No.	Religious resources	Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
1	Eucharist as the source and summit of spiritual life	0.794	0.976
2	Living in the state of sanctifying grace	0.842	0.976
3	Regular sacramental practice	0.831	0.976
4	Hope of eternal life	0.823	0.976
5	Forgiveness of sins	0.828	0.976
6	Gift of the Holy Spirit	0.860	0.976
7	Viewing suffering in the context of salvation	0.734	0.977
8	Ability to transform the heart through grace	0.861	0.976
9	Remembrance of God's miracles	0.813	0.976
10	Fidelity to the teaching of the Church	0.783	0.976
11	Faith in God	0.789	0.976
12	God's mercy	0.823	0.976
13	Trust in God's providence	0.856	0.976
14	Confidence that God hears prayers	0.815	0.976
15	Ability to perceive the signs of God's providence	0.862	0.976
16	Confidence that God hears prayers	0.830	0.976
17	Ability to grow spiritually in difficult times	0.805	0.976
18	A sense of peace, even in chaos	0.710	0.977
19	Strength to fight temptations	0.738	0.976
20	Strength to face fears	0.739	0.977
21	Ability to see the good in difficult situations	0.735	0.977
22	Awareness of being loved unconditionally by God	0.762	0.976
23	Motivation to do good	0.709	0.977

Source: own research.

Table 6. Reliability analysis for the Spiritual Resources Scale

No.	Spiritual resources	Item-Total Correlation	Cronbach's Alpha if Item Deleted
1	Self-acceptance	0.577	0.897
2	Self-confidence	0.428	0.902
3	Emotional balance	0.541	0.898
4	Ability to accept change	0.467	0.900
5	Acceptance of reality	0.507	0.899
6	Serenity of mind	0.644	0.895
7	Openness to experience	0.425	0.902
8	Spiritual wisdom	0.582	0.897
9	Humility	0.612	0.896
10	Responsibility for one's own life	0.584	0.897
11	A purpose of living	0.654	0.895
12	A sense of responsibility for the world	0.529	0.899
13	Commitment to the common good	0.651	0.895
14	Love for others	0.626	0.896
15	Willingness to help others	0.574	0.897
16	Ability to feel gratitude for life	0.654	0.894
17	Ability to share the good	0.585	0.897

Source: own research.

3.7. Criterion Validity

As part of the criterion validation, the scores of the Spiritual Resources Scale and the Religious Resources Scale were correlated with the results of the DUREL questionnaire.

The DUREL questionnaire consists of five questions and is designed to assess three main aspects of religiosity: Organized Religious Activity (ORA; 1 question), Non-Organized Religious Activity (NORA; 1 question), and Intrinsic Religiosity (IR; 3 questions). ORA refers to public religious activities, such as attending religious services or participating in other group-based religious activities (e.g., prayer groups). NORA includes private religious activities performed at home, such as praying, studying the Holy Scriptures, or listening to religious radio broadcasts. IR evaluates an individual's personal religious commitment or religious motivation.

Table 7. Correlations between the Spiritual Resources Scale, Religious Resources Scale, and DUREL Scale Scores

Variables	ORA	NORA	IR
Rootedness in faith and sacraments	0.418	0.345	0.435
	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Personal experience of relationship with God	0.366	0.313	0.362
	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Spiritual Resources—overall score	0.420	0.349	0.432
	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Inner stability	0.120	0.055	0.171
	0.027	0.306	0.002
Spiritual responsibility	0.276	0.210	0.313
	<0.001	<0.001	<0.001
Social responsibility and empathy	0.302	0.181	0.275
	<0.001	0.001	<0.001
Religious Resources—overall score	0.270	0.169	0.293
	<0.001	0.002	<0.001

Source: own research.

The correlation analysis results indicate significant relationships between the ORA, NORA, and IR variables from the DUREL questionnaire and the various aspects of spiritual and religious resources. The highest correlations were observed for “Rooted in Faith and Sacraments” and the overall Spiritual Resources score. This suggests that individuals with higher levels of religiosity tend to have more developed spiritual resources. Personal Experience of Relationship with God also showed significant but slightly lower correlations across all three DUREL subscales (ORA, NORA, and IR). Inner Stability was significantly related only to ORA and IR, with the strongest correlation found for IR. Spiritual Responsibility and Social Responsibility & Empathy were clearly correlated with all three religiosity indicators, with higher Pearson’s correlation values noted for ORA and IR. These findings indicate that religiosity and spiritual resources are interconnected, with organized religious activity and intrinsic religiosity playing a particularly strong role in the development of spiritual and religious resources.

4. Conclusions

For several decades, biblical studies have been opening up to cooperation with social sciences, particularly psychology. Topics such as emotions, interpersonal communication, ways of coping with stress and trauma, personal development, the pursuit of happiness, and relationship building are featured in studies that examine texts using positive psychology, neuroscience, anthropology, and social sciences. However, it is rare to find joint research by biblical scholars and psychologists that empirically tests the impact of biblical content. An opportunity for such research is provided by the KUL project, “The Relevance of the Bible for the Development of Religious and Spiritual Resources.” It offers a real opportunity for biblical studies to enter into an interdisciplinary dialogue with the social sciences, mainly psychology and sociology, by examining the impact of the Bible on the well-being of individuals and communities and the effectiveness of biblical models of relationship building and crisis management (Hobfoll 2011b, 127–47; Hall et al. 2015, 561–68; Fel, Niewiadomska, and Lenart-Kłoś 2022).

By using the Religious Resources Scale and/or the Spiritual Resources Scale to deepen reflection on biblical texts, it can be shown that the Bible has much to offer to contemporary society. It can enrich the network of resources necessary for adaptation to various life situations, increase psychological resilience in coping with problems, reduce civilizational stress, and/or help building relationships with other people (Chen, Westman, and Hobfoll 2015, 95–105; Niewiadomska and Jurek 2022).

It should also be emphasized that the research approach proposed in the article allows for the methodological distinctiveness of biblical and social studies to be preserved in the scientific process. The results obtained on the basis of separate methodologies and studies should be confronted, compared and/or supplemented so that, thanks to the interdisciplinary approach, innovative conclusions can be drawn in comparison with research conducted in a single discipline. Dialogue between biblical studies and psychology can help identify personality factors that contribute to multi-dimensional human development and help people constructively solve the problems they encounter (Hobfoll 2011a, 116–22; 2014, 21–32; Niewiadomska 2022).

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Marcin Kowalski: Methodology, Writing original draft, review & editing, Supervision, Bibliography search, Corresponding author | **Iwona Niewiadomska:** Data collection, Methodology, Writing original draft, Supervision, Bibliography search | **Mirosław Kalinowski:** Methodology, Writing original draft, review & editing, Supervision | **Mirosław Wróbel:** Writing original draft, Review of the terminology concerning religious and spiritual resources | **Krzysztof Jurek:** Data collection, Formal analysis, Methodology, Writing original draft, review & editing, Corresponding author | **Wojciech Wcisł:** Data collection, Writing original draft.

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Spirit(s), Angels, and Virtues: The Reception of Isaiah 11:2–3a in Early Judaism

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Abstract: This article examines the reception history of Isa 11:2–3a in Second Temple Judaism, as it relates to pneumatological perceptions and uses of the words for “spirit” in Hebrew and Greek (*rūah* and *pneuma*). Isaiah 11 plays an important role in messianic expectations in both Judaism and Christianity, but its reception in early Judaism sheds light also on early pneumatological developments and forms the background to later, early Christian interpretations of this text. Via close readings and analyses of (1) The Septuagint translation of Isa 11:2–3a; and relevant texts from (2) Qumran; (3) the Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha; and (4) the Targum Isaiah this study demonstrates different interpretative lines and uses of “spirit.” The main conclusions are that there are both royal or messianic and more “democratized” interpretations and applications of the original “royal charisma” in Isa 11:2; furthermore, that “spirit” can be used to denote the spirit of God, human dispositions, charismatic gifts or virtues, and angelic beings—and, sometimes, the distinctions between these categories are blurry and overlap.

Keywords: Book of Isaiah, reception history, Second Temple Judaism, pneumatology

Nowhere else in the Hebrew Bible are the attributes of the spirit of God described in such a concentrated way as in Isa 11:2.¹ Here, the spirit of YHWH—empowering the future Davidic king with the qualities needed to rule justly as God wills—is presented as the spirit of wisdom and understanding, of counsel and strength, of knowledge and fear of YHWH. When studying the early Jewish and Christian reception of texts about the Spirit and how these relate to developments in pneumatology, it is no surprise that Isa 11:2 emerges as one of the most vital texts.

This text has connections to royal psalms (e.g., Ps 72), the anointing of David (1 Sam 16:13), and the wisdom tradition (Ma 1999, 34–39; Ringgren 1956, 31–32).

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¹ The Book of Isaiah as a whole is one of the most quoted books in both early Judaism and early Christianity (Sawyer 2018, 2–3); in the Hebrew Bible, it is second only to the Book of Ezekiel when counting the number of occurrences of the word רוּחַ, with 51 and 52 occurrences respectively. At least 18 times, רוּחַ refers to the spirit of God (Isa 11:2; 30:1; 32:15; 34:16; 40:7, 13; 42:1; 44:3; 48:16; 59:19, 21; 61:1; 63:10, 11, 14; possibly also 4:4; 11:4, 15; 27:8; 28:6; 30:28). In Isa 11:2–3a (MT), רוּחַ is used four times; the Greek (LXX) has πνεῦμα five times. Only in two verses in the Hebrew Bible does רוּחַ occur as many as four times: Isa 11:2 and Ezek 37:9.

According to Tryggve Mettinger, it combines “the martial charisma of Saul and the judicial wisdom of Solomon.” (Mettinger 1976, 253) There is evidence to suggest that the first ten verses of Isa 11, together with Gen 49:9–11; Num 24:17 and perhaps 2 Sam 7:10–14, was part of a “core group of *testimonia*” in Jewish, pre-Christian, expectations of a royal, Davidic messiah; and that these texts were, subsequently, applied to Jesus by Christians (Albl 1999, 58, 208–15).² Furthermore, the six attributes of the Spirit in the Hebrew text of Isa 11:2 become seven in the Greek (LXX Isa 11:2–3a); by the second century a Christian tradition of the “sevenfold spirit,” in which the seven attributes are interpreted as denoting the fullness of the Spirit and/or charismatic gifts,³ has already been established (e.g., Justin, *Dial.* 87; Iren., *Haer.* 3.9.3; 3.17.1–3; *Epid.* 9; Tert., *Jud.* 9.26–27; *Marc.* 3.17.3–5; 5.8.4; *Cor.* 15.2; cf. Aphrahat, *Dem.* 1.9). Tertullian, e.g., explicitly identifies the “gifts” of Isa 11:2–3a with the nine *χαρίσματα* of 1 Cor 12:8–10 (*Marc.* 5.8.8). Isaiah 11:2–3a is also associated with personified and angelomorphic perceptions of the Spirit (e.g., Justin, *Dial.* 87–88) (see Bucur 2008, 201).⁴

This article aims to examine the early Jewish reception of Isa 11:2(–3a), to see if and in which ways it forms the background to these early Christian interpretations, and show that the Jewish reception of this text contains different—but many times interconnected and overlapping—interpretative lines. This also sheds light on early Jewish pneumatological developments and perceptions of the spirit of God.⁵

² See also Collins 2010, 28, 74–75; Penner 2020, 426. “Isaiah 11:1–5 was probably the most popular text of Davidic messianism in early Judaism.” (Bauckham 2008, 193) It should also be pointed out that Isa 11 is part of a larger context in the Book of Isaiah, and read together with, e.g., Isa 9:5–6, the “Shoot of Jesse” can be interpreted as referring to someone who is *more* than just a human offspring in the line of David; several words or concepts connect Isa 9:5–7 and 11:1–9 with each other, such as “counsel/counsellor” (ייעוץ/עצה), “strength/mighty” (גבור/גבורה), the connection to David (and a Davidic rule), the Prince of Peace (9:5) and the rule of peace (11:6–9). Furthermore, in the LXX, the child is called *μεγάλης βουλής ἄγγελος* (the angel or messenger of great counsel), who will bring peace to “the princes” (τοὺς ἀρχοντας); this could foreshadow some of the later “angelomorphic” Christological interpretations, and perhaps even some of the angelic interpretations of the “spirits” in Isa 11:2–3a that will be encountered in this article (if the spirits are understood as the angelic “princes” of the Shoot of Jesse/the Angel of great counsel). This would require further research, however.

³ Already in its original context, Isa 11 is a *charismatic* text, if by this is meant the “royal charisma” that Mettinger connects to “the king’s endowment with the Spirit of God and with the idea of his divine wisdom.” He defines “charismata as specific gifts of body and spirit which are conceived of as supernatural in the sense that they are not accessible to everyone.” (Mettinger 1976, 233) This is not charismatic in the same sense as the spiritual grace gifts Paul and later Christian writers like Tertullian write about, but, as I aim to show, in the early Jewish reception of Isa 11:2–3a, we do find developments in that direction.

⁴ It can also be argued that the seven spirits in Rev 1:4; 4:5; 5:6 allude to both Isa 11:2–3a and seven principal angels—or express an archaic angelomorphic understanding of the Spirit. Angelomorphic perceptions of the Spirit are also found in, e.g., Justin, *Dial.* 116.1 (see Oeyen 1972, 220–221); Asc. Isa. 3:15; 4:21; 7:23; 9:36, 39, 40; 10:4; 11:4, 33; Herm. 43:9.

⁵ John Levison argues against the view that pneumatology started as a Christian discipline and that “the study of the spirit as a person or a *hypostasis*—pneumatology proper, finds no place ... in the Old Testament,” and aims to show that “[p]neumatology began in ancient Israel with a burst—a big bang—of creativity.” (Levison 2022, 4, 21)

The texts are analyzed as they relate to: (1) The context and identity of the recipients of the spirit's endowment/attributes from Isa 11:2-3a, i.e., does the text contain *royal*, *messianic*, or *priestly* expectations, or does it express a “*democratization*” of the Davidic promise? (2) The use of the terms רוּחַ and πνεῦμα: do they denote, e.g., the *spirit of God*, *human dispositions*, *charismatic gifts* or *virtues* (in themselves), or *angelic beings*? (3) The nature of the different attributes quoted or alluded to from Isa 11:2-3a: are they best understood as, e.g., *attributes* (or names) of the spirit(s) in question, or as *human dispositions*, *gifts*, or *virtues*?

This study is primarily reception-historical and includes surveying texts in early Judaism in which Isa 11:2-3a is quoted or alluded to. By means of a close reading of these texts, the *translation*, *use*, and *interpretation* of Isa 11:2-3a is examined, with a special interest in how this relates to pneumatological perceptions. As a starting point in the selection of texts, Armin Lange and Matthias Weigold's *Biblical Quotations and Allusions in Second Temple Jewish Literature* (2011) and Steve Delamarter's *A Scripture Index to Charlesworth's The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (2002) have been consulted (see also Flint 2012, 389-406). These works, however, need updating, so texts have also been added to the investigation.⁶ The categories suggested by Matthias Henze and David Lincicum (2023) to distinguish between different uses of Scripture have been employed in the analysis, which are: marked and unmarked citations, verbal and conceptual allusions.⁷ All of these are present and sometimes overlap in the texts selected for this study.

1. From Six to Seven Attributes: Hebrew and Greek Texts

The consonantal text of Isa 11:2-3a in Codex Leningradensis and the text in the Great Isaiah Scroll from Qumran (1QIsa^a 10:20-21) are verbatim identical to each other (1QIsa^a is a proto-Masoretic text)⁸ and will hereby only be referred to as the Hebrew text (or MT). In this text, the spirit of יהוה is described as having six

⁶ This has been done when reading through Second Temple Jewish Literature, and via suggestions in research seminars (primarily the Exegetical research seminar at Åbo Akademi University), and conferences. I especially want to acknowledge the advice I have received from Professor Antti Laato and Professor Terje Stordalen.

⁷ Marked citation: “an explicit citation of a discrete text that is marked for the reader in some way”; unmarked citation: “might have a verbatim agreement with a scriptural predecessor text but is not marked as such”; verbal allusion: “a reference to a specific word or string of words without an explicit marker” (no distinction between allusion and echo); conceptual allusion: “a reference to a theme or topic that is not tied to a specific text in Scripture but nonetheless may plausibly be seen to derive from it.” (Henze and Lincicum 2023, 7-9)

⁸ For more about this group of manuscripts, see Tov 2012, 24-39. Note that 1QIsa^b does not contain Isa 10:20-13:15.

attributes or qualities that transfer onto the messianic figure upon whom the Spirit will come to rest. There could, however, be a connection to the number seven even here, if רוח יהוה in 11:2a is counted as one of the “spirits” or attributes; also in 11:15, רוּחוּ is mentioned, together with שבעה נהלים (“seven streams”). The spirit of YHWH can then be likened to the Menorah, with one stem and six branches, having seven lamps in total (Exod 25:31–37).⁹ When Aphrahat quotes Isa 11:2 in his demonstrations, he closely follows the Hebrew text, with the spirit of God plus six attributes, but simultaneously states that these are “seven operations” of the Spirit (Dem. 1:9) (Bucur 2009, 188–90).

With the Greek versions, the sevenfold pattern becomes unequivocal. The יראת יהוה at the end of 11:2 becomes καὶ εὐσεβείας, and a seventh attribute is added via: (1) the integration of 11:3a, where יראת יהוה becomes φόβου θεοῦ; and (2) the translation of והריחו as derived from רוח instead of ריח, (see Shifman 2012, 242) thus translating into ἐμπλήσει αὐτὸν πνεῦμα. The translation of Isaiah into Greek is “notorious for the liberties it takes with its source text” (Penner 2020, 3);¹⁰ and among its mistakes, the confusion of *waw* and *yod* is “especially common” (Penner 2020, 6).

Table 1. Hebrew and Greek Texts

Isa 11:2–3a (MT) = 1QIsa ^a 10:20–21	Isa 11:2–3a (LXX Göttingen)	Isa 11:2–3a (LXX Sinaiticus) ¹¹
ונחה עליו	καὶ ἀναπαύσεται ἐπ’ αὐτὸν	καὶ ἐ παναπαύσεται ἐπ’ αὐτὸν
רוח יהוה	πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ,	πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ,
רוח חכמה ובינה	πνεῦμα σοφίας καὶ συνέσεως,	πνεῦμα σοφίας καὶ συνέσεως,
רוח עצה וגבורה	πνεῦμα βουλῆς καὶ ἰσχύος,	πνεῦμα βουλῆς καὶ ἰσχύος,
רוח דעת ויראת יהוה	πνεῦμα γνώσεως καὶ εὐσεβείας·	πνεῦμα γνώσεως καὶ εὐσεβείας·
והריחו	ἐμπλήσει αὐτὸν πνεῦμα	καὶ ἐμπλήσει αὐτὸν πνεῦμα
ביראת יהוה	φόβου θεοῦ	φόβου θεοῦ

There are some textual variants in Greek, apart from the minor ones seen in Sinaiticus in Table 1,¹² such as κυριος instead of θεος, and the repetition of φοβου in 11:2b–3a. According to Chrysostom and minuscule 710, both Aquila and Theodotion (second century CE) use φοβου instead of εὐσεβείας in 11:2b, and render 11:3a as σφρανει αυτον εν φοβω κυριου, which is closer to the Hebrew text. It is

⁹ Irenaeus, e.g., makes a connection between Isa 11:2–3a and the Menorah (*Epid.* 9).

¹⁰ See also Seeligmann 2004, 184; Troxel 2008, 2–4, 72; Parry 2012, 151–68. The LXX Isaiah is “a text closely resembling the MT, but with considerable freedom.” (Dines 2004, 22)

¹¹ Differences from the critical edition of Göttingen are highlighted in bold.

¹² The tables and figures in this article are all the author’s own work.

clear, however, that the Greek translation, with the spirit of God connected to *seven* attributes, has been of crucial importance in the development of a “seven spirits” or “sevenfold spirit” tradition, as is also reflected in the early Christian sources.

Πνεῦμα is by far the most common word used in the LXX to translate רוח (277 times),¹³ and its semantic range makes it “a remarkably appropriate term” (Edwards 2012, 110). Both רוח and πνεῦμα can denote: (a) wind, breath (air in movement); (b) the animating principle, i.e., that which animates the body of living creatures, including humans; (c) the human soul or immaterial aspect of the human personality, e.g., the seat of emotions and intellectual capacities (also, the mind of God); (d) the spirit of God, his own presence and creative power as he relates to humans and the world, or a unique, transcendent divine agent; (e) the divine spirit as agent of prophetic or mantic inspiration; (f) independent, noncorporeal beings and intermediaries, whether good or evil, i.e., angelic spirits and demons.¹⁴

Relevant in this study, too, is that there are *angelomorphic*¹⁵ tendencies related to the use of πνεῦμα in the LXX. John Levison has demonstrated the existence of angelic or angelomorphic perceptions of the spirit of God in early Judaism, already in the Hebrew Bible. The choices made by the LXX translators often only make this perception stronger: “there are indeed several instances in which LXX-translations provide intimations that the spirit continued to be interpreted as an angelic being in the Greco-Roman period.” (Levison 1995, 474)¹⁶

¹³ This count includes Da. Θ and Sir (Baumgärtel 1968b, 367–68).

¹⁴ See, e.g., “רוח,” HALOT 3:1197–1201; “πνεῦμα,” BDAG 832–36; Baumgärtel 1968a, 359–67; Kleinknecht 1968, 334–59; Edwards 2012, 93–120.

¹⁵ The definition for “angelomorphic” used in this article comes from Crispin Fletcher-Louis: “we propose its use wherever there are signs that an individual or community possesses specifically angelic characteristics or status, though for whom identity cannot be reduced to that of an angel.” (Fletcher-Louis 1997, 14–15)

¹⁶ A few examples from Levison’s paper: “To trouble” (פַּעַם), naturally translated by ταρασσῶ (Gen 41:8; Ps 76:4; Dan 2:1), in LXX Judg 13:24f is instead translated as “to accompany” (συνπορεύομαι; *Codex Vaticanus* has συνεκπορεύομαι); “Such a translation indicates the presence of the belief in the Greco-Roman era that a spirit of God could be present by accompanying rather than possessing someone.” (Levison 1995, 474–75) Regarding Isa 63:14: instead of livestock going down (MT), the LXX connects “going down” with the spirit: the spirit descends, and “the spirit is not רוח יהוה but πνεῦμα παρὰ κυρίου”: παρὰ “often signals an independent רוח”; “Taken together, these elements suggest that the LXX translator understood Isa 63:14 to refer to a spirit which descended from Yahweh in order to lead the people of Israel to Canaan.” (475–76) In Mic 3:8 (MT) the prophet is filled with power, the spirit of YHWH, justice and might; in the LXX translation, however, the prophet is filled by power, justice and strength, but not by the spirit: here the translator describes the spirit as “the means or person by which the prophet is filled with power and justice.” (488–78) Judith 16:14c changes Ps 104:30a (LXX Ps 103:30a) from God sending his spirit to the *spirit* being the subject of the verb (to build): the spirit “is no longer a vehicle through which the creation is built but the subject which builds.” (479)

2. Qumran Writings

In the following, texts from Qumran which quote or allude to Isa 11:2–3a are investigated; some quote the whole passage (marked or unmarked citations), while others make verbal or conceptual allusions.¹⁷ First, two passages in which Isa 11:2 (or parts of it) is quoted are dealt with (2.1.–2.2.); these texts also contain clear *messianic* interpretations. Then come passages with verbal allusions to Isa 11:2 (more than one or two keywords) (2.3.–2.5.); these present us mainly with *charismatic* interpretations in which the attributes of the Spirit from Isa 11:2 are seen as virtues or gifts from God endowed on individual humans. And finally, passages in the Two Spirits Treatise with allusions to the “spirits” in Isa 11:2, which have been interpreted either as angelic beings or as human dispositions (2.6.), and allusions in the Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice with *angelological* interpretations (2.7.) are investigated.

When studying the use of רוּחַ (even רוּחַ קוֹדֵשׁ) in the writings of Qumran, one must be careful to keep two things in mind: first, these writings are not homogeneous in their uses of these terms or in their respective pneumatological perspectives (Tigchelaar 2014, 167–240; Menzies 1994, 76, 82); second, these terms can be employed for different things even in the same writing: “the designations, holy spirit or spirit of holiness, describe equally God’s spirit (e.g., 1QS 8:16; 1QH 7:6; 9:32), angelic spirits (e.g., 1QH 8:12; 4QS1 40, 24, 5), and the human spirit (CD 5:11–12; 7:3–4).” (Levison 1995, 486)

2.1. 1QS^b (28^b)

In one section of the Rule of Blessings, namely 1QS^b (28^b) V, 21–27, the messianic Prince is given a benediction and parts of Isa 11 are quoted, in the following order (with commentary in between): 11:4a, 4b, 2c–d, 5 (11:2c–d is squeezed in between 11:4 and 11:5). The first part of Isa 11:2 is missing, but the rest follows with only a few deviations (see Table 2). The benediction is written like a prayer: “May He [i.e., God] give [you ‘the spirit of *coun*]sel and of eternal *might*, the spirit of *knowledge* and *fear of God*” (V, 25).¹⁸ An allusion is also made to Num 24:17 in line 27 (the “scepter”), and the context of the whole passage makes it clear that the messiah is expected to be a warrior (Collins 2010, 68): He will be like a “forti[fied] tower” and a goring bull, who will “kill the wicked,” and “lay waste the earth” (V, 23, 24–25, 27). This indicates how the spirit of “eternal *might*” (גְבוּרַת עוֹלָם) was expected to operate through the messiah (cf. how the Spirit comes or “rushes upon” judges in the Book of Judges to give military victories, Judg 6:34; 11:29; 15:14). Military themes also exist in the

¹⁷ Many of them also connect to or have parallels in other Qumran texts, which are noted, but the parallel texts are not handled in separate sections in this article.

¹⁸ Words in *italics*, in quotes from the source texts, are words that are also found in Isa 11:2–3a (MT+LXX); this will be the case consistently throughout the article.

close context of Isa 11, at the end of chapter 10, just before the promise of the “shoot of Jesse” and his rule of peace: the Lord YHWH of hosts promises to “wield a whip against” the Assyrians and cut down “the great in height” (Isa 10:24–34).¹⁹

2.2. 4QIsaiah Peshera^a

In the 4QIsaiah Peshera^a (4Q161), a commentary on Isa 10:20–11:5, Isa 11:1–5 is quoted and commented on. Table 2 shows the quotations in 1QS^b (dealt with above) and 4Q161, compared to the MT text of Isa 11:2–3a (= 1QIsa^a 10:20–21). As can be seen, the reconstructed quotation in 4Q161 is identical to the MT/1QIsa^a consonantal text, apart from one missing *yod*.

Table 2. Quotes from Isa 11:2–3a in 1QS^b and 4Q161 Compared to the MT

1QS ^b V, 25	4Q161 8–10 III, 11b–13a	Isa 11:2–3a (MT)
יתן] לכה	ונח]ה עלו	ונחה עליו (v. 2a α)
	ר]וח] יהוה	רוח יהוה (v. 2a β)
	רוח חכמ]ה ובינה	רוח חכמה ובינה (v. 2b)
רוח עצ]ה	רוח עצ]ה	רוח עצה (v. 2c α)
וגבורת עולם	[וגבורה]	וגבורה (v. 2c β)
רוח דעת	רוח דע]ת]	רוח דעת (v. 2d α)
ויראת אל	[ויראת יהוה]	ויראת יהוה (v. 2d β)
	והריחו ביראת] יהוה	והריחו ביראת יהוה (v. 3a)

In the commentary, the author of 4Q161 states that this oracle refers to “[the Branch] of David, who will sprout in the fi[nal days...],” and that “God will support him with [the spirit of *strength*]” (III, 18–19). It is emphasized that this Davidic messiah will be powerful: he is given a “glorious [thro]ne” and will “rule over all the G[entiles], even Magog [and his army... al]l the peoples his sword will judge” (III, 20, 21b–22a). As in 1QS^b, this text envisions a warrior messiah, and there are parallels to themes in the War Scroll (1QM) about an eschatological battle against Belial and the *Kittim* (often used of “Westerners,” i.e., Romans or Seleucids) (Collins 2010, 62–64; Bauckham 2008, 193–97). The “majestic one” in Isa 10:34, who will cause Lebanon to fall, “is understood to refer to the Prince of the Congregation” (the messianic figure) “and ‘Lebanon’ to the king of the Kittim.” (Bauckham 2008, 196)

¹⁹ Note, however, also the conclusion of Philp Sam (2025), who argues that the “shoot of Jesse” in Isa 11 is presented as a “mimetic/hybrid figure” who *both* “subverts the imperial discourse” (of the Assyrians) “as well as nationalistic hegemonic overtures of the Davidic dynasty” (in Israel).

In the comment on Isa 11:3, rather than the messiah gaining insight and discernment in judgment from the spirit of YHWH, and therefore not judging by ear or by eye, it is claimed that this means that the messiah will be advised by what can be inferred to be the Zadokite priesthood: “and according to what they teach him, he will judge, and upon their authority ... with him will go out one of the priests of renown...” (III, 24–25a). Here, the role of the spirit of God is, thus, in practice, reduced and at least partly replaced with the priesthood.

2.3. 4Q213^a (Prayer of Levi)

4Q213^a is a narrative text, featuring Levi, and written in Aramaic.²⁰ There is an allusion to Isa 11:2 in the following prayer:

Remove far [from me, Lord, the spirit of injustice and] evil [thoughts] and fornication; turn away [pride from me. Show me the holy spirit, counsel, *wi*]sdom, intelligence and *strength* [חַכְמָה וּמַנְדֵּעַ וּגְבוּרָה] [to do your will, to] find your compassion before you, [to praise your deeds towards me, and to do] what is beautiful and good before you [... and] may no adversary rule over me. (4Q213^a I I, 12b–17)

Here the “holy spirit” stands in contrast to the “spirit of injustice” and the adversary (שׂטָן) that Levi prays to be rid of and protected from, just as the four virtues connected with the holy spirit—counsel, wisdom, intelligence (knowledge), and strength to do God’s will—are opposites to evil thoughts, fornication and pride. Line 14 of this prayer is related to Isa 11:2, “the only place in the Hebrew Bible where all the elements of [this line] are reflected (spirit, counsel, wisdom, knowledge, might).” (Drawnel 2004, 214) The final pair of attributes from Isa 11:2 is missing, but the prayer “to do your will”—or “to do what pleases you” in some reconstructions—is, nonetheless, conceptually close to “knowledge and fear of YHWH.”

The royal or messianic context is absent too; but, “[o]n the other hand,” Henryk Drawnel argues, “by adapting to his purposes the Isaian text, the author ... undoubtedly connected to Levi, to a priestly person, traits ascribed to a Davidic salvific individual.” (Drawnel 2004, 215)²¹ This is not surprising: it is well-known that the Qumran material contains expectations of both a royal–military and a priestly messiah (Collins 2010, 79–109); cf. with 4Q161, where the priesthood is emphasized too.

²⁰ This text has a parallel in the Aramaic Levi Document (ALD), and is also related to the Testament of Levi; there are “remarkable agreements” between this Aramaic fragment (4Q213^a) and the Prayer of Levi, inserted in T. Levi 2:3 (after ἀδικία) in a Greek ms. (MS *e/cod.* 39) from Mt. Athos (Hollander and de Jonge 1985, 17; also Kugler 2001, 30–31, 47–56; Drawnel 2004).

²¹ See also Collins 2010, 99, where he states: “The formulation echoes Isa 11:2, but again it is not clear that there is any messianic implication in this context. The attributes in question emphasize the wisdom of the ideal priest.”

2.4. 4QIncantation

The 4QIncantation (4Q444) is written to combat evil spirits. The author says that he belongs to “those who *fear* God” (מִירֵאֵי אֱלֹהִים), directly followed by two clauses: “with his true *knowledge* he opened my mouth” (בְּדַעַת אֱמֻתּוֹ פָּתַח פִּי), “and from his holy *spirit*...” (וּמְרוּחַ קוֹדֶשׁ) (1, 1). In lines 3–4, we read: “A *spirit* of *knowledge* and *understanding* [רוּחַ דַּעַת וּבִינָה], truth and justice, did God place in [my] hea[rt ...],” so that he can be strong in God’s precepts and battle “the spirits of iniquity.” Several words and concepts in this passage connect it with Isa 11:2: רוּחַ plus three of the attributes. The “holy spirit” clearly references the spirit of God, since it is “his.” The “spirit of knowledge and understanding, truth and justice,” however, does not appear to be a description of the attributes of the holy spirit, but rather, in contrast to the evil spirits, either human dispositions/virtues given by God and his holy spirit, or an angelic spirit (Tigchelaar 2014, 209).

2.5. 1QH^a

In the first parts of the Hodayot^a (1QH^a), the Thanksgiving Hymns, the author gives thanks to God “for the spirits which you have placed in me” (מְרוּחוֹת אֲשֶׁר נָתַתָּה בִּי) IV, 17)²² and for having “spread [your] holy *spirit* upon your servant” (הַנִּיפּוֹתָה רוּחַ) (קוֹדֶשְׁךָ עַל עַבְדְּךָ IV, 26). In column 6, there are a few verbal allusions to Isa 11:2: through the “*spirit* of your holiness” (רוּחַ קוֹדֶשְׁךָ), the author can approach the *understanding* of God (בִּינָתָ VI, 13; cf. line 8), and he is favored with the “*spirit* of *knowledge*” (רוּחַ דַּעַת VI, 25). Further down, a similar prayer is found: “And I, the Instructor, have known you, my God, through the *spirit* which you gave in me [בְּרוּחַ אֲשֶׁר נָתַתָּה בִּי], and I have listened loyally to your wonderful secret through your holy *spirit* [בְּרוּחַ קֹדֶשְׁךָ]. You have [o]pened within me *knowledge* [דַּעַת] of the mystery of your wisdom [שִׁכְלִי], and the source of [your] *strength* [[גְּבוּרַת] כֹּה]” (XX, 11–13; cf. 4Q427). Although the links to Isa 11 are not strong or direct here, it can be argued that the author uses language drawn from a conceptual universe to which Isa 11:2 has contributed.

2.6. Two Spirits Treatise

In 1QS IV, 3, we read about a spirit who “engenders humility, patience, abundant compassion, perpetual goodness, insight [שִׁכְלִי], *understanding* [בִּינָה], and *mighty wisdom* [חֲכָמַת גְּבוּרָה],” i.e., seven virtues. In the next line, a רוּחַ דַּעַת בְּכֹל מַחֲשַׁבַת מַעֲשֵׂה (“a *spirit* of *knowledge* in every plan of action”) is mentioned.²³ Further down (IV, 20–22), it is

²² The way of numbering the verses follows García Martínez and Tigchelaar 1997.

²³ Parallel text: 4Q257 V, 1–6.

said that God will refine “all man’s deeds,” and instrumental in this will be a cleansing “by [the/a] holy *spirit*” (ברוח קודש) and sprinkling (root: נזה) “upon him [the/a] *spirit* of truth” (עליו רוח אמת); this, in turn, leads for the upright “to *understanding*” (להבין) “with *knowledge* of the Most High and [the] *wisdom* of the sons of heaven [i.e., angelic beings]” (בדעת עליון והכמת בני שמים). Several words, thus, connect these passages with Isa 11:2 (MT). In both of them, however, the spirit, if indeed only one, and the virtues of that spirit are not promised to a messianic or royal figure but rather to every upright man and all the children of light who follow the spirit of truth.

This text is part of the Two Spirits Treatise. It has been much debated among scholars whether the two spirits that God “put in” or “placed before” man to walk in (רוחות האמת והעול)—the “spirits of truth and of deceit” (רוחות להתהלך בם) III, 18–19—should be considered angelic beings influencing humans or simply human dispositions (psychological interpretation).²⁴ The two spirits describe two pathways or patterns of conduct, which humankind can choose between to walk in (III, 18–19; IV, 23–24), each with its own distinctive results: virtues or vices (IV, 3–11).²⁵ The declared purpose of this instruction concerns the “nature of all the sons of man” and “all the kinds of their spirits” (לכול מיני רוחותם) III, 13–14; at the end of the whole section it is stated that God has given these two spirits to the sons of man for them to know good and evil, and that the fate of every living being will be decided “according to his spirit” (lit. “the mouth of his spirit,” לפי רוחו IV, 26). Nevertheless, I do not think that the two spirits can be equated merely with human impulses (similar to the יצר הטוב and the יצר הרע—the “good and evil inclinations”—in later rabbinic literature) (Wernberg-Møller 1961, 418–34; Heger 2012, 303–5).²⁶ Seeing them as “spiritual influences” on the human heart, with a somewhat autonomous agency and within a framework in which there are no clear distinctions between the category of “spirit” (as in God’s spirit or the human spirit) and “angelic spirit-being,”

²⁴ Iranian influence has been suggested due to similarities to the Gathas of Zarathustra (two fundamental spirits, good and bad), in attempts to identify the two spirits with cosmic/angelic/demonic entities (Kuhn 1952, 296–316; Dupont-Sommer 1952, 5–35). Author P. Wernberg-Møller (1961) argued instead for the two spirits being human dispositions. Arthur Sekki argued that three different interpretations of רוח coexist in 1QS III–IV: (1) the feminine gender (e.g., III, 18–19), is used in reference to human dispositions and man’s spirit; (2) the masculine gender is used when talking about angels beings; (3) the term “spirit of holiness” (IV, 21) refers to an eschatological gift of God, the Spirit of God (cf. Isa 44:3; Joel 3:1 [LXX]; Ezek 36:25–27), partly because this kind of cleansing always is the work of God or his spirit in Qumran texts (Sekki 1989, 193–219). For an overview of the discussion, see Levison 1995, 480–486. James H. Charlesworth (1969, 396) notes that III, 18 does *not* talk of two spirits *within* human beings, but of two spirits *for* human beings to follow. Mladen Popović (2016, 58–98) understands the spirits as distinct, created beings that influence human behavior, but also discusses their ambiguous nature. Levison and Robert Menzies view the spirits as human dispositions, although Levison ends his discussion on an uncertain note, lending credibility to both possibilities (Levison 1995, 486; Menzies 1994, 72–73).

²⁵ Cf. Paul’s discussion on walking in the flesh or in the spirit and the different “fruits” of those (Gal 5:16–25).

²⁶ Note, however, that Ishay Rosen-Zvi (2008) has challenged the scholarly consensus of two *yetzarim* in Rabbinic sources overall, arguing for a “single-*yetzer* model” (placing sources that speak of two inclinations in the margins).

fits the context and logic of the passage better.²⁷ The two spirits are created by God (III, 25); they “contend” (ריב) with each other in the human heart (IV, 23), and stand, respectively, under the dominion of the two angelic beings called the Prince of Lights—presumably the same as the Angel of God’s truth—and the Angel of Darkness (III, 20–21, 24).

The term “spirit of truth” could, furthermore, denote two different spirits: the first, none other than the spirit of God (e.g., III, 6; IV, 21); the second, a human disposition or an external spiritual influence/angelic being (e.g., III, 18; IV, 23). However, the parallels between III, 6–8 and IV, 20–22, which both speak of God cleansing the upright, indicate that the “*spirit* of [the] true *counsel* of God” (רוח עצת אמת אל), the “*holy spirit* of the community” (רוח קדושה ליהוד), the “*spirit* of uprightness and of humility” (רוח ישר וענוה), the “*spirit* of holiness” (רוח קודש) and the “*spirit* of truth” (רוח אמת) are closely related to each other. The image of sprinkling, “like purifying waters” (IV, 21), resembles Ezek 36:25–27, which speaks of God’s spirit. But even if we do not identify some or all of these spirits with the spirit of God, they, whatever they are—human dispositions, spiritual entities, something in between, or both—undoubtedly reflect the attributes and character of God and his spirit.

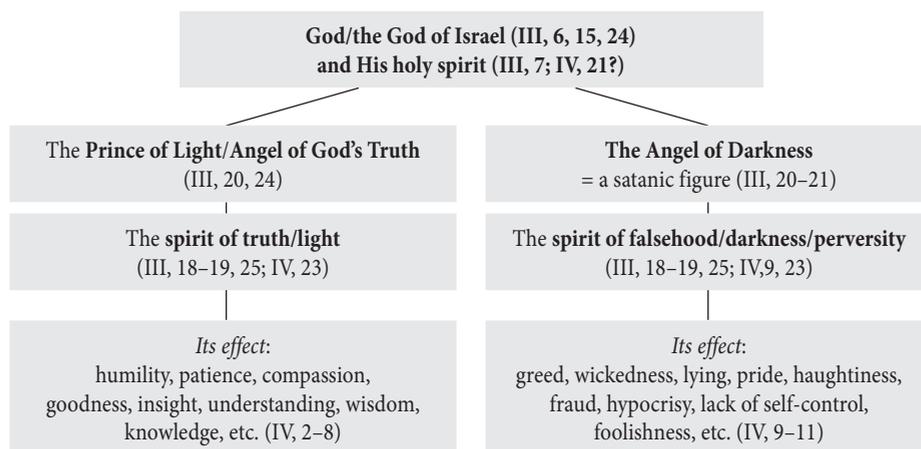


Figure 1. Spirits and Angels in 1QS III–IV

²⁷ “It is clear, however, that a cosmic significance is not entirely absent for ruach in 1QS 3:18 & 18/19 despite the author’s primary interest in it as a human disposition.” (Sekki 1989, 198) “[O]ne may argue that in the section as a whole, spirits sometimes seem to be cosmological figures and sometimes metaphysical entities, or again psychological traits. Some of the tensions in the *Treatise* may be solved if one assumes that its present form consists of multiple layers that were edited.” (Tigchelaar 2014, 179) Shaul Shaked states that רוח is used in four ways in Qumran: (1) two spiritual entities (representing “the two poles of the ethical dualism”); (2) two opposing qualities inherent in man; (3) the “numerous qualities and faculties in Man”; (4) as indicating “angel”; and suggests that the distinction between these can be blurred (Shaked 1972, 436).

In conclusion, I propose taking the lack of distinction between “spirit” as human disposition and a separate entity/being in this treatise seriously, and view the created spirit of truth and light as a spiritual influence, extending into—and connecting—the human and angelic realms. Regardless of their exact nature, the “good spirits” in this treatise reflect the character of God and are associated with attributes and word pairs shared with the spirit of YHWH in Isa 11:2 (MT). The only attribute missing is the fear of YHWH.

2.7. Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice

The Songs of the Sabbath Sacrifice (4Q400–407) consists of thirteen songs that describe the celestial liturgy of the angels serving as priests in the heavenly temple. The idea is that through liturgical practice, the community can join the angels in their worship and cross the symbolic boundary between heaven and earth, the sacred and profane (von Weissenberg and Seppänen 2015, 71–97). These songs, as far as they are extant to us, neither clearly nor unambivalently mention God’s own spirit; four times, a “spirit of utter holiness” (lit. “spirit of holiest holiness,” (רוח קודש קודשים) is mentioned,²⁸ but even this “does not seem to single out a specific spirit” (Tigchelaar 2014, 202). The same composition, but using the plural “spirits,” occurs many times more and refers to angelic beings in the heavenly sanctuary.

The angelic beings, of which there are many in these songs, are often called “divinities” (אלים), “gods” (אלהים), “spirits” (רוחות), or “angels/messengers” (מלאכים). The words knowledge (דעת) and understanding (בינה) occur with high frequency and are related to angels in constructs such as “divinities of knowledge” (אלי דעת), “spirits of understanding” (רוחי בין), “exalted ones of knowledge” (רומי דעת), “spirits of knowledge and light” (רוחי דעת ואור), “spirits of knowledge and understanding” (רוחי דעת ובינה), and “spirits of knowledge of truth and justice” (רוחי דעת אמת וצדק). Thus, “spirits,” “knowledge,” and “understanding” often occur together; moreover, even if they are divorced from their pneumatological meaning and the context of Isa 11, the purely verbal connection still stands. It is also possible that the “spirits” in Isa 11:2 have been given an angelic interpretation; similarly, the spirit which moves the living creatures in Ezek 1:12, 21, has been transformed into the “spirits of living gods” (א[לוהים חיים] רוחות) in 4Q405 20 II, 9–11.

There are many “sevens” in these songs: seven words, seven heavenly counsels, seven chief princes (high-ranking, priestly, angelic beings); clearly, this has a symbolical meaning. Most interesting for this study are the “seven mysteries of knowledge” (שבע רזי דעת) spoken by seven priestly princes (4Q403 1 II, 27).²⁹ No spirit is mentioned here, but the princes are “spirit beings.” In another song from

²⁸ 4Q403 1 II, 1; 4Q404 5, 1; 4Q405 14–15 I, 2; 23 II, 8.

²⁹ As already demonstrated, there is a basis for a “sevenfold” spirit even in the Hebrew text of Isa 11:2.

Qumran, a connection between God's holy spirit, knowledge (דעת), and mystery (רז) is explicitly made (1QH^a XX, 11–13). God is the God of knowledge (אלוהי דעת, e.g., 4Q402 4, 12), exalted among the “divinities of knowledge” (4Q403 1 I, 31), i.e., angelic high-ranking beings of which Elliot Wolfson writes: “The angels are designated in this way not because they apprehend the inner knowledge of God but because they are manifestations of the divine mind (*maḥšavah*) wherein all knowledge inheres.” (Wolfson 2004, 208) This view of angelic beings can be related to Isa 11:2, where instead the Spirit conveys YHWH's wisdom and knowledge.³⁰

2.8. Summary

The Qumran material is diverse, both in terms of its reception of Isa 11:2 (quotes and allusions) and its different perceptions of the spirit of God and use of רוּחַ. Both 1QS^b and 4Q161 quote from Isa 11 and speak of a warrior messiah, to whom the spirit of strength (or “eternal might”) will be given. 4Q161, however, partly replaces the role of the Spirit as the source of the messiah's insight with that of the priesthood; in 4Q213^a, the attributes/virtues of the Spirit from Isa 11:2 are applied to a priestly individual (with no explicit messianic context). In 4Q213^a; 4Q444; 1QH^a VI; XX, and 1QS III–IV, the charismatic endowments of the Spirit on the royal figure in Isa 11:2 are transformed, “democratized” and applied to non-kingly or non-military individuals. “Spirit” (רוּחַ) is used in reference to the spirit of God (4Q213^a I, 14; 4Q444 1, 1; 1QH^a IV, 26; possibly 1QS III, 6–7; IV, 21), but can also be understood as human dispositions, virtues, or gifts (1QS III–IV; 4Q444 1, 3; 1QH^a VI, 25)—or angelic beings (4Q400–407; possibly 4Q444 1, 3). Wisdom and understanding are the most commonly used of the attributes from Isa 11:2.

3. Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha

Writings commonly referred to as the Jewish Apocrypha and Pseudepigrapha will now be addressed.³¹ While most of the following sources are undoubtedly Jewish writings, the origins of some have been debated; the texts included here, however, are all considered by most recent scholars to be of Jewish origin. For this reason, the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs and its allusions to Isa 11:2–3a (T. Levi 2:3; 18:7; T. Jud. 24) are excluded: the general consensus today is that this work, as we have it, should be considered a Christian text, and that it is hard or even impossible

³⁰ Wonsuk Ma states that the spirit of God in the Book of Isaiah functions as an extension of YHWH's own being and executes his will as he relates to “human beings, nature and ... the nation.” (Ma 1999, 29; see also 16, 26)

³¹ The problems with these terms and their definitions are well-known in scholarship; I hereby acknowledge this.

to reconstruct a pre-Christian, Jewish *Vorlage* (if such ever existed) even though it makes heavy use of Jewish material and traditions.³²

3.1. Ben Sira

In Ben Sira, three passages have connections to Isa 11:2–3a: Sir 24:23–29; 39:6–7 and 48:24. Originally written in Hebrew, this book is extant as a whole only in Greek although many fragments in Hebrew have been found in Qumran, the Cairo Geniza and Masada (Shehan and Di Lella 1987, 51–62; Coggins 1998, 33–41).³³ These findings show that at least two Hebrew recensions of the book existed. Only the last of the passages analyzed here is found in a Hebrew fragment;³⁴ for the other two, we depend on the Greek texts.

For the author of Ben Sira, wisdom is mainly to be found through studying the *torah* (Sir 1:26; 6:37), and in 24:23–29, the personified Wisdom is even identified with the book of the *torah*. However, this “Wisdom-*torah*” is described like a spirit (Shehan and Di Lella 1987, 336) and shares several of the attributes of the Spirit in Isa 11:2–3a: “This book possesses the same qualities as the Spirit of the Lord. The allusions to Isaiah 11:2 are unmistakable: the book is full of wisdom (Sir 24:25), understanding (24:26), knowledge (24:27) and counsels (24:29).” (Argall 1995, 56)

³² The debate has centered around the question of whether the Testaments of the Twelve Patriarchs (as we have it today) should be viewed as a Jewish work with considerable Christian editing and interpolations, or as a Christian composition that incorporates Jewish material and traditions; in my opinion, we must also consider the alternative that this work could be of Jewish-Christian origin, from when the “parting of the ways” was not yet fully realized and the borderlines between Christianity and Judaism was still open. See Hollander and de Jonge 1985, 1–85; de Jonge 2004, 303–15; Collins 2010, 101; Kugler 2001, 28–38. David DeSilva uses criteria set up by Robert Kraft and James Davila for determining whether a text transmitted by Christians should be treated as a Jewish document or not, and argues that even though the extant text is Christian, it is not impossible to recover earlier, pre-Christian, Jewish elements; we do not have to abandon it as a witness to early Jewish reflections, it is best to see the Testaments as a Jewish text that was later adapted for Christian interests (DeSilva 2013, 21–68). The situation is somewhat different for the Testament of Levi, since discoveries in the Cairo Geniza and Qumran make it possible to compare the text to older, parallel Aramaic material (e.g., 4Q213^a); as a result, a “pre-Christian, non-Greek ‘Testament of Levi’ begins to emerge.” (Kugler 2001, 48) Unfortunately, the passages relevant for this study have no parallels in the ALD. In 2:3, Levi states that as he was tending his flocks, “a *spirit of understanding* of the Lord came upon me” (πνεῦμα συνέσεως κυρίου ἦλθεν ἐπ’ ἐμέ), making him see the sinfulness and injustice of humans; this is a moment of calling for him (cf. Amos 7:14–15). T. Levi 18:6–7 says: “the *spirit of understanding* and sanctification shall rest upon him” (καὶ πνεῦμα συνέσεως καὶ ἁγιασμοῦ καταπαύσει ἐπ’ αὐτόν). One Greek ms. (A^β) even has γνώσεως (“of *knowledge*”) instead of ἁγιασμοῦ; in the same ms., however, “in the water” (ἐν τῷ ὕδατι) is added at the end of v. 7, revealing it as a Christian interpolation.

³³ See also Rey and Joosten 2011; Muraoka 2023. Of the two Greek witnesses, G1 is the most important one; G2 is not an independent translation but builds on G1, with additions and changes based on the HT2 (the 2nd recension of the Hebrew text). There are also a Syriac version and the version found in the Vetus Latina; the Syriac seems to have fused the two Hebrew recensions attested in the Hebrew fragments, and the Vetus Latina version was compiled from a Greek text tradition (in line with G2).

³⁴ For the examination of the Hebrew manuscript fragments, Beentjes 1997 has been used.

Of these, only knowledge is described using a different word than Isa 11:2 (LXX): παιδεία, which could also translate as “education,” instead of γνῶσις.

These connections become even stronger when turning to Sir 39:6–7. To the scribe who has devoted himself to the study of God’s law, prophecies, proverbs and prayer (38:34–39:6), wisdom can be given by God through the infilling of the “*spirit of understanding*” (πνεύματι συνέσεως), which will lead to speaking “words of wisdom” (ῥήματα σοφίας), thanksgiving, and divine guidance in *counsel* (βουλή) and knowledge (ἐπιστήμη). The use of βουλή together with πνεῦμα, σοφία, and σύνεσις indicates an allusion to Isa 11:2, but the use of ἐπιστήμη could also point to Exod 31:3 (cf. 35:31). It is safe to say that Sir 39:6–7 seems to allude to both Isa 11 and Exod 31 (see Table 3).³⁵

Table 3. Connection of Key Words in Sir 39:6–7 to Other Biblical Texts

Exod 31:3 (MT + LXX)	Sir 39:6–7	Isa 11:2 (MT + LXX)
רוח אלהים πνεῦμα θεῖον	πνεῦμα	רוח יהוה πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ
חכמה σοφία	σύνεσις	חכמה σοφία
חבונה σύνεσις	σοφία	בונה σύνεσις
–	βουλή	עצה βουλή
דעת ἐπιστήμη	ἐπιστήμη	דעת γνῶσις

Whereas in Exod 31, the spirit of God is equips *craftsmen* for practical work, and in Isa 11, the coming *king* is to be empowered to rule justly, in Sir 39:6–7, the spirit of understanding from the Lord imbues the *scribe of the torah* with wisdom and knowledge³⁶ (and practical work is viewed as something for “simple people,” very different from scribal activities).³⁷ The lowest level of “sapiential achievement” is for people who work with their hands (their work, however, is considered very important, 38:25–33); the next level is for the student of the law (38:24; 38:34–39:5),

³⁵ Parallel in 4Q365 10, 4, where there is a marked citation of Exod 31:3.

³⁶ “This wisdom is available to anyone who can devote the requisite time to mastering it.” (B. G. Wright 2007, 168)

³⁷ The link from wise/skilled craftsmen to wise scribe is, however, closer than from the messianic/royal charisma to wise scribe, which strengthens the connection between Sir 39 and Exod 31.

but the “the highest level of wisdom is reserved for the sage who receives the Spirit of understanding” (Menziez 1994, 64)³⁸ (39:6–11). This finds a parallel in Philo, who seems to think that the highest form of knowledge is “attained through an experience of Spirit-inspired prophetic ecstasy.” (Menziez 1994, 60)³⁹

The third passage speaks of the prophet Isaiah, who “by his *dauntless spirit* saw the future and comforted the mourners in Zion” (Sir 48:24). The Greek has πνεύματι μεγάλῳ, and the Hebrew (MS B) has ברוח גבורה. The echo of Isa 11:2 is thus stronger in the Hebrew text.

3.2. Wisdom of Solomon

I have devoted another study to the spirit of wisdom in the Wisdom of Solomon (Johansson 2025), and offer only a summary of the conclusion here. The author of this work brings together three different concepts from the earlier Jewish Scriptures—the divine “spirit of wisdom” (Exod 28:3; Deut 34:9; Isa 11:2), the personified Wisdom from the sapiential literature (e.g., Prov 8–9), and the Angel of the Lord (Exod 23:20–23)—and lets them converge in one figure. This “spirit of wisdom” (Wis 7:7) is a πνεῦμα (1:6) reminiscent of the Stoic world soul (7:22–8:1), but is also personified (e.g., 6:12–25; 9:9–11:1) and, as I argue, “angelomorphized.” Wisdom is associated with angelic motifs (such as God’s throne, fire/light, and the sun), is depicted as an angel in 18:15–16 (here as the Word of God), and takes on the salvific role of the Angel of the Lord in a retelling of the Exodus (Wis 10:15–21). In this retelling, Wisdom both behaves as a spirit (10:16; cf. 7:25, 27) and acts as a guide for the people, being identified with the pillar of cloud-and-fire (10:17–18). I have also shown linguistic and thematic similarities between this text and Isa 63:8–14, which is interesting as a comparison due to its textual variants: The Hebrew text (according to the *Qere*-reading) states that the “angel of his presence” saved the people (v. 9) and seems to identify the holy spirit of ὙΗΩΗ with this angel; the LXX, on the other hand, is polemical against the idea that God used an angelic agent to save the people (in v. 9),⁴⁰ but simultaneously states that a “spirit *from* the Lord” (πνεῦμα παρὰ κυρίου) *came down* (κατέβη) to lead the people (v. 14), which could be interpreted angelomorphically.⁴¹

³⁸ Menziez here follows Davies 1984, 16–21.

³⁹ Philo of Alexandria seems to think that there are three types of knowledge: (1) Knowledge received through the senses; (2) Knowledge attained through philosophical reflection; (3) “Pure” knowledge, given through Spirit-inspired prophetic ecstasy. See also Davies 1984, 52; Pearson 1973, 45.

⁴⁰ In the Hebrew (*Qere*), it is stated that “In all their affliction he was afflicted, and the angel of his presence saved them.” The *Kethib* can be read in two ways, either as (a) “In all their affliction [there was] no affliction, and the angel of his presence saved them,” or as (b) “In all their affliction, neither messenger nor angel [but] he himself saved them.” The LXX here follows (b), negating that an angel saved them.

⁴¹ See Levison 1995, 470–471; and footnote 16 above.

In the Wisdom of Solomon, personified Wisdom is thus identified simultaneously with the spirit of God (the spirit of wisdom) and with the angelic presence that led the Israelites through the desert in the Exodus. Wisdom is depicted as a spirit with angelic features, and is, therefore, an early example of angelomorphic pneumatology.⁴²

3.3. Susanna

In the story about Susanna in the Old Greek (OG) version of the Book of Daniel, a “spirit of understanding” (Sus 45) and “a spirit of knowledge and understanding” (Sus 62b) are mentioned, before alterations in the “*Theodotion* recension” of Daniel (Θ’-Dan). The textual history of the Greek forms of the book is complex, and the nomenclature can be confusing: The OG version is sometimes called the LXX but was almost universally rejected in the early church, and Θ’-Dan was, in fact, not compiled by the historical Theodotion but much earlier.⁴³

In the OG, “an angel” (ὁ ἄγγελος)—earlier in the same verse called ἄγγελος κυρίου—gave, as commanded, “a spirit of *understanding*” (πνεῦμα συνέσεως) to the young Daniel (Sus 45). This is in line with passages in the Book of Daniel which speak of angels conveying revelation to him (Dan 9:21; 10:5ff.). In Θ’-Dan, however, there is no mention at all of an angel; instead, we read: “God raised up the holy spirit of a young man named Daniel” (ἐξήγειρεν ὁ θεὸς τὸ πνεῦμα τὸ ἅγιον παιδαρίου νεωτέρου, ᾧ ὄνομα Δανηλ). God is now the subject, and the spirit in question is none other than Daniel’s own (human) “holy spirit” being stirred up or, possibly, the holy spirit of God he already possessed (cf. Dan 4:9, 18; 5:11) (Moore 1977, 108). A tradition in which angels functioned as mediators, transmitting “spirits” from God to man, has thus been replaced with a far less compelling alternative.

Something similar occurs in v. 62b/63. In the OG, the story concludes: “let us watch out for young powerful [δυνατούς] sons; for youths will be *pious* [εὐσεβήσουσι], and a *spirit* of knowledge and *understanding* [πνεῦμα ἐπιστήμης καὶ συνέσεως] shall be with them forever and ever.” Here, both verbal and conceptual allusions to LXX Isa 11:2–3a are found (Collins 1993, 435) (see Table 4). This also reflects

⁴² I am aware of the fact that different conclusions and interpretations can be made; for a fuller presentation of my arguments supporting this position, see Johansson 2025.

⁴³ Theodotion lived in the late second century CE, but the so-called Theodotion’s version of Daniel (Θ’-Dan) is attested in the New Testament (as is also the OG). Scholars agree that Θ’-Dan depends on and is a revision of the OG, which in turn is usually dated to somewhere around 100 BCE. The term “Θ’-Dan” is therefore a misnomer, but continues to be used by scholars to avoid creating even more confusion. In Θ’-Dan, the story of Susanna is placed before Dan 1, but in the OG (and the Vulgate), it is placed after chapter 12; in one manuscript (Papyrus 967), the story is placed after another addition (Bel and the Dragon). The original language of the story is debated: many assume a Semitic original (Hebrew/Aramaic), but there is no manuscript evidence for this (Collins 1993, 3–13, 426–428; 2001, 3–5; Di Lella 2001, 586–607; Moore 1977, 16–18, 78–84; Newsom 2014, 4–5).

LXX Dan 1:17 (Knibb 2001, 27), where Daniel and his friends (all young men) are gifted with “knowledge and *understanding* and skill” (ἐπιστήμην καὶ σύνεσιν καὶ φρόνησιν).⁴⁴ In Θ´-Dan, none of this remains, and the chapter ends with the words: “from that day onward Daniel had a great reputation among the people.”

Table 4. Allusions to Isa 11 in Sus 62b

Sus 62b (OG)	Isa 11:2–3a (LXX)
δυνατός	ισχύς
εὐσεβέω (verb)	εὐσέβεια (noun)
πνεῦμα	πνεῦμα
ἐπιστήμη	γνώσις
συνέσις	σύνεσις

While the later recension of the story of Susanna contains no clear allusions to Isa 11:2–3a, this is not true of the OG version, which mentions the/a “spirit of (knowledge and) understanding.” The exact nature of the spirit(s)—whether it pertains to the spirit of God and its different attributes or to charismatic virtues transferred to the human spirit—is, however, unclear. The connection to the angelic realm, the idea that spirit(s) can be given via angels, is notable and has parallels in other sources (e.g., 1QS III–IV; Herm. 43:9).

3.4. Psalms of Solomon 17–18

In the Psalms of Solomon, two passages allude to different parts of Isa 11:1–5 and mention a “spirit,” and both occur in the explicitly messianic psalms.⁴⁵ Their historical setting is shortly after the invasion of Jerusalem by Pompey (63 BCE),⁴⁶ who is considered by most commentators to be the “foreigner” in 17:7, 13. These psalms are extant in eleven Greek and four Syriac manuscripts, but were probably originally written in Hebrew (R. B. Wright 2007, 1–33; 1983, 639–70).

The second half of Pss. Sol. 17, beginning with v. 21, is a prayer for God to raise up the messianic king, the “son of David” (remarkably called χριστός κύριος in 17:32), and a description of his rule. The passage contains clear allusions, both verbal and

⁴⁴ In the Hebrew text (MT), only two virtues are mentioned: מַדַּע וְהַשְׂכָּל (knowledge/learning and skill/wisdom).

⁴⁵ The Psalms of Solomon are extant in both a Greek and a Syriac version, and there are twelve Greek manuscripts. There has been a consensus about a Hebrew *Vorlage*, but this has also been challenged (Bons and Pouchelle 2015, 4). In this analysis, I use Robert B. Wright’s (2007) critical edition of the Greek text.

⁴⁶ Probably even after Pompey’s death (48 BCE), since the death of a foreign invader is mentioned in 2:26 (Collins 2010, 52–53).

conceptual, to Isa 11 (Collins 2010, 58). The king will “not weaken during his reign, [relying] on his God,” because “God made him powerful in the holy *spirit* and *wise* in the *counsel* of *understanding*, with *strength* and *righteousness*” (ὁ θεὸς κατεργάσατο αὐτὸν δυνατὸν ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ καὶ σοφὸν ἐν βουλῇ συνέσεως μετὰ ἰσχύος καὶ δικαιοσύνης, 17:37). Later, it is also stated that he will be strong “in the *fear of God*” (ἐν φόβῳ θεοῦ, 17:40). However, here the πνεῦμα [ἅγιον] is connected directly only to God making the king powerful, and not to the other key words from Isa 11:2–3a, as the sentence is structured in the following way (see Figure 2, below):

God makes him:	– (a) strong/mighty	– in/by [a] holy spirit	
	– (b) wise	– in/by “intelligent counsel”	– with strength and righteousness

Figure 2. Structure of Pss. Sol. 17:37

Moreover, ἐν πνεύματι ἁγίῳ can be read in two ways: instrumentally, as “by/with [the/a] holy spirit”; or as “in [his] holy spirit,” denoting a human disposition in the messiah. The connection to Isa 11 strengthens the first reading, but the similarities between these psalms and Qumran writings, which have been pointed out by many,⁴⁷ make this conclusion less certain, since in the writings of Qumran, שׁוֹרֵה קוֹדֶשׁ or similar terms can often denote the human spirit (e.g., CD V, 11: “they have corrupted their holy spirit”).

In Pss. Sol. 18:7–8, the psalmist talks in positive terms about the discipline of Israel by the Lord’s messiah, and the *fear of God* is a repeated theme (18:7, 8, 9, 11). Verses 7–8 read as follows, with words also found in Isa 11:1–5 (LXX) in italics:

under the *rod* of discipline of the Lord Messiah in the *fear of his God* [ὑπὸ ῥάβδον παιδείας χριστοῦ κυρίου ἐν φόβῳ θεοῦ αὐτοῦ], in *wisdom of spirit* [ἐν σοφίαι πνεύματος], and of *righteousness* and of *strength* [καὶ δικαιοσύνης καὶ ἰσχύος], to direct people in righteous acts in the *fear of God* [φόβῳ θεοῦ], to set them all in the *fear of the Lord*.⁴⁸

The allusions are clear, but the spirit’s role is not emphasized, and ἐν σοφίαι πνεύματος can be read in different ways: “in the spirit’s wisdom,” “in the spirit of wisdom,” or “in wisdom of spirit.”

John Collins sees the rule of the messianic king in these psalms as “undeniably violent” (Collins 2010, 58–59), but the texts themselves are at least ambivalent in this

⁴⁷ Some scholars are even suggesting Qumran as the locale for the writing of the Psalms of Solomon (R. B. Wright 2007, 9). They are, however, completely absent in the Qumran scrolls (Collins 2010, 74).

⁴⁸ The last phrase is based on Ms. 260. The doubling of the fear of God possibly reflects the doubling in Isa 11:2d–3a (MT). Other mss. read “to establish them all before the Lord.”

regard. It is stated that the awaited king “will not rely on horse and rider and bow” or on “the day of war” but be merciful towards the Gentiles (17:33–34). It is also a repeated theme that it is *with his word* (and wisdom) that he will “strike,” “judge,” and “destroy” sinners/lawbreaking Gentiles (17:23–24, 29, 35–36; cf. Isa 11:4) and discipline his people (17:42–43). Antti Laato argues that it “is not the Messiah’s political power which plays a significant role in the subjugation of sinners and gentiles but his wisdom and righteousness.” (Laato 1997, 281–82) Thus, while the interpretation of Isa 11 and related messianic expectations in the Pss. Sol. 17–18 show similarities to 1QS^b and 4Q161, they are less explicit and clear about the messiah taking on a militant role. In a broader sense, it is, however, clear that these sources bear witness to a common Jewish understanding of Isa 11 in the first and second centuries BCE (cf. Collins 2010, 74). The messianic figure will be an eschatological king who will subjugate the Gentiles, and in both these psalms and 4Q161, the role of the Spirit as the direct source of the virtues of the messiah is somewhat toned down.

3.5. 1 Enoch—Book of Parables

The most relevant texts from the composite 1 Enoch for this study are all found in the Book of Parables (chs. 37–71).⁴⁹ 1 Enoch 49:3 contains “an almost verbatim quotation of the Davidic oracle in Isa 11:2.” (Nickelsburg and VanderKam 2011, 178) Table 5 provides English translations of 1 En. 49:3–4 and Isa 11:2, side by side:

Table 5. Text Comparison of 1 En. 49:3–4 with Isa 11:2

1 En. 49:3–4 ⁵⁰		Isa 11:2
49:3	And in him [the Chosen One] dwell	The spirit of YHWH will rest upon him;
	the spirit of wisdom and the spirit of insight,	the spirit of wisdom and understanding,
	and the spirit of instruction and of might,	the spirit of counsel and might,
	and the spirit of those who have fallen asleep in righteousness.	the spirit of knowledge and the fear of YHWH.
49:4	And he will judge the things that are secret, and a lying word none will be able to speak in his presence; for he is the Chosen One in the presence of the Lord of Spirits according to his good pleasure.	[cf. Isa 11:3b–4: “He shall not judge by what his eyes see...” etc.]

⁴⁹ This is probably the latest part of 1 Enoch, dated to “around the turn of the era” (Nickelsburg and VanderKam 2011, 3–4) or “the end of the first century CE” (Knibb 2007, 27–28) and is only extant in Ge‘ez. It is not clear if it was originally composed in Hebrew or Aramaic.

⁵⁰ Translation from Nickelsburg and VanderKam 2012.

God is repeatedly called the “Lord of Spirits” in the Book of Parables (102 times), which corresponds to יהוה צבאות in the Hebrew Bible. The “Chosen One” refers to the messiah (also, the “Anointed One,” “Righteous One,” and “Son of Man”). Non-angelic spirits are rarely the means by which revelation is received in 1 Enoch; more often, as in apocalyptic texts in general, revelation is given via angelic messengers (Russel 1964, 160; Menzies 1994, 65–66). Here, however, perhaps due to the connection to Isa 11:2, it is by “spirit” wisdom, insight, understanding, and might are given. As shown in Table 5, 1 En. 49:3 follows Isa 11:2 quite closely in the first parts of the verse, but deviates in the last one; this is “presumably because the author does not consider the knowledge and, especially, the fear of ΥΗΩΗ, ascribed to the human king, to be appropriate to this heavenly figure.” (Nickelsburg and VanderKam 2011, 178)

As in the Psalms of Solomon, the messiah is equipped to rule as king, and it is less clear precisely what is meant by “spirit.”⁵¹ This is further complicated by the reference to the spirit (in singular) of the righteous who have fallen asleep (dwelling together with the other “spirits” in the messiah). One possible interpretation is that the righteous are thought of as being partakers of the same spirit as the messiah; another option is that the messiah is the one who gathers together the spirits of the righteous when they have died, i.e., those who have hoped for his salvation (Nickelsburg and VanderKam 2011, 178).

1 Enoch 61:11 does not quote Isa 11 but, nevertheless, contains a conceptual allusion. The whole host of heaven, including many ranks of angelic beings (and the Chosen One), is said to praise the Lord of Spirits *in* a “sevenfold” spirit or *with* seven spiritual virtues:

And they will raise one voice, and they will bless and glorify and exalt with the spirit of faithfulness and with the spirit of wisdom, and with (a spirit of) long suffering and with the spirit of mercy, and with the spirit of judgment and peace and with the spirit of goodness. And they will all say with one voice, “Blessed (is he), and blessed be the name of the Lord of Spirits forever and ever.”

Only the “spirit of wisdom” matches the “spirits” (i.e., attributes) in Isa 11:2–3a, but the fact that there are precisely seven of them indicates a connection. These spirits cannot be angels, since the angelic beings mentioned in the immediate context partake in the worship described as taking place *with/in* these spirits. If the translator into Gèez wanted to indicate that the spirits were angelic beings, he would have

⁵¹ In the Book of Parables as a whole, “spirit” often refers to the human spirit or the whole person (e.g., 41:8; 67:8; 71:1, 5, 6, 11), but is also used to denote a human disposition (e.g., 56:5), evil spirits/demons (69:12), and weather phenomena (60:16–20; 69:22). Possible references to the spirit of God, apart from 49:3; 61:11, are found in: 62:2, where the “spirit of righteousness” is poured out on the Messiah; and 68:2, although the “power of the spirit” experienced by the angel Michael probably refers to his emotional state.

used *mesla* (together with) instead of *ba* (in/with).⁵² Neither are they human spirits. The most probable interpretation is that they refer to the different attributes of the spirit of God and/or the state/attitude in which the worship takes place;⁵³ and, thus, finds a parallel in the “seven mysteries of knowledge” by which the angels in 4Q403 praise and bless God.

Lastly, in 1 En. 71:11, “Enoch” himself praises God, “with a loud voice, with a *spirit of power*,” when his own spirit has been “transformed.”

Like so many other writings in early Judaism, the Book of Parables connects its messianic expectations with Isa 11. Its use of “spirit,” however, is often difficult to determine: It can refer to angelic beings and human dispositions, virtues, and attitudes, but rarely in a fully unambivalent way to the spirit of God.

3.6. Joseph and Aseneth

In Genesis, Joseph is already associated with the possession of God’s spirit, extraordinary understanding, and wisdom; according to Pharaoh, he is a man in whom the divine spirit dwells (אִישׁ אֲשֶׁר רוּחַ אֱלֹהִים בּוֹ) (אִישׁ וְחָכָם) (Gen 41:38–39). The much later Joseph and Aseneth, which most recent scholars consider to be a Greek writing of Jewish origin from 100 BCE–115/117 CE,⁵⁴ expands Gen 41:45 (which briefly mentions Aseneth) into a story of love and of conversion to the true Jewish faith.

Joseph and Aseneth 4:9 describes Joseph as a man who worships God, a self-controlled male virgin, “powerful in *wisdom* and knowledge, and the *spirit of God* is upon him” (δυνατὸς ἐν σοφίᾳ καὶ ἐπιστήμῃ καὶ πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐστὶν ἐπ’ αὐτῷ).⁵⁵ This echoes the language in Gen 41:38–39 (LXX) and also its structure: the wisdom and knowledge that Joseph possesses is not directly tied to the Spirit but set as a parallel

⁵² The Ge’ez preposition *ba* is equivalent to the Hebrew בְּ.

⁵³ “As they sing God’s praise, they express the seven virtues that live in them and that are characteristics of the deity. Perhaps this also implies that they are qualities of the righteous person.” (Nickelsburg and VanderKam 2011, 252) There are similarities between this list of spirits and the fruit of the Spirit in Gal 5:22–23; six of the seven spirits mentioned (all but wisdom) could, with some generosity, be equated to six of the nine fruits in Gal 5.

⁵⁴ This has been challenged by Ross Kraemer, who argues for a later date (not ruling out Christian origin), but most scholars still hold to the earlier consensus and the view that it is more probable that Joseph and Aseneth is of Hellenistic–Jewish origin. See Burchard 1983, 187–88; Chesnutt 1995, 65–93; Humphrey 1995, 30, 33; Kraemer 1998. For an overview of the debate: Humphrey 2000, 18–26. Collins argues for an origin in (Egyptian) Judaism, with the following main points: the issue of intermarriage was more central in Judaism than in Christianity; the absence of baptism in Aseneth’s conversion; no explicit Christian references in the work (Collins 2005, 97–112).

⁵⁵ For the Greek text, I follow Christoph Burchard’s critical edition (the “long text”): Burchard 2003, which he also defends in Burchard 2005. About Kraemer’s contribution and critique of Burchard, Patricia D. Ahearne-Kroll states: “Kraemer convincingly demonstrates that some of the differences between the longer and shorter texts reflect redactions.... Nevertheless, as we have seen, redaction occurred with most of the manuscripts, not just between manuscript families.” (Ahearne-Kroll 2020, 74)

to having the Spirit. It seems, however, that Isa 11:2 (LXX) has influenced the phrasing too; see Table 6 for a comparison.

Table 6. Key Words in Jos. Asen. 4:9 and Related Texts

Gen 41:38-39 (MT + LXX)	Jos. Asen. 4:9	Isa 11:2 (MT + LXX)
(v. 39b) נבון וחכם φρονιμώτερος καὶ συνετώτερός	δυνατός	גבורה (v. 2cβ) ἰσχύος
(v. 38b) רוח אלהים בו πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐν αὐτῷ	καὶ πνεῦμα θεοῦ ἐστὶν ἐπ' αὐτῷ	חכמה ובינה (v. 2bα) σοφίας καὶ συνέσεως דעת (v. 2dα) γνώσεως
		עליו רוח יהוה (v. 2a) πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ (v. 2aβ) ἀναπαύσεται ἐπ' αὐτόν (v. 2aα)

Other mentions of “spirit” in this writing include: (1) 8:11, where Joseph lays his hand on Aseneth and prays for her to be “renewed by your spirit” (ἀνακαίνισον αὐτήν τῷ πνεύματί σου), “re-moulded [ἀνάπλασον] by your hidden hand,” and “re-made-alive [ἀναζωοποίησον] by your life.” Aseneth is immediately filled with joy and repents from her idolatry (9:1-2), and thus, Joseph’s blessing and laying on of hands are effective, presumably by the Spirit. (2) 19:11, in which by kissing Aseneth three times, Joseph gives her the/a “spirit of life” (πνεῦμα ζωῆς), “spirit of wisdom” (πνεῦμα σοφίας), and “spirit of truth” (πνεῦμα ἀληθείας). That 8:11 refers to God’s spirit is clear, but in 19:11, the “spirits” could refer to attributes of the spirit of God, charismatic gifts/virtues, or both. These texts portray Joseph as a “man of the Spirit”: He has the spirit of God (4:9), and he can transfer the Spirit/spirits to other people by physical means (laying on of hands and kissing). He is not a messianic figure, but certainly a charismatic figure. The allusions to Isa 11:2-3a in Joseph and Aseneth are thus both found in charismatic contexts.

4. Later Jewish Reception: Targum Isaiah

This final section focuses on a text that is, technically, later than the Second Temple Era, but which, it can be argued, reflects earlier stages of the Jewish reception of

Isa 11. The Targum Isaiah (T^l) contains many layers of interpretative stages, but it is relatively safe to assume that parts of it go back to the Tannaitic period (prior to 220 CE), although precisely what parts is more challenging to ascertain.⁵⁶ In the following text (T^l Isa 11:1–4), words in italics are words that either deviate from or are additions not found in the Hebrew text:

And a *king* shall come forth from the *sons* of Jesse, and *the Messiah* shall be exalted from *the sons of his sons*. And a spirit *before* the LORD shall rest upon him, a spirit of wisdom and understanding, a spirit of counsel and might, a spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD. And the LORD shall *bring him near to his fear*. And he shall not judge by the sight of his eyes, and he shall not reprove by the hearing of his ears; but in *truth* he will judge the poor, and reprove with *faithfulness* for the needy of the *people*; and he shall strike *the sinners of the land* with the *command* of his mouth, and with *the speaking* of his lips the wicked shall *die*.⁵⁷

Important to note is, firstly, that the words “shoot” (חטר) and “branch” (בצר) are replaced with the more explicit “king” and “messiah,”⁵⁸ indicating that the messiah will indeed be a king. It is also emphasized that the messiah will punish sinners (v. 4), be surrounded by righteous people (not just himself being girded with righteousness, v. 5), and bring peace to the land by subjecting the nations (vv. 6, 10).

Secondly, the spirit’s attributes number six (as in the MT), and no spirit is mentioned in 11:3a; instead, the “his delight” or “his smelling” (הריחו) of the messiah has been translated as “bring him near to,” with God as the active subject. Rabbinic texts often emphasize that there are six virtues or blessings in Isa 11:2 (e.g., t Sanh. 93b:6; m Ruth Rabbah 7:2; m Bamid. Rabbah 13:11).

Thirdly, even though רוּחַ (as a single word) is indefinite in the MT, it is still clear that the reference is to the spirit of YHWH; here, however, the indefiniteness is made explicit by the addition of “before” in “a spirit *before* [*qdm*] the Lord.” The preposition *qdm* as moderating “spirit” is also used in 61:1: “a spirit of prophecy *before* the LORD God is upon me.” In many other instances in the Targum Isaiah, the spirit is translated as “the holy spirit” and connected with prophecy (Chilton 1982, 49–50),

56 “At both the Tannaitic and Amoraic phases, current interpretations of Isaiah were obviously gathered together and ordered into the paraphrase which we know as the Targum. But it is impossible to know whether a complete Targum was produced at the Tannaitic phase, and reworked at the Amoraic phase, or whether both phases were partial affairs, and only formed a coherent whole when they were brought together. The latter alternative is perhaps the more probable, in that much of the material in the Targum coheres with the general theological orientation of the document, but is not easily assigned to either of the twolevels.... During the Tannaitic and Amoraic periods, it would appear, rabbis developed an interpretative translation of Isaiah. Successive generations took up the work of earlier interpreters until the coherent Targum we can now read emerged.” (Chilton 1987, xxiv–xxv)

57 Translation: Chilton 1987 (based on the British Museum Ms. 2211).

58 “Branch terminology” is replaced with “Messiah” several times in the Targum Isaiah (Chilton 1982, 86–96).

e.g., 40:13; 59:21; the fact that this is not the case in 11:2 only underlines the indefiniteness. The spirit in 11:2 seems to be no longer God's own spirit but a separate entity. This could be explained by a willingness to distance the text from Christian interpretations, but it also opens it up for *angelic* interpretations, or an *angelomorphic* view of the spirit of God. A "spirit before the Lord" is reminiscent of 1 Kgs 22:21, where "a spirit [a member of the heavenly host] came forward and stood before YHWH" (MT: ויצא הרוח ויעמד לפני יהוה; LXX: καὶ ἐξῆλθεν πνεῦμα καὶ ἔστη ἐνώπιον κυρίου), and then went out as a lying spirit in the mouths of the prophets. Other times where "a spirit" is used in the Targum Isaiah, it can, e.g., refer to "a spirit of deception" (19:14; 29:10) or "a spirit of understanding" (29:24; a human disposition); and in 37:7, God says that he will "put a spirit in him [the Assyrian king]." In these cases, the spirit referred to is not the spirit of God, but either an angelic spirit (a "spirit-being") or a human disposition. Thus, it seems as if the spirit in Isa 11:2 (T¹) that is before the Lord and will rest upon the messiah, is best interpreted as a spirit or quality going forth from God.

Conclusions and Discussion

This survey and analysis of quotes and allusions to Isa 11:2-3a in Second Temple Jewish sources has illuminated different uses and interpretations of this text. This helps shed light on later, early Christian reception of Isa 11, in which these interpretations have been appropriated, taken further, and modified. A summary of the findings is presented in Table 7.

Isaiah 11 is about a future Davidic king, his endowment by the spirit of God (the royal charisma), and his rule. It is interpreted as a *messianic* text in many of the sources (1QS^b V, 25; 4Q161; Pss. Sol. 17:37; 18:7-8; 1 En. 49:3; T¹ Isa 11:1-2), the very same texts which most clearly quote Isa 11:2 or significant parts of it (rather than merely containing allusions or focusing on a few of the attributes). Common themes suggest that the messianic figure will be an eschatological ruler, who will subjugate the nations and be endowed by/with the "spirit of" + different attributes from Isa 11:2.

In several texts, however, the royal or messianic theme and context have been omitted or transformed. The attributes/endowments of the Spirit (or allusions to those attributes) are understood as *virtues*, *charismatic gifts*, or *human dispositions* given to or possessed by Levi/priests (4Q213^a), diligent scribes/students of the torah (Sir 39:6-7), the "sons of truth" (1QS III, 24-IV, 8), anonymous supplicants (1QH^a VI, 13; XX, 11-13; 4Q444), or young Jewish men: Joseph (Jos. Asen. 4:9), Daniel and his friends (OG Sus 45, 62b). This "democratization" of the original royal charisma can be related to Isa 55:3-5, the only text in Isa 40-66 which speaks of

David, and “the most obvious case of a collective interpretation of the dynastic promise.” (Laato 1997, 11) This is a key to understanding how Isa 11 could be applied to people other than the future Davidic king—the promise given to the dynasty is expanded to the whole people: God will make an everlasting covenant with the people, his “steadfast love for David” (חסדי דוד הנאמנים); “all” are invited (Isa 55:1).⁵⁹

The term “spirit” (רוח/πνεῦμα), with its broad semantic range, is used in different ways. In the sources surveyed, it can refer to: (1) the *spirit of God* (Isa 11:2–3a [MT+LXX]; 4Q161; 4Q213^a; 4Q444 1, 1; 1QH^a XX, 12b; Wis 7:7; Jos. Asen. 4:9; probably 1QS^b V, 25; 1QH^a VI, 13; Sir 39:6–7; Pss. Sol. 17:37; 18:7–8; possibly 1QS III, 6–7; IV, 21; OG Sus 45, 62b; 1 En. 49:3; Jos. Asen. 19:11; T^j Isa 11:2); (2) *human dispositions* (possibly 4Q444 1, 3; 1QH^a VI, 25; XX, 11–12a; 1QS III, 6–8; Sir 48:24; Pss. Sol. 18:7); (3) *charismatic gifts* or *virtues* (possibly 4Q444 1, 3; 1QH^a VI, 25; OG Sus 45, 62b; Jos. Asen. 19:11);⁶⁰ or (4) *angelic spirit-beings* (4Q400–407; possibly 4Q444 1, 3; T^j Isa 11:2). In the Wisdom of Solomon, and perhaps also in the Targum Isaiah, the spirit of God is presented with angelomorphic traits; and in 1QS III–IV, the created spirit of truth/light is best understood as a spiritual influence on the human heart which is subordinate to the Angel of God’s Truth and reflects the nature of God and his spirit. Since רוח and πνεῦμα can denote both angelic beings and other kinds of “spirits,” including human ones and charismatic gifts, the distinctions between these categories are often blurry and may overlap. Another connection between the angelic and charismatic conceptual realms is found in Sus 45 (OG), which reflects a tradition in which spirits—perhaps even God’s spirit—are given to people via angelic messengers. In 1 En. 61:11, the seven “spirits” listed are neither connected to the spirit of God nor entities of their own, but rather spiritual virtues in which the angelic host are worshipping God.

Lastly, the use of seven/sevens, which later becomes significant in Christianity, also needs to be addressed. Even though this number clearly has symbolic meaning in some of the sources, no clear Jewish concept of a “sevenfold spirit” is to be found; many times, the number of attributes, virtues or “spirits” does not seem important at all (e.g., Sir 39:6–7; 1QS^b V, 25; 4Q213^a; Pss. Sol. 17:37; 18:7–8; 1 En. 49:3).

⁵⁹ Isaiah 11:1–16 and 55:3–5 echo ideas from 2 Sam 7; but Isa 55 reflects an exilic interpretation of God’s promise. Laato argues that this democratization and collective interpretation of the promise to the Davidic dynasty does not exclude messianism; instead, it connects the people’s actions and the fulfillment of these promises (Laato 1997, 46, 149, 194–95; 2022, 252–53, 257–58).

⁶⁰ The *attributes* of the Spirit from Isa 11:2–3a are interpreted as charismatic gifts or virtues in other sources too (as discussed in the previous paragraph), but here I only list texts where the term *spirit* (possibly) is used of the gifts/virtues themselves. Note that categories 2 and 3 are similar and can overlap.

Table 7. Summarized Overview of Texts Investigated

Text	Number of “attributes”	Comments/context
Isa 11:2 (MT) [= 1QIsa ^a]	Spirit of YHWH + wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, fear of YHWH (1+6)	Attributes of God’s spirit; Davidic future king equipped to rule justly
Isa 11:2-3a (LXX)	Spirit of God + wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, piety, fear of God (1+7)	
1QS ^b V, 21-27	Quoting Isa 11:4a, 4b, 2c-d, 5: spirit of <i>counsel</i> + eternal <i>might</i> ; spirit of <i>knowledge, fear of God</i> (4)	Messianic Prince
4Q161	Quoting Isa 11:1-5: Spirit of YHWH + wisdom, understanding, counsel, strength, knowledge, fear of YHWH (1+6)	Messianic text; role of the Spirit downplayed
4Q213 ^a	Holy spirit + <i>counsel, wisdom, intelligence, strength</i> (4/3) ⁶¹	Prayer by Levi
4Q444	<i>Fear of God + knowledge</i> + holy spirit + a spirit of <i>knowledge and understanding</i> (3)	Holy spirit = God’s spirit; “spirit of...” = human disposition or angelic spirit
1QH ^a VI, 13, 25	Holy spirit + <i>understanding</i> ; spirit of <i>knowledge</i> (2)	God’s spirit + human dispositions/virtues
1QH ^a XX, 11-13	Spirit + holy spirit + <i>knowledge, wisdom, strength</i> (3/2)	
1QS IV, 3	A spirit + seven virtues: among them, <i>understanding and mighty wisdom</i> (7/3)	Spiritual influences on the human heart
1QS IV, 4	Spirit of <i>knowledge</i> (1)	
1QS IV, 21-22	Spirit of truth + <i>understanding, knowledge, wisdom</i> (3)	Possibly God’s spirit
4Q400-407	Spirits of <i>understanding</i> + spirits of <i>knowledge</i> (+ seven mysteries of knowledge)	Angelic spirits
Sir 24:23-29	Wisdom/Torah is full of <i>wisdom, understanding, knowledge</i> (education), <i>counsels</i> (4/3)	Wisdom is like a spirit
Sir 39:6-7	Spirit of <i>understanding</i> + <i>wisdom, counsel, knowledge</i> (4)	Given to the diligent scribe of the Torah
Sir 48:24 (MS B)	Spirit of <i>strength</i> (dauntless/mighty spirit) (1)	About Isaiah, it gives him the ability to foresee the future
Wis 7:7	Spirit of <i>wisdom</i> (1)	Angelomorphic divine spirit of wisdom
Sus 45 (OG)	Spirit of <i>understanding</i> (1)	Given by an angel
Sus 62b (OG)	Powerful and <i>pious</i> young sons + spirit of <i>knowledge and understanding</i> (4/3)	Human dispositions, virtues from the spirit
Pss. Sol. 17:37, 40	Powerful in the holy spirit + <i>wise in counsel of understanding + strength + fear of God</i> (5)	Messianic text

⁶¹ When two numbers are given in this format (e.g., “4/3”), the first number denotes the total number of attributes/virtues, etc., and the second denotes the number of attributes that are in common with Isa 11:2-3a.

Text	Number of “attributes”	Comments/context
Pss. Sol. 18:7–8	Wisdom of spirit + strength + fear of God (3)	Messianic text
1 En. 49:3	Quoting Isa 11:2: spirit of wisdom, insight, instruction, might + of those fallen asleep (5/4)	Messianic text; unclear what the “spirits” are
1 En. 61:11	Worship in the spirit of faithfulness, wisdom, long suffering, mercy, judgment, peace, goodness (7/1)	Angelic worship; “spirits” = virtues/attitudes
1 En. 71:11	Spirit of power (1)	Unclear meaning
Jos. Asen. 4:9	Strong in wisdom and knowledge + spirit of God (2)	Human disposition/virtues
Jos. Asen. 19:11	Spirit of life, wisdom, truth (3/1)	God’s spirit, or charismatic gifts/virtues
T ¹ Isa 11:2–3a	Spirit before the Lord + wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, fear of the Lord (1+6)	Spirit before God, angelic spirit and/or virtues

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Theotokos and Unity in the Context of the Theological Image of God: A Hypothesis of Dependence

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Abstract: This article addresses the presence of the *Theotokos* within the mystery of unity, analyzed in light of the theological image of God. It examines the hypothesis that the image of Mary is shaped by the theological image of God. Through an analysis of three Marian titles—*Mater unitatis*, *Mater unionis*, and *Mater communionis*—the study reveals how each reflects a distinct understanding of unity: as absolute oneness, reconciled diversity, and Trinitarian communion. The research confirms a dynamic and dialogical character of this dependence: the image of God conditions the development of Mariology, yet it is also Mariology—through its sensitivity to relationship, communion, and participation—that may inspire a deeper theological vision of God, especially in its Trinitarian dimension. Reflection on Mary in the context of unity not only enriches the doctrine of the *Theotokos* but also contributes to a renewed vision of both God and humanity.

Keywords: *Theotokos*, unity, image of God, Mariology, Holy Trinity, *Mater unitatis*, *Mater communionis*, *Mater unionis*, *koinonia*, communion

The theological hypothesis regarding the dependence of the image of Mary, the Mother of Jesus, on the image of God has been positively verified in the course of numerous studies by Polish theologians on Marian and Mariological texts (Ferdek 2007, 183–85; A. Napiórkowski 2024, 779–80; Pek 2009; S. C. Napiórkowski 2000). One of the key areas supporting this dependence has been a broad study of the Mariological teaching of the Church in Poland and the theological contributions of Polish scholars in the 20th century. The analysis of the source material has allowed the formulation of the following conclusion: wherever the history of salvation was grasped in a Trinitarian perspective—as the work of the Father accomplished through the Son in the power of the Holy Spirit—Mary was presented in the role of a participant and witness of God's action. The growing conviction of God's providential guidance of history simultaneously resulted in an intensification of encouragement to give glory to the Triune God, after the model of the Magnificat hymn of the Mother of Jesus. A certain distortion of the Christian image of God, however, occurred when Mariological texts were limited to declarations about the oneness of God, while ignoring His Trinitarian nature. Equally theologically insufficient were those interpretations of the history of salvation which assigned to Mary a central place—supposedly by

divine institution—while at the same time passing over the fundamental significance of the Word of God and the sacraments. Consequently, wherever the Trinitarian vision of God was lacking, redemption was interpreted reductively, as the joint work of Christ and His Mother (Pek 2009, 307).

This study takes up the hypothesis in a new way: not merely as a historical affirmation of dependence, but as a tool for theological analysis of the relationship between Mariology and the development of the doctrine of God. The article aims to show that the image of Mary not only reflects, but at times provokes a correction of the image of God—especially when that image has been reduced to non-Trinitarian formulations.

This theological dependence gains special relevance in the context of the concept of unity, particularly in the title referring to Mary as Mother of Unity. This designation is not merely a devotional invocation or metaphorical expression but also emerges from deep theological reflection on the person of Mary—as *Theotokos*—in the economy of salvation. The title *Theotokos*, bestowed at the Council of Ephesus-Alexandria, was intended to safeguard the truth of the unity of divine and human natures in the person of Jesus Christ. In later acceptance—often simplifying the original meaning—the emphasis shifted primarily to the aspect of divine motherhood. Although *Theotokos* (literally “God-bearer”) expresses first and foremost the act of bearing (not conception, which is a key dimension of motherhood), it is the title *Mater* that became entrenched in Marian teaching and Mariology in reference to Mary as the Mother of Christ.

The history of Mariological development shows that this had theological consequences. The term “Mater” does not inherently imply reference to God, and this is what occurred. Christotypical and ecclesiotypical Mariologies clearly emerged. There is also a need to speak of a pneumatotypical Mariology, which attributes functions of the Holy Spirit to Mary. The human experience of motherhood came to the fore, fostering an affective Mariology. In this context, when reflection on unity extended to ecclesiological, ecumenical, and social dimensions, the title *Mater unitatis*—Mother of Unity—emerged.

In the 20th century, particularly during the Second Vatican Council, the complexity of the title *Mater unitatis* came to light. Though the term resonates with both devotion and doctrine, it was ultimately excluded from the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen gentium*, despite its presence in preparatory documents and Catholic devotion (notably since 1947 in the Focolare Movement—Chiara Lubich, and the Schoenstatt Movement) (Królikowski and Kupiec 2000, 181–96). One reason for this reservation was the Mariocentric interpretation of the title, suggesting that Mary possesses a unifying function not only among the faithful of various Christian denominations, but even between humanity and God (Napiórkowski 1992, 33–42, 150–151).

The debate over the title *Mater unitatis* did not remain an academic dispute. While many theologians abandoned the designation as excessively Mariocentric,

others sought to overcome the isolation of Mariology from theology, discovering a renewed way to present the Mother of the Lord from the perspective of unity. Creative inspiration arose especially when the person of the *Theotokos* was reinterpreted in the light of the theological image of God—particularly as the Trinitarian and communal God, actively present in the life of the Church and the world.

The aim of this article is to present three of the most original theological concepts illustrating the presence of the *Theotokos* within the perspective of unity, each shaped by a particular theological image of God. The term “theological image of God” refers to the way God is understood and represented in theological reflection—as the Absolute, Creator, Mystery, etc. This image is neither uniform nor static; it has developed historically and influenced the understanding of all aspects of faith, including the role of Mary. The article investigates how various conceptions of God have provided the context and point of reference for the development of Marian titles relating to unity.

The method adopted in this study consists in identifying representative theological concepts and analyzing their original assumptions, with particular attention to how the person of the *Theotokos* is understood in the perspective of unity. Therefore, this work does not primarily address authors who merely repeated or disseminated established theological schemas. Representativeness was determined by the originality of the ideas and their reception in the scholarly literature.

Although the hypothesis presumes the dependence of the image of Mary on the theological image of God, it must be noted that its realization is not unequivocal. In many historical periods, the image of God itself was incomplete, simplified, or subject to reinterpretations—e.g., as a monolithic God of power, ignoring the communal structure of the Trinity. In such cases, Mariology did not simply “adapt” to the image of God, but rather revealed tensions that required rethinking the theology of God itself. Hence, the difficulty of verifying the hypothesis increases as the researcher is confronted not only with the image of Mary but also with the evolving understanding of God. This article attempts to interpret that relationship in a dynamic theological key, accounting for the influence of Mariology on correcting, deepening, or challenging a reduced image of God.

1. *Mater Unitatis* and *Deus Unus*: *Theotokos* and the Mystery of Absolute Divine Unity

In 1962, the deliberations of the Second Vatican Council commenced. Carlo Balić, a Mariologist of significant scholarly standing and ecclesial authority (S. C. Napiórkowski 1992, 19–24), presented a proposed text on Mary: *De Maria matre Iesu et matre Ecclesiae*, in which one chapter was devoted to “Fautrix et Mater unitatis christianae” (Aračić 1980, 275–76). The author expressed the conviction that:

[Mary—K.P.] is the bond of unity (*vinculum unionis*) among Christians and the most powerful mediatrix in the matter of uniting humanity with Christ.... This Mother of the Church, through her most powerful intercession, will promptly obtain the gift of unity within the Christian family, which is the most excellent fruit of her intercession. (S. C. Napiórkowski 1992, 150)

Balić's proposal was not accepted by the Council Fathers and did not form the basis for the final drafting of the conciliar text. The inclusion of the title *Mater unitatis* in conciliar documents was likewise abandoned. Nonetheless, the question of Christian unity became the subject of ongoing theological reflection. In 1965, Pope Paul VI explicitly employed the title *Mater unitatis*, encouraging efforts toward Christian unity.

The citation from the Croatian Mariologist, albeit without extensive context, is comprehensible to those familiar with the prevalent theological discourse on God in the mid-20th century. Many theologians at the time noted—often critically—that a pre-Trinitarian image of God had become widespread. Christ was predominantly perceived as God in the glory of the Father, while pneumatology remained marginal.

The roots of this reductive image of God reach back to the era of conflict with Arianism. At the turn of the first millennium, the idea of mediation to Christ arose, and with it developed a theology of Mary's and the saints' intercession (Jungmann 1968). In Balić's brief formulation, it is evident that the expression *vinculum unionis*—traditionally referring to the Holy Spirit in Patristic thought—is attributed to Mary. The efficacy of the action of Christ and the Spirit is thereby shifted to the background. Such a formulation of the intercessory role of the *Theotokos* implies a vision of God who must be persuaded to heed the Christian desire for unity—an implication that risks distorting the Trinitarian structure of salvific action (Pek 2024).

The title *Mater unitatis* again became the subject of theological reflection in 2018. The German Mariological Society organized a congress on this topic, and the proceedings were edited by Manfred Hauke (2020). In his opening lecture, Hauke referred at the outset to the transcendental dimension of the concept of unity. He emphasized the oneness and unity that exists in God (Hauke 2020, 17). The novelty of his interpretation of unity, as expressed in the title "Mother of Unity," lay in the fact that he understood it not only in light of the mystery of absolute divine unity, but as the mystery of the One God in Three Persons. It is worth pausing at the broader context of the statement under discussion in order to grasp the structure of the theological argument being made. The transcendental unity also includes properties of being such as truth, goodness, and beauty. From the perspective of the relation between unity and truth, one must refer to the High Priestly Prayer of Christ recorded in the Gospel of John (John 17:20–21, 26). In this prayer, the close bond between unity and faith is clearly shown, a bond which finds its orientation in Christ and at the same

time constitutes a confirmation of the claim of truth, as emphasized by the words (John 17:17). Such unity in truth leads to communion with God, and at the same time separates from those who reject the truth. This becomes especially evident in the concluding passages of the Eucharistic Discourse in the fourth Gospel, where many disciples—scandalized by Jesus’ demanding teaching—withdraw (John 6:66). In this context Peter appears as the representative of those who remain with the Master, professing their trust in Him (John 6:68). Unity cannot be considered apart from truth, but also not apart from transcendental goodness, which appears as the goal of striving and the expression of love. The category of beauty also has its place here, since the motif of “glory” appears in the prayer, interpreted as the radiance of God’s presence (John 17:22) (Hauke 2020, 18).

Hauke’s theological reconstruction of the Christian image of God makes it clear that unity must be understood as revealed, not as derived from human notions. Thus, the Mother of the Lord can be presented as a participant in the divine work of unity. The Three Divine Persons emerge as the model and cause of unity. Hauke, however, retains the title *Mater unitatis* without directly addressing its historical interpretive burdens. He acknowledges them but does not engage them explicitly.

A similar approach is adopted by Adam Wojtczak (a distinguished Polish scholar of Marian titles) in his interpretation of the title *Mater unitatis*. Familiar with the materials from the German academic session (Wojtczak 2021), he prepared his own study in which his interpretation is clearly conditioned by the theological image of God and situated within the broad context of revelation and faith experience:

To grasp the theological significance of the title “Mother of Unity,” one must contemplate Mary’s life and mission in the light of the Trinitarian mystery of God, whose providential plan is the central reality of Revelation and faith.... Mary was eternally inscribed in the salvific design of the Triune God, the source and exemplar of unity. (Wojtczak 2024, 121)

Wojtczak’s theological presentation ensures that the image of Mary as Mother of Unity does not arise from autonomous reflection on her person, but from contemplation of the revealed God, who in His inner life is a communion of Persons and the source of all unity. The *Theotokos* thus appears as a living sign of that which originates “from the will of the Father”:

In the divine economy of salvation there are no coincidences. Everything has its “source in the will of the Father.” He is also—as the collect for the Mass “Mary, Mother of Unity” proclaims—“the source of unity and concord.” (Wojtczak 2024, 122)

In this perspective, Mary does not so much “bring about” unity as she allows herself to be encompassed by it—first by the Father’s love, and then by the mercy that transforms her and makes her “the first witness of the Father’s saving love”:

She became the “first witness of the Father’s saving love,” the one who, in a unique way, more than anyone else, experienced God’s mercy.... The Father “willed that there be no barrier between the Mother and the Son. No shadow should obscure their bond.” (Wojtczak 2024, 122–23)

It is this direct and unbreakable relationship with the Son, through the action of the Holy Spirit, that grounds her exceptional place in the work of unity. Christ—as “the author and lover of unity”—chose her precisely because in her He could manifest the fullness of communion that ought to exist between God and humanity:

He, ... the author and lover of unity, chose for Himself a Mother of virginal body and heart.... She conceived Him not only in faith but also in her body.... She proved to be the link between the Redeemer and the human race. The bond broken by sin was graciously restored. (Wojtczak 2024, 124–25)

Wojtczak also emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit, who acts through Mary as the Spirit of unity, peace, and reconciliation. Thus, the “Marian title” *Mater unitatis* (as he calls it in the title of his article) is situated within the full Trinitarian dynamism:

She was the living instrument of the “Spirit of concord and unity, peace and reconciliation....” Mary gave her response of love on behalf of the entire human nature. Consequently, her cooperation with the Spirit in the Incarnation—their shared fruitfulness—brought forth the incarnate Son of God into the world. (Wojtczak 2024, 128–29)

While retaining the title *Mater unitatis*, Wojtczak introduces additional theological images—such as icon, servant, instrument of the Spirit—intended not merely for semantic enrichment but for expressing the multidimensional nature of Mary’s participation in the mystery of unity, rooted in God as the Holy Trinity:

Mary serves Christian unity in two ways: she is both its icon and intercessor.... Her maternal influence upon Jesus’ disciples ... continues to be active in the work of Christian unity. (Wojtczak 2024, 130–131)

The use of diverse terms allows Wojtczak to demonstrate that the *Theotokos* does not function as an external symbol of unity, but as a person truly united with the divine work of unity and salvation. Her action as the icon of unity flows from her profound communion with Christ and the Holy Spirit, revealing her as the locus of divine harmony.

The title *Mater unitatis*, as presented in Wojtczak’s extended interpretation, is complemented by theological images that transcend a merely literal understanding of *mater*. The most radical step in this direction is taken by Polish theologian

Andrzej Napiórkowski (2018), who explicitly presents the *Theotokos* as the *Servant of Unity*. Though in other writings he uses the title “Mother of Unity,” he also employs terms that present the *Theotokos* in the mystery of unity not only as Mother, but also as Sister. What unites these expanded interpretive perspectives—Wojtczak’s and A. Napiórkowski’s—is the central role of the theological image of God.

In conclusion, the ontological understanding of divine oneness and unity—though revealed through the Incarnation and Redemption—initially placed the *Theotokos* as the agent of unity, particularly through her intercession. Yet the salvific work revealed a deeper truth: it is the Triune God who is the true author of unity, while Mary participates in this work as Servant. Her mission is not confined to motherhood—she also appears as Sister and model of communion, united with the will of the Father through the Word and the Spirit.

2. *Mater Unionis* and *Deus Mediator*: *Theotokos* as the Icon of Divine Reconciliation

In available theological literature, there is a lack of comprehensive studies devoted specifically to the title *Mater unionis*. Nevertheless, this designation can be observed functioning both in the context of popular devotion and in academic reflection, particularly within the Czech theological tradition. The title, applied to the *Theotokos*, is closely linked to the venerated image of Mary as the “Mother of Union” (*Matka jednoty*) in Velehrad, and is deeply embedded in the spirituality of this region of Central Europe (Pavlik 2006).

In the second half of the 19th century, on the occasion of the millennial anniversary of the mission of Saints Cyril and Methodius—the apostles to the Slavs—Velehrad became a center of spiritual renewal, inspired by their legacy. As a result, numerous congresses were organized there (1907–1936) focusing on the idea of Christian unity between East and West (Górka 2006–2007). During this time, a Cyrillo-Methodian apostolate developed, and the Byzantine rite liturgy was celebrated in Church Slavonic. Within this spiritual and cultural context, the title *Mater unionis* became firmly established—expressing not only faith in reconciliation but also openness to the diversity of Christian traditions (Budniak 2009, 41–42).

The legacy of Cyril and Methodius is characterized by the message of unity in diversity. These apostles, originating from Byzantium, founded a Church that remained in communion with Rome while remaining open to local languages and cultures. Their mission became a symbol of Christianity rooted in tradition yet open to inculturation. The desire to live in united faith while respecting differences inspired reflection on a Christian culture built in dialogue and diversity. However, it must be emphasized that the primary focus was the mystery of unity in Christ.

In this context, the invocation of Mary as *Mater unionis* points to her profound relationship with the work of Jesus Christ—*Unus Mediator*—who reconciled humanity with God and imparted to the Church the Spirit of reconciliation. The application of this title to the *Theotokos* thus signifies not only her spiritual maternity toward the Church, but also her mission of uniting Christians through prayer and the witness of life.

The title *Mater unionis* therefore deserves deeper theological reflection. Its originality lies in expressing the idea of unity in diversity—rooted not in human compromise, but in God Himself, revealed in Jesus Christ. Mary, as the Mother of Reconciliation, appears not merely as a symbol of spiritual unity but as a living icon of the one Church that abides in the mystery of the Three Divine Persons.

Liturgical and ecumenical sources (Jelly 1978; Triacca 2001; Pałęski 2012) may offer fruitful assistance in reflecting on the presence of the *Theotokos* in the mystery of reconciled unity. These sources often emphasize an original image of the Triune God and provide important contributions to the theological understanding of unity-in-diversity.

3. *Mater Communionis* and *Unus Deus in Tribus Personis*: *Theotokos* in the Heart of Trinitarian Love

In 1994, the University of Navarra in Pamplona (Spain) published a doctoral dissertation by Anthony Anderson, who employed the title *Mater communionis* to explain the theological meaning of the Marian title “Mother of the Church.” Like *Mater unitatis*, this title had been widely discussed in the mid-20th century but was ultimately not included in the official documents of the Second Vatican Council. Nevertheless, both titles found a place in the teaching of Pope Paul VI, who explicitly encouraged theologians to reflect on them, and preserved them in liturgy and devotional practice.

Anderson’s work did not attract much attention from scholars practicing so-called communal Mariology (e.g., Marek Jagodziński). Such neglect seems unjustified, given that the author used the title *Mater communionis* to illuminate the theological significance of *Mater Ecclesiae*—on the assumption that it must be interpreted within the mystery of God:

One great teaching confirmed by the title [*Mater Ecclesiae*—K.P.] is that the Church is an intimate, mystical communion united to the Trinity through Christ. A cornerstone of Vatican II’s pedagogy is the ecclesiology of *communio*. Mary seals that communion as *Mater Ecclesiae*. (Anderson 1994, 220)

The originality of Anderson's approach lies in his desire to explain the title "Mother of the Church" in the context of the mystery of God revealed in Jesus Christ. He drew upon conciliar methodology, which placed the theological image of God at the starting point of ecclesiology.

Of course, if the ecclesial maternity fosters and teaches true *koinonia*, then horizontal, human communion is neither the only nor the first communion promoted. Horizontal communion in the Church depends on the vertical communion by the Father with the Word in the Spirit. In other words, if Mary effects fraternity in the Church, it is because (through God's grace) she helps effect the unity of all Christians with God. The mystical brotherhood of the saints springs from our brotherhood with Christ, our filiation under the Father, and our bearing of the Holy Spirit. (Anderson 1994, 282)

The interpretation of the title *Mater communionis*, rooted in the theological image of God, also reveals the specificity of the mystery of unity within the Holy Trinity. In this perspective, unity has a personal and relational character. The *Theotokos*, present in the midst of the Church—*communio*—appears not only as a Mother involved in the lives of her children (where relationships are key), but also as a Sister. Anderson, in a highly condensed manner, expresses the multidimensional nature of the truth about the *Theotokos* in the unity of God and humanity.

The phrase "Mary seals that communion," as used by Anderson, is theologically ambiguous and may raise concerns, as it suggests a constitutive role for Mary in building the Church's communion with the Holy Trinity. The term "seal" can be interpreted as confirmation or completion, but also as closure or conclusion, which risks misattributing to Mary a function reserved for Christ and the Holy Spirit. In theological tradition, it is precisely the Holy Spirit who is considered the "seal" of God and the agent of unity. According to Revelation, Christ alone is the Mediator, and *communio* finds its source in the inner life of the Holy Trinity. Nevertheless, if understood symbolically and analogically, one may affirm that Mary "seals" communion in the sense that she fully embodies it, confirms it by her life, and supports it as *Mater Ecclesiae*. Her *fiat* and enduring presence in the mystery of the Church make her a model and icon of perfect relationship with God. This phrase should, therefore, be interpreted with theological caution—to avoid assigning Mary a role proper to the Holy Spirit—while presenting her as a privileged participant and sign of the Church's communion with God.

Without directly referencing Anderson's research or the title *Mater communionis* promoted by him, Jagodziński produced a study titled *An Outline of Communion Mariology*. The author explores the person of the *Theotokos* from the theological perspective embedded in the Greek word *koinonia*. He demonstrates familiarity with the title *Mater unitatis* (Jagodziński 2019, 181), but it does not play a central role in his formulation of a unique concept of "communion Mariology," which goes beyond

the concept of unity itself. In fact, almost all titles referring to the *Theotokos* are connected by the author to the category of *koinonia*:

... the titles of Mary, which express the communal specificity of her position and role in the faith and life of the Church, form, when arranged together, a kind of “Marian litany of communion”: Gate of the Communion of Salvation, Immaculate Seal of Communion, Mother of the Communion of the Incarnation (divinity and humanity in Jesus Christ), Virgin Sign of the Communion of the New Creation, Bride of the Communion (of the Holy Trinity), Mother of the Communion of Joy, Mother of the Communion of Light, Mother of the Communion of Suffering, Mother of the Communion of Pain ..., Mother of Familial Communion, Mother of the Communion of Nations, Mother of Ecumenical Communion. (Jagodziński 2019, 186)

Jagodziński distances himself from the Latin term “*communio*,” which, in his view, unduly restricts the meaning of *koinonia* to a purely social or institutional dimension. He argues that such a reduction overlooks the theological depth and spiritual dynamism of the Greek notion, which embraces not only external forms of community but also the inner mystery of participation in divine life. For Jagodziński, *communio* does not adequately convey this richness, since it tends to emphasize institutional aspects of ecclesial organization and external unity, whereas *koinonia* highlights the interpersonal and relational character of existence itself. Consequently, he insists that both categories must be understood in their deepest sense—as expressions of an intensified personal relationality in which love, reciprocity, and the lived experience of communion are central and find their ultimate foundation in the life of the Triune God. The essence of this relation is the full co-existence of persons, their deep union, and mutual indwelling, which express the dynamic character of life as both given and shared. In this light, *koinonia* is not confined to a mere external bond but encompasses the entire reality of interpersonal relations rooted in participation in divine unity, which, in Christian theology, finds its ultimate foundation in God himself (Jagodziński 2019, 8).

In the context of this present study—devoted to the presence of the *Theotokos* in the mystery of unity as conditioned by the image of God—Jagodziński’s proposal enriches theological reflection through the postulate of discovering God as *Mysterium communionale*. This theological view also leads to a renewed anthropological vision, which the author describes as communal anthropology. From this vantage point, both the titles *Mater communionis* and *Mater unitatis* not only refer to the mystery of God but also reveal a renewed image of the human being. Unity here appears as an anthropological value: personal and relational. The starting point of the reflection remains the reality of divine *koinonia*. Consequently, it is impossible to undertake Mariological questions without reference to the mystery of the Holy Trinity, understood as the communion of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The biblical texts

that deal with themes related to the person of Mary focus above all on her relation to God the Father, on her unique role as the Mother of Jesus Christ, and on the special action of the Holy Spirit in her life. In theological terms, Mary thus appears as a person deeply inscribed in the Trinitarian dynamic of love, becoming thereby not only the recipient but also the participant of the divine communion. It is precisely this perspective that allows a better understanding of her place in the history of salvation and her unrepeatable participation in the economy of salvation (Jagodziński 2019, 8).

Given these sources and reflections, one may conclude that the title *Mater communionis* allows for a deeper grasp of the relational character of unity, rooted in the Holy Trinity. Mary as *Theotokos* participates in the mystery of salvation history not only as Mother (Lekan 2019), but also as Sister and icon of *koinonia*. True unity flows from the *koinonia* of God and finds its human reflection in Mary's communal participation.

Conclusion

This article has presented selected theological concepts that illustrate the presence of the *Theotokos* within the mystery of unity, as shaped by the evolving image of God. Based on a selective analysis, a systematic framework was proposed through three Marian titles: *Mater unitatis*, *Mater unionis*, and *Mater communionis*.

The research conducted confirms the hypothesis regarding the dependence of the image of Mary on the theological image of God. At the same time, it was shown that in some instances, it is precisely the development of Mariology—especially the emergence of new devotional titles—through its sensitivity to the categories of relationality, mediation, and communion, that inspired theologians to deepen their understanding of the image of God, particularly in a Trinitarian perspective. The relationship, therefore, is not only one of dependence but also dialogical in nature, and at times corrective with respect to reduced conceptions of God.

The most frequently used title—*Mater unitatis*—underwent significant reinterpretation: from being grounded in the image of God as absolute unity, toward an understanding of Trinitarian unity. This was accompanied by an effort to expand the understanding of Mary's divine motherhood to include other dimensions of her identity—among them, as Sister in unity. The unity of which Mary is a sign is not limited merely to an ecclesial or ecumenical dimension.

The title *Mater unionis* emphasizes unity-in-diversity—rooted in the relational reality of the Divine Persons—and presents unity as a dynamic reality, one that is missionary rather than merely integrative.

In contrast, *Mater communionis* does not arise from the concept of unity *per se*, but from the revelation of God as *koinonia*. This allows unity to be perceived as

a personal and relational reality, with profound anthropological and ecclesiological potential.

The three concepts presented are not the result of linear stages in the development of theological thought but correspond to distinct ways of understanding God. They complement one another and confirm the legitimacy of using a variety of Marian titles to express the presence of the *Theotokos* in the divine work of unity offered to all creation by the Triune God.

Translated by Thaddaeus Lancton

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The Doctrine of the Infinity of God and Its Implications: Clement of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa

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Abstract: This article aims to demonstrate that the concept of God's infinity, as developed by Gregory of Nyssa in many of his works, may have been influenced by earlier Christian theology, rather than solely by Plotinus' philosophy, as many contemporary scholars believe. One of the theologians who introduced this concept before Plotinus was Clement of Alexandria, who not only defined God as the infinite One, but also, like Gregory, drew important anthropological conclusions from the notion of infinity. After an introduction describing the history of research on the presence of a positively understood concept of the infinity of God in Christian theology before Plotinus, the article compares the doctrine of Clement of Alexandria with that of Gregory of Nyssa in the following three thematic sections: (1) the infinity of the incorporeal being; (2) the infinity of the Good; and (3) the infinity of the process of human assimilation to God. The method adopted in the article is a comparative analysis of ancient texts. The research carried out leads to the conclusion that both Clement and Gregory understand the nature of the infinite God similarly, use similar metaphors and argumentation, and believe that the process of human assimilation to God extends into infinity.

Keywords: God, infinity, infinity of God, assimilation to God, negative theology, Clement of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, Plotinus, Origen

1. Introduction: A Brief History of Some Misunderstandings

Charles Bigg, a 19th-century English scholar, in his lectures held at Oxford University, stated:

What an absurd yet mischievous word is “infinite,” purely material in all its associations, and as unmeaning when applied to spirit as “colourless” or “imponderable” would be. Yet it is habitually used as if it were the highest term of reverence. To a Platonist, “infinite” means almost the same as “evil.” Limitation is of the essence of truth and of beauty. (Bigg 1913, 198)

The Platonist to whom the Oxford scholar refers was Origen, who in his work *De principiis* was to state that the power and wisdom of God are finite (see *Princ.* 2.9.1; cf. *Princ.* 3.5.2; 4.4.8; *Comm. Matt.* 13.1).¹ I report Bigg's opinion here because in 1978

¹ Although in the passages indicated, Origen speaks only of the finite number of creatures created by God and of the fact that the infinite cannot be comprehended, Bigg unjustifiably applies these theses to God. For, in fact, he states: “The God of Origen is no longer the Unconditioned. He is not Absolute but Perfect,

Henri Crouzel and Manlio Simonetti, two eminent scholars of Origen's thought, alluded to it in their commentary incorporated into the critical edition of the *De principiis* (see Crouzel and Simonetti 1978, 213). These researchers agree with the thesis of the 19th-century scholar and state that it was only Plotinus who introduced the positively understood concept of infinity into philosophical discourse, whereas "Origen remained in the Hellenistic view: the finitude of God's power is required by his very perfection." (Crouzel and Simonetti 1978, 213) Indeed, according to many Greek philosophers before Plotinus, what is infinite is incomplete, indeterminate, and therefore imperfect.² This opinion and the passages from *De principiis* quoted by the above scholars have been reproduced in numerous encyclopedias and dictionaries of theology and philosophy. In the same vein, numerous authors of patristic handbooks and monographs, echoing the opinion of Crouzel and Simonetti, claim that Gregory of Nyssa was the first Judeo-Christian author to develop a positively understood concept of the infinity of God based on Plotinus' philosophy.³

I do not wish to develop this thread here because some of my previous articles have already demonstrated that the passages referred to by Crouzel and Simonetti do not actually represent Origen's view, but that of the emperor Justinian.⁴ I would only point out that in the Latin translation of the work *De principiis* by Rufinus, the statement on the finite power of God does not appear,⁵ whereas in Origen's texts preserved in Greek, the term ἄπειρον is used in reference to God (see *Philoc.* 23.20; *Or.* 27.16; *Cels.* 3.77). Moreover, Origen explicitly states that God's wisdom and knowledge have no limits and that man's pursuit of the inscrutable riches of God's wisdom and knowledge can have no end (see *Hom. Num.* 17.4.2; cf. *Philoc.* 23.20; *Sel. Ps.* 144 [PG 12, 1673a]; *Princ.* 4.3.14). This is because the infinite can neither be embraced nor comprehended by a finite intellect. Nevertheless, Origen's predecessors, namely Philo of Alexandria and Clement of Alexandria, also frequently spoke

and perfection is itself a condition. He is perfectly wise, perfectly just, perfectly mighty, but the perfection of these attributes consists precisely in the fact that they are limited by one another." (Bigg 1913, 198)

² See Gilson 1955, 38; Owen 2006, 668; Reale 2018, 2332–33.

³ See Sweeney 1998, 6–9; Meredith 1999, 13–14; Simonetti 2000, 120; Moore 2001, 43–47; Moreschini 2005, 136; 2008, 171; Neidhart 2008, 533–37; Reale 2018, 2025–27; Young 2010, 165–69; Meredith 2010, 477–80; Achtner 2011, 27; Lilla 2014, 231; Moran 2014, 512; Krainer 2019, 21–36.

⁴ See Mrugalski 2017, 437–75; 2018, 493–526; 2022, 69–84; 2024, 467–78.

⁵ It should be made clear at this point that many scholars of Origen's thought have no confidence in the Latin translation of the work *De principiis* made by Rufinus. In fact, the ancient translator repeatedly attempted to correct the Master so that his statements would sound orthodox from the perspective of post-Nicene theology. In this vein, Paul Koetschau, author of the critical edition of *De principiis*, decided to paste parallel passages preserved in Greek into the Latin text of the work. Unfortunately, some fragments come from Origen's accusers, who might also have altered the original sense of the Alexandrian thinker's statements. Thus, in the case of the statement on the finite power of God, Koetschau quotes a passage from the Emperor Justinian's *Letter to Menas* (see Koetschau 1913, 164). Although Crouzel and Simonetti hold that this passage is not an exact quotation from the *De principiis*, they believe that the idea contained in it reflects the thought of Origen (see Crouzel and Simonetti 1978, 211–13).

in their works of the infinity of God and the infinite process of man's assimilation to God.⁶ This fact, however, has been overlooked by many scholars, including those of Gregory of Nyssa, who believed that Gregory, in his doctrine of the infinity of God, either relied on Plotinus or developed his own approach to arrive at the concept of the infinity of God positively understood. One of these scholars was Ekkehard Mühlenberg, who wrote the now-classic monograph *Die Unendlichkeit Gottes bei Gregor von Nyssa*. In this work, Mühlenberg argues that Gregory of Nyssa is the first thinker, contrary to the Platonic-Aristotelian philosophy, who describes God's essence using the term infinite (Mühlenberg 1966, 27). The basis for this assertion is precisely the thesis he states at the beginning of his monograph, namely that Origen was still the heir of Greek philosophy on the negative understanding of the concept of infinity. Gregory, on the contrary, in his works "consciously wants to refute classical philosophy, because he rightly suspects that it lies behind Origen's position." (Mühlenberg 1966, 27) In the chapter dedicated to Origen, the researcher refers to the passage from *Princ.* 2.9.1, mentioned above, and more specifically to its Greek version derived from the Emperor Justinian's *Letter to Mennas*, and uncritically finds this version reliable. Afterwards, by citing numerous texts which demonstrate a negative understanding of infinity in Greek philosophers and at the same time failing to analyze other texts by Origen in which a positively understood concept of infinity appears, Mühlenberg arbitrarily concludes that the Alexandrian thinker was the heir of Greek thought (Mühlenberg 1966, 78–80). The scholar takes a similar approach to the doctrine of Clement of Alexandria, the predecessor of Origen. Although in the chapter devoted to him, he cites a passage in which the infinity of God is stated, he underestimates its importance. He does not mention or analyze other texts by Clement that refer to the infinite process of man's assimilation to God. In fact, he states outright that Gregory's dependence on Clement cannot be established, as Clement does not know the positive concept of the infinite and does not speak of the assimilation of man to God that extends *ad infinitum* (Mühlenberg 1966, 75–76).

The lack of in-depth research into the concept of infinity in the doctrines of Christian thinkers before Plotinus, or the repetition of common and unexamined theses claiming that Plotinus was the first thinker to introduce a positively understood concept of the infinity of God into philosophical discourse, leads scholars dealing with theology developed after Plotinus to come to erroneous conclusions. In fact, many of them uncritically assert that either Gregory of Nyssa was the first theologian to incorporate Neoplatonism into Christianity, and with it the positively understood concept of the infinity of the Absolute, or that Gregory of Nyssa was the first theologian to develop the positively understood concept of the infinity of God in Christian theology, but arrived at it independently of Plotinus. Meanwhile, neither

⁶ For example, see Philo, *Opif.* 23; *Sacr.* 59, 124; *Conf.* 171–72; *Post.* 151, 174; *Somm.* 1.12; *Her.* 31–32. For Clement of Alexandria's statements on the infinity of God, see below.

thesis is accurate. The concept of the positively understood infinity of God was present in Christianity from its very beginnings. Furthermore, it had already appeared in Hellenistic Judaism, that is, at the time of the encounter between the Bible and Greek philosophy.⁷ In turn, Gregory of Nyssa was the heir to this ancient theology and significantly developed the themes raised by Jewish and Christian thinkers over the first four centuries of the Common Era.

This article attempts to demonstrate that Gregory of Nyssa may have been inspired by Clement of Alexandria's doctrine of the infinity of God, but also by the implications that the Alexandrian thinker draws from this doctrine. This study is divided into three parts: (1) the infinity of the incorporeal being; (2) the infinity of the Good; and (3) the infinity of the process of human assimilation to God. Each part compares the statements of Gregory of Nyssa and those of Clement of Alexandria on the concept of infinity, including those that Mühlenberg, as well as many other scholars after him, have overlooked in their research.

2. The Infinity of the Incorporeal Being

Before examining the concept of the infinity of incorporeal being, a few remarks must be made about certain ontological premises present in both the doctrine of Clement of Alexandria and that of Gregory of Nyssa.⁸ Both thinkers adopt the Platonic division of all reality, namely, they distinguish between the level of intelligible being (νοητός) and the level of perceptible being (αἰσθητός). The former is incorporeal and knowable by means of the intellect, while the latter is corporeal and knowable by means of the senses (Plato, *Tim.* 27d–28a; *Phaed.* 65c–66a; *Resp.* 477a, 509d; *Phaedr.* 247c–e). According to Plato, the intelligible beings are the Ideas and God, i.e., the Demiurge, as discussed in the *Timaeus*, as well as the Idea of the Good, described, for instance, in the *Republic*. Plato does not consider the latter as being, but as existing beyond being (ἐπέκεινα τῆς οὐσίας) (*Resp.* 509b). However, the Idea of the

⁷ It is worth noting on this occasion, however, that a number of works have recently been published whose authors have begun to notice the presence of a positively understood notion of infinity in theological thought before Plotinus (see Geljon 2005, 152–77; Tzamalikos 2006, 245–59; Ramelli 2017a, 194–98; 2018, 326–39). These publications, however, contain only a few exemplary quotations demonstrating the positively understood concept of infinity in Philo of Alexandria or Origen. They do not discuss the metaphysical, epistemological, and ethical concepts that the doctrine of God's infinity implies. Unfortunately, many scholars have failed to notice these publications and continue to repeat the common theses I wrote about above.

⁸ I will merely touch here on some general aspects of the philosophy of Clement and Gregory, which will serve as a basis for further analysis. For more on the philosophy of both authors, see Völker 1955, 23–48; Lilla 1971; Wyrwa 1983; Peroli 1993; Osborn 2005, 81–131; Hägg 2006, 71–206; Moreschini 2013, 315–59, 747–821; 2005, 100–127, 571–616; 2008, 160–236; Zachhuber 2020, 15–71; Havrda 2021, 357–71.

Good is also of an intelligible nature, since it is knowable by means of the intellect (see *Resp.* 508e, 516b, 517b–c, 518c, 532a–b). The perceptible beings, on the other hand, are the material things of the visible world. A similar distinction is also made by Plato's later interpreters, known as the Middle Platonists, with the difference, however, that in their doctrines the Platonic Ideas become thoughts of the transcendent God.⁹ This doctrine was first formulated by Philo of Alexandria, a Jewish thinker also numbered among the Middle Platonists.¹⁰ The influence of Philo's doctrine on the thought of later Christian thinkers, including Clement of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa, is evident and has been described by many scholars.¹¹

Having said that, we can now move on to the question of infinity that interests us. As already mentioned, many scholars believe Gregory of Nyssa to be the first Judeo-Christian thinker who, in opposition to Platonic-Aristotelian metaphysics, developed a doctrine of a positively understood infinity of God. In fact, Plato, while defining Ideas as simple and incorporeal, does not pronounce on their infiniteness. On the contrary, he defines Ideas as measures of things, and since they are measures, they cannot be infinite (see *Phileb.* 16c–e; 26c–27b). In fact, they indicate what a thing is; they define it, that is, they impose certain limits on things. An Idea, therefore, is not and cannot be unlimited, otherwise it could not be the measure of finite things. Aristotle, on the other hand, maintains that there cannot exist an infinity in act. Since everything that has a form and is actualized also has definite limits. According to Aristotle, the infinite can be said to exist only in potency, for instance, as a process of addition or division (see *Phys.* 206a–207b). Gregory of Nyssa disagrees with the theses of Plato and Aristotle, since in his *Homilies on the Song of Songs* he states (*Cant.* 6: GNO 6, 173,9–174,1):

Hence we reckon something to fall into the category of the perceptible (αἰσθητόν) to the extent that it is grasped by sense perception, but we reckon as intelligible (νοητόν) that which falls beyond the observation of the senses. Of these two, the intelligible has neither limit (ἄπειρον) nor bound (ἄόριστον), while the other is entirely contained by particular limits. For since matter in its totality is grasped in terms of quantity and quality, which determine its bulk and form and surface and shape, what one sees of it constitutes, in its case, a limit to what is known about it, so that the person who is investigating materiality has nothing apart from some one of these characteristics to lay hold of in the imagination. Contrariwise, that which is intelligible and immaterial, being released from such confines, escapes limit and is bounded by nothing.

⁹ For more on the concept of Ideas as God's thoughts in the various Middle Platonists, see Dillon 1996; Ferrari 2005, 233–46; Tarrant 2010, 63–99; Ferrari 2015, 321–37; 2020, 239–61.

¹⁰ See Runia 1999, 154–58. A different view is presented by John Dillon, who sees the doctrine of the Ideas as thoughts of God as far back as the Old Academy (see Dillon 2019, 35–49; cf. Mrugalski 2020, 159–70).

¹¹ See Hoek 1988; Runia 1993, 132–56, 243–61; Ramelli 2017b, 80–110; Geljon 2002; Mira 2010, 601–3.

Later in the work cited, Gregory makes another distinction. Thus, intelligible nature is divided into two kinds: the first is uncreated and creates other beings, and the second is created. The former is, by nature, immutable and infinite, while the latter is mutable; yet, precisely because of this mutability, it is also infinite. For it can continually grow in and assimilate to the Good in which it participates from the very moment of creation. Since the uncreated Good is infinite, the assimilation to it by rational created natures will continue into infinity (see *Cant.* 6: GNO 6, 174,1–20). We will return to the latter topic in the last section of this paper, where we will analyze the concept of *homoiosis theo*, that is, the infinite process of man's assimilation to God. Meanwhile, in the text quoted above, Gregory derives the concept of the infinite from the very notion of incorporeality. Thus, that which is not corporeal has no boundaries set by form, appearance, figure, or any other kind of property confining material beings.

Is it possible that this thesis was borrowed in some way from Clement of Alexandria? Well, as already noted, Clement, following Philo of Alexandria and ultimately Plato, also makes a distinction between intelligible nature, which he terms κόσμος νοητός, and perceptible nature, which he calls κόσμος αἰσθητός (*Strom.* 5.93.4). Unlike Plato, and as Gregory will later do, Clement divides intelligible nature into two kinds: uncreated and created. This distinction is made by Clement while interpreting the first chapters of Genesis allegorically, which describe God's work of creation. What was created on the first day, according to Clement, was the world of Ideas, and at the same time the archetype of the perceptible world (see *Strom.* 5.93.4–94.6). As for God, Clement refers to him by the term “uncreated” (ἀγένητος) (*Strom.* 5.68.2) and, in many places in his writings, emphasizes the Divine radical transcendence. Thus, God does not have physical qualities such as form, appearance, depth, width, length, or any other such characteristics (see *Strom.* 5.71.2–5; 6.114.4; 7.30.1). Since he is invisible and infinite (ἀόρατος καὶ ἀπερίγραφος), he cannot be represented in any image, nor can any temple enclose him (see *Strom.* 5.74.4–6; 7.28.1; 7.30.1). Moreover, not only the temple, but as Clement writes elsewhere, no place can contain God, because “He is beyond space and time and anything belonging to created beings. Similarly, He is not found in any section. He is never in a part or by delimitation or separation, as he contains everything in Himself, but is not contained by anything.” (*Strom.* 2.6.1–2) However, there is one statement in which Clement derives the notion of God's infinity directly from the concept of incorporeality (*Strom.* 5.81.5–82.2; translation by the author):

This discourse concerning God is the most difficult to handle. For since it is difficult to find the principle of everything, it is by all means hard to indicate the absolutely first and oldest principle that is the cause of the origin of all other beings, as well as those that have come into being. For how can that be expressed which is neither genus, nor difference, nor species, nor an individual, nor a number, nor an attribute, nor something to which an attribute can be attributed? No one can adequately name him as a whole. For the whole

is a category of magnitude, whereas he is the Father of the whole (of the universe). Nor, finally, can one speak of parts in Him. For the One is indivisible (ἀδιάρητον); therefore also he is infinite (ἄπειρον), not in the meaning of being non-traversable (οὐ κατὰ τὸ ἀδιεξίτητον), but in relation to his being without dimensions (ἀδιάστατον) and having no limits (πέρας). Therefore, he has no form or name. And if, by all means, we name him (albeit not in the proper sense), either the One, or the Good, or Mind, or Being itself, or God, or Creator, or Lord, we speak not as if we were pronouncing his name; rather we use noble names as auxiliaries, so that the mind may have them as points of support and not err in other respects. For each of them by itself does not express God, but all of them together point to the power of the Omnipotent.

In the above text, Clement clearly refers to the theses put forward by Plato and Aristotle regarding the notion of infinity. In stating that the One is indivisible (ἀδιάρητον) and therefore infinite (ἄπειρον), he alludes to one of the hypotheses put forward in Plato's *Parmenides* (see 137c–d). On the other hand, by specifying what he means, namely by claiming that infinity, in the case of God, does not consist in being non-traversable (ἀδιεξίτητον), he dissociates himself from Aristotle's thesis. In fact, the latter, in one of the definitions of infinity provided in *Physics*, states that infinity, understood as something that cannot be traversed, does not exist either in act or in potency (see *Phys.* 206b 22 ff.). Clement, however, does not stop at these two allusions to ancient philosophers. However, in his definition of infinity, he explains that when thinking of God's infinity, the absolute absence of dimension (διάστασις) and limit (πέρας) must be taken into account.¹² The term ἀδιάστατον, which he uses here, does not seem to appear in any context concerning infinity before Clement (see Choufrine 2002, 167). After Clement, however, it also occurs in Plotinus and Gregory of Nyssa. The latter, in his *Contra Eunomium*, states (*Eun.* 3.7.33: GNO 2, 226,25–227,2):

Or how can one encompass infinity (τὸ ἄοριστον) with beginning and end? “Beginning” and “end” are words for dimensional limits (διαστηματικῶν περάτων). When there is no dimension (διαστάσεως) there are no limits, either. But of course the divine nature

¹² For a more detailed analysis of the passages of *Strom.* 5.81.5–82.2, see Osborn 1957, 27–31; Mühlenberg 1966, 29–76; Whittaker 1976, 155–72. Meanwhile, Arkadi Choufrine, while criticizing the analyses of the aforementioned scholars, notes (Choufrine 2002, 165–66): “Unfortunately, neither Mühlenberg nor Osborn notices the difference in the subject matter between the *Parmenides* and the Hellenistic interpretations. It is only natural then that they fail to notice the uniqueness of Clement's interpretation of ‘the One.’ For Osborn, Clement has just ‘expressed the idea of the First Hypothesis in the Christian context’ (Osborn 1957, 27). What makes Clement's departure from Plato radical, I believe, is that the notion of ‘the One’ in *Parmenides* is the object of reflection on the paradoxes of language only; whereas with Clement, it first becomes the tool of reflection on the paradoxes of God. The first (and perhaps, so far, the only) scholar to have noticed the priority of Clement was Whittaker. His interest, however, was not so much in Clement as it was in the evidence one can draw from Clement's text for the ‘pre-Plotinian theological interpretation of the First Hypothesis’ (Whittaker 1976, 159).”

is unextended (ἀδιάστατος), and being unextended, has no limit; it is, and the unlimited (ἀπεράτων) is called infinite (ἄπειρον). So it is futile to circumscribe (περιγράφειν) the infinite with beginning and end: the circumscribed cannot be infinite.

In the above passage, we can easily find references to the first hypothesis of Plato's *Parmenides*. However, in addition to these references, Gregory's statement also contains clarifications that we find precisely in the works of Clement of Alexandria regarding the concept of the infinite. Both thinkers agree that what is absolutely without extension or dimension (ἀδιάστατος) cannot have any limits (πέρας).¹³ Therefore, the infinity of God is due to his incorporeality and simplicity. What is incorporeal cannot be completely traversed in the physical sense, as Clement stresses, nor encompassed by anything, as Gregory emphasizes.¹⁴ It is not, therefore, a question of infinity in the sense of being non-traversable (οὐ κατὰ τὸ ἀδιεξίτητον), such as Aristotle reflected upon when thinking of beings composed of form and matter. According to Clement and Gregory, it is possible to speak of the infinity of an immaterial and therefore dimensionless being. Such a being is God, who, having neither parts nor beginning nor end, nor any other limit, can rightly be termed unlimited (ἄπεραντος)¹⁵ and consequently infinite (ἄπειρος) and thus uncircumscribed (ἀπερίγραφος).

Finally, it is worth noting that both authors also similarly link the question of the infinity of the Divine nature to the issue of its unknowability and ineffability. Mentions of the issue occur in the texts cited above. Since this theme is related to the intellectual-ethical process of man's assimilation to God, we will develop it in the last part of this article. Here, we merely aimed to illustrate that both Clement of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa employ a similar argumentation that links the notion of God's infinity to the question of the incorporeality of his nature, and that on this occasion, both authors make use of the same technical terms related to the issue of infinity, such as πέρας, ἀπεραντος, ἀδιάστατος, ἀπερίγραφος.

¹³ For the notion of διάστημα and the concept of the being διαστηματικός and ἀδιάστατος in Gregory of Nyssa, see *Ecdl. 7*: GNO 5, 412–13; Völker 1955, 28–35; Peroli 1993, 43–51; Douglass 2010, 227–28.

¹⁴ It should be noted, however, that it is not only Gregory who emphasizes that God cannot be encompassed by anything. Clement, too, in a number of places in his writings, notes that God and his Logos, due to the incorporeality and infinity of the divine nature, are not encompassable. In doing so, he employs the term ἀπερίγραφος, or the formula περιέχων οὐ περιεχόμενος. The latter also occurs repeatedly in Philo of Alexandria, but also in Gnostic texts (cf. Clem., *Strom.* 2.6.2; 5.74.4; 7.5.5; Philo, *Conf.* 136; *Post.* 7; *Somn.* 1.63–64; Epiph., *Pan.* 31.5.3).

¹⁵ The term ἀπεραντος occurs in the *Strom.* 5.81.3, and is employed by Clement to describe the “womb of God,” which is the divine Logos. Like the “womb” such a Logos is impenetrable and impassable. The theme, however, is connected to the unknowability of the Divine essence and the infinite process of man's cognition of God, which will be discussed below. I now mention this text to draw attention to similar technical terms related to the issue of infinity that appear in Clement and Gregory.

3. The Infinity of the Good

Gregory of Nyssa emphasizes in several places in his works that the Good, which is God, has no limits. The limit of Good should be some evil or vice. This, however, is not attributable to God. Such a reasoning emerges in the aforementioned *Homilies on the Song of Songs* (see *Cant.* 5: GNO 6, 157–58), in the *Contra Eunomium* (see *Eun.* 1.168–169: GNO 1, 77; 1.236–237: GNO 1, 95–96), and in the *Life of Moses* (see *Vit. Moys.* 1.5–7: GNO 7/1, 4). Of course, in each of these writings, the line of argumentation varies somewhat, either because it is an elaboration of themes appearing in particular texts of Scripture or because it is a response to Eunomius' theses.¹⁶ However, it is worth dwelling on the basic framework of Gregory's argumentation on the infinity of the Good. Thus, in the *Life of Moses*, our author states the following (*Vit. Moys.* 1.5–7: GNO 7/1, 3,17–4,10):

No Good has a limit in its own nature but is limited by the presence of its opposite, as life is limited by death and light by darkness. And every good thing generally ends with all those things which are perceived to be contrary to the good. Just as the end of life is the beginning of death, so also stopping in the race of virtue marks the beginning of the race of evil...

The Divine One is himself the Good (in the primary and proper sense of the word), whose very nature is goodness. This he is and he is so named, and is known by this nature. Since, then, it has not been demonstrated that there is any limit to virtue except evil, and since the Divine does not admit of an opposite, we hold the divine nature to be unlimited and infinite (ἀόριστος ἄρα καὶ ἀπεράνωτος).

Can we find these kinds of arguments in Clement's writings? There are many examples where Clement emphasizes that doing good is a property of God's nature. God is, and has always been, good, even before the foundation of the world. If God stopped doing good, Clement argues, he would cease to be God (see *Strom.* 4.141.7–142.1), which is, of course, impossible. Although the theologian does not use the term "infinite" in these cases, he somehow assumes that God's power is inexhaustible and boundless. He says, e.g., that "God, being a good Father and becoming so in constant beneficence, remains inviolable in the identity of his goodness. For what is the use of good that does not act and do good?" (*Strom.* 6.104.3) The terms ἀναλλοίωτος and ἀπαράβατος, used in this context, indicate the immutability, perpetuity, and therefore eternity of God's benevolent activity.

All the statements of Clement quoted here, however, are only part of the argument presented by Gregory. For the latter not only argues that it is an attribute of

¹⁶ For a more detailed analysis of Gregory's passages containing different types of argumentation for the infinity of the Good, see Mühlberg 1966, 100–147; Böhm 1996, 108–49; Geljon 2005, 152–68; Ramelli 2010, 623–26.

God's nature to do good continually and that in this beneficent activity God is immutable,¹⁷ but also that the good can only be limited by its opposite, that is, by evil or vice. Nevertheless, there is a passage in which Clement, rejecting the view that pagan philosophy might have been the work of the devil and proving that it is the work of a good God, mentions opposites, which also occur in Gregory's text given above (*Strom.* 6.159.4–7):

For as the lyre is only for the harper, and the flute for the flute-player; so good things are the possessions of good men. As the nature of the beneficent is to do good, as it is of the fire to warm, and the light to give light, and a good man will not do evil, or light produce darkness, or fire cold; so, again, vice cannot do aught virtuous. For its activity is to do evil, as that of darkness to dim the eyes. Philosophy is not, then, the product of vice, since it makes men virtuous; it follows, then, that it is the work of God, whose work it is solely to do good. And all things given by God are given and received well.

What links the above text of Clement with that of Gregory is the statement that realities such as good or light cannot be the cause of that which is opposite to them, namely evil and darkness. Since it is a property of the Divine nature to do only good, God cannot be the cause of evil or vice. However, can evil done by others put an end to God's beneficent activity? The answer to this question is found elsewhere in the *Stromateis*, where Clement explicitly states that there is no such possibility (*Strom.* 1.85.6–86.3):

Nothing can oppose God (τῷ θεῷ δὲ οὐδὲν ἀντίκειται); nothing can stand in his path (οὐδὲ ἐναντιοῦται τι αὐτῷ); he is Lord and ruler of all. But the plans and actions of the rebel angels are partial only, and spring from a rotten disposition, like bodily diseases. But the Providence who directs the universe directs them to a healthy conclusion even if the original cause is disease ridden. At any rate, the supreme example of God's Providence lies in his not allowing the evil which springs from that freely chosen rebellion to lie in unprofitable uselessness, still less to become totally baneful. It is the work of divine wisdom, excellence, and power not only to create good (this is, so to speak, God's nature, as it is the nature of fire to warm, and light to illuminate) but above all to bring a course of action devised through some evil intentions to a good, valuable conclusion, and to make beneficial use of things which seem bad.

Let us first note that the above text again advances the thesis that God's nature is solely to do good (τὸ ἀγαθοποιεῖν), just as the nature of fire is to warm and of light to illuminate. Nothing can put an end to this beneficent activity of God, and nothing

¹⁷ It is worth noting, however, that Gregory, similarly to Clement, introduces the premise of God's immutability into his argument for the infinity of the Good. Although it does not appear in the passage from the *Life of Moses* quoted above, it occurs in other writings (see *Eun.* 1.169; GNO 1, 77; *Cant.* 6: GNO 6, 174).

can oppose it (τῷ θεῷ δὲ οὐδὲν ἀντίκειται οὐδὲ ἐναντιοῦται τι αὐτῷ), not even the rebel angels who have consciously chosen evil. After all, God's beneficent activity can transform even evil chosen by others into good. Elsewhere, Clement asks why a good God could ever cease to do good. For incapacity? For lack of will? In answering, he states that neither the one nor the other can characterize an omnipotent and intrinsically good being (see *Strom.* 7.6.5).¹⁸ It follows that God's eternal beneficent activity has no limits, neither internal nor external.

To conclude this part of our argument, we must note that Clement, when considering the question of the nature of God as the Good that has no limits, does not employ the term ἄπειρος or its synonyms, as Gregory does. Nevertheless, the argumentation put forward by both authors is remarkably similar. God's beneficent activity is infinite not only temporally but also ontologically. No opposite can put a limit on it.

4. The Infinity of Human Assimilation to God

Gregory of Nyssa links the infinity of God with the doctrine of human assimilation to God (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ), a concept already present in many other pagan and Christian thinkers before Gregory, with its roots in Plato's famous statement in *Theaetetus*.¹⁹ In Gregory's doctrine, *homoiosis theo* denotes the intellectual-ethical process by which man, through the practice of the virtues and growth in knowledge, becomes more and more similar to God. However, since God is infinite, the process of man getting to know him and the process of man growing in the good must also be infinite. Indeed, a finite being can never fully embrace and thus comprehend the infinite, for this is logically impossible. However, neither can a finite being ever be good and love in the way that God does, because perfect goodness and love have

¹⁸ Also, Gregory of Nyssa, in one of his arguments in favour of the infinity of the Good, speaks of the absurdity of attributing a lesser or greater good to the Divine nature (see *Eun.* 1.169: GNO 1, 77). This argument occurs in the context of a polemic against Eunomius, who belittled the good that is the Logos. It is worth noting here that in *Strom.* 7.6.5 mentioned above, Clement of Alexandria also refers to Christ. And later on, he states that the Son is the activity of the Father and the power of the Father (see *Strom.* 7.8.1; 7.9.1).

¹⁹ See Plato, *Theaet.* 176a–b: “Therefore we ought to try to escape from earth to the dwelling of the gods as quickly as we can; and to escape is to become like God, so far as this is possible (ὁμοίωσις θεῷ κατὰ τὸ δυνατόν); and to become like God is to become righteous and holy and wise.” For more on the concept of man's assimilation to God in Gregory of Nyssa's predecessors see Merki 1952; Helleman 1990, 51–71; Annas 1999, 52–71; D. Russell 2004, 241–60; Lavecchia 2007; Osmański 2007; Ashwin-Siejkowski 2008, 147–87; Reydams-Schils 2017, 142–58; Torri 2019, 228–50; Giardina 2022, 325–52; Torri 2024, 19–57. This issue also arises in various chapters of monographs that chronologically discuss the theological, anthropological, and ethical doctrines of individual ancient thinkers (see especially Dillon 1996; N. Russell 2004; Louth 2007).

no limits.²⁰ What is possible, however, is perpetual progress in the good, in love and in getting to know God, and thus a process that extends *ad infinitum* (*Eun.* 1.364: GNO 1, 134,17–26):

When someone has traversed the ages and all that exists in them, the contemplation of the divine nature displays to his mind a sort of boundless ocean (πέλαγος ἀχανές), and it will give no sign to indicate any beginning for itself, if he tries to extend his conceptual grasp to what lies beyond. So the one who busies himself with what is senior to the ages, and who goes back to the beginning of existent things, will not be able to stop at any point in his reasoning, for his quarry will always slip away ahead and will indicate no place where his curiosity of intellect can stop.

Similar statements referring not only to man's continual pursuit of knowing the Divine nature but also to man's participation in the infinite Good and continual growth in virtue may be found in many of Gregory's works. On these occasions, Gregory refers several times to a passage from St. Paul's Epistle to the Philippians,²¹ in which the Apostle tells of his race toward the prize that is still ahead of him: "Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus" (Phil 3:13–14). The same passage, and in a similar context, is also referred to by Clement, who wonders that "some people dare to call themselves perfect and Gnostics, laying claim in their inflated pride to a loftier state than the Apostle." (*Paed.* 1.52.2) In fact, the theologian notes, Paul "considers himself perfect, in the sense he has changed his old way of life and follows a better one, but not in the sense that he is perfect in knowledge (οὐχ ὡς ἐν γνώσει τέλειος). He only desires what is perfect." (*Paed.* 1.52,3) Just as for Gregory as for Clement, Paul is the symbol of the perfect Christian or Gnostic. His perfection, however, consists in a constant race, that is, in growing in the acquisition of knowledge rather than in the possession of it.²²

²⁰ The concept of human assimilation to God is linked to the doctrine of ἐπέκτασις, which stands at the centre of Gregorian spirituality, but also of Gregorian theology in general, since it is also linked to the theme of God's knowability, or rather the question of his unknowability and ineffability, as well as to Gregorian anthropology and eschatology. The term ἐπέκτασις alludes to the Apostle Paul's statement in Phil 3:13–14 and indicates the constant "straining forward" or "exerting oneself" and consequently "transcending oneself" which is present in the intellectual-ethical process aimed at knowing God and uniting with him. However, because of the infinity of God's essence, ἐπέκτασις will accompany man even after death, throughout eternity, and will never end. For more on this subject, see Daniélou 1944, 291–307; Mateo-Seco 2010, 263–68; Ramelli 2018, 326–39; Smith 2018, 340–359.

²¹ See *Cant.* 5: GNO 6, 137–38; *Cant.* 6: GNO 6, 173–74; *Vit. Moys.* 1.5: GNO 7/1, 3; *Vit. Moys.* 2.225: GNO 7/1, 112.

²² Gregory also states that when it comes to virtue, it is difficult to define it as perfection (τελειότης). Because perfection is connected to finite being, that is, to the achievement of the goal (τέλος), whereas perfection, according to the Nyssenian, is a continuous and infinite growth in virtue. Thus, the perfection of virtue is not having an end (see *Vit. Moys.* 1.5–7).

However, the question remains as to whether Paul's race will reach its successful end, that is, whether the perfect Christian can comprehend the Divine Essence. If God is infinite, then gaining knowledge of him should also continue infinitely. According to Mühlenberg, such an understanding of infinity will not be found in Clement of Alexandria. Indeed, in his monograph on Gregory's notion of the infinity of God, he concludes the chapter discussing Clement's thought by stating: "A direct dependence of Gregory on Clement does not make sense to me, since Gregory unquestionably assumes that ἄπειρον contentually encompasses ἀδιείρητον and thus the *progressus in infinitum!*" (Mühlenberg 1966, 76) Mühlenberg, however, in discussing the theses of the Alexandrian thinker, focused only on the concept of the infinity of incorporeal being. This type of reflection also appears in Gregory of Nyssa, as already shown above. However, he did not examine Clement's assertions regarding the Gnostic process of getting to know God and assimilating to him. Meanwhile, Clement, after having expounded on the method of abstraction, named afterwards as *via negationis*, that is, purifying the notion of God from all physical connotations, adds (*Strom.* 5.71.3–4; translation by the author):

If, then, having abandoned everything that belongs to bodies and things called incorporeal, we throw ourselves into the magnitude of Christ (εἰς τὸ μέγεθος τοῦ Χριστοῦ) and from there we advance by sanctity into the abyss (εἰς τὸ ἀχανές), we would then move somehow towards an understanding of the Omnipotent, having become acquainted not with what he is, but with what he is not. And shape and motion, or state, or a throne, or place, or right side, or left side, are not at all to be conceived as belonging to the Father of the universe, although it is so written.

Having purified the notion of God from all categories proper to physical entities, and having thus achieved a notion of unity devoid of all corporeality, dimension, and position (see *Strom.* 5.71.2), Clement points to another way of getting knowledge of God. It is no longer the *via negationis*, but getting to know the magnitude (μέγεθος) of the Wisdom of God, who is Christ. This process is likened to traversing the abyss (ἀχανές), that is, something boundless. Let us remember that the term ἀχανές also occurs in Gregory's text given above (*Eun.* 1.364: GNO 1, 134,19), where the nature of God is compared to a boundless ocean (πέλαγος ἀχανές). Moreover, the thinker himself resorts to a similar metaphor when he mentions Paul's mystical experience of being raptured to the third heaven. According to Clement, the third heaven was not the end of the Apostle's intellectual journey. The third heaven is only the beginning, because beyond it stretches the inscrutable depths of wisdom and knowledge of God, which is compared precisely to the infinite ocean (ὠκεανὸς ἀπέραντος) (*Strom.* 5.80.1–3). It is for this reason, according to Clement, that Paul exclaims: "Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!" (Rom 11:33). It should be noted,

however, that his metaphor no longer includes the term ἀχανές, which can also be translated as “vast” or “immense” but ἀπέραντος, which means “boundless” or “infinite.” Furthermore, referring to the passage in the *Prologue* of the Gospel of John that speaks of “the only-begotten God, who is in the bosom of the Father” (John 1:18), the Alexandrian thinker notes that “some have called this bosom the depth (βυθός), as containing and embosoming all things.” Consequently, Clement terms this Depth as “unreachable and infinite together (ἀνέφικτόν τε καὶ ἀπέραντον).” (*Strom.* 5.81.3–4)

Nevertheless, the infinity of divine wisdom is expressed by Clement not only through the metaphors of the boundless and immeasurable ocean, the abyss, or the depth, but also through specific technical terms that had appeared in Greek philosophy in relation to the notion of the infinite. Well, in one of his definitions, Aristotle states that the infinite is that which can be traversed, although the process of traversing it can never be brought to an end (τὸ διέξοδον ἔχον ἀτελεύτητον) (see *Phys.* 204a 2–7). According to the Stagirite, an infinite being, that is, one the traversing of which never reaches an end, does not exist. According to Clement, such a being is precisely the divine Logos. God, as we have seen above, is infinite because of his incorporeality and simplicity. This kind of infinity Clement connects, not with the issue of being incorporeal, but with the question of the absolute absence of dimension, of parts, and therefore of limits. The divine Logos is also incorporeal and therefore also has no dimension. However, since he is “wisdom, knowledge, truth and everything that has affinity with it,” the Logos has διέξοδον, which means that he is capable of being intellectually traversed (see *Strom.* 6.156.1). But since the Ideas and Powers of God, which exist in Him as a unity, are infinite, getting to know Him, or traversing Him intellectually, can never be brought to an end. “For in Him,” Clement states, “the end becomes a beginning and this in turn ends in a beginning again, never having any interruption (τὸ τέλος ἀρχὴ γίνεται καὶ τελευτᾶ πάλιν ἐπὶ τὴν ἄνωθεν ἀρχήν, οὐδαμοῦ διάστασιν λαβών).” (*Strom.* 6.157.1–2)²³

The traversing, and thus the getting to know, of the infinite Wisdom of God by finite creatures is possible only through the grace of God (see *Strom.* 5.82.4). It is interesting to note that this grace, which God grants to souls progressing in

²³ The statement we have quoted here is part of Clement’s more extensive discourse on the Logos, which begins with the following words: “The Son does not become one as one, nor even many as [divided] parts, but one as all [things].” (*Strom.* 6.156.2) In this regard, Choufrine rightly notes that “Here Clement contrasts the ‘one as all [things]’ (which he elsewhere identifies with the monad) with the ‘one as one’ and the ‘many as [divided] parts.’ He does not give any reason for bringing together the three concepts. What might all three have in common? Interestingly, the three notions of infinity one finds in the *Parmenides* are precisely those; the one as one (the First Hypothesis; *Parm.* 137c), the one as many (the Second Hypothesis; *Parm.* 143a), and the many as many (the Fourth; *Parm.* 158c, and the Eighth Hypotheses; *Parm.* 165b–c). Clement thus seems to assume that the audience he addresses knows the *Parmenides* well enough to understand his belief that the infinity of the monad is to be construed in terms not of the First, Fourth or Eighth, but of the Second Hypothesis. Another conclusion one may draw is that for Clement there are two grades of infinity in God (corresponding to the monad and ‘the One’), the difference between which is technical enough for him to inscribe them without reservations into Plato’s scheme.” (Choufrine 2002, 174)

faith and holiness, is also infinite. However, it is received by them in a finite way, that is to say, according to the measure in which each of them can receive it. This is why Clement asserts that the Holy Spirit spreads in the believing soul in an infinite manner (ἀπεριγράφως), although according to the limit of each (κατὰ τὴν ἐκάστου περιγραφὴν) (see *Strom.* 6.120.2).²⁴ The soul, which is finite by nature, can, however, expand its boundaries as it advances in the assimilation to God. It is for this reason that the Alexandrian theologian states that the perfect Gnostic becomes more and more spiritual (πνευματικός) through a continual growth in faith, virtue, and knowledge, but also through the omnipotent power of God and the infinite love that unites him to the spirit (διὰ τῆς ἀόριστου ἀγάπης ἦνωται τῷ πνεύματι) (see *Strom.* 7.44.5–6). Thus, the intellectual and moral effort of the Gnostic in the spiritual process, but also the action of divine grace and infinite (ἀόριστος) love, expands the boundaries of the human soul, assimilating it (though never completely) to God. The human assimilation to God must never be completed, because God and His Wisdom are infinite. This does not mean, however, that we are dealing with some imperfection, although this is how many Greek philosophers conceived the infinite. Thus, fully aware of this, Clement emphasizes that getting to know God, in which the Gnostic participates, “aims at a goal that is infinite but perfect (πρὸς τέλος ἀγει τὸ ἀτελεύτητον καὶ τέλειον).” (*Strom.* 7.56.3; cf. *Strom.* 2.134.1–2; Choufrine 2002, 178–86) Let us recall that the term ἀτελεύτητος, employed by Clement, is found in one of Aristotle’s definitions of infinity, referred to above (*Phys.* 204a 5). It is also worth noting that, for the Stagirite, “what has no end cannot be perfect; and the end is the limit (τέλειον δ’ οὐδὲν μὴ ἔχον τέλος, τὸ δὲ τέλος πέρας).” (*Phys.* 207a 14) By contrast, according to the Alexandrian thinker, as later for the Nyssean, it is God who is an infinite but perfect being.²⁵ Similarly, human assimilation to God is also infinite but perfect.²⁶

²⁴ We find the same thought in Gregory of Nyssa. He also believes that getting to know the infinite God is possible only through grace, which he compares to spiritual nourishment. This super-abundant nourishment is received according to the measure of the recipient, but at the same time receiving it expands the boundaries of the recipient, so that the latter is able and desires to receive it more and more. The abundance of nourishing food, in turn, increases as the capacity of the recipient expands (see *An. et res.*: GNO 3/3, 77–79; *Beat.* 5: GNO 7/2, 122–23).

²⁵ Let us emphasize here that Gregory of Nyssa very often employs the term ἀτελεύτητος when referring to God. In *Contra Eunomium*, he even explains why God must be referred to, as ἀτελεύτητος (*Eun.* 1.669–670: GNO 1, 218,22–219,7): “Holding such a concept of him as befitting the God of the universe, we proclaim our thought by two titles, using ‘unbegotten’ (τῷ ἀγεννήτῳ) and ‘endless’ (τῷ ἀτελευτήτῳ) to express the infinity, perpetuity and eternity of the life of God. If only one of these were contemplated in the mind alone, and the other not referred to, then the meaning of the one would surely be impaired by the omission of the other. It is not possible to express correctly the meaning of either through just one of them: to say ‘endless’ is to show only the absence of any end, but tells one nothing about the beginning; to use the term ‘unbegun’ demonstrates that the object denoted is superior to a beginning, but leaves ambiguous the question of the end.”

²⁶ The process of the Gnostic’s assimilation to God and, at the same time, his road to perfection has various stages, which we have not analysed here, and which have been identified and described by Piotr

In concluding this part of our argument, we can claim that Mühlenberg's conviction that Gregory's direct dependence on Clement does not make sense, since Gregory assumes that the notion of infinity includes being non-traversable, and thus the *progressus in infinitum* is not correct. As we have demonstrated in the examples above, Clement utilizes technical terms that originated in Greek philosophy in the discussion of the notion of the infinite. These are terms such as ἀδιεξίτητος, διέξοδος, ἀτελεύτητος, τέλος, or τέλειος. By using them and drawing metaphors comparing the Wisdom of God to the impassable and infinite ocean (a metaphor also used by Gregory), the abyss, and the depth, Clement makes it clear that he also conceives of the infinite as something non-traversable. The implication of God's infinity conceived in such a way is the doctrine of the human assimilation to God. That this is an endless but perfect process, Clement states *expressis verbis*, and his statements constitute an obvious polemic against Aristotle's theses. This very polemic may have been the inspiration for Gregory of Nyssa's theory of *epektasis*. The latter, after all, also states *expressis verbis* that, as far as virtue is concerned, it can hardly be defined as perfection (τελειότης), since what is perfect cannot have an end (τέλος). Although it is true that Clement, in discussing the infinite, rarely uses the term ἄπειρος (perhaps because of its earlier negative connotations), he does use other terms with which to describe the infinity of God's Wisdom or the infinity of man's assimilation to God. Besides the Aristotelian technical terms mentioned above, several others occur in a similar context in Gregory of Nyssa, including ἀπέραντος, ἀόριστος, ἀχανές, ἀπερίγραφος, περιγραφή, ἀδιάστατος, or διάστασις.

Ashwin-Siejkowski (see 2008, 147–232). Furthermore, it is worth noting that Clement incorporates not only elements of Platonic or Middle Platonic philosophy but also Stoic philosophy into his doctrine. After all, the aim of man's assimilation to God is also *apatheia* understood, not only as freedom from all passions, but also as an unshakeable and perpetual abiding in the good and a perpetual contemplation, which even becomes the nature of the Gnostic. In fact, Clement states (*Strom.* 4.136.4–5): “For the exertion of the intellect by exercise is prolonged to a perpetual exertion (νοεῖν ἐκ συνασκήσεως εἰς τὸ αἰεὶ νοεῖν ἐκτείνεταί). And the perpetual exertion of the intellect is the essence of an intelligent being, which results from an uninterrupted (ἀδιάστατον) process of admixture, and remains eternal contemplation (αἰδιος θεωρία), a living substance (ζῶσα ὑπόστασις).” A little further on, Clement touches on the issue of the Gnostic's habit of doing good, and thus imitating the nature of the good itself and abiding in it (see *Strom.* 4.137.1–138.4).

Similar Platonic and Stoic elements are found in Gregory of Nyssa's doctrine of human assimilation to God. Although the Nyssean often speaks of continual growth in virtue and at the same time of running towards the goal, which is God, he notes that this effort and running is paradoxically standing still and motionless: “This is the most marvelous thing of all: how the same thing is both a standing still and a moving. For he who ascends certainly does not stand still, and he who stands still does not move upwards. But here the ascent takes place by means of the standing. I mean by this that the firmer and more immovable one remains in the Good, the more he progresses in the course of virtue.” (*Vit. Moys.* 2.243: GNO 7/1, 118,3–8)

5. Conclusions

Both Clement of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa, in opposition to Platonic-Aristotelian ontology, postulate the infinity of incorporeal being. In their writings, apart from technical terms indicating infinity, we find the term ἀδιάστατον, which, prior to Clement, was not used in the context of the notion of infinity. The incorporeal being is thus, according to them, infinite, but not in the sense of being non-traversable, but in the sense of absolute absence of dimension (διάστασις) and limit (πέρας).

Both Clement and Gregory discuss the issue of the infinite Good. While Gregory explicitly states that the Good that is God is infinite, Clement, although he does not use the term ἄπειρον in this context, similarly postulates the immutability and inexhaustibility of God's eternal and beneficent activity. Nevertheless, the point is not merely infinite in the sense of temporality, for both thinkers unequivocally state that nothing can put a limit to the absolute Good. Although finite creatures receive the good flowing from God in a finite way, that is, according to the disposition of their finite nature, or even, turning away from the good, may do evil, no rebellion, no opposition, or disobedience can stop or stand in the way of God, whose nature is exclusively to do good.

According to both Clement and Gregory, God is Wisdom, or rather, he possesses Wisdom, which is his Logos. This Wisdom is also infinite. In this case, we are dealing with infinity, not in the sense of having no dimensions and therefore no limits, but in the sense of the superabundance of God's ideas, powers, and graces, which both authors compare to an immeasurable and boundless ocean or abyss. Even if the finite intellect is capable of traversing this divine Wisdom, though never by its own forces only but by God's grace, traversing it will never be completed. In this sense, according to both authors, God is infinite in terms of being non-traversable. Although the process of getting to know him and of man's assimilation to God, because of its infinite object, will never be complete, both authors emphasize that it should not be conceived of as something imperfect. The divine goodness, wisdom, and knowledge are also perfect, though infinite. After all, they are not related to some lack, but to an excess that cannot be encompassed or embraced by anything. Perfect, can also be the happiness of a human being who, at every stage of the process of assimilation to God, lacks nothing but, on the contrary, abounds in an excess of God's goods. Thus, the two authors, by stating that the infinite can be something perfect, are evidently repudiating the Platonic-Aristotelian ontology according to which what has no end cannot be perfect. Finally, let us add that, for both authors, the symbol of the perfect Christian is the Apostle Paul, who excels not in knowledge but in his continuous pursuit of getting to know the infinite God and never stops doing so.

Of course, Gregory of Nyssa's doctrine of the infinity of God is much more elaborate and features in many of his writings. Nevertheless, given the examples, metaphors, and terminology indicated in this article, we can conclude that the inspiration

for this doctrine was precisely the theses put forward by Clement of Alexandria in his polemic against Greek philosophy. These theses, however, were not something new on Judeo-Christian grounds. Earlier, the question of the infinity and unknowability of God had also appeared in Philo of Alexandria and, after Clement, in Origen of Alexandria.

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Ukrainian Religious Migration as a Challenge to Ecumenism in Poland

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Abstract: This article analyzes how military migration from Ukraine has changed the religious field in Poland. The author examines the impact of a large number of Ukrainian Christians of different denominations on the transformation of interchurch relations in Polish churches and their rethinking of confessional identity and pastoral approaches. The article examines the church environment of the three main denominations: Catholicism, Orthodoxy, and Protestantism. The research method used includes eleven semi-structured interviews with clergy and theologians of different denominations, as well as discourse analysis of church documents and media. As a result, new modes of ecumenical interaction have been identified: from institutional dialogue to practical concelebration and humanitarian cooperation. Military migration has become a catalyst for changes in Polish ecumenism from formal diplomacy to solidarity action. This experience demonstrates that in times of war, ecumenism ceases to be only a theological concept and becomes a tool for responding to social challenges.

Keywords: ecumenism, religious migration, Ukrainian churches in Poland, interchurch dialogue, war in Ukraine, religious field in Poland

The Revolution of Dignity in 2013 and the Russian–Ukrainian war caused certain shifts in the religious map of Ukraine. The most important consequence was the emergence of the autocephalous Orthodox Church of Ukraine (OCU) and the weakening of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church (UOC). This complicated the rules of the game in the Ukrainian market of religious services, affecting most of the market’s actors.

Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 forced many Ukrainian Churches to reconsider their role in society, often leading to more radical and politicized positions. Meanwhile, chaplaincy and the volunteer movement strengthened cooperation between Ukrainian Churches. The war also triggered an unprecedented wave of migration from Ukraine to Poland. Ukrainian migrants encountered a large number of humanitarian and spiritual needs, which almost all Polish Churches met. On the other hand, a number of Ukrainian Churches have expanded their activities on the territory of Poland. Together with the help of their compatriots, they transferred

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to Poland the ideas inherent in internal Ukrainian realities about their role in society, the way Churches are organized, spiritual practices, and lines of tension between the Churches.

Polish–Ukrainian relations have long been the subject of multidisciplinary research by both Ukrainian and Polish researchers. These studies were especially intensified in the context of two waves of migration from Ukraine: in 2014 and 2022. Researchers from the Ukrainian Catholic University, Olha Mikheeva and Viktor Susak (2019; 2023) studied the transformation of values, attitudes, and daily practices of Ukrainian migrants in Poland. In the context of state security issues, Ukrainian migration was studied by Dominika Liszkowska (2023). Separate studies have been conducted on the relations of Ukrainian migrants with religious communities of Wrocław (Lubicz Miszewski 2023), Kraków (Mróz 2023), and Chorzów (Śpiewak et al. 2023). Catholic minorities have also been the subject of ethnographic research. The Mioszowski Center has researched the mutual perception of neighbors (Wołosewycz and Boklan 2024; Mazurkiewicz and Sygnowski 2025).

Theological research forms a distinct strand within these studies. Several conferences of the Reconciliation in Europe Group have addressed reconciliation in Europe, with a particular focus on Polish–Ukrainian relations. Works by Oleksandr Dobroier (2024), Heorhii Kovalenko (2018), and Mykhailo Cherenkov (2017) discuss theological dialogue in Ukraine from various denominational perspectives. Recently, both Polish and Ukrainian researchers have focused on the issues of Ukrainian autocephaly (Bortnyk 2022; Blaza 2022; Kałużny 2019). Mateusz Jakub Tutak (2023) has dealt with the religiosity of Ukrainian migration as a challenge for the Church in Poland—from the point of view of the Roman Catholic Church (RCC).

This study examines Churches and church communities in Poland, representing three traditions: Catholic, Orthodox, and Evangelical. The problem considered is how the radical change in the religious landscape brought about by the war changes the Church's openness, the unity of the Church, and the practice of ecumenism in Poland. To examine this issue, the author has set himself these research goals: to find out how changes in the Ukrainian religious field affected the Polish religious environment due to the mass migration of Ukrainians; to analyze how Polish Churches and communities from various traditions have responded to this new situation, both in theological rhetoric and pastoral practice; and to identify new models of ecumenical interaction emerging in Poland as a result of these changes.

In order to achieve these goals, eleven semi-structured interviews were conducted with representatives of various religious communities. A detailed review of information on official websites and social media platforms of Churches and their communities was also conducted. The collected and analyzed data enabled assessing the changes that have occurred in Poland's religious field and describing the main challenges that have arisen for the Churches in Poland as a result of religious migration from Ukraine.

The collected material highlights issues of practical ecumenism in entirely new circumstances for Poland from various perspectives. These forms of cooperation complement common prayer and theological dialogue (Kantyka 2010, 189). However, this novelty should provide a new impetus for further theological research, since “a Catholic theologian should not be closed to understanding the faith of other confessions.” (Skierkowski 2007, 316)

Ecumenism today is important not only in the context of religious issues but also as a response to political and social challenges. Facing these challenges—both internal and external—religious dialogue becomes a tool for strengthening social stability. This work is another step toward understanding Polish–Ukrainian relations in a new, previously unexplored aspect.

1. Catholics

1.1. The Roman Catholic Church

The RCC in Poland, like other religious communities, immediately reacted to Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This reaction took place on several levels: formal, humanitarian, and pastoral.

On the very first day of the attack on Ukraine, February 24, 2022, the head of the Polish Bishops’ Conference, Archbishop Stanisław Gądecki, made a statement calling Russia’s attack on Ukraine a “shameful act of barbarity.” (Gądecki 2022) A week later, he wrote a letter to Patriarch Kirill, in which he called for influencing the Russian leadership to stop the war. He also asked the head of the Russian Orthodox Church (ROC) to influence the military and dissuade them from participating in war crimes.

In the first three weeks of the war, Roman Catholic parishes, monasteries, and Caritas centers assisted over 8,000 refugees and created over 2,000 places for them (Tasak 2023, 106–7).

Even we, in the Pallottine house in Lublin, received people from Ukraine for several months. They lived with us, ate breakfast with us at the same table. It was a very good human experience—ordinary closeness, without pathos. And it became important for us not only to help, but also not to insult their faith, their needs. (Pawłowski 2024, pers. comm.)

This practical experience of the Church has been reflected in a number of documents. In particular, it is worth mentioning here *Pro memoria dotyczące posług religijnych udzielanych wiernym z Kościołów i Wspólnot kościelnych niemających pełnej wspólnoty z Kościołem katolickim* [Pro memoria on religious services provided

to the faithful of Churches and ecclesial communities not in full communion with the Catholic Church], prepared by the Council for Ecumenism together with the Legal Council of the Polish Bishops' Conference already in March 2022 (KEP 2022). The document essentially repeated the main principles of the Catholic Church's attitude toward non-Catholic Christians (Pawłowski 2022). It does not contain any dogmatic formulations. Instead, it is more of a reference book for the Catholic clergy. However, its principal value lies in its practical dimension. For many Polish Christians, including priests, ecumenism was something very theoretical until recently. However, with the influx of a large number of refugees from Ukraine (Orthodox, Protestants), these norms acquired a concrete application and were adapted to the context of the war.¹

The document has a distinct pastoral direction. Its main principle is to ensure that all Christians have a source of grace during difficult times in their lives. However, the authors of the document clearly state that the Catholic Church must provide assistance to the faithful of other Churches, "respecting their confessional identity and ecclesiastical affiliation." As the document states, "the administration of the Sacrament or other religious services to baptized non-Catholics does not lead to a change in their faith, and such a situation should not be used for actions that would have signs of proselytism." (KEP 2022, no. 3)

A significant part of the document focuses on Orthodox Christians, as they have constituted and continue to constitute a substantial portion of the refugees. Under certain conditions, a Catholic priest is allowed to administer communion to an Orthodox Christian, after making sure that the latter has asked for the sacrament consciously, and not as a result of confusion or ignorance (KEP 2022, no. 4). It is also permitted in some instances to baptize a child of Orthodox Christians (at their request), which does not mean that this child becomes a Catholic (KEP 2022, no. 6).

The document pays special attention to the permission to use temples, chapels, and objects of worship. The Polish Orthodox Church considered such a position to be interference in the internal affairs of Orthodoxy. It was the practice of providing premises for worship by the RCC to priests of the OCU, as well as the misunderstanding of the fact of the ban by the Ukrainian authorities of the UOC, which led to a certain crisis in relations between the RCC in Poland and the Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church (PAOC). In November 2023, the work of the Catholic-Orthodox bilateral group was even suspended (Pawłowski 2022, 161-64). Through the efforts of the co-chairs of the Commission, Catholic Bishop Adam Bab and Orthodox

¹ "The war in Ukraine has made the issue of ecumenism relevant, calling for cooperation between the Churches," said Bishop Krzysztof Nitkiewicz, former chairman of the Council for Ecumenism of the Polish Bishops' Conference, in an interview with the Catholic Information Agency. Cf. Bieliński 2023.

Bishop Abel, it was possible to find an understanding quite quickly and resume the work of the group. Bishop Bab explained to the journal *Więź*:

We treated Orthodox people kindly, without even asking which Church they belonged to—whether autocephalous or affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate. However, the Orthodox side made this distinction and suggested that we should take into account their canonical assessment of the situation. In their view, the autocephalous Church is in fact not a canonical Church; they have reservations about the very procedure of proclaiming autocephaly and even about the validity of ordinations. From the canonical point of view, this is not our concern. We were simply guided by the necessity of helping those in need, without analyzing their church affiliation. Here we were motivated simply by love of neighbor, not by the canons. (*Polscy prawosławni* 2023)

So the Polish Bishops' Conference did not make a generally binding decision on the provision of churches for the service of the OCU, but left it to the discretion of local bishops. Sławomir Pawłowski, believes that providing for such an ambiguity is the only way to show that the RCC does not interfere in the affairs of Orthodoxy:

We take such a middle position. On the one hand, we must hear what the Orthodox side, which is in Poland, says, because they are our ecumenical partner. On the other hand, we also have a certain freedom of our own, and we do not want to get involved in an internal Orthodox dispute at all. This is the official position. We do not interfere, but this does not mean that we refuse hospitality. (Pawłowski 2024, pers. comm.)

Pro memoria also provides for certain conditions under which Catholic ministers can administer the sacraments to members of Protestant communities. Such conditions include belief in the absolution of sins in confession, the real presence of Christ in the Eucharist, and the special grace that is the sacrament of anointing of the sick (Pawłowski 2022, 168). The document pays attention to the correct naming of religious groups. It avoids some theological issues (e.g., the continuity of apostolic ministry, the validity of the sacraments in non-Orthodox communities). This is explained precisely by the pastoral nature of the document (Pawłowski 2022, 171–72). *Pro memoria* reflected a new theological balance. It demonstrated openness to practical ecumenism without the threat of losing Catholic identity on the one hand and the temptation of proselytism on the other.

Since the mid-2010s, the Mass in Ukrainian has been introduced in some churches in Poland (Tokarz 2025). With the beginning of the full-scale invasion and the influx of refugees, such offers appeared in many cities in Poland. These services became regular, although on average, they involved several dozen people.²

² For example, in Lublin, where there is a large community of Ukrainian students and immigrants, Sunday Mass is in Ukrainian at the Dominican Fathers and in the academic church of the Catholic University of

Thus, it can be assumed that for most Ukrainian Roman Catholics in Poland, language is not the main feature of their religious identity. Recent experience shows that many believers easily integrate into Polish-language liturgical practices without perceiving this as a loss of their Catholic identity. At the same time, the regular holding of services in Ukrainian indicates that for some of the faithful, this factor retains symbolic and pastoral significance, especially in the context of forced migration and war. Thus, the role of language can be described as an additional but not decisive element of religious identity, the importance of which may vary depending on the specific community and personal circumstances of believers.

1.2. The Greek Catholic Church

The Greek Catholic Church has long been a bastion of Ukrainian identity in Poland. The linguistic marker has been important for Greek Catholic communities. Religious services here were and are held only in Ukrainian. The Church has always maintained ties with Ukraine. Since prewar times, part of the Ukrainian labor migration lived “in two countries.” Bishops of the Greek Catholic Church in Poland participate in the Synods of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church (UGCC). In Poland, the Greek Catholic Church has systematically carried out various initiatives for many years, contributing to the cohesion of Ukrainian youth and the preservation of their national identity. It is worth mentioning, at the very least, the activities of the youth movement “Sarepta” or the Foundation for Spiritual Culture of the Borderlands.

Therefore, it is quite natural that with the beginning of the full-scale invasion, Greek Catholic communities in Poland became, in a certain sense, landmarks and first points of assistance for many Ukrainians who found themselves in Poland. These were places where Ukrainians could not only pray but also find various forms of assistance, including information, humanitarian aid, and legal support. Greek Catholic communities became centers for people who are ready to integrate into Polish society, respect its culture and social norms, but do not want to assimilate. It is crucial for them to preserve their Ukrainian culture and identity.

The Greek Catholic Church in Poland is taking steps to make itself more accessible to Polish society, as well as to partners in ecumenical dialogue. One of such initiatives was the publication of the Catechism of the UGCC in Polish.

Today, there is still no reliable data on the growth of the Greek Catholic Church in Poland since 2022. However, by observing the lives of these communities and analyzing other data, we can confidently say that this growth has occurred multiple times (Batruch 2024). Some “fading” parishes have been given new life. In many places, new parishes have also emerged (Ukrainska Hreko-Katolytska Tserkva 2025).

Lublin. In total, fewer than 100 people come to these Masses in both churches.

The Greek Catholic Church in Poland occupies a special position. On the one hand, it is neither a competitor nor a partner in the ecumenism of the RCC (because it is too small for that). On the other hand, it is constantly criticized by the Orthodox. Therefore, it occupies a relatively small niche. Nevertheless, it has a close-knit and loyal following. It mediates between the dominant Roman Catholicism and the communities of the Byzantine tradition. It also combines the Catholic identity with the liturgical identity of the Orthodox Churches, which are represented in Poland by the PAOC and the OCU.

2. Orthodoxy

Ukrainian migration has had a significant impact on the Orthodox community in Poland. There are several reasons for this. First, Orthodoxy is the dominant Christian denomination in Ukraine, with 72% of the population identifying themselves as members of this Church (KMIS 2022). In Poland, approximately 1% of the population identifies as Orthodox (GUS 2022). Second, Orthodoxy has never been homogeneous in Ukraine, unlike in Poland. Without delving into the lengthy and complex history of Orthodoxy in modern Ukraine, let us note that at the outset of Russia's full-scale war against Ukraine, two primary Churches in the country represented this denomination: the UOC and the OCU.

2.1. The Ukrainian Orthodox Church

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, it was only the UOC that was recognized as canonical by the whole world. Until the events of the Revolution of Dignity and the beginning of the Russian war against Ukraine in 2014, it held a dominant position in Ukrainian Orthodoxy. This Church maintained close ties with the ROC and, in fact, had a privileged status. It also maintained close ties with the authorities, especially during the presidency of Viktor Yanukovich.

With Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the situation of the UOC within the country became very complicated. Communication with Moscow was interrupted, but the declaration of independence in the form of autocephaly was not implemented. It was decided that this situation would not change until the war was over (cf. Blaza 2022, 23–24). However, there was a strong association of the UOC with Moscow in society, reinforced by the media. Finally, on August 20, 2024, the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine adopted Law No. 8371 On Amendments to Certain Laws of Ukraine Regarding the Activities of Religious Organizations in Ukraine. On August 24, 2024, it was signed by the President of Ukraine. The law imposed restrictions on the activities of religious organizations in Ukraine whose headquarters

are located in a country carrying out aggression against Ukraine. The law was specifically directed against religious organizations affiliated with the ROC. Although no organization was named, the context of the law's adoption indicated that it was aimed at the UOC.

This is especially true of the sharp anti-Ukrainian rhetoric employed by certain UOC public figures between 2018 and 2022. Such a disrespectful attitude toward the state in the current geopolitical situation affects—though indirectly—the reputation of the PAOC precisely because of its long-standing ties with the UOC.

Priests of the UOC are permitted to serve together with priests of the Polish Church. However, the practice of accepting Ukrainian priests into the staff remains extremely limited. They are mostly outside the staff of the PAOC and only join in the service on Sundays and holidays.

2.2. The Orthodox Church of Ukraine

The issue of Ukrainian autocephaly, both in history and in modern times, has never been only canonical but has always been political (Kałużny 2019; Dobroyer 2019). Moscow has always viewed Ukrainian Orthodoxy as its branch. The fear of losing Ukraine had quite measurable indicators. Having lost influence over the UOC, the Russian Church would have lost about 30% of its structure (almost a third of parishes and clergy). At the same time, this would have meant for Moscow the loss of the main support of the “Russian world.” It would also have lost the right to speak on behalf of “all Eastern Slavs.” Since 2004, the Ecumenical Patriarchate has taken a number of active steps aimed at granting autocephaly to Ukraine. After 2014, they took place against the backdrop of increasing sanctions pressure and the isolation of Russia. A number of prominent American and European politicians have spoken out in support of granting autocephaly to Ukraine.

As a result, on January 5, 2019, Patriarch Bartholomew granted the Tomos to the OCU. Thus, an autocephalous Church was established in Ukraine. However, this process did not lead to the creation of a single Orthodox Church in Ukraine. None of these Churches is recognized today by the entire Orthodox world. Some Orthodox Churches (mainly from the Greek world) recognize only the OCU, while others (including the ROC and the PAOC) recognize only the UOC. Some Churches recognize both Orthodox Churches on the territory of Ukraine as legitimate (Blaza 2022, 27). This ambiguous situation, due to the large number of Ukrainian Orthodox refugees, was “imported” into Poland and significantly affects ecumenical relations in the country.

According to the Tomos, the OCU is not permitted to create parishes outside of Ukraine. However, on October 18, 2022, the Synod of the Church, guided by pastoral intentions, created a Chaplaincy Mission to provide spiritual services and assistance to Ukrainian refugees. The pastoral care and coordination of the mission in Poland

was entrusted to Metropolitan Hilarion of Rivne and Ostroh. Today, such missions operate in many Polish cities, including Warsaw, Gdańsk, Wrocław, and Katowice.

In Poland, the OCU branches do not use state registration. They operate mainly as unregistered communities or as public organizations. In most cases, the places for worship services are provided to the priests of the OCU by the RCC. This is precisely what has become a reason for strained relations between the Catholic and Orthodox Churches in Poland. In some cases (such as in Wrocław), the premises are provided by the city authorities.

As the OCU priests explain, they are in Poland to “take care of the faithful who are here, and there are a lot of them here, much more than the faithful of the Polish Orthodox Church.” Despite the protests of the PAOC, the missions continue to operate. The main arguments against the OCU from the Polish Church are the non-recognition of the canonical status of the OCU and the creation of parallel structures on the territory of another autocephalous Church. At the same time, the OCU authorities do not see a problem in their Church’s canonical status, understanding it as part of the universal Church. In matters of canonicity, they follow the logic emphasized by one of the interlocutors:

If you recognize [the existence of the OCU—O.D.], there are no questions, yes, of course, then we are ready to act within canonical norms. If you do not recognize..., what non-canonicity are we talking about?... There is no recognition, there is no non-canonicity.... We are forced to take care of our faithful, we cannot abandon them. (Sergienko 2024, pers. comm.)

Such a position of the OCU does not formally deny the importance of canonical structures. However, it emphasizes pastoral needs and puts its own ecclesiological legitimacy first. In the relations between the OCU and the UGCC in Poland, one can observe the parallel presence and even a certain level of competition. In a certain sense, such a situation reflects the relation between these Churches in Ukraine itself. Although the conversations highlight the existence of diplomatic relations between the pastors of these communities, the author’s observation suggests that these relations are somewhat distant. As for the laity, the vast majority have their own specific ecclesial identity (Orthodox or Greek Catholic) according to which they attend the respective religious services. However, there is a small number of those who “go to both us and the Greek Catholics.... They say: we want your singing, your tradition.” (Revtov 2024, pers. comm.) In this case, parishioners primarily choose between these communities based on the “style of church life,” which encompasses the language, nature of the liturgy, and pastoral approach.

2.3. The Polish Autocephalous Orthodox Church

Orthodoxy is traditionally represented in Poland by the PAOC (Mironowicz 1999). Most of its parishioners have historically come from Belarusian and Ukrainian families. The PAOC has been and remains a recognized yet peripheral actor in the religious field. For decades, it has enjoyed limited but genuine historical and cultural capital in Polish society. It strengthens symbolic legitimacy through institutional cooperation with other religious minorities within the framework of the Polish Ecu-
menical Council. In the Polish religious life, it plays the role of a “keeper of tradition.”

The “Ukrainian question” reappeared for the PAOC in the context of granting autocephaly to Ukrainian Orthodoxy. On May 9, 2018, the Synod of Bishops of the PAOC issued a communiqué, which, in response to a letter from the Primate of the UOC, Metropolitan Onufriy, noted that “the church-canonical life of the Orthodox Church must be based on principles that are grounded in the dogmatic-canonical teaching of the Orthodox Church. Violation of this principle introduces chaos into the life of the Orthodox Church.” (PAKP 2018a) While this message remained formally neutral, in the broader context of the confrontation between Moscow and Constantinople, it indicated that the PAOC leans more toward the pro-Moscow position.

Notably, the same communiqué reported that the Synod had information from Patriarch Kirill of Moscow “on the inclusion in the catalog of holy new martyrs and confessors” and approved the decision “to include their names in the diptych of saints of the PAOC.” (PAKP 2018a) Since the accession of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad to the ROC in 2007, the Russian Church has included in its diptychs many figures representative of the spiritual revival of the “Russian world.” (Dobroyer 2010; cf. Szabaciuk 2022) Although the communiqué does not mention specific saints, the very inclusion of martyrs glorified by Moscow, rather than Constantinople, in the diptychs affirms, in a certain sense, the sacred memory of the “Russian Golgotha” of the 20th century as the core of the common identity of Orthodox Christians in the post-Soviet space. This legitimizes the ecclesial hegemony of the ROC through the “spread of holiness” from Moscow and reinforces the symbolic “church map” of the “Russian world” in Poland.

The issue of Ukrainian autocephaly was then subsequently considered by the Council of Bishops of the PAOC several more times: in November 2018, and in April and October 2019 (PAKP 2018b; 2019a; 2019b). In these discussions, the same points were reiterated: The PAOC does not oppose granting autocephaly to the Ukrainian Church, but the process must involve all Orthodox Churches, adhere to dogmatic and canonical norms, exclude those deprived of episcopal and priestly ordinations, and prohibit the clergy of the PAOC from entering into liturgical and prayerful contact with the “clergy” of the “Autocephalous Church.” These arguments closely mirror those of the Moscow Patriarchate.

With the beginning of Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Council of Bishops of the PAOC sharply condemned the military actions against Ukraine, appealed to the secular authorities of Russia for a ceasefire, and urged Patriarch Kirill to assist in this effort. Despite the apparent change in tone, the unequivocal condemnation of the war, and the expression of support for Ukraine, some elements in the letter are interpreted differently by various actors in ecclesial life. For instance, calling the war "fratricidal," according to the authors, refers to the Cain and Abel story. However, for Ukrainians, this term echoes post-Soviet rhetoric—which is considered utterly unacceptable in Ukraine today—and recalls the Soviet euphemism of "fraternal peoples." (PAKP 2022)

The condemnation of the "criminal invasion of the Russian Federation into the territory of independent Ukraine" once again appeared in the letter from Metropolitan Sava, when he had to explain his inappropriately courteous greeting to Patriarch Kirill on the 14th anniversary of his enthronement in February 2023. The hierarch explained that he had not taken into account the "difficult geopolitical situation." (PAKP 2023)

Nonetheless, it should be noted that over the past 10 years, the PAOC has gone from cautious concern to outright condemnation of the war. Although this anti-war stance remains without specific geopolitical assessments, it indicates a shift in attitude toward the events in the neighboring country and the Church.

Religious services in the PAOC are held mainly in Old Church Slavonic, sometimes in Polish. In some parishes, elements of the Ukrainian language are introduced (during sermons, singing, and some parts of the liturgy). A significant part of Ukrainian parishioners who attend PAOC churches are assimilated or do not show a strict linguistic or confessional identity. The faithful of all Orthodox jurisdictions of Ukraine can receive the sacraments in the PAOC. At the same time, the position regarding the clergy of the OCU remains unchanged: The Polish Church does not recognize it. The clergy of the OCU can receive the sacraments of the PAOC, as well as all secular Orthodox believers.

Historically, after the collapse of the USSR, the entire Orthodox world accepted the UOC as the only possible Ukrainian Orthodoxy. Therefore, for years, the Orthodox world, including the PAOC, looked at religious life in Ukraine through the prism of the ROC and the UOC affiliated with it. There were no contacts with other Church structures, and they were practically ignored. According to the Polish Orthodox priest Łukasz Leonkiewicz, "We ... the last few years, ... have not been on this topic, it is a bit foreign to us.... I understand that this is mostly a Ukrainian problem in Ukraine." (Leonkiewicz 2024, pers. comm.) Among the issues that authors and pastors have overlooked is the importance of Ukrainian national identity in Ukrainian church life. Father Leonkiewicz comments on this point, "It is clear that we do not yet understand each other. But in general, I believe that establishing relations, even very cautious ones at first, is the beginning of any dialogue. Therefore, I believe that

it is a plus that we are finally starting to get to know each other.” (Leonkiewicz 2024, pers. comm.)

The presence of a large group of Orthodox Ukrainian migrants is a challenge for the PAOC, since their total number is equal to or exceeds the number of faithful in the Polish Church. The cautious and slow opening of the PAOC to the needs of the Ukrainian community is also due to the need to protect the Church’s identity. Even if there are fewer truly active parishioners among Ukrainian refugees than those who identify themselves as Orthodox, this is still a reasonably large number of people. Some of them will adapt to the Polish Church. Still, some will likely seek a “Ukrainian” Church, and the OCU in Poland will serve as an alternative.

3. Evangelical Christians

3.1. Baptists

From the very beginning of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Baptists in Poland, like other communities, were involved in helping Ukrainian refugees. For example, 85 out of 110 congregations of the Council of Christian Baptist Churches of the Polish Republic had refugee reception centers. The arrival of people from Ukraine, most of whom were either Orthodox or had not previously encountered religion, required Baptist ministers and volunteers to learn to navigate new realities. According to Marek Głodek, “So this united us as Christians who go to help not only materially but also spiritually.... And at the same time, it showed, from the point of view of Christian theology, the picture of this Kingdom of God as the people of God from different nations, cultures, and languages.” (Głodek 2025, pers. comm.) Understanding that they had people from different backgrounds under their care, who were to some extent dependent on the people who hosted them, Polish Baptists did not demand that Ukrainian refugees reevaluate their lives or did not encourage them, for instance, to become Baptists: “We did not do this and did not offer this to our coordinators or the communities we worked with. Rather, these people attended services at Orthodox churches, if there were any, and it did not bother them. We did not exert such pressure, and I think this is ecumenism in practice.” (Głodek 2025, pers. comm.)

Speaking about the differences in structure, customs, and liturgical practices between Ukrainian and Polish Baptists, a few notable distinctions are worth mentioning. In Polish churches, congregationalism is well-developed, and decisions are made by the congregation council or the General Assembly (Conference). In the Ukrainian tradition, there is a hierarchical structure in communities. Often, the pastor is the person who makes all decisions. There are very clearly defined roles for deacons. This organizational structure is usually more straightforward. To this day, in Baptist

churches in Ukrainian communities in Poland, leadership is concentrated in one or two individuals, whereas in Polish churches it is typically vested in a church council elected from among the members. This presents a challenge because Ukrainians in Polish churches expect the pastor to have all the information and to make decisions on the spot. In contrast, in the Polish tradition, decision-making rests with the council (Głodek 2025).

Additionally, Polish Baptist meetings typically include wine during the Lord's Supper. However, the consumption of wine by Polish parishioners is often frowned upon by Ukrainian parishioners and sometimes even considered tantamount to being unbelievers. Certain internal rules also distinguish Baptists of both nations. For example, in the Polish tradition, either during the service or after, when getting to know each other, men shake hands with women in greeting. Therefore, women in Polish churches do not feel discriminated against or left out. According to the testimony of the interlocutors, Ukrainian men do not shake hands with women, do not greet women at all, and sometimes do not even pay attention to them. When Polish men greet community members, they shake hands with women first, and Ukrainian women often "read" this as courtship.

In Ukrainian congregations, there is a tradition of married women covering their heads. In Polish congregations, this discussion took place more than 20 years ago, and today it is a matter of personal preference, although it is not often practiced. The practice of bowing during prayers is also relevant in Ukrainian and some Polish conservative congregations, but it is almost nonexistent among Polish churchgoers.

Sometimes disputes arise regarding which language to use during worship services—Russian or Ukrainian. For example, one of the Warsaw churches, which previously used Russian, changed to Ukrainian last year. Sometimes, the service is conducted in a mix of Russian and Ukrainian, with one song in each language. This involves considering the interests of individuals who speak Ukrainian or Russian on a daily basis. Quite often, communities seek to understand and include both groups in their services. It is worth noting that Russian-speaking people are not only Russians or Russian-speaking Ukrainians. These individuals, also from Moldova or Belarus, have migrated to Poland over the past decade in several waves of economic and political migration.

However, at this time, new churches were also emerging, consisting of refugees themselves. An example of such a congregation is the Church "Svitlo Yevangelia" ("Light of the Gospel") in Kraków. It owes its origin to Oleh Shaykevich, the Baptist pastor of the Church "Skynia" in Odessa. However, establishing a Church was not his immediate goal. The start of the full-scale invasion caught him abroad. Having received permission from his Church, he began working on the border with Ukraine, in Chełm. Kraków was chosen as the hub city due to its logistical convenience. There were also several partner Churches that helped in the first days of the evacuation (Shaykevich 2025).

Before the start of the full-scale invasion, Shaykevich was unaware of Polish Churches. However, he quickly got to know them and they offered help (e.g., Pastor Maciej Wilkosz founder of the Voice of the Persecuted Society or the First Baptist Christian Assembly in Kraków). By the way, the subdomain of this Church's website contains a link to the "Light of the Gospel" Church.³

According to Głodek, institutional ecumenism has lost its former meaning today. At the same time, the pastor sees great sense in ecumenism at the community level, where the success of ecumenical activities depends on the personality of local leaders and their environment. He calls such ecumenism more personal, based on personal faith in Christ, than the one that has an institutional dimension. In his opinion, it is this kind of ecumenism that will survive in the future, as opposed to the institutional one, which he believes is somewhat politicized.

There is also a noticeable difference between Polish and Ukrainian traditions in their attitudes toward cooperation with other Churches. In Poland, communities are small, so to organize events or initiatives, they often need to unite with other denominations. In contrast, Ukrainian Baptist communities in Ukraine are usually large and accustomed to relying on their own resources. They bring this experience of self-sufficiency with them to Poland.

3.2. Pentecostals

Like Baptists, Pentecostal communities have developed several strategies for involving Ukrainian believers. One such example is the Pentecostal Church "Bethany," which has been in Katowice for many years. Religious services are held in Polish, but Ukrainian believers now have the option of translation into Ukrainian. The second strategy involves establishing a Ukrainian community adjacent to the existing Church. For example, in Olsztyn, the Ukrainian community "God's Love" was established next to the Church "Your Harbor" in 2022. Other communities, such as the Church "New Hope" in Katowice, have services in Ukrainian and Russian, and run their social networks in both Ukrainian and Russian.

It should be noted that the issue of language—which, among other things, distinguishes Pentecostals from the Orthodox OCU or Greek Catholics—is not paramount or equally fundamental. The leaders of such churches try to avoid radicalism in matters of language. Evangelical identity is of decisive importance here, compared to ethnic identity: "We understand that the problem is not in the Russian language, the problem is in ideology. And the problem is that Russians, like Russia, also need Christ. If we are divided on issues of language, then when will we end up?" (Radchenko 2025, pers. comm.)

³ See <https://baptysci-krakow.pl/ua/>.

Differences in customs and service forms are minor, but they do exist. For instance, in Polish Pentecostal communities, wine is allowed during the Lord's Supper. Among Ukrainian Pentecostals, there is a strict ban on alcohol. Regarding other differences (such as whether to cover one's head or not), there is tolerance.

Considering that in our Church there are people from different regions of Ukraine, from different countries, from different confessions, we do not impose prohibitions such as making it mandatory to cover one's head, wear pants or a skirt. We do not set boundaries. We strive to maintain a balance, and our stance is that if you choose to cover your head, do not judge those who do not. If you do not cover your head, do not judge others. If you judge, then repent and live on. (Radchenko 2025, pers. comm.)

The history of the Church "Word of Faith" is an example of another strategy for the development of Pentecostalism in Poland, with the participation of Ukrainian migrants. It was founded about 10 years ago, initially in Warsaw. It was then that Pastor Oleksandr Demyanenko, from Western Ukraine, began to come to Poland at the request of Ukrainian Pentecostal migrant workers. Later, he moved to Poland, where he founded the Church "Word of Faith." Today, there are approximately two dozen Ukrainian Pentecostal "Word of Faith" churches in the country, most of which were founded by Pastor Demyanenko. A significant part of the congregation consisted of Ukrainians, but it is open to Belarusians (in Poznań, the pastor and 70% of its members are Belarusians). There are also Russians and a few Poles. Practical considerations largely drove the desire to have their own pastor.

At the beginning of the full-scale invasion, about 700 people attended the central church in Warsaw. Today, about 400 people come to Sunday services at 20 Wyborna Street. In addition, this Church has organized Life Centers. One of these is located near Warsaw, in Ząbki, at Piłsudskiego Street. Together, about 100,000 people have passed through these centers in Warsaw, Lublin, and Łódź.

Ukrainian Pentecostals have enormous missionary potential and a passion for it. New churches emerge with the establishment of home groups, which are attended not only by Pentecostals but also by Baptists and Charismatics. For example, five cities around Warsaw where many Ukrainians live have been identified: Otwock, Pruszków, Ząbki, Legionowo, and Piaseczno. There are plans to open new churches in these cities based on home groups. The preachers also give sermons in city squares, including in Warsaw's Old Town. The sermons are in Ukrainian and Polish. According to church leader Vadym Radchenko, Poles also join the Church, although such cases are rare.

The Church has also founded the "Maranatha" mission, opened an organization with the same name, and works in Poland and other European countries (including Germany and Scandinavia). As Radchenko says, Poles see "that there are many Ukrainians, churches are growing, a certain movement is taking place, and God is

doing something through the Ukrainian people.” (Radchenko 2025, pers. comm.) Formally, the “Word of Faith” Church is part of the Pentecostal Church in Poland. However, there are already plans to register their own congregation.

What immediately catches the eye of Ukrainian Protestant refugees is the total dominance of the Catholic Church in Poland. For Christians who come from Ukraine, where religious pluralism exists, this is an unusual context. Today, the “Word of Faith” Church has no relations with the Catholic Church, but does not exclude such a possibility in the future. However, it has good contact with Baptists and Charismatics. Pastors visit each other, gather for pastoral meetings, and preach at each other’s churches.

4. Polish Ecumenical Council

One of the main projects of the Polish Ecumenical Council (Pawlik 1996), in which Ukraine is involved, is the “Reconciliation in Europe” project and its Inter-Church Working Group (WG). It has been and remains a platform for dialogue between the Churches of Poland, Germany, Ukraine, and Belarus for about 30 years. This platform works on developing contacts between Christian communities of different traditions, organizing conferences, seminars, and joint prayers (Polska Rada Eku-*m*eniczna 2016; Glaeser 2016, 2021). From Ukraine, official representatives from the RCC and UGCC, Deutsche Evangelisch-Lutherische Kirche der Ukraine (DELKU), and UOC participate in the work of the International Reconciliation Group. Despite the formal composition, the conferences it organized, including some in Ukraine, attracted a wider range of participants, particularly representatives of the OCU.

The confrontation between the two Ukrainian Orthodox Churches (UOC and OCU), which has been unfolding in Ukraine, was reflected in internal discussions in the WG even before 2022.⁴ Due to the Alexander Lukashenko regime’s support for Russian aggression, its Ukrainian members expressed doubts about the possibility of cooperation with Belarusian participants in further projects. Finally, despite all this, the WG decided not to change its composition. The rule was to refrain from interfering in confessional crises until the Churches themselves resolved them. This rule is not formally fixed, but it has a certain tradition. The same logic was followed in the mid-2010s during the crisis in the DELKU.

Until 2022, events in eastern Ukraine and Crimea were not perceived by some of the Group members as decisive in religious or political terms. Ukrainian representatives have repeatedly emphasized the war that has been ongoing since 2014, but in the collective perception of other members, it was perceived more as a “local

⁴ Ukrainian Orthodoxy in the WG has been represented solely by a delegate of the UOC from the beginning.

conflict” rather than as a fundamental civilizational struggle. This is how the director of the Polish Ecumenical Council (PRE), Pastor Grzegorz Giemza, commented:

When we met, the Ukrainian side always said that there had been a war since 2014. We somehow didn't fully realize this in the Group. We somehow did not know that this was a war. I don't think we treated the annexation of Crimea as a war. Now that this aggression has taken place and manifested itself, it has also had a very strong impact on the Group. (Giemza 2024, pers. comm.)

At the beginning of 2022, it became clear that traditional approaches to Church reconciliation were insufficient to overcome new challenges. First, it was understood that in wartime conditions, reconciliation is impossible. However, it is possible to maintain relations and prepare the ground for future dialogue. Secondly, a full-scale war does not allow anyone to remain neutral. According to the director of PRE this lack of neutrality has a downside: the ecumenical structures of the West have become too politicized, representing the *de facto* position of Western foreign policy in the ecumenical space. In this perspective, there is no room for a complex, polyphonic dialogue. As an example, Pastor Giemza cites the “Pathway to Peace” program of the Conference of European Churches. In response, the Group developed its own strategy to distinguish between politics and faith, trying to maintain openness to personal and Church dialogue despite political circumstances. The Group does not question the legitimacy of the need to speak about peace and justice, but advocates for preserving a space for multilateral presence, even if it includes complex or politically undesirable voices. This applies in particular to the UOC, which is not Russian, but whose voice is now marginalized (Giemza 2024, pers. comm.).

Today, the Group focuses on preserving informal connections, institutional memory, informal trust—anything that in the future can become a resource of symbolic capital for the restoration of dialogue. The Group defines itself as “a bridge that has not been destroyed.” The International Reconciliation Group does not make official statements or take sides in ecclesiastical disputes, but supports regular meetings—online and in neutral spaces. This “relationship maintenance regime” is seen as a contribution to the possibility of future reconciliation when the political and moral prerequisites appear (Giemza 2025).

Conclusions

As a result of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the wave of migration it caused, Polish Christian communities faced a reality that led to significant movement in the country's religious field. They were confronted with the need not only to respond

to the social and religious problems of a large number of migrants from beyond the eastern border, but also to begin the processes of rethinking the principles of their own ecclesial identity, openness, and the limits of communion. Migrants brought with them the peculiarities of religious life in Ukraine, which is characterized by diversity, with the dominant role of Orthodoxy; a dramatic weakening of the UOC and the growth of the OCU; strengthening of the role of Evangelical Churches; quiet rivalry between two eastern “Ukrainian” Churches: the OCU and the UGCC. All this made the polyphony of Christian Ukraine visible, which had previously not been noticed by many Polish Churches.

For the dominant RCC in Poland, the need to serve “others” (Orthodox, Protestants) has turned from an academic issue into a matter of pastoral responsibility. The document *Pro memoria* highlighted new meanings in the understanding of Catholic identity and hospitality and was an attempt to adapt pastoral practice to a multi-confessional presence. Guided by this, the RCC, in particular, provides its churches for the use of Greek Catholics and the OCU. The latter caused new challenges in the relationship with its long-time partner, the PAOC. This prompts the RCC to balance hospitality and respect for Orthodox identity without proselytism. The encounter with a large number of non-Catholic Christians highlighted the challenge of the deeper ecumenical preparation of the Catholic clergy.

The influx of migrants from Ukraine significantly increased the size of Greek Catholic communities. The close connection with national identity (through language, tradition, and history) has made it a powerful center for the integration of Ukrainian migrants. This will contribute to the growth of the UGCC’s influence in the religious field. However, the appearance of the OCU in the same field creates a challenge to build some form of relations with this Church for the benefit of the entire Ukrainian migrant community. The challenge facing the UGCC in Poland is, on the one hand, not to lock itself in the national ghetto, and on the other hand, to be open to the needs of Ukrainian non-Catholics in Poland. This opens a new page of Polish ecumenism—the coexistence of two migrant “Ukrainian” Churches on the same territory. To better understand Polish partners, the UGCC will need to produce more Polish-language content.

The greatest challenges due to Ukrainian migration are for Orthodoxy in Poland in particular, due to the emergence of OCU structures. In Poland, it operates on the basis of its own ecclesial logic, where legitimacy is determined not by pan-Orthodox recognition but by declared responsibility to its people. Other Churches and communities (except PAOC) see it as a legal ecclesial partner. Its emergence in Poland added to the religious life of this country a complexity inherent in the Orthodox reality of Ukraine. In particular, it appeals to pastoral necessity and thus undermines traditional Orthodox ideas about the limits of jurisdiction. However, it appears that in the future this Church will attempt to develop its infrastructure in Poland and seek institutional consolidation of its presence through partnership models.

The internal tension that has arisen through the “canonical line” requires the PAOC to adapt to new realities. The Orthodox Church of Poland faced a gap between its canonical self-awareness and its real pastoral situation. The attitude of the PAOC towards the OCU is an expression of the classic dichotomy between *oikonomia* (pastoral indulgence) and *akribeia* (canonical accuracy), which has yet to find a single theological solution in Orthodox ecclesiology. The specialty of the situation also lies in the fact that the churches of the PAOC are visited by many OCU believers, along with the faithful of the UOC. This situation could become a source of deep theological reflection for Polish Orthodoxy in the future, prompting a reevaluation of its sources, given that the PAOC is historically one of the heirs of the ancient Kyivan Church. The gradual opening of the Church to the needs of Ukrainian migrants (also through the language of the liturgy) could contribute to its greater attractiveness for Ukrainian migrants, as well as the rejection of rhetoric and practices that can be perceived as pro-Russian. There is a minority of Evangelical communities in both Ukraine and Poland. However, they are very active and create many spiritual and humanitarian opportunities for Ukrainian refugees. They embody the model of “network” or horizontal ecumenism. With cautions about institutionalized ecumenism, they practice inter-church ties built on trust, friendship, and common service. This is the ecumenism of action. It poses an alternative and a challenge to the institutional forms of ecumenical activity, which are often perceived as a matter of hierarchies and are limited to common declarations. It is worth noting certain forms of cultural, theological, and organizational differences between the Polish and Ukrainian Evangelical communities. There are also differences in the language, but they are not acute. With the dominant tendency to serve in Ukrainian, bilingualism is also practiced, including Ukrainian and Russian.

Another model of ecumenical activity in response to the challenges of wartime in Ukraine is demonstrated by the Reconciliation in Europe Group, which operates on the basis of the Polish Ecumenical Council. Despite certain crisis moments in the Group caused by the war in Ukraine, it has found its own formula for cooperation. The fact is that the issue of reconciliation is postponed until the postwar period. The Group’s main efforts focus on maintaining informal connections and trust among participants. This “relationship maintenance regime” is seen as a contribution to the possibility of future reconciliation when the appropriate conditions for it appear.

Thus, the Polish experience of ecumenism in the conditions of the war in Ukraine demonstrates the possibility of one’s own reawareness. We observe a shift from Church diplomacy to solidarity, from interfaith politeness to collective action for peace and justice. The war and the large wave of military migration from Ukraine became a kind of test of the sincerity of ecumenical efforts. Where ecumenism was based only on formal principles or diplomatic courtesy, it is now in crisis. Instead, in places where cooperation is built on a common shared understanding of human

dignity and a common Christian responsibility before God and people, new impulses have emerged for the Polish ecumenical movement.

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Concern for the Identity of the Priest in Light of Benedict XVI's Teaching

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Abstract: In the article, the author reflects on the issue of priestly identity, being experienced in a mature way, in light of the teachings of Pope Benedict XVI. Based on an analysis of the Pope's selected statements addressed to the clergy, three fundamental, internal dimensions of priestly identity have been identified: spiritual, psychological, and intellectual. They should find expression in the priest's external ministry as a shepherd and minister of the sacraments, a witness to the world, as well as a teacher and evangelizer. The juxtaposition of these two dimensions—internal and external—illustrates their mutual complementarity, which determines the need for their integral development. The article demonstrates the formative potential of Benedict XVI's teaching for the renewal of priestly life in the contemporary Church.

Keywords: priestly identity, concern for formation, Benedict XVI, priest, clergy

Concern for the identity of the priest¹ is one of the key challenges for the contemporary Church. In the face of increasing secularization, the wave of criticism pouring down on the Church and priests, and a crisis of priestly vocations, we need priests who are “deeply and fully immersed in the mystery of Christ and capable of embodying a new style of pastoral life.” (*PDV* 18)

Although the sacrament of Holy Orders imbues the priest with an indelible spiritual character that forever defines his identity and enables cooperation with the grace of the sacrament, it does not determine his way of life in the contemporary world. This stems from the fact that priestly identity has a complex structure and is experienced both internally and externally. It is expressed in the internal life of the priest, but also in his external attitudes, his way of life and pastoral ministry.

In light of the above remarks, the aim of this article is to present the specific nature of priestly identity and its essential dimensions, which require a special formative concern as specified in the teaching of Benedict XVI. The article is an attempt to answer the following research questions: How did Benedict XVI define the essence of

¹ In this paper, the terms “priest” and “priesthood” refer to the ministerial or hierarchical priesthood, conferred through the sacrament of Holy Orders. Therefore, we are not dealing with the common priesthood of the faithful, but with the participation in the one priesthood of Christ, consecrated by Holy Orders in the priesthood (cf. *LG* 10, 34).

the identity of the priest? What does the concern for a mature priestly identity entail? What is the significance of ongoing formation for the development of priestly identity? How to care for the proper building up of priestly identity and ministry within the Church community?

Following a research study, we have analyzed the Pope's statements, included primarily in his homilies, catecheses, addresses, and speeches directed at the clergy. The selection of material stems from the assumption that they show Benedict XVI's specific pastoral guidelines and encouragement to reflect on the priestly vocation. Accordingly, his concern for the identity of the priest and its essential dimensions, as well as his directions on building up priestly identity were most fully demonstrated. In analyzing the material, we have employed the method of theological hermeneutics, which has allowed us to interpret the Pope's statements within their pastoral, doctrinal, and existential contexts, while simultaneously considering the coherence of his teaching, and the challenges related to priestly formation.

The issue addressed in this article fits into the broader current of contemporary research on priestly identity, developed in theological literature in various contexts. Previous studies emphasized the complexity and multifaceted nature of this issue, but rarely highlighted the dimension of the concern for the integrity, development, and consolidation of priestly identity.² In this regard, Benedict XVI's teaching constitutes a valuable and coherent contribution that remains relevant today. Presenting a positive perspective rooted in the Pope's teachings can help priests strengthen and "renew" their identity, as well as encourage them to development and ongoing formation. Furthermore, presenting the beauty and depth of the gift of the presbyterate can contribute to a more fruitful pastoral ministry and provide effective decision-making assistance for those who consider the ministerial priesthood a mission and lifelong passion.

1. The Specificity of Priestly Identity

Personal identity is a vision of oneself and a lasting belief about who one is (Radecki 2010, 28). The human being, understood in terms of a person, is a free and responsible subject, and although a person reveals himself in his complex somatic-psychic-spiritual wholeness, he is not limited to any of these dimensions, nor to their sum. Therefore, personal identity is not limited to the sense of one's body

² Among publications focusing on the identity of the priest, it is worth mentioning: Nocko 2013, 139–49; Smuniewski 2017, 65–94; Dyrek 1999; Słomka 1996; Kondracikowski 2014, 207–20; Kowalski 2025, 37–52; Rabczyński 2020, 247–58; Ponce Cuéllar 2020, 465–90; Mullady 2011, 294–305; McGovern 2002; Fabidun 2021; O'Malley 1988, 223–57; Nikić 2010, 847–68; de Boer 2005, 369–77.

or sense of one's mental states and processes, but, taken integrally, it refers to the very being a person, because personal vocation and mission, the sense of coming into existence, and the guidelines that influence the lifestyle appropriate to one's vocation are closely linked to this fact and mystery (Paszowska 2007, 67–68). Also, the identity of the priest is not limited solely to the role he fulfills, but encompasses, above all, his internal development and awareness of his vocation. It contains elements of continuity and individualization, combining the person's coherence with his uniqueness (Dyrek 2014, 9). As we read in *Pastores dabo vobis*, priestly identity is “built upon the type of formation which must be provided for priesthood and then endure throughout the priest's whole life.” (PDV 11) According to Teresa Paszowska, it is precisely “the lack of a clear definition of identity that gives rise to most of the crises we are dealing with today.” (Paszowska 2007, 67)

In a context of widespread secularization, which is systematically eliminating God from the public sphere and weaken his presence in the social conscience, the priest is often perceived as “foreign.” This is because the priesthood is a sacramental and existential reality, and not merely functional. It is not limited to fulfilling specific tasks in society, but has its source in the ontological transformation that occurs within a person through receiving Holy Orders (Benedict XVI 2010a). Thus, as Benedict XVI observes, the priest is “a man of the sacred, removed from the world to intercede on behalf of the world,” (Benedict XVI 2010a) is consecrated for God to act in the world in his name. Therefore, he cannot be merely a “religious worker,” because the essence of his identity is a deep relationship with Christ, being an “alter Christus,” called, chosen, and sent by Christ in a special way (Benedict XVI 2009h). It is in this relationship, called the Christocentrism of priesthood, that the Holy Father saw the essence of the priestly ministry (Pudło 2024, 127).

By virtue of the sacrament of Holy Orders, the priest is ontologically linked to Christ the Priest in the Mystery of the Trinitarian God. Therefore, the true foundation of the priest's life, the foundation of his priestly existence, is God himself. It is this relationship, defined by the Pope as “theocentricity of the priestly existence,” meaning truly knowing God within through a personal relationship with him and expressed in the mission of bringing God to the world, that constitutes the core of priestly identity and vocation. In the priest's life, it is also crucial not to lose the zeal in his actions (Benedict XVI 2006d). For “the priest learns the ‘methods’ of leading man to an encounter with God from Kyrios himself.” (Paszowska 2007, 69)

The courage to follow Christ on the path of vocation, despite the many difficulties priests face in fulfilling their pastoral duties, is born above all from love. Therefore, sacrificial love for others should be the sign distinguishing contemporary clergy (Kozioł 2013, 148). The point is that the priest is a clear sign of the Gospel values for the world. In this way, he can be a continuator of the love of Christ the Lord. As the Pope stated unequivocally, the priesthood and the priestly ministry are rooted and deeply embedded in the Heart of Jesus (Benedict XVI 2010g). Through the liturgical

sign of the laying on of hands during the ordination rite, Christ takes the priest under his special protection and enshrines him in his hands and heart. By virtue of the sacrament he receives, the priest receives the fullness of who he is as a servant of Christ. By uttering the sacramental words, he acts not in his own name, but in the name of Christ—*in persona Christi*. Christ uses his lips, hands, generosity, and talents (Benedict XVI 2006c). From the moment of ordination, the priest has been freed from the dependence of the world and offered to God; he has given himself completely to God, to be his property, to be at the disposal of all (Benedict XVI 2009f).

The identity of the priest, according to Benedict XVI, is an identity received, not earned (Paszowska 2007, 74), since the priesthood is an undeserved gift that cannot be the result of personal ambition or spontaneous choice. In the opinion of the Holy Father, “[t]he priesthood is the response to the Lord’s call, to his will, in order to become a herald of his truth, not a personal truth but of his truth” (Benedict XVI 2010f) and thus, “in the way of thinking, speaking, and judging events of the world, of serving and loving, of relating to people, also in his habits, the priest must draw prophetic power from his sacramental belonging, from his profound being.” (Benedict XVI 2010a)

Referring to the Book of Deuteronomy (Deut 18:5, 7) that define the mission of the Old Testament priests, Benedict XVI highlighted two expressions that define the essence of the priestly ministry: *astare coram te et tibi ministrare*. Explaining their meanings, the Pope recalled that in the Old Testament context, the vocation of priests was a life of total dedication to God. They did not undertake paid work, but their task was to remain in God’s presence and to do priestly service on behalf of the people. According to the Holy Father, the presence of these words in the Second Canon of the Mass, immediately after the consecration of the gifts, indicates that the priest stands before the truly present Lord, and that the Eucharist is the center of the priest’s life and vocation (Benedict XVI 2008c).

The Pope attempted to reinterpret the Old Testament vision of priesthood in light of the Christian priestly identity. Presumably, his goal was to emphasize the sacramental nature of the attitude of the priest, which constitutes an ontological consequence of the sacrament of Holy Orders and makes the priest a servant of God’s presence.

Standing before God during the Eucharistic celebration is, therefore, not merely a liturgical gesture, but a real participation in the one priesthood of Christ. The Eucharist constitutes the essence of priestly identity; within it lies the secret of the priest’s own sanctification, and its celebration should be the focal point of his ecclesial mission (Kozioł 2013, 153).

The papal apostolic exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* includes a fundamental statement that help understand priestly identity: “in the Church and on behalf of the Church, priests are a sacramental representation of Jesus Christ—the head and shepherd.” (PDV 15) This brings us to another important aspect of priestly identity, which

is evident in the Pope's teaching. According to Benedict XVI, it consists in the fact that the priesthood, by its very nature, exists in the Church and for the Church, because it "has a constitutive relationship with the Body of Christ in his dual and inseparable dimensions as Eucharist and as Church, as Eucharistic body and Ecclesial body." (Benedict XVI 2005a) Therefore, in reflecting on the essence of priestly identity, which the Church constantly reminds us of in the context of the formation of future priests, it is crucial to recognize the primary role of the sacramental-ontic dimension, which means that the priest is deeply rooted in Christ and his Church (*RFIS* 30, 31).

Through the sacrament of Holy Orders, the priest can imitate Christ in his life, dedicate himself entirely to preaching, and contribute to the healing of people, both bodily and spiritually. Ultimately, his mission leads to the supreme act of sacrifice and "giving his life" for others, "which finds its sacramental expression in the Eucharist, the perpetual memorial of Jesus." (Benedict XVI 2012)

Through the service of the ministerial priesthood, which is a visible sign of Christ's presence, Christ the Head and Shepherd of the community of believers, the Church carries out her mission in a world that is undergoing constant changes that influence the condition of contemporary man. In this mission, as Benedict XVI repeatedly recalled, Mary, the Mother of Priests, always accompanies priests, "because of his identification with and sacramental conformation to Jesus, Son of God and Son of Mary, every priest can and must feel that he really is a specially beloved son of this loftiest and humblest of Mothers." (Benedict XVI 2009e)

2. The Importance of Ongoing Formation for the Development of Priestly Identity

The Church's pastoral activity provides ample evidence that neglect in the areas of education and formation leads to serious crises. An example of this negligence was the crisis of the priesthood, which emerged with considerable force after the Second Vatican Council. It concerned the dispute over the identity of the priest and the specific nature of his vocation. In the theological debate and pastoral practice of the Church during that period, two opposing conceptions of priesthood emerged. On the one hand, there was a sacramental-ontological vision, emphasizing the supernatural nature of the priesthood and the hierarchical structure of the Church; on the other hand, there was a socio-functional vision, in which the priesthood was understood as a service to the community and a service undertaken by the mandate of that community. This was a dispute between the sacred and social understanding of the priesthood. In the society, whose sense of the sacred was weakened, there was a tendency to replace supernatural values with more "human" categories, based on functionality. Priests were then forced to confront dominant trends that led to the relativization of

their identity. The weakening and disappearance of the sense of the sacred and the understanding of their own identity fostered attitudes of frustration, compromises, and sometimes even abandonments of their vocation (Giemza 2007, 78–80).

It seems that today priests are exposed to an even greater number of external factors that can lead to crisis situations and undermine their own identity, e.g., sudden dismissal from office, unjust accusation, physical or mental illness, problems with school work, conflicts with superiors, crisis of faith, feeling of unimportance and being on the margin, or criticism in the media (Plata 2020, 267). Identity confusion, growing self-uncertainty, and decreasing psychological resilience make one susceptible to the influence of others (Augustyn 1999, 202). Therefore, in the perspective of continuing formation, priests need to deepen the awareness of their own identity (Bramorski 2005, 265). A renewed and joyful awareness of the greatness of God's gift of priesthood can help priests themselves and the Church, which suffers from the infidelity and immaturity of some of her servants. It can also be a significant point of reference for those responsible for priestly formation and for spiritual directors (Benedict XVI 2009h).

Given the numerous manifestations of human immaturity in the socio-cultural area, there is a need for mature priests, capable of serving as leaders in the faith. Therefore, among the most important elements of priestly formation, according to Benedict XVI's teaching, there are: education into the truth, recognition of one's own weaknesses, willingness to convert, extensive study, liturgical and spiritual formation, proper discipline and daily routine, sacrificing ability, and cultural formation (Giemza 2007, 89–91). Therefore, the priesthood, rooted in the sacrament of Holy Orders, enables priests not only to minister the sacraments but also to care for people in all their complexity, which includes the individual and social dimensions, considering their earthly and eternal lives as well as religious and moral lives (CV 30).

The identity of the priest is also defined as commitment to all that is essential to the priestly lifestyle. Such activity should manifest itself in predictable and consistent attitudes of the priest, unchanging over time and independent of circumstances. Commitment is also intended to connect his various activities, subordinating them to his vocational values. According to Krzysztof Dyrek, there should be congruence between ideals and lifestyle, meaning fidelity to undertaken commitments and renunciation of anything that contradicts this lifestyle (Dyrek 2014, 12). Since priestly formation aims at gradually achieving maturity, understood as inner coherence, freedom from one's own problems and hurts, as well as the ability to consistently follow the values stemming from priestly vocation. A mature priest is a person whose inner support is centered on Christ, a person with psychological integrity and transparency in his witness of life and in the way of proclaiming the Gospel (Cencini and Manenti 1985, 122–33).

This is the kind of life attitude, based on personal holiness, that the faithful expect from priests. They want to see them as genuine religious and moral authorities,

as well as ethical models in which they can find reference for their own daily lives. The example of priestly holiness and faith is an important contribution to the holiness and faith of lay Catholics. Hence, there is a need for constant concern for the unity between the ministerial vocation and personal holiness. This is expected and demanded by the faithful, whom priests are to lead as shepherds (Baniak 2000, 16).

The spectrum of contemporary problems and phenomena that affect humanity and, consequently, also threaten the Church and priests, leading to a "spiritual wilderness" and causing an identity crisis, is becoming wider and wider (Benedict XVI 2005a). Therefore, in the Pope's statements, addressed directly to the clergy, there is a clear concern for priests, that they should continually return to the roots of their vocation. This source and model for living priestly identity is the person of Jesus Christ, whom the priest is to continually imitate.

Analyzing these papal statements allows us to identify and order the dimensions of a mature experience of priestly identity, which require an ongoing formational care. The statements cover both the internal forum and the external dimension of the priestly ministry.

3. Concern for Shaping the Fundamental Dimensions of Priestly Identity

In light of Benedict XVI's statements, the identity of the priest in its internal aspect is expressed primarily through spiritual, psychological, and intellectual dimensions. These individual dimensions interpenetrate and are revealed in the priest's mature attitude.

3.1. Concern for the Spiritual Dimension

In our cultural reality in which one can observe the blurring of all permanent references and suspicion towards the concept of identity, sometimes considered contrary to freedom and democracy, cultivating the spiritual depth of the priest becomes particularly important. According to Benedict XVI, only by grounding his life in the theological truth of priesthood as participation in the priesthood of Christ can the priest maintain fidelity and internal unity, without succumbing to "temptation to reduce it to the prevalent cultural categories." (Benedict XVI 2010a) Consequently, there is a need for people called from the Heart of God, ready to become workers in his harvest "so that this harvest which is ripening in people's hearts may truly be brought into the storehouses of eternity and become an enduring, divine communion of joy and love." (Benedict XVI 2006a) Thus, the Pope proposed a positive,

spiritually and theologically deepened, vision of priesthood that could provide an answer to the crisis of contemporary anthropology.

The essence and foundation of the priestly ministry is, therefore, a profound relationship with Christ, which is to be the focal point of the entire priestly formation and spiritual life. The condition for building and developing this relationship is prayer and contemplation, which lead to “a constitutive relationship with the Body of Christ in his dual and inseparable dimensions as Eucharist and as the Church, as Eucharistic body and the Ecclesial body.” (Benedict XVI 2005a) The priest must be a man of prayer, a deeply spiritual person, aware that he does not act in his own name or for his own benefit, but as an instrument in the hands of God, who makes his own action present through the priestly ministry (Benedict 2010f). Thanks to his well-established spirituality, constantly animated by faith, hope and love, the priest can fruitfully continue the saving mission of Jesus (Benedict XVI 2007c).

The spiritual rooting of the priest in the Mystery of the Eucharist and the Church protects him from activism and an individualistic understanding of spirituality, and directs him toward an attitude of service to the community. Therefore, in the Pope’s teaching, prayer and contemplation are not optional practices, but constitute a necessary environment in which the priest’s identity matures.

Prayer should be a place for constant discovery of the depths of the person of Jesus Christ and a source of renewal of the priestly ministry. According to Benedict XVI, for the priest, personal prayer, especially the Prayer of the Hours, is the fundamental nourishment for his soul, empowering for all his actions (Benedict XVI 2010c). “Only those who have a profound relationship with the Lord are grasped by him, can take him to others, can be sent out.” (Benedict XVI 2010h) The Pope reminded the ordinands that a profound relationship with the Lord was not an addition to pastoral work, but its central part, especially when the pressure of duties seemed to obscure the contemplative dimension of the priestly mission. Regardless of the place and circumstances, the priest is called to constantly “abide with him,” because abiding with Christ gives meaning and strength to every dimension of the priestly ministry (Benedict XVI 2010h). Spending time in God’s presence in prayer is a real pastoral priority of every priest (Benedict XVI 2005a). The formulas of the Rite for the Ordination of Priests lead to this unity with Christ. Through the generous response of the priest himself to the question: “Are you resolved to consecrate your life to God for the salvation of his people, and to unite yourself more closely every day to Christ the High Priest, who offered himself for us to the Father as a perfect sacrifice?” this unity, which happens in the sacrament, can “become closer every day,” (Benedict XVI 2012) and thanks to the daily celebration of the Eucharist, it can be constantly renewed (Benedict XVI 2005a).

The Eucharist is the source and summit of the priest’s spiritual life, determining its meaning, direction and style of service (Benedict XVI 2005c). It is of key importance to the sanctification of the priest (Benedict XVI 2010d), and that is why the

Pope encouraged priests to celebrate and deeply experience the Eucharist every day (Benedict XVI 2010c). Time spent in the adoration of the Blessed Sacrament can help them in that (Benedict XVI 2005c), since

it is Jesus who wants to be with us, to live in us, to give himself to us, to show us God's infinite mercy and tenderness; it is the one sacrifice of the love of Christ who makes himself present, who makes himself real among us and arrives at the throne of Grace, at God's presence.... And the priest is called to be a minister of this great Mystery, in the Sacrament and in life. (Benedict XVI 2010d)

In the Pope's reflection, the Eucharistic piety of the priest appears as the hermeneutical key to his entire identity and mission. In closeness to the truly present Lord, the priest discovers the truth about himself and his mission. The Eucharist thus becomes not only the place of his sanctification but also a touchstone of his spiritual maturity and the authenticity of his ministry.

Benedict XVI warned against the routine celebration of Holy Mass, calling for the celebration to identify with the words, gestures, and event, which becomes a saving event. For the priest who celebrates the Eucharist, participating deeply in it, with faith and prayer, continually and anew receives a great richness from it and "communicates to people more than just what comes from the priest, namely, the presence of Christ." (Benedict XVI 2006a)

In the context of the sacraments administered by the priest, the Pope drew attention to the need to strive for moral perfection, which should characterize a true priestly heart (Benedict XVI 2010d). The priest who ministers in the sacrament of Reconciliation should constantly strive for the holiness of life. His attitude should stem from prayer, penance, and the constant entrustment of human souls to Divine Mercy (Benedict XVI 2007d).

Of fundamental importance in the priest's life is the awareness of his own limitations and the need to have recourse to Divine Mercy to ask for forgiveness, to convert his heart and to receive spiritual support on the path to holiness (Benedict XVI 2010b). The lack of regular confession, despite the priest's deep desire to imitate Christ, carries the danger of a gradual slowing down of the rhythm of his spiritual life, which may gradually weaken or even die out (Benedict XVI 2008a). In this way, Benedict XVI recalled the truth that the path of holiness for the priest does not consist in moral impeccability, but in constant conversion of his heart and submission to the action of grace, which continually purifies, strengthens, and leads the priest to a deeper unity with Christ.

Therefore, in the Year of Priests, the Pope pointed to St. John Vianney as a model of unflinching trust in the power of the sacrament of Penance, which should occupy a central place in the pastoral concerns of every priest. A priest who has deeply experienced his own limitations and the healing power of Divine Mercy can carry

out the ministry of reconciliation with conviction and humility. As a minister of Penance, he becomes a steward revealing God's merciful love (Benedict XVI 2010b) in a world where there is so much noise and bewilderment (Benedict XVI 2006c).

3.2. Concern for the Psychological Dimension

Maturity is a concept that expresses a synthesis of reality. It encompasses a series of coordinated aspects and elements of psychomotor, affective, relational, professional, motivational, spiritual, and other traits that contribute to defining the maturity of a person. It develops gradually under the influence of personal, relational, and socio-environmental conditions (Decaminada 1997, 72–75). In psychological terms, maturity marks the phase of personality development that corresponds to biological and psychological maturation. According to Alexander Franz, after reaching a certain level of intelligence and the ability to reflect on one's own emotions and experiences, a person can be called emotionally mature (Franz 1967, 1).

Thanks to maturity, persons can consciously and responsibly manage their emotional and affective behavior, make life choices, and accept all the consequences of their decisions and actions. They recognize their dignity, worth, and uniqueness and are able to adapt to life in society. They can interact with others, endowing them with positive feelings: love, kindness, friendship, and cordiality. And if such a situation arises, they can also overcome the negative feelings that arise within them: anger, malice, hatred, jealousy (Plata 2020, 83).

In light of the above assumptions, Benedict XVI also recognized the need to concern for the identity of the priest, which is expressed, among other things, in his psychological maturity. In the face of so many forms of human immaturity, visible at the social, economic, and political levels, there is a need for priests, who will become mature guides in the faith, specialists in the encounter between man and God, and experts in the spiritual life, to be able to help others in situations of great burden. Priests themselves must demonstrate an appropriate level of maturity, since "Christ needs priests who are mature, virile, capable of cultivating an authentic spiritual pater-*ternity*." (Benedict XVI 2006c)

A priest who has not built up priestly identity or has a weak one (and this is also expressed in his weakened psychological maturity) may be internally divided, frustrated, uncertain, and unstable in his attitudes, choices, and ministry, more vulnerable to vocational crises and difficulties. Persevering in his vocation and priesthood may then become too difficult a task for him, an unbearable burden (Benedict XVI 2006a). He may be exposed to sin, lack of freedom, and the temptation to leave (Benedict XVI 2007a).

In his speech during a meeting with the clergy at the Archcathedral of St. John in Warsaw, Benedict XVI appealed to priests from all over the world to renew their faith in the power of the priesthood, in which they received everything they are:

[b]e authentic in your life and your ministry. Gazing upon Christ, live a modest life, in solidarity with the faithful to whom you have been sent. Serve everyone; be accessible in the parishes and in the confessionals, accompany the new movements and associations, support families, do not forget the link with young people, remember the poor and the abandoned. (Benedict XVI 2006c)

To meet these demands, the Pope identified specific psychological predispositions that priests should possess. They must be ones who keep watch. They must be steadfast in the face of the currents of the times, unwavering in truth and in doing good. Also, they must be righteous, fearless, and ready to endure any insult for the Lord (Benedict XVI 2008c). For “[t]he priesthood, let us always remember, is based on having the courage to say ‘yes’ to another will, in the awareness that we are growing every day, that precisely by conforming to God’s will.” (Benedict XVI 2010h)

This level of psychological resilience is possible to achieve when priests remain in a deep communion of feelings and desires with Jesus. This means getting to know Jesus in an increasingly personal way, listening to him, living with him, and being close to him in a friendly relationship (Benedict XVI 2006f). It is crucial that priests believe in the transforming power of faith and consciously nurture its development. Faith is present not only in their religious moods and experiences, but encompasses their entire existence, inner struggles, community life, apostolate, thoughts, actions, and intentions (Benedict XVI 2006b). Therefore, a concern for a consciously cultivating faith should permeate their entire lives, thus shaping their identity and becoming a source of unity between thought, action, and attitude. In this way, faith becomes not only the foundation of the identity of the priest but also the instrument of his authentic witness to the world.

The Pope reminded priests that they must live in deep friendship with Christ and thus discover true freedom and great joy in their ministry (Benedict XVI 2009a). They should be aware that at the moment of their ordination, they essentially renounce the pursuit of “self-fulfillment,” and by joining Christ, they enter a path that requires renunciation and responsibility (Benedict XVI 2009f). As a result, without succumbing to short-lived cultural trends, changing opinions, their own ambitions, the temptation of power, flattering others to gain respect (Benedict XVI 2010h), through their lives, they are able to proclaim to the contemporary world the prophecy of fidelity, which has its origin and source in Christ’s fidelity to humanity (Benedict XVI 2010a).

According to Benedict XVI, in the priest’s life, freedom does not mean a lack of obligations or self-sufficiency, but is expressed in his total dedication to Christ. Only then can a priest live his ministry in the truth and authenticity. In this way, he becomes a prophet of fidelity and a witness to God’s love, which does not enslave but liberates from superficial dependencies, opening him to a deeper freedom in the service of God and others.

A clear sign of priestly freedom and fidelity is celibacy, which the Pope presented in very positive terms, seeing it as a great gift. Responding to contemporary criticism, he presented celibacy as an expression of the priest's psychological and spiritual maturity. Only a mentally stable person, free from internal conflicts and self-centeredness, can authentically communicate to others the true love he himself has experienced in his relationship with God. Therefore, in presenting the essence of the priesthood, Benedict XVI unequivocally stated that celibacy is, above all, a witness to love and faith in God. It is not only a form of external discipline but an indicator of the priest's personal identity (Benedict XVI 2006d), which the modern world needs so that thanks to the eschatological life of celibacy, the future world of God can be seen (Benedict XVI 2010c).

Analyzing the thoughts of Benedict XVI, one can conclude that the contemporary Church needs priests who are deeply religious, having an integrated personality, emotionally stable, able to work upon themselves, open to others, with a very effective power of influence, whose words, actions and attitudes are resistant to the pressure of the changing socio-cultural reality.

3.3. Concern for the Intellectual Dimension

In addition to the spiritual and psychological dimensions, an essential pillar of the priest's mature identity is the intellectual dimension. The Holy Father repeatedly expressed concern for a solid education as well as personal cultural and intellectual development (Benedict XVI 2007c), so that priests may be able to proclaim the Gospel "in a cultural context marked by the hedonistic and relativistic mindset that tends to delete God from the horizon of life and does not encourage the acquisition of a clear set of values to refer to that would help one to discern good from evil." (Benedict XVI 2010b) Given this type of mentality, even among the clergy, there may be a temptation to reduce religious life to the sphere of feelings, thus weakening the Church's ability to build a consistent vision of the world and to engage in a profound dialogue with the many other worldviews competing for the hearts and minds of people living in our times (Benedict XVI 2008d).

Young priests in particular may succumb to this temptation to get lost amidst the proposals of the culture of the moment, and therefore, they need serious mentors at their side, who will help them especially in the first years of their priestly ministry (Benedict XVI 2006c). As the Pope stated: "in the face of the temptations of relativism or the permissive society, there is absolutely no need for the priest to know all the latest, changing currents of thought; what the faithful expect from him is that he be a witness to the eternal wisdom contained in the revealed word." (Benedict XVI 2006c)

For this purpose, the priest should deeply assimilate the teaching he is to pass on and should experience as his own the truth of the faith, i.e. all that Jesus taught

and that the Church has passed on (Benedict XVI 2010f). Addressing bishops as the first formators of priests and religious under their care, the Pope reminded them that “theological formation, as well as education in sacred sciences, needs to be constantly updated, but this must always be done in accord with the Church’s authentic Magisterium.” (Benedict XVI 2007b) “The priest does not teach his own ideas, a philosophy that he himself has invented, that he has discovered or likes ... but, in the medley of all the philosophies, the priest teaches in the name of Christ present, he proposes the truth that is Christ himself, his word and his way of living and of moving ahead.” (Benedict XVI 2010f)

One of the fundamental tasks of the Church, especially of priests, is the concern for deepened intellectual and cultural formation, and in order to minister adequately, they need a cultural preparation, including the knowledge of foreign languages, of history and of law, with wise openness to different cultures (Benedict XVI 2005b). In this aspect, the intellectual formation of the priest should not stop at the academic knowledge acquired in the study of theology, but should lead to his personal synthesis of knowledge and faith, which allows him to pass on the faith in an authentic and understandable way (Benedict XVI 2009b). Along these lines, intellectual and cultural formation appears to be a crucial element of the priest’s mature identity. Attention to this dimension reveals a significant feature of Benedict XVI’s teaching, which emphasizes not only the development of the spiritual life but also the shaping of the priest’s identity through the acquisition of in-depth theological, philosophical, and cultural knowledge.

During a meeting with seminarians and priests participating in a course for confessors, organized by the Apostolic Penitentiary, the Pope stressed that the confessor should have a proven knowledge of Christian behavior and experience of human affairs. To be able to fulfil this important mission, he must be faithful to the Church’s Magisterium concerning moral doctrine, aware that the law of good and evil is not determined by the situation, but by God (Benedict XVI 2007d). For this reason, it is important that priests have a constant aspiration to asceticism, and “that they tirelessly dedicate themselves to keeping up to date in the study of moral theology and the human sciences.” (Benedict XVI 2010b)

The Holy Father reminded priests that one of their duties is to penetrate faith with thought, because it is important that in confronting the contemporary world, priests must be able to show competently and convincingly the reason for the hope they lived. On the other hand, Benedict XVI warned that speaking alone does not suffice, it must be rooted in vivid faith and personal witness (Benedict XVI 2009g), because “it is absolutely indispensable, fundamental, to give credibility to this word through witness so that it does not only appear as a lofty philosophy or a fine utopia, but as reality.” (Benedict XVI 2009b)

The intellectual dimension is, therefore, an indispensable pillar of the priest’s mature identity, enabling him to proclaim the Gospel with wisdom, courage, and

fidelity to the Magisterium of the Church. In the papal teaching, concern for this dimension centers around a solid theological preparation and a profound integration of the revealed truth with the priest's personal experience, so that he may be a credible witness to what he teaches.

4. Concern for the Realization of the Priest's Identity and Ministry in the Church Community

In light of Benedict XVI's statements addressed to the clergy, the identity of the priest is expressed internally but is also realized externally in his specific ministry. Therefore, this identity must be integrated, and the priest's internal formation should harmonize with his external witness. Otherwise, there is a risk of reducing the priesthood to a mere professional function, instead of perceiving it in its profound ontological dimension (Benedict XVI 2010a).

Caring for the priest's internal experience of identity is complemented by nurturing its external manifestations. The priest's mature experience of his identity should find its expression in his ministry, as a shepherd and minister of the sacraments, a witness to Christ in the world, as well a teacher and evangelizer.

4.1. The Priest as a Shepherd and Minister of the Sacraments

Pastoral charity has its source in the Eucharist and finds its highest fulfillment there. Through a fruitful experience of Holy Mass, the priest's life takes on a sacrificial character and allows him to integrate his vocation more fully. In the Eucharist, the priest discovers his identity as a person who should give of himself to others (Benedict XVI 2012). Therefore, at the end of the Year of Priests, Benedict XVI pointed out that priestly ministry should always be anchored in the heart of Jesus. Priests are called to share with God their concern for people at this particular point in history so that people are able to experience God's protection in a tangible way. For this reason, priests must know their sheep. It is not about merely exterior knowledge, loving people, striving to walk with them along the path of God's friendship (Benedict XVI 2010g). The essence of the priesthood consists of two inseparably linked aspects: accompanying Jesus and being sent to people. "Anyone who has been with him cannot keep to himself what he has found; instead, he has to pass it on." (Benedict XVI 2006e)

Above all, the priest is obliged to share love—*caritas*, specifically with the suffering, the little ones, the children, for people in difficulty, and for the marginalized. Thus, he can make present the love of the Good Shepherd (Benedict XVI 2010c).

Also, the People of God expect their shepherds to share “the example of faith and the testimony of holiness.” (Benedict XVI 2010d)

In one of his homilies, the Pope asked: “Where can a priest today find the strength for such an exercise of his ministry, in full fidelity to Christ and to the Church, and complete devotion to his flock? There is only one answer: in Christ the Lord.” (Benedict XVI 2010e) Jesus, who sets the example of humble and loving service, provides priests with a point of reference for exercising authority that is a true expression of pastoral love. In this way, the Pope recalled that the paradigm of authority in the Church, as indicated by Christ, is one of service, not domination. It is focused on caring for the people entrusted to the priest, not on the fulfillment of his own ambitions. Only in this sense can the service of authority exercised by the priest be an expression of his authentic pastoral love.

Another equally important point of reference for the exercising of that authority, which is the true expression of pastoral charity, can be found in the numerous saints, among them St. John Mary Vianney, who with love and devotion carried out the task of caring for the portion of God’s People entrusted to them, showing themselves to be strong and determined men with the single aim of promoting the true good of souls (Benedict XVI 2010e). It can be noted that Benedict XVI tried to present the saints as living witnesses to the fact that priestly identity reaches its full realization in selfless pastoral charity, rooted in Christ and directed towards the good of the faithful.

The source of strength for many holy priests was their intimate relationships with Jesus, which is why for priests, prayer is the fundamental pastoral ministry. The Pope explained that prayer is not a retreat into privacy, but a priority pastoral task. It is an action in which the priest himself is filled anew with Christ and draws others into the communion of the praying Church, through which the presence of Jesus Christ flows into the world (Benedict XVI 2006a). In a world gripped by feverish activism, time dedicated to prayer is, according to Benedict XVI, a time of truly pastoral activity (Benedict XVI 2005c). Showing the example of Father Pio, the Pope stated that daily prayer, listening to the Word, an assiduous practice of the Sacraments and cordial membership in the community of the Church must be the basis of the program of life of each priest and religious (Benedict XVI 2009c).

Priests, rooted in God, despite their human poverty, but through the Sacrament of Orders, can “become sharers in his own priesthood, ministers of this sanctification, stewards of his mysteries, ‘bridges’ to the encounter with him and of his mediation between God and man and between man and God.” (Benedict XVI 2010d) This is accomplished through the administration of the sacraments, in which God is always the one who acts, and the priest is his instrument through which the effects of sanctification are realized. The Pope explained that “it is in the celebration of the Holy Mysteries that the priest finds the root of his holiness.” (Benedict XVI 2010d) This is a fundamental truth for the identity of the priest and results from fulfilling the task of sanctification; therefore, the Pope warned against renouncing the sacramental

pastoral care, without which it is impossible to exercise the priestly ministry in an authentic way. The priest, as an ordained minister continues the mission Christ, not only through the “word” but also the “sacrament,” in this totality of body and soul, of sign and word (Benedict XVI 2010d).

The task of the priest is to accompany people in such a way that they can truly experience the love of Christ and discover his presence in specific events of their own lives (Benedict XVI 2007d). Hence, the Holy Father encouraged priests to always experience the Liturgy and worship with hearts full of joy and love, because it is an action which the Risen One carries out with the power of the Holy Spirit. The Sacrament of Reconciliation should be given special attention as a place where the faithful may find compassion, advice and comfort, where they can feel that they are loved and understood by God, and experience the presence of Divine Mercy beside the Real Presence in the Eucharist (Benedict XVI 2010d).

In order to be a shepherd according to the heart of God, the priest needs inner freedom, mature will, a clear awareness of the identity received in Priestly Ordination, and an unconditional readiness to lead the flock entrusted to him in accordance with the Will of the Lord, without personal calculations. Since only the one who lives in profound and true obedience to Christ and the Church, is able to lead the People of God, fulfilling his pastoral ministry (Benedict XVI 2010e).

In the teaching of Benedict XVI, the priest’s pastoral ministry stems from his ontological bond with Christ. The Pope consistently reminded priests that true spiritual authority is based on obedience and unity with the Lord. Then, priests become transparent signs of Christ the Good Shepherd, and their ministry gains credibility and the power of evangelical witness.

4.2. The Priest as a Witness of Christ in the World

In the face of pastoral challenges and a constantly changing reality that contests Christian values, there is a need of priests with strong and balanced personalities. The apostolic exhortation *Pastores dabo vobis* emphasizes that priests should be capable of bearing the burdens of pastoral responsibility, as “living images” of Jesus, and following his example, they should be able to know the depths of the human heart, to perceive difficulties and problems, to facilitate encounters and dialogue, to create trust, to express serene and objective judgments, and to establish cooperation with others (*PDV* 43).

The requirements for priestly predispositions are reflected in the teaching of Benedict XVI, who placed a strong emphasis on the need to bear witness to charity. On numerous occasions, his wish was that priests be wise, generous, gentle, strong, respectful and convinced witnesses, as well as confident servants (Benedict XVI 2008e). Since this witness is especially needed by young people, for whom the priest becomes a point of reference (Benedict XVI 2009b). Although priests

have various tasks entrusted to them and their charisms may differ, they should always carry them out in the same spirit so that their presence and action among the Christian people become an eloquent witness of God's primacy in their lives (Benedict XVI 2009c).

The core of the priest's mission is to witness joy and to be a collaborator in the joy of others in a world that is often sad and negative. The Pope said that the priest is able to be a messenger and multiplier of joy, bringing it to all, especially to those who are sorrowful and disheartened, only when he himself have the joy of the Lord dwelling in him (Benedict XVI 2008e). It is precisely this example of joyful service to the Lord that can contribute to young people generously following their calling (Benedict XVI 2009b).

In his concern for joy in the life of the priest, the Pope expressed profound discernment of the existential needs of young people. In a world marked by pessimism and existential crisis, joy present in the priest's life appears as a sign of hope and fruit of the Holy Spirit, rooted in the experience of God's love. It is worth noting that in the Pope's teaching, joy had not only personal and communal but also vocational significance. The example of a life filled with joy positively presents the priestly vocation as the fullness of life and service.

In this context, priestly fraternity is an immense resource for the renewal of the priesthood and the raising up of new vocations. The Pope encouraged bishops to foster opportunities for ever greater dialogue and fraternal encounter among their priests, and especially the younger priests. He was convinced that this would bear great fruit for their own enrichment, for the increase of their love for the priesthood and the Church, and for the effectiveness of their apostolate (Benedict XVI 2008f). "Hierarchy implies a triple bond: in the first place the bond with Christ and with the order given by Our Lord to his Church; then the bond with the other Pastors in the one communion of the Church; and lastly, the bond with the faithful who are entrusted to the individual, in the order of the Church." (Benedict XVI 2010e)

Another important aspect of witness, which our world with its desire for "self-realization" and "self-determination" needs is obedience that has nothing to do with external constraint and the loss of oneself (Benedict XVI 2007a). Obedience to God's will and obedience to Jesus Christ must be practically humble obedience to the Church (Benedict XVI 2007a). Priestly obedience "is a believing with the Church, a thinking and speaking with the Church, serving through her." (Benedict XVI 2008c) This obedience then extends to obedience without reservations before the Truth itself that is Christ. This obedience not only purifies priests but above all also frees them "for service to Christ and thus for the salvation of the world, which nevertheless always begins with the obedient purification of one's own soul through the truth." (Benedict XVI 2009g)

Benedict XVI noted that a witness to faith must be chastity and celibacy, which only have meaning if they are based on God (Benedict XVI 2006d). Chastity

means an intensive relationship with the living Christ and with the Father (Benedict XVI 2007a). Therefore, in the contemporary world, living in voluntary celibacy is a sign of “freedom and joy which can draw others to the Love which lies beyond all other loves.” (Benedict XVI 2008d) By the vow of celibate chastity, priests solemnly promise to put themselves completely and unreservedly at the service of God’s Kingdom and at the service of others, wanting to build deep relationships with them. Thus, amid so much greed, egoism that cannot wait, consumerism and the cult of the individual, priests and religious show that selfless love for men and women is possible (Benedict XVI 2007a).

In the Pope’s reflection on the identity of the priest, there are also references to evangelical poverty, which is an important pillar of the priest’s life. That is why the Holy Father encouraged priests to a constant and serious examination of conscience in this aspect, since anyone who wants to follow Christ in a radical way must renounce material goods, so that he lives this poverty in a way centered on Christ, as a means of becoming inwardly free for their neighbor (Benedict XVI 2007a). In the broader context of the Pope’s statements under analysis, one can conclude that concern for evangelical poverty is not merely about material sacrifice, but rather a deeper attitude of freedom of the heart. Only priests who are internally free, available to the needs of others, and capable of living in simplicity and the logic of gift, can be credible witnesses to the Gospel.

In the teaching of Benedict XVI, the testimony of the priest’s life appears as a fundamental and irreplaceable element of evangelization. Rooted in a deep relationship with God and obedience to the Church, joyful and dedicated service in fidelity to commitments is in itself a form of proclamation to people in the contemporary world.

4.3. The Priest as a Teacher and Evangelizer

One of the fundamental tasks of the priest is the service of the word, which includes preaching the Gospel and teaching the truths of faith. Since the priest is the sacramental presence of Christ the Teacher, in contacts with all people he should be a man of mission and of dialogue (*RFIS* 40, 42). According to the instructions of *Pastores dabo vobis*, “deeply rooted in the truth and charity of Christ, and impelled by the desire and imperative to proclaim Christ’s salvation to all, the priest is called to witness in all his relationships to fraternity, service and a common quest for the truth, as well as a concern for the promotion of justice and peace.” (*PDV* 18)

In this spirit, Benedict XVI placed particular emphasis on the need for the priest to be deeply rooted in the truth. During a meeting with the clergy of the Aosta diocese, he encouraged them to renew their confidence that Jesus is the Truth, and that only by walking in his footsteps do priests go in the right direction, and it is in this direction that they lead others (Benedict XVI 2005d). This renewal happens through contact with God’s word, since when read and pondered in the Church, it acts upon

the priest and transforms him. As the manifestation of divine Wisdom, that word becomes his "life companion," "good counsellor" and an "encouragement in cares and grief." (Benedict XVI 2008b)

The priest, who lives in a deep relationship with the Word of God, becomes in a natural way a teacher and evangelizer. According to Benedict XVI, he can fulfill this mission in many ways: carefully preparing homilies, imparting catechetical formation in schools, in academic institutions; and above all, giving an example of his own life, he can teach and proclaim the Gospel. Since he does not do it from a position of superiority, but "with the humble, glad certainty of someone who has encountered the Truth, who has been grasped and transformed by it, hence cannot but proclaim it." (Benedict XVI 2010f)

In light of the above, it is worth drawing attention to the aspect of the priest's ordinary life, which resonated strongly in the teachings of Benedict XVI. The Pope pointed to the ordinariness of the priest's daily ministry as a space in which the Gospel gains credibility. This ordinariness does not imply banality, but rather the simplicity and clarity of a life rooted in Christ. In the face of various falsifications and identity crises, it is precisely this ordinariness of the life of the priest that can be an effective tool for evangelization.

Benedict XVI emphasized that in the context of contemporary educational challenges, the task of teaching, which is one of the fundamental duties of the priest, takes on particular importance: "we are very confused about the fundamental choices in our life and question what the world is, where it comes from, where we are going, what we must do in order to do good, how we should live and what the truly pertinent values are." (Benedict XVI 2010f) Referring to this type of doubt, catechesis can be of valuable help. Therefore, the Holy Father encouraged priests to intensify the catechesis and the faith formation not only of children but also of young people and adults, since "mature reflection on faith is a light for the path of life and a source of strength for witnessing to Christ." (Benedict XVI 2007c)

Indicating the great need to teach and evangelize, the Pope encouraged priests to use modern forms of communication. Homilies, lectures, Bible courses or theology courses do not exhaust the possibilities of formation today. It is necessary to "have recourse also to the communications media: press, radio and television, websites, forums and many other methods for effectively communicating the message of Christ to a large number of people." (Benedict XVI 2007c)

This openness to new communication tools and the encouragement for priests to fearlessly use new forms of communication reveal a significant aspect of the Pope's concern for the fulfillment of the priest's identity and ministry within the Church community. As a teacher and evangelizer, the priest should harmoniously combine fidelity to Christ's message with the courage needed to enter new socio-cultural contexts. In this way, the Pope emphasized that the priest's mission cannot be limited to traditional pastoral areas but must also encompass the new realms of the digital reality.

The priest, as a herald of the Good News, is sent especially where people struggle with poverty, exclusion, and loneliness. Benedict XVI expressed great appreciation for clergy and laity who, despite difficulties, carry not only the word of truth but also a concrete sign of love through their presence, solidarity, and action for justice (Benedict XVI 2007a). This mission requires courage, humility and readiness to enter into dialogue with everyone in a spirit of understanding, sensitivity and charity (Benedict XVI 2007b).

The Pope emphasized that priests need to show openness and collaboration in the Church's mission of evangelization. Therefore, he appealed to priests to accompany the new movements and associations, support families, and do not forget the link with young people (Benedict XVI 2006c).

Special attention must be paid to young people who need help to enter a culture inspired by faith (Benedict XVI 2009b). Since the priest as an educator and evangelizer cannot be a passive observer of modern day culture, but is called to appreciate its merits and critically evaluate its limits. The task of the priest is the proclamation of the Gospel with the firm assurance that it is the greatest service to render to man, because it leads people to God, reawakens faith, lifts the person out of his inertia and desperation (Benedict XVI 2010e).

In his teaching, Benedict XVI raised awareness that teaching and evangelizing should be carried out in a positive way, showing the beauty of the Gospel "as an integral way of life, offering an attractive and true answer, intellectually and practically, to real human problems." (Benedict XVI 2008f) In this aspect, the priest's task is to create a place for an authentic "dialogue of salvation," which is born from the deep certainty of being loved unconditionally by God. This certainty "helps the human being to recognize his sin and gradually to enter that stable dynamic of conversion of heart which leads to radical renouncement of evil and to a life in accordance with God." (Benedict XVI 2010b) Therefore, in the spirit of responsibility for educating the faithful, the Pope encouraged priests to assume a sacrificial and generous approach to sacramental confession as a space that allows priests to demonstrate the merciful love of God in words and in drawing near to the penitent (Benedict XVI 2007d).

In view of the emerging tendencies, concerning the priest's identity and mission, to emphasize only the dimension of preaching the word, while marginalizing or even omitting the aspect of sanctification stemming from the sacramental pastoral ministry (Benedict XVI 2010d), it is necessary to retell and explain that true priesthood is only possible when it is rooted in the sacramental ministry.

The Lord makes his own action present in the person who carries out these gestures. These three duties of the priest which Tradition has identified in the Lord's different words about mission: teaching, sanctifying and governing in their difference and in their deep unity are a specification of this effective representation. In fact, they are the three

actions of the Risen Christ, the same that he teaches today, in the Church and in the world. Thereby he creates faith, gathers together his people, creates the presence of truth and really builds the communion of the universal Church; and sanctifies and guides. (Benedict XVI 2010f)

In light of these reflections of Pope Benedict XVI, the essence of the priest's identity also includes his active participation in the formation of the faithful and his constant search for ways to reach them with the message of the Gospel. The foundation of this ministry, despite changing circumstances, is the priest's rooting in Christ—the Truth so that he can effectively undertake the task of teaching the Truth, sanctifying through the sacraments, and guiding the faithful toward salvation.

Conclusions

The teachings of Pope Benedict XVI constitute valuable and extensive research material, particularly in the context of reflection on the identity of the priest. Therefore, the primary goal of the analyses undertaken in this paper was not to provide an exhaustive discussion of all issues concerning priestly identity, but rather to reveal its essence and to identify and order those dimensions of its experience that, in light of Benedict XVI's pronouncements, require ongoing formational concern. This approach has allowed us to show the theological depth of the Pope's teachings and their significance for contemporary priestly formation.

Benedict XVI consistently presented the priest's identity as a sacramental-ontological reality, deeply rooted in the mystery of participation in the priesthood of Christ. This identity appears as a complex and dynamic reality that is not limited to the internal sphere but necessarily and naturally demands realization and visibility in the external dimension.

The identity of the priest, embedded in his inner being, encompasses spiritual, psychological, and intellectual dimensions and is expressed externally in his ministry in the Church and in the world. It is noteworthy that the Pope strongly emphasized the unity and complementarity of these two dimensions, which fully correspond to the threefold mission entrusted to the priest in the Church: shepherding, sanctifying, and teaching. For the priest to effectively fulfill his external tasks—as a shepherd and minister of the sacraments, a witness to the world, a teacher and evangelizer—he must, internally, maintain a deep relationship with Christ and be spiritually grounded, develop psychologically toward greater maturity, and continually improve his education.

Benedict XVI's teaching clearly demonstrates a profound concern for an integral and integrated understanding of the priest's identity, which presupposes the unity of

his spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral life. The Pope advocated a return to a personalistic model of formation rooted in a living and personal relationship with Christ. Implementing this principle continues to be an adequate response to contemporary identity crises and formation challenges.

A significant and innovative aspect of the Pope's teaching is his strong emphasis on the need to shape the intellectual dimension of priestly identity. In the context of cultural relativism and the axiological confusion, which the Church is facing in the contemporary world, this intellectual dimension is treated as an indispensable tool for evangelization.

A particularly valuable and effective way of demonstrating the essence of priestly identity is Benedict XVI's reference to the examples of saint priests. Reflecting on the multifaceted maturity of priests, especially during the Year of Priests, the Pope frequently invoked the figure of St. John Mary Vianney, presenting his life as a living and compelling embodiment of what the priesthood is all about. Thus, the theological content was grounded in concrete experience, and the identity of the priest was presented as a feasible vocational path rather than an abstract concept.

Numerous thoughts of the Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI have been implemented in *Ratio fundamentalis institutionis sacerdotalis* (RFIS 1, 36, 87, 97, 103, 131, 166, 172). Thus, his concern for the priest's mature identity can be understood as a proposal for a comprehensive formation program, encompassing the internal and external aspects through which priestly identity is expressed. His words, addressed to the clergy, remain relevant regardless of the changing socio-cultural and pastoral context, and their acceptance and implementation in the priestly formation seem essential for the renewal of the priest's life and the regaining of the Church's credibility in the world.

Translated by Maria Kantor

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Out of Justice or Charity? The Fulfillment of the Vow to Serve the Poor in the Company of the Daughters of Charity in the Case of Servant of God Sister Barbara Samulowska, D.C.

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Abstract: The author of the study reveals the nature and thus the richness of the vows lived out in the Company of the Daughters of Charity. Their specificity comes from the fact that these vows are non-religious, annual, and renewable. Furthermore, they are rooted in the mystery of Christ and the Church. An essential element of the promises made to God by the Daughters of Charity is that these promises are lived by in the light of the vow to serve the poor. The other vows are understood and lived by the sisters in relation to this very vow. Saint Vincent de Paul was convinced that serving the poor was doing justice. In turn, this had to be associated with charity. An example of living by the vow to serve the poor is Sr. Barbara Stanisława Samulowska, D.C. Her just service intertwined with mercy came not so much from the privilege of Marian revelations, which she experienced at Gietrzwałd, but rather from the fulfillment of the charism and aim of the congregation to which she belonged.

Keywords: Barbara Stanisława Samulowska, baptism, justice, vow to serve the poor, Company of the Daughters of Charity

Through making their choice to live based on the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty, and obedience, the Daughters of Charity devote themselves to God in order to serve Christ in the poor. It formally began on March 25, 1642, when, accompanied by four other sisters, Louise de Marillac, co-founder of the Company of the Daughters of Charity, pronounced the vows for the first time, “for life.” Gradually, other sisters also made such vows. In 1648, the vows became annual, both the first vows and the renewed ones. As time went by, it became common for sisters to make their vows for the first time between the fifth and seventh year of vocation. Since 1801, this condition has been a requirement to continue in the Company (cf. Calvet 1961; Mezzadri and Nuovo 1991).

This study aims to present the specificity and richness of the vows made in the Company of the Daughters of Charity. To achieve this, it was essential to draw upon the key writings and teachings of St. Vincent de Paul concerning the unique nature of these vows—with particular emphasis on the first vow, namely, the vow of service to the poor. It marks the identity and objective, which the Company fulfills in the Church. Having the above vow in perspective, the author strives to give a response

to the following questions: Does serving the poor involve doing justice or charity? and How did Sr. Barbara Stanisława Samulowska, D.C., a visionary from the village of Gietrzwałd, missionary and Servant of God,¹ manage these two elements, resulting in the accomplishment of the vow of serving the poor?

1. A Unique Form of Commitment

The Company of the Daughters of Charity is a society of apostolic life in which religious vows are not made in the meaning specific to convents and congregations. However, the Daughters of Charity do undertake the living out of the evangelical counsels through the bonds formulated in the Constitutions (cf. CCL 731). They may not be religious vows, yet they constitute commitments—*aliquo vinculo*—defined by the internal laws of the Daughters of Charity (cf. Wroceński 2006, 185–207). The Constitutions determine these commitments as “non-religious, annual and always renewable.” (C 28a)

What makes these vows non-religious is that they differ from the ones made in convents. This mainly refers to the fact that the profession of the evangelical counsels in religious life is made through public vows and in this manner men and women religious are confirmed, whereas one becomes a Daughter of Charity through the total gift of self to God which is done through the service (to Him) in the poor from the very moment of entering the Seminary (cf. C 5a). The vows are made for the first time between five and seven years of vocation, and they are to confirm the total commitment to God, as well as serving the poor in a more profound dimension (cf. C 28c).

Being non-religious (not belonging to a religious institution), the Daughters of Charity do not profess their vows. Their Constitutions use such words as “choose,” “commit,” or “ratify.” (C 8b, 27, 28a) As far as the specificity of their service is concerned, it ought to be as follows:

They shall bear in mind that they do not belong to a Religious Order because that state is incompatible with the duties of their vocation. Nevertheless, since they are more exposed to

¹ Barbara Samulowska was born on January 21, 1865, in the village of Woryty. As a young girl, she experienced the grace of meeting the Virgin Mary from June 28 to September 16, 1877 (the Apparitions in Gietrzwałd are the only Polish Marian apparitions approved by the Church). They led Barbara to the decision to give herself to God and to serve the poor in the Company of the Daughters of Charity, where she took on the name of Stanisława. Sister Stanisława spent most of her life serving the sick in Guatemala. She died on December 6, 1950, in an aura of sanctity at the age of 85, after 66 years of her vocation and 55 years of her missionary work. On February 2, 2005, the process of beatification of Sr. Barbara Samulowska officially began. On May 31, 2023, a *positio* was submitted, and on December 1, 2023, the diocesan tribunal took an oath on the matter of validating the miraculous healing attributed to Servant of God Sr. Barbara Stanisława Samulowska (cf. Pranga 2024, 4–6).

the occasions of sin than nuns bound to the cloister, having for monastery only the houses of the sick and the place where the Superioress resides; for cell, a hired room; for chapel, the parish church; for cloister, the streets of the city; for enclosure, obedience, with an obligation to go nowhere but to the houses of the sick or to places necessary for their service; for grille, the fear of God; for veil, holy modesty; making no other profession to ensure their vocation and that, by their constant trust in Divine Providence and the offering they make to God of all that they are and of their service in the person of the poor. (Vincent de Paul 2006, 530)

In the beginning, the founders pondered whether the Daughters of Charity should make vows. They feared that the Daughters of Charity would be perceived as religious once they had professed vows and, in consequence, be forced into cloistered life, subsequently losing the possibility of moving freely, which was important for their visiting the poor who needed it. However, after the time of reflection, the founders decided to introduce the vows. Saint Vincent strove to make the Daughters of Charity aware that they would not become a religious order through the mentioned vows. “If he asks you, ‘Do you make religious vows?’ tell him, ‘Oh no, Monsieur! We give ourselves to God to live in poverty, chastity, and obedience.’” (Vincent de Paul 2004, 432)

The vows of the Daughters of Charity are neither public, solemn, nor entirely private, but constitute a distinctive feature of the Company (cf. *IVDC* 1991). At the center of religious consecration is profession, whereas in the consecration of the Daughters of Charity, it is ministering to the poor that stands out as the central point (cf. Martínez 1991).

The vows are temporary and annual. Each year, the Daughters of Charity renew them on the Feast of the Annunciation. Through the renovation of vows, they reaffirm their original choice of vocation, made at the time of entering the Company, through which they gave themselves to God in the service of Christ in the poor (cf. *IVDC* 1991, 36–37).

The importance of the act of renovation also derives from the fact that it is never the same. Since the last vows, each sister has gained new experience, which has added shape to her unique history of vocation. Therefore, the annual renewal in the Company of the Daughters of Charity is never a copy of the previous one, for it always means “a new phase of deepening their total gift to God in the service of the poor.” (*IVDC* 1991, 38)

The founders emphasized that temporality as such should not interfere with the option of fundamental choice. They agreed to the vows made in the Company as a sign of maturity and stability of vocation, since fidelity to vocation assumes persistence, which was pointed out by St. Vincent, “Our first reason for giving ourselves wholeheartedly to God to be faithful to Him, is that you’ve given yourselves to Him in the Company, with the intention of living and dying in it.” (Vincent

de Paul 2004, 495) This is also confirmed by St. Louise, “We only accept those who have aspirations to live and die in the Company.” (Louise de Marillac 1987, 595)²

The temporality of the vows does not mean making short-term commitments, but it should truly be a symptom of spiritual dynamism and a help in the gradual deepening of vocation. From the very start, vows are made for life. The annual renovation confirms the first choice, which has become stable and invariable. The fact that vows are made for one year at a given time does not mean that the positive response to the previously made choice of life would only be valid for 12 months, as was clearly expressed by St. Vincent: “Still, it would be better not to make them at all than to have the intention of obtaining a dispensation whenever you wished.” (Vincent de Paul 2004, 22)

When the founders agreed on the decision to introduce vows in the Company, they did it knowing what their significance in the Church was—a commitment to follow Christ radically, stating:

And it would be well for those to whom God has granted the grace of giving themselves more perfectly to Him and who have promised to serve Him in the Company, to renew their vows. (Vincent de Paul 2004, 277–78)

By entering the Company, you chose Our Lord as your Spouse, and He received you as His spouses or, to put it better, you were engaged to Him and, at the end of four years, more or less, you gave yourselves entirely to Him by the vows, so you are His spouses and He is yours. (Vincent de Paul 2006, 138)

Each of you was inscribed in the book of charity when you gave yourselves to God to serve the poor, Sisters; and, on the day you took your vows. (Vincent de Paul 2006, 379)

The above statements show clearly that the evangelical radicalism of the vows of the Daughters of Charity is not in any degree diminished by the fact that they are “non-religious, annual and always renewable.”

2. The Vows Rooted in the Mystery of Christ and the Church

When St. Vincent debated with the Daughters of Charity on the topic of persevering in their vocation, he first and foremost invited them to be faithful to the Sacrament of Baptism and all that it contained. He used the following words:

If you're really faithful in the observance of this way of life, Sisters, you'll all be good Christians. I wouldn't be saying as much if I told you that you'd be good nuns. Why do people

² All translations have been prepared by the author.

join Religious Orders if not to become good Christian men and women? Yes, Sisters, really make it a point to become good Christian women by the faithful practice of your Rules. God will be glorified by it, and your Company will edify the whole Church. (Vincent de Paul 2004, 103)

Becoming a good Christian involves discovering the grace of baptism. It is there that the process of growing and imitating Christ has its starting point. Gradually, through religious consecration, one strives to cling unreservedly to Jesus—chaste, poor, and obedient—in these three dimensions of His earthly life.

The practice of the evangelical counsels in the Company of the Daughters of Charity related to the Sacrament of Baptism as the root of their existence is explained in the following way: “In order to serve Christ in persons who are poor, the Daughters of Charity commit themselves to live their baptismal consecration through the practice of the evangelical counsels of chastity, poverty and obedience, which receive from this service their specific character.” (C 27) Through the profession of the evangelical counsels the Daughters of Charity endeavor to live and develop their baptismal consecration in daily life, so as to “imitate Christ more closely.”

Though the word *consecration* relates mainly to the act of professing the evangelical counsels in religious life (cf. CCL 654–58), this term has been applied in the Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity in such phrases as: “they give themselves entirely and in community to the service of Christ” (C 7) or “serving is for them the expression of their total gift of self to God in the Company and gives it its full significance.” (C 16b) It is in this sense that the Daughters of Charity are indeed women “religious.” These terms were used by the founders and the Constitutions adopted them to describe the vocation of the Daughters of Charity.

Although the consecration of the Daughters of Charity differs from religious consecration, they both include similar evangelical radicalism and requirements. Saint Vincent’s words in this matter sound quite meaningful: “Making no other profession [Daughters of Charity—S.S.] to ensure their vocation than trust in Divine Providence, they have as much and even more need of virtue than if they had made their profession in a Religious Order.” (Vincent de Paul 2006, 531)

Being aware that the sisters ministered to the poor “out in the world” and that their vocation might be more exposed to temptations than in the cloister, St. Vincent explained: “[I]t’s so important that you are more virtuous than nuns. And if there’s one degree of perfection for members of Religious Orders, Daughters of Charity need two, because you run a great risk of being lost if you’re not virtuous.” (Vincent de Paul 2006, 527–28) The above seemed to be Vincent’s answer to frequent opinions among the sisters that the state of cloistered women religious was more perfect than the “loving state” of the Daughters of Charity. The founder assured them that this was not the case. Although he was full of admiration for the nuns, it was true that the Daughters of Charity were not nuns. Nevertheless, in all the reality surrounding

them, “they live in that state of perfection, if they’re true Daughters of Charity.” (Vincent de Paul 2004, 13) In order to confirm his way of thinking, he added: “I’ve never seen a more perfect state,” (Vincent de Paul 2004, 538) the state in which one lives their baptismal consecration, practicing the evangelical counsels and giving themselves wholeheartedly to the poor.

Servant of God Sr. Barbara Samulowska was baptized on January 22, 1865. That moment marked the beginning of a gradual discovery of the Sacrament of Baptism’s grace and a deeper sense of becoming like Christ. This evolution was happening mostly through faithful everyday life in the Vincentian charism, especially in the service to the poor in Guatemala. Particularly noteworthy are the testimonies of her co-workers who stressed her exceptional goodness, which distinguished her from the rest of the staff (cf. Pranga 2024, 13–19).

3. The Vow of Serving the Poor Versus Justice

The Company of the Daughters of Charity exists in the Church as a society of apostolic life. As such, it is expected to distinguish itself by a specific apostolic purpose. For the Daughters of Charity, this is accomplished through serving the most impoverished (*PE*, nos. 59, 369), which is expressed by the vow to serve the poor. The Constitutions of the Company name it as the first out of four, before chastity, poverty, and obedience (C 28a) because the three classic evangelical counsels must be understood and lived in relation to it (cf. Vincenzo de Paoli 1980; Delgado 1981). It is directly connected with the identity and aim that the Company fulfills. The formula of the vows specifies it as follows:

In response to the call of Christ, who invites me to follow Him and to be a witness to His charity to the poor, I... renew the promises of my Baptism and vow to God, for one year, chastity, poverty, and obedience to my legitimate Superiors, and to devote myself to the corporal and spiritual service of the poor, our true Masters, in the Company of the Daughters of Charity, in accordance with our Constitutions and Statutes. Grant me, O Lord, the grace of fidelity, through your Son Jesus Christ crucified, and through the intercession of the Immaculate Virgin. (C 28b)

Remarkably, this specific character of the service—abundant in self-giving in the service of the poor, understood as the realization of love of Christ—played a key role in choosing the Company by the young visionary from Gietrzwałd. When the revelations ended, Barbara Samulowska stayed at the centers run by the Daughters of Charity. Undoubtedly, it influenced her decision to bind her life to this Company (cf. Wierzchosławski 1987, 215).

For the Daughters of Charity, the practice of the evangelical counsels needs to be always linked with serving Christ in the persons of the poor (C 27), and charity stands for one of its fundamental aspects. There is an urge to ask in what manner the co-founder, St. Vincent de Paul, proclaimed the patron of all works of charity in the Church by Pope Leo XIII in 1885, understood charity. Although a precise definition of charity cannot be found in Vincent's writings, we may point to some crucial elements that define it.

The first essential element is showing God's merciful face to the poor—following the example of Jesus Christ—and out of concern for their salvation. It is the contemplation of Jesus, Incarnate Word, from where Vincent's charity and love for the poor stems, who, as Vincent taught, need to be treated as the person of Jesus (Vincent de Paul 2004, 216). The words of the postulator of the Vincentian congregations on this matter are truly meaningful:

It is not love for others that led him to sanctity, but rather sanctity truly and effectively shaped him to be abundant in love. The poor did not give him to God. Quite the opposite—God gave him to the poor. If he is perceived more as a philanthropist than a mystic, if he isn't thought of as a mystic then one makes a picture of Vincent de Paul that never existed. (Guerra 2024, 105)

Another vital element of charity is ministering in all places, to all poor people, especially those most in need, and ministering in cooperation with others. Vincent, a priest, was constantly on the lookout for ways to do this work. Gradually, his life changed into ministry. It is worth noting that in Vincent's time, society in his native country tended to hide the poor, often feeling ashamed of their presence. Poor people were taken away from the streets and locked in places like Hôtel-Dieu. Charity was not practiced through affirmation but rather through confinement. A relevant example would be Marseille with its *Vieille Charité*. The poor did receive adequate help, yet they remained socially and physically isolated. It was for them that Vincent fought for justice and freedom (cf. Krasucka 2024, 91).

The founder of the Daughters of Charity served galley convicts, as well as peasants living on the de Gondis' estate, always giving attention to what was happening around him. To him, every situation was a place of the revelation of God's will and action, the most significant of which were the events that took place in 1617 in Folleville (confession of a poor man) and Châtillon-les-Dombes (aiding an abandoned family). Meeting those poor persons was equivalent to meeting Christ, and this was how Vincent viewed this issue.

Vincent did not restrict himself to a particular form of poverty; he did not "specialize" in helping one chosen social group but struggled for each and every person's dignity of life (cf. Krasucka 2024, 90).

Yet another characteristic feature of Vincentian charity is the service of Christ in the poor, both corporally and spiritually. This is expressed by Vincent in the *Conference on the Service of the Sick*, delivered to the sisters on March 16, 1642:

We wouldn't, in fact, be doing enough for God and the neighbour if we only gave the sick poor food and medicine and if we didn't assist them, in accord with God's Plan, by the spiritual service we owe them. When you serve poor persons in this way, you'll be true Daughters of Charity, that is to say, daughters of God, and you'll be imitating Jesus Christ. (Vincent de Paul 2004, 50)

What is also important is the approach to charity, which gradually develops into a structured system and long-term care. In Châtillon-les-Dombes, Vincent realized that the suffering of the poor was not caused by the lack of merciful hands but by the lack of sufficient organization of their help. The municipal archives preserve the note stating this rule:

As indeed charity is a sure indication of true children of God, and one of its signs is visiting and feeding the poor and sick, some pious girls and virtuous local ladies of Châtillon-les-Dombes, diocese of Lyon, wanting to get from God the grace of being His true daughters, agreed to help the inhabitants of their city, both financially and spiritually. They suffered more because of the lack of organisation providing help, than because of the lack of compassionate people. (MACh 1617, document 126)

Another distinctive component of Vincent's experience should be highlighted. The duty of people in the service of the poor is to put on the spirit of Jesus Christ, i.e., the spiritual robe of the Vincentian virtues. Referring to Vincent's Conference, dating back to November 1, 1658, the Constitutions of the Daughters of Charity recommend the sisters to perform charitable acts in the spirit of the Gospel. "[Sisters—S.S.] serve Him [Jesus—S.S.] in His suffering members 'with compassion, gentleness, cordiality, respect and devotion.'" (C 10b)

Bringing help is a desired activity; however, for St. Vincent, it was the manner in which it was performed that remained extremely important. Thus, in the closing scene of the film *Monsieur Vincent* (1947), Maurice Cloche, the director, put in a moving scene with St. Vincent addressing a young Daughter of Charity who was going on her first mission with the words:

Jeanne, you will soon realise that charity is a heavy load to carry. It's heavier than a pot of soup and a basket of bread. But you will always keep your tenderness and your smile. It is not hard to serve soup and bread. Even the rich can do that. But you are a servant of the poor, a Daughter of Charity, always smiling, always in a good mood. They are your masters. Touchy and demanding masters, as you'll see. The uglier and the dirtier they are,

OUT OF JUSTICE OR CHARITY? THE FULFILLMENT OF THE VOW TO SERVE THE POOR

the more unfair and vulgar they are, the more love you'll have to give. Only because of your love, and your love alone, will the poor forgive you for the bread you're giving them. (Guerra 2024, 110)

Although charity is an essential element of living the vow of service of the poor in the Company of the Daughters of Charity, one may come across the following argument in the *Letters by Vincent*:

I praise God for the charity the City of Marseilles is showing to the poor in their present need, and for the timely help you have procured for the convicts suffering from the cold weather and poverty. God will grant you the grace, Monsieur, of softening our hearts toward the wretched creatures and of realizing that in helping them we are doing an act of justice and not of mercy! (Vincent de Paul 1997, 115)

The above words lead to the conclusion that the fundamental element that builds the service of the poor is not so much charity but justice. Vincent's words addressed to the sisters confirm this:

But you, Sisters, will be suitable mothers if you see to the needs of these little creatures, instruct them in the knowledge of God, and correct them with fairness accompanied by gentleness. (Vincent de Paul 2004, 113)

Here, it seems appropriate to refer to how Vincent understood justice. In another *Conference to the Daughters of Charity of 11 November 1657*, he said:

To leave everything you have in this world, Sisters,—father, mother, brothers, sisters, relations, friends, and possessions if you have any, and even your country! Why? To serve those who are poor, to instruct them, and to help them get to paradise. Is there anything more beautiful and more admirable? If we could see such a Sister, we'd see her soul shining like the sun, as Our Lord says in Holy Scripture, 'The just man is like the sun' (cf. Matt 13:43). "Sisters, if you only realised what a grace it is to serve those who are poor and to be called by God for that purpose!" (Vincent de Paul 2004, 271–72)

The Founder of the Company relates to the classical rule of law defined by the Roman jurist Ulpian, living in the 3rd century:

"Justice is a steady and eternal will to give what is really due to each individual. These are the rules of law: make an honest living, do not harm the other, give what is really due to each individual" (Lat. *Iustitia est constans et perpetua voluntas ius suum cuique tribuendi. Iuris praecepta sunt haec: honeste vivere, alterum non laedere, suum cuique tribuere*). (Jońca 2011)

The statement “give what is really due to each individual” (*suum cuique tribuere*) forces us to reconsider what is human and proper to a man, what a person really needs to be himself/herself and to live a human life. According to the ancient sentence above, living in a human way means giving what is truly due to each human being. Justice, as it is understood in this manner, leads not to perceive a human in terms of whether he or she deserves specific help but to recognize what their needs are at a given time.

Interestingly enough, the mentioned definition of law given by the Roman jurist, particularly the *suum cuique tribuere* component, derives from family relations. Back then, lawyers drew inspiration from family rules, where a person would often receive more than he or she deserved or the law required. This is how people build relationships with one another, which enables them to see what the others really need.

Vincent de Paul firmly believed that, through the service of the poor, justice, above all, was provided, and that it should always accompany charity. His reflection on justice could be summarized in two sentences: “justice should always be combined with charity” and “there is no love if it is not coupled with justice.” (Baylach 1995, 329)

4. Vow(s) in the Life of Sister Barbara Samulowska, D.C.

In 1877, when the Gietrzwałd revelations ended, visionaries Justyna Szafryńska and Barbara Samulowska lived at a center run by the Daughters of Charity, located in the Warmia region, for safety reasons. In 1880, Barbara went to Chełmno, where she served the poor together with other Daughters of Charity. It was then and there that a desire to become a Daughter of Charity of St. Vincent de Paul grew in her (cf. Ryszka 2004, 81). She began her initial vocational discernment. Barbara was a candidate and participated in various activities for the service to the poor run by the Daughters of Charity. A year later, she began her mission at a nursery school that had been granted permission by the Prussian government to reopen on May 31, 1881. On the very first day, approximately 130 children were brought by their parents, and after 3–4 weeks, the number of children increased to 300 (cf. Wierchosławski 1987, 215).

In late 1880 and early 1881, a famine and typhus epidemic broke out in the area of Chełmno. According to the information from the Chronicles, the house of the Daughters of Mercy was virtually besieged by the poor (cf. ADCCCh Chronicle (1850–1950), 220–221). Apart from assisting the poor, the sisters from Chełmno were responsible for preparing children for their First Holy Communion, and also for taking care of the poorest high school students. Moreover, they were in charge of the sewing workshop for girls, a place to which Barbara also came, as indicated by the

report applying to her Seminary period, mentioning her ability to sew (cf. ADCCh Chronicle (1850–1950), 143).

After an almost eight-year interval, on December 8, 1881, the postulatum was reopened. Despite the deficiency in vocations, not all candidates were admitted, as the rules described by the superiors were strictly followed, and great caution was recommended. Barbara Samulowska was admitted to postulancy on August 22, 1883. It began on September 8 of the same year (cf. ADCCh II A/III-2/2s, 394–95, 425).

As the personal file of the Servant of God shows, she was admitted to the Seminary at the Motherhouse in Paris. On January 9, Barbara entered the Seminary and began her retreat. After that, she officially began her Seminary on January 19. The latter date is given as the starting point of her incorporation into the Company. These dates come from her personal files (cf. APHG 2005–2006, fols. 1216–1217). She received the habit on November 8, and she took the name of Stanisława to emphasize her Polish origin and her spiritual bonds with St. Stanisław Kostka, patron of the Polish youth and a great advocate of the Mother of God (cf. Brzozowski 2009, 146).

After finishing the formation, the young Sr. Samulowska made her vows for the first time on February 2, 1889 (cf. Brzozowski 2009, 146). At this early stage of her missionary work, she stayed in Paris, in the house of Belleville, guided by Sr. Marie Mauche. Then in 1895, she started on her new mission among the poor of Guatemala, where she stayed until the end of her life (APHG 2005–2006, fols. 1317).

Being on a mission for 55 years, she fulfilled her vow of service to the poor, primarily focusing on three key groups: the poor, the sick, and medical students. With great respect, Sr. Stanisława treated the needy and always tried to be at their disposal. One of the sisters confirmed:

I observed a great love towards the poor in her, particularly when I was a doorkeeper, she told me many times: “whenever a poor person comes, look for me, do not allow them to wait long, call me at once.” ... I witnessed material and spiritual assistance, which she provided. She said frequently: “If a poor man is looking for me while I am not around, please, get Sister X to serve him, as no one must leave without being paid attention to.” (Cybula 2006, 97)

Sister Stanisława met the most urgent needs of the poor. She also strove to provide them with honest work whenever possible. Above all, she would make sure that the sick had everything they needed. During this time, she served alongside other sisters in the hospitals of Guatemala City, Antigua, and Quetzaltenango. Warm as she was, she did not hesitate to point out others’ impatience toward the sick, reprimanding: “By what right do you behave in such a manner towards the sick? We are meant to treat them with more patience and love.” One of her patients left a testimony of her: “An angel among the sick, full of sweetness and hope.” (APHG Sección 1.J.19.60.33)

Through her attitude, Sr. Samulowska had a positive effect on the medical staff working at the Central Hospital in the capital of Guatemala. She was able to notice

very personal deficiencies. She was motherly and open. She helped medical students, especially those who struggled financially with their studies. She acted discreetly, avoiding any public recognition (cf. Pranga 2024, 15). What is worth stressing is Sr. Samulowska's manner of referring to others. The witnesses of her life emphasized her gentleness, cordiality, and respect for everyone. Many sisters agreed that extraordinary goodness led her to sanctity (APHG 1950, no. 616).

Among many testimonies describing her service to the poor and her life in the community, we find a unique opinion. One of her fellow Daughters of Charity underlines: "She was known for extraordinary goodness." Another sister mentioned her motherly way of behaving and her "goodness which is very unusual." (APHG Sección 1.J.19.60.33)

The way in which she lived her vow to serve the poor was undoubtedly Vincentian. She was often depicted as "a living rule" by the sister who worked with her. If the Church officially declares her Blessed, her sanctity will not be considered to be the result of the grace of seeing and speaking to the Mother of God (although this certainly helped her to trust Jesus through her spiritual friendship with His Mother), but the realization of her Vincentian vocation, which, among other things, led her to acquire holiness through the vow of the service of the poor (cf. AMP AA1/2), giving with love what others lacked, in order to live their lives with dignity.

Conclusions

Although the vows of the Daughters of Charity are considered non-religious, they demand no less radical commitment from them and remain adequate for this society of apostolic life. They are temporary and renewed each year, in order to reaffirm one's first choice and receive new strengths and graces to live and persevere in this vocation. Therefore, the vows do not make a Daughter of Charity, but they are the result of being a Daughter of Charity and an aid to coming one more perfectly.

In addition, the vows open up the space to deepen God's grace. Vincent de Paul encouraged sisters to live the vows in the context of religious virtue; therefore, the act of consecration of the Daughters of Charity is the very realization of the words "I believe...."

The fundamental aspect of the vows pronounced by the Daughters of Charity is the fact that they are understood in the light of the vow of service to the poor. The other vows are understood and lived by the sisters in relation to this special vow. Vincent de Paul was convinced that, above all, one does justice through serving the poor, and justice needs to be accompanied by charity.

The life of Sr. Barbara Stanisława Samulowska, D.C., is undoubtedly an example of the living out of the vow of service to the poor. Her just service combined with

charity was not so much the privilege of the Marian revelations which she experienced at Gietrzwałd, as the fulfillment of the charism and aim of the Company to which she belonged. Her fidelity to the charism proves her holiness, and it is holiness that keeps the Vincentian charism alive and up-to-date.

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In Search of a Universal Landmark of Hermeneutic Reflection

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Abstract: The aim of the present article is to identify a universal landmark of hermeneutics in order to discern what is involved in the act of cognition and the object towards which the process of understanding is directed. The focus is placed on a paradigmatic shift from the horizon of dialogue between inner and outer speech to a perspective of freedom, which ultimately confers meaning upon the act of dialogue itself. In this context, reference is made to Hermann Krings' transcendental analysis of freedom, which does not provide a direct answer to the hermeneutical question, but rather thematizes the preconditions for the realization of freedom. This thematization elucidates the substantive dimension of cognition, engages its point of origin and its teleological orientation, and substantiates the phenomenological perspective. However, in order to ensure that transcendental analysis is not construed as an absolutist claim regarding the determination of consciousness, the present article also points to the need for defining the status of the hermeneutical process itself. The process of transcendental analyses presupposes factuality, revisits the historical-critical method, and aims to “regulate” the inherent dynamics and laws of understanding. Such an approach gestures toward the horizon of the possibility of understanding, which, although shaped by a regulative concept (a worldly mediation) and situated within a framework of epistemic reference or a particular system of thought—may also be determined by the creative act of the Absolute. As such, this act transcends the existing epistemic frameworks and cognitive systems, thereby opening a theological perspective that does not negate rational categories but rather integrates them into the quest for an order oriented toward the Absolute.

Keywords: hermeneutic, freedom, truth, transcendental analyses

The civilizational crisis is a sign of a hermeneutical crisis, which is understood as a deficiency of meaning. The determination of a universal landmark in hermeneutical inquiry reflects the desire to overcome this crisis. This desire arises through the conceptual identification of understanding. This implies that the conceptual definition of hermeneutics' universal landmark represents an attempt to comprehend it, though the universal aspect of hermeneutics traditionally was conceived within the paradigm of transmission as the givenness of the internal word—*im verbum interius*. Jean Grondin sees Hans-Georg Gadamer's explanation of this aspect along Augustinian lines, within the complexity of inner dialogue, which cannot provide the possibility of saying everything (Grondin 2001, 10). This complexity was considered

This article presents, in a modified form, a certain conceptual aspect of my book published in Georgian (Vardidze 2025).

a universal moment in which *actus signatus* never completely coincides with *actus exercitus*. Universality was reduced to linguisticity. For Gadamer, the being that can be understood is language. The uttered is understood fully only when the hidden inner speech is comprehended beyond it. Of course, this does not refer to a private or psychological world that precedes linguistic expression, but rather to the depositum that strives for the articulation of wrestling as such. But the orientation of the wrestling also raises questions. With an anti-metaphysical logic, the utterance is self-sufficient and must be examined for its internal consistency. However, in Martin Heidegger's language, expression for hermeneutics is secondary, futural (*Abkünftiges*). The wrestling with the expressed and the desire to possess it reveals a wrestling with language. In classical hermeneutics, this is precisely what has been considered the universal landmark.

However, the purpose of this article is not to search for this universal in the linguistic horizon, but to redirect it to freedom, which seeks the basis of understanding and is concretized in the paradigm of transcendental logic. It is precisely in this logic that the conceptual instrumentarium is perceived—an instrumentarium that does not provide a substantive response to hermeneutical inquiry but rather defines the starting and target points in the explication of its universal component. This relates to the mutual constitution of the structures of knowledge and freedom. Consequently, conceptual precision is sought not in the definition of language, but in comprehending meaning as a component of freedom. In other words, the universal determiner in hermeneutics is not in the expression of dialogue, but in the realization of freedom underlying it, because the struggle with language is not primary, but rather a self-determination expressed in the definition of language. It is precisely self-determination that represents the primary ability and reality which provides the hermeneutical process with its foundation and legitimacy. The difference between foundation and legitimation points to the interconnection and fundamental distinction between persuasiveness and conviction within the hermeneutical process, which emerges in the dialectic of (knowledge) possession (*Haben*) and being (*Sein*). This difference demonstrates that hermeneutics is not reduced to a rhetorical discipline requiring linguistic juggling, but remains faithful to a statement of truth, which attributes an authentic and factual significance to foundation and legitimation.

1. The Contemporary Challenge of Hermeneutics

First, if we cast a glance at the historical development of hermeneutical thought, we can summarize it by enumerating several hermeneutical components that play a decisive role in the process of cognition and have been emphasized within the

systemic vision of various hermeneutical schools.¹ It is evident that the rational nativity of empiricism and mechanism (the assumption that what we perceive directly and empirically is self-evident) does not provide convincing and clear answers. Instead, it demands a more precise and lucid description of the cognitive process. This process is characterized by preconditions that are marked by existential orientation (Heidegger 1984) and are always perceived within a specific perspective, paradigm, or tradition (Gadamer 1986). It is the nature of the mind not only to combine the received experience into a one whole (Immanuel Kant), but also to obscure or even expel experience deemed unnecessary from consciousness (Sigmund Freud). Phenomenological analysis reveals that, stemming from the existential component and the non-immediate, eccentric-intentional character of consciousness, there are no pure facts or their immediate apprehension. Rather, every object of cognition is the result of interpretation and is transmitted through interpretation. Interpretation presupposes the existence of what is already understood, because if nothing is comprehended, nothing can be the subject of interpretation. The incomprehensible cannot be interpreted unless it enters the space of understanding. In the process of cognition or interpretation, language appears not merely as a passive instrument of comprehension and communication but is viewed as an active and living flow of understanding—a conceptual system under constant development that both animates and conditions cognition as a creative process.

The aforementioned discourse clearly demonstrates that the hermeneutical process is characterized by complexity, revealing multiple intricate dimensions of cognition: a relational nature of truth; perspectival constitution and hierarchical nature of comprehended reality; its interconnection with constitutive variables and contextual dynamics; the coherence of relationships between the holistic and the partial; the structural significance of the hermeneutical circle; the intermediary component of reality as an echo of the spirit's eccentricity. Drawing from Paul Ricoeur's conceptualization of self-consciousness (Ricoeur 1988–91; 2005), the "I" is understood as a continuous process of reception, reformulation, and transmission. In this process, the understanding of the experience of belief emerges as a translation of the yet inexpressible; moving from the internal/intrinsic word to the external/expressed word. This experience carries an *excess of meaning* that demands a persistent exercise of doubt and critique (as explored by Jürgen Habermas (1988a, 1988b), Max Horkheimer, Theodor Adorno), and a continuous content renewal (Ricoeur 1976). The process of experiencing and comprehending requires a fundamental reference point that often serves an orienting and systematizing function. Consequently, truth is frequently ascribed a functional significance. Such a reference point is expressed through fundamental experience, orienting thought, key conceptual frameworks,

¹ For reference, we can cite the following positions as supporting literature: Thiselton 2009; Jensen 2007; Joisten 2009; Ineichen 1991; Jeanrond 1991; Grondin 1994.

and paradigmatic constructs (as in Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language). This is particularly evident in Gadamer's concept of horizon fusion—experienced as an unexpected and incalculable encounter of intersecting experiences.

Against the contemporary epistemological landscape, a profound philosophical question emerges: Is the act of cognition a process deliberately orchestrated by the subject, or an inevitable, self-illusory endeavor suspended in perpetual anticipation of the ultimate revelation of meaning? Within the labyrinthine terrain of pluralism, ambivalence, and postmodern critical discourse, the "I" confronts an existential challenge: How does it situate and discover itself as an active cognitive subject? A fundamental phenomenological observation reveals that the human being—as a consumer of freedom and an ardent pursuer of knowledge—actualizes self-experience through complex, multi-dimensional processes. This occurs not merely within accompanying contextual frameworks, but within the fundamental existential processes that define one's very being. Whether manifesting through the dynamics of self-realization or in the concrete facticity of striving toward the absolute, the individual emerges as a person and cognitive subject through a dialectical formation of continuous searching and experiential accumulation. The ambivalent interconnection between dependence and freedom illuminates the thinking subject, whose content—drawing from the *Cogito* conception—is entangled in the maelstrom of history and language, immersed in their inherent ambiguities.

For the American theologian David Tracy, hermeneutics fundamentally investigates two pivotal dimensions: historical context and linguistic significance (Tracy 2014, 159–69).² From their analysis, it logically follows that there is no primary

² In his article, Tracy argues that theological hermeneutics must encompass four critical dimensions: (1) Historical development of hermeneutical traditions incorporate and critically engage with the historical schools of hermeneutical teachings, recognizing their evolutionary trajectories and epistemological contributions; (2) Mystical-prophetic actuality of christianity emphasizes the contemporary relevance of Christianity's mystical and prophetic dimensions, ensuring that theological interpretation remains dynamically connected to its transformative spiritual essence; (3) Ecclesiastical diversity and justice develop a hermeneutical approach that is fundamentally just and responsive to the growing diversity within the universal church, acknowledging multiple perspectives and cultural expressions of faith; and (4) Preferential option for the marginalized integrate a critical lens that prioritizes attention to the impoverished, marginalized, and suffering populations as a fundamental Christian criterion for confronting systemic global injustice.

Tracy's approach does not seek to replace the theological-political focus with a new conceptual framework. Instead, he advocates for a hermeneutical pluralization of critique and reconstruction—a discourse that operates as a "trans-cultural" orientation and remains open to hermeneutical approaches from Eastern religious traditions. Against this backdrop, Tracy indicates a four-dimensional development of contemporary Western hermeneutics: (1) Restoration of understanding/experience recovering and reinterpreting foundational experiential narratives; (2) Critical elimination of conceptual errors systematically identifying and eliminating misunderstandings and conceptual fallacies; (3) Exercise of doubt and self-criticism cultivating an intuition of potential error that requires ongoing verification, representing a critical hermeneutical self-reflection; and (4) Reconstructive synthesis achieving new reconstructive frameworks through: (a) restoring systematic coherence; (b) resolving internal contradictions; and (c) generating

point of knowledge from which everything else can be derived. Instead, it becomes evident that knowledge is always connected to the *Other*, which, through its difference, cannot be captured under the categories of rationality or the thinking “ego”—except at the cost of violence that does not enable comprehension, but rather leads to classification, cataloging, and conquest. Tracy fundamentally takes up this issue and perceives it epistemologically and theologically through the Christian concept of sin, which is already linked to knowledge in its original form (Gen 3) and manifests in the logic of an “ego” possessed by desires. Consequently, considering the historical and linguistic-theoretical labyrinths, Tracy calls into question the subject’s autonomy as an instance of self-determination, where the idea of the self, as a self-revealing linguistic user instrument, the I as “ego,” establishes reality. This is because this “ego” is never fully presented to itself—neither in René Descartes’ moments of certainty nor in Edmund Husserl’s transcendental reduction. The contemporary Cartesian “ego” confronted its own language, where it awoke and no longer knows who or what it is. Everything is difference, and every difference is already always a deferral, a delay of any meaning. Difference has transformed into differentiation (Tracy 1993, 87). The inevitability of interpretations remains. Only through interpretation can reality be conditionally described: within radical multiplicity and ambiguity (Tracy 1993, 98–120). This is the primary characteristic of postmodernism (Sheehan 2004, 20–43).

If no approach to reality is possible other than its interpretations, the traditions of interpretation acquire special significance. Now, Tracy struggles to critically recognize the importance of such traditions. There is no ultimately justifiable standard in its premises, because any possible identification in this direction must inherently be critical, as well as historical, conditional, and consequently, ambiguous and arbitrary. Traditions became fragile on the horizon of pluralism in the course of history. However, simultaneously it can be said that certain traditions are considered despite their exceptional significance or precisely because of this significance. According to Tracy, these are texts, events, symbolizations, or people associated with the experience of truth. They pose or respond to ultimate questions: about the meaning of life, death, the whole, the ultimate cause, as well as God. Over time, such traditions have maintained their significance: questions and attempts to answer them have revived their importance and relevance.

Ultimately, in postmodern theology, truth is understood as facticity, as linguistically transmitted, a simultaneous self-establishment and self-limitation of reality, in which it is revealed as the enlightenment of human existence and its authorization regarding the meaning of its being. In light of this understanding, it is not the result of interpretation, though it does not exist without the effort of interpretation.

more comprehensive understanding. The goal is not to replace one hermeneutical approach with another, but to develop a dynamic, self-critical methodology that progressively eliminates the reality of conceptual “sin” and achieves more nuanced philosophical and theological insights.

Immediacy with God becomes a phenomenon of interpretation. God's word is identified as such, that is, defined by its interpretation, as mediation, as the displacement of signs, as the intertwining of God's absence and presence. Only from the highest, absolute perspective could the identity of the sign and the signifier be guaranteed. However, since such a hermeneutical central position can only be comprehended through signs from a human perspective, due to its conditional nature, it must also be deconstructed.

On the other hand, contrary to postmodern tendencies, if we do not reread the hermeneutical process from a subjective-theoretical perspective and do not conceive it as the starting point of freedom and meaning-seeking, then ultimately any discussion about personal responsibility and the significance of cognition loses its meaning: the striving towards cognition, the hermeneutical process leads the subject, beyond recognizing itself, to an authentic form of existence that corresponds to it as a free and responsible subject, and in which it satisfies the possibility of meaning as its horizon opened in the other.

The subject is not surrendered but authentically experiences itself in the structure of self-transfer—in a “self-transcendence” brought through and in the other. It is already more than its facticity; meaning also transcends the given content. The subject is seen in its freedom, but not merely in simple distancing, in the formation of difference and the deconstruction of the positive. It is understood in self-determination, creativity, and the discovery of the new. This requires comprehending a process whose result opens the experience of meaning. Not negative self-identification, not the constitutional understanding of difference, or Derridean deconstruction, but its positive formation and subsequent calling into a new being creates the foundation in which the primacy of relationality, as a creative reality, is established. Meaning is now presented not in ontological categories, but as the subject's recognition of encountered reality and the realization of this recognition. The recognition of reality is the beginning of a new search and the harbinger of meaning.

2. First-Philosophical Orientation of Hermeneutics

To comprehend such a process (and not to define its content), we can invoke Krings' transcendental analysis of freedom (Krings 1980; Pröpper 2023),³ through which it becomes possible to connect truth with freedom and consider this as the personal

³ We connect truth with freedom as a criteriology to demonstrate the location of hermeneutical judgment, where convincingness is sought and cognition's necessary precondition is identified. Here, freedom is discussed as being unconditional and absolute in its formal aspect, while materially determined by the content of cognition. It is understood as the human's primary intrinsic ability to engage with one's own

foundational origin of subject constitution. However, this connection is not simply received *a priori* but is also interpreted as an act of knowledge and cognition, where the expectation of freedom's fulfillment as an experience of meaning emerges. Knowledge is now seen within the paradigm of freedom, as a free act entering into freedom, whose structure corresponds to the structure of knowledge.

A discussion based on the transcendental analysis of freedom reveals the primary philosophical foundation, which provides the ultimate justificatory standard and the criteria of interpretation within its own presuppositions (Verweyen 2000, 67–72). It does not define the meaning of sense, but reveals the foundation of its clarity. Notably, sense demands absolute justification of meaning, and the connection between freedom and sense resolves the dilemma of sense and meaning insofar as it conceives the presence of the absolute within itself as the ultimate guarantor of sense, its anticipation, and necessary precondition—without which everything would sink into the maelstrom of absurdity. Conceiving the hermeneutical process and constitution of being from the perspective of freedom creates the possibility of escaping ontological constraints and substantiating interrelational categories. This approach evaluates being in its futural relation (existence within the horizon of possibilities, self-transcendence through the perspective of sense, fullness, or the absolute). Such an approach both circumscribes the meaning of sense and leaves it open to the potential horizon of meaning's fullness.

By seeking the first-philosophical foundation, one must distinguish between persuasiveness and convincingness to prevent the hermeneutical process from becoming a manipulative, existentially groundless act of superficial belief. Instead, it should create complete clarity and convincingness in the subject; a fundamental basis of autonomy and authenticity. The boundary between persuasiveness and convincingness must be verified through the experience of freedom and overcome the space of manipulation. This means that hermeneutics does not become rhetoric, but discovers an authentic, sense-oriented form that directs its art (hermeneutics understood as the art of understanding) toward truth and freedom. However, it must be emphasized that freedom invoked through transcendental analysis (understood through its aporetic nature and initial character of self-determination) reveals itself,

knowledge: to analyze, recognize, distance oneself from, or even reject it. This manifests as an expression of will open to cognition and striving for its substantiation—serving as the act's scale, origin, and purpose. On this basis, the cognitive process acquires its autonomy and self-development/self-determination, realized through reflection, where the comprehended content transforms into real experience. If cognition's content is not validated by freedom, it may appear as a pure thought figure lacking real foundation and potentially recognized as a product of fantasy. It is also worth noting that the first philosophical use of freedom also takes on special significance for theological discourse. The paradigm of freedom plays a crucial role not only for philosophical but also for theological cognition. In this regard, the following literature is noteworthy, the conceptual echo of which is also evident in this article. For example, see the following literature: Pröpper 2011; Essen 1996; Essen and Pröpper 1997.

above all, as the primary existential moment that transcendently underlies the act of cognition.

Krings suggests in his transcendental analysis of freedom that the reduction of being to freedom on the basis of rationality was first accomplished by Kant through the transcendental critique of reason, where he established limits for theoretical reason and objective knowledge of being, beyond which he defined the place of belief. Metaphysics was transformed through the self-convincingness of practical reason and the making of distinctions (Krings 1980, 136–37). Conceiving being and freedom in one perspective as constitutive of sense is not new in the history of philosophy. Johann Gottlieb Fichte understands subjectivity as self-initiative (*Selbsttätigkeit*). The character of a rational being is the activity of returning to itself. Fichte seeks how the transcendental unity of consciousness is possible. The question is: How can the sense of self-positing/self-regulation (*Selbstsetzung*) be conceived? This sense cannot exist as a precondition beyond this self-positing/self-regulation because it has no precondition—this is the character of its freedom. But if self-regulation, on the one hand, does not pose a question about a sense existing beyond itself, and on the other hand, the absoluteness of the concept does not provide an answer, then what is the meaning of extended reflection on posing the question? What is the point of asking a question if it is *a priori* known that no answer can be given? To clarify this, Heidegger speaks of a “step back” towards understanding being as the basis of freedom. From the concept of “ontological difference,” Heidegger attempts to take this “step back” and comprehend freedom as “transcendence” and “ex-istence.” (Krings 1980, 136–37) Instead of the Heideggerian “reverse step,” the transcendental analysis of freedom reveals a radical alternative path of thinking that must identify the constitutive conditions of sense.

Similar to Krings’s approach, where being is considered in relation to freedom, sense, and the process of cognition must be revealed in the act of freedom. What sense is, appears as freedom. The essence of freedom consists in entering into relation with one’s own being, as well as with knowledge, and justifying what is declared, clear, and certain. But what is the comprehension of knowledge, the possession of sense? It is a meaning that does not exist without its own analysis, its own explanation, insofar as this explanation opens up to knowledge and enters into relation with it, so that through its own aspiration and seeking, it circumscribes its meaning. To have essence for a human being means that knowledge has meaning, and not as an *eidos*, a visible form, or eternal duration to which being freely belongs as an essential characteristic. Moreover, sense consists in manifesting one’s meaning in reality and thereby recognizing freedom as sense.

The question “What is sense?” cannot be answered *a priori*. Not because it must first be answered *a posteriori* and be transferable to empirical experience, but because the concepts of *a priori/a posteriori* are inapplicable where sense must be understood in its primary relationship to freedom. Sense is a transcendental category

that demands a categorical resolution (cf. Frankl 1996). However, it is formally pre-determined. The use of the concept of sense pre-supposes knowledge as a duration (*Bestand*), which points to either the “before” or the “after” as the basis for all determinations.

In other words, while the question about sense cannot be answered *a priori*, its existence is *a priori* determined, just as with Krings, the primacy of being (*Sein*) is inherently given. This means that sense does not simply “subsist” (*besteht*), but “subsists” insofar as it manifests, self-presents, and is validated in the perspective of knowledge. Therefore, it must be formally understood as the distancing, difference, and “reflection” that appears in the structure of knowledge. This suggests that sense, insofar as it is comprehended and experienced as freedom, is identical to knowledge according to its primary self-awareness. Knowledge is freedom. Just as knowledge is free with itself, so conversely: the free being-with-itself of sense (*freies Beisichselbstsein*) is the essence of knowledge.⁴ It follows from this that the primary relationship between sense and freedom is the same as the primary relationship between knowledge and freedom. Just as, according to Krings, thinking of being (*das Denken des Seins*) as freedom cannot be established beyond thinking of knowledge (*Denken des Wissens*), similarly the meaning of sense cannot be established without the experience of freedom (Krings 1980, 138).

Knowledge, as well as meaning, does not originate either beyond itself or in a zero point, but rather within itself. The knowledge for which the foundation is questioned does not simply reveal the knowable, but points to doing, to demand. Therefore, the primary relationship does not consist of knowledge and meaning emerging in freedom, but rather that *freedom emerges*. The knowledge of three times three is free from external factors. Analogously, the primary, transcendental dimension of responsibility, and consequently ethics, is comprehended—which signifies an attitude toward givenness and self-determination.

How can the origin of knowledge be understood, how can we comprehend that meaning is free? In other words, how is the comprehension of meaning an experience of freedom? This requires a radical reflection, a transcendental analysis. This radical analysis is necessary so that freedom is revealed in its prior constitutional conditions and simultaneously defined within the boundaries of its substantively complete and determined knowledge, and not beyond it (Krings 1980, 144). When knowing something, not only is a determined content known, but also the fact that it is and, as such, is comprehended. Knowledge is realized not only in a material understanding, but in its prior conditions, in a prior comprehension, that is, in what “words are” and what truly has its own name. It has not only a material horizon

⁴ What is the difference between knowledge and sense? The Knowledge is objectified consciousness, sense is the comprehension of being. Both being and sense are the realization of freedom, insofar as their structure is the possibility of being-with-itself in the other and within the other.

of determined contents, but an understanding of the formal horizon of being and knowledge. Possessing this primary understanding is the prior condition of reflection, of thinking. Where nothing is simply understood (if we do not understand the words), there is nothing to be conceptualized. The primary understanding of being and knowledge (not merely the understanding of concepts, but the propriety, the belonging of the experience underlying these concepts) is the space of the movement of knowledge that is called reflection. This means that the understanding of being (*Sein*), as implied in real knowledge, of the final or primary (i.e., *a priori*) meaning and knowledge (*Wissen*) is not a result of reflection. The understanding that is the result of reflection (which can be called *secondary understanding*) must be structurally distinguished from the *prior understanding* which is the condition of reflection and without which reflection would not occur (Krings 1980, 142). Reflection is not capable of concluding primary knowledge, just as it cannot generate or derive the understanding of being and knowledge. What is simply known is brought forth as implicit. What is generally conceived is self-evident as that which is called “being” and “knowledge.” There is no prior conceptualization about this; rather, the understood is the precondition of all knowledge.

But from where does this *prior understanding* exist, by which real knowledge is *a priori* “informed,” and reflection points to its content, through which it is realized as reflection? It does not stem from reflection or thinking. However, it does not exist beyond knowledge either. The origin of *prior understanding* is this understanding itself, that is, *prior understanding* (creativity) must be understood by itself as primary knowledge. Yet, not as an innate idea (*idea innata*), moreover, knowledge itself must be comprehended as a primacy through which the primary openness of content and thereby openness in the general sense, manifestability is brought forth. Understanding and comprehension reveal a hermeneutical process. (“First” the life, there is creativity/action/awareness and subsequently action/reaction/consciousness. These together form the hermeneutical circle.) Primacy negatively means non-derivability, non-deducibility. The primary is not something reducible to a foundation, but itself represents the establisher in knowledge. Positively, primacy means that openness is unexpectedly self-actualizing disclosure. Primary understanding is understanding from freedom (Krings 1980, 143). The transcendental manifestation character of primary knowledge does not enable reflection upon it but rather creates the possibility of the act of reflection, just as transcendental hearing establishes personhood and is not a capacity of the person. Accordingly, reflection reveals not the content of *prior understanding*, but the comprehension of this content. This is accentuated by the postmodern inevitability of “difference,” which seeks the constitutional moment of the hermeneutical process. On the same basis, representatives of existentialism argue that a human being does not simply have freedom but is already freedom.

3. The Phenomenological Necessity of Hermeneutics

Parallel to the transcendental analysis, let us briefly mention the phenomenological aspect, where truth and freedom are viewed not from a transcendental, but from a categorical, substantive perspective. If the hermeneutical process of inquiry is not fixed on truth but is focused solely on determining content and its persuasiveness, then it can be said that the characteristic of truth or freedom oriented toward persuasiveness is an insistent negation of the finite (cf. further reflection: Grondin 2001, 196–98). In this negation, the fundamental movement of metaphysics can justifiably be recognized. Here, metaphysics is conceived etymologically, objectively, and historically as overcoming the temporal/time-bound. But what is the basis of this overcoming? Is there an apprehension of absolute truth? According to Heidegger, such transcendence is founded on the expulsion of one's own temporality. The pretension to infinite truth originates from the self-negation of the finite. Finitude possesses the reality (if this is not to be a meaningless tautology) that it remains finite, precisely at the moment when it makes a claim to infinity.

Unconditional truth must be absolute, not relativized. However, the absence of absolute truth does not imply that no truth exists at all. As the undeniable experience of falsehood and falsity testifies, we always have a claim to truth, to something rational that is in harmony with objective experience and that allows for arguments, evidence, and testimony. To deny this would be a sophisticated delusion. The truths in which we participate and for which we justly struggle are neither an arbitrary nor an absolutely guaranteed reality. Descartes' novelty was equating truth with a methodical assurance of knowledge. This method, from which scientific development found diverse applications, was not absolute or detached from human interests, but dependent on the mind's dialogue with itself, oriented towards verifying one's own knowledge. Thanks to its great success, this model, which was subsequently uprooted from its origins, has now become the standard for all knowledge. From this perspective, everything else is essentially hopelessly relativistic.

Such a view became essential for 19th-century historicism. The danger facing it and the unacceptability of its consequences led hermeneutics to a point where historicism adopted the scale used against it and thereby ultimately overcame itself. This process made clear that knowledge recognized within historicity is measured by metaphysical and absolute criteria (cf. Corzillius 2013, 396–97; Gross 1998, 235–36). A serious resultant error lay in considering the historical dialogue, which each mind conducts with itself and expands in world comprehension, as a barrier to truth. Hermeneutics has once again found in historicity the saving seed of self-understanding. Historicity was not viewed as a limit of mind and its declaration but as a positive condition for the comprehension of truth. Through this, historical relativism lost its argumentation. The demand for an absolute truth

criterion revealed itself as an abstract-metaphysical idol that loses all methodological significance. Historicity resolves and eliminates the shadow of historical relativism here.

Despite the significance of the method, it must be emphasized that truth still exists beyond its methodical transmission of comprehension. Indeed, there are many foolish things both within and beyond methods. However, the criterion for recognizing foolishness is not found, but only a dialogue about truth is raised, for which not everything is acceptable, and which only calls truth into itself. Its benchmark of realization is within the experience of freedom, because dialogue, as an expression of freedom, finds truth in freedom, as an inherently self-contained substantial determination. It is precisely here that the drama of human essence unfolds, in which the struggle with oneself reveals one's determination and uniqueness. It is not language or external logos that characterizes humanity (animals also use signs), but rather inner thought, which enables human beings to distance themselves from everything and establishes the fact of decision as freedom. Humans are not hopelessly surrendered to their instincts, but rather are given an inner space of freedom, which continually remains the subject of hermeneutical inquiry.

4. The Statute of Historical Awareness of Hermeneutics

Within the framework of historical research, cognitive-critical-constructive approaches, which are oriented towards event reconstruction and evaluation, indicate that the result of historical thinking is not a repetitive or duplicated reproduction of events in a continuous and expansive sequence through space and time. Instead, its effort is directed towards systematizing past events within the historical context of events and meanings.

Historical knowledge can be derived from categories and principles that organize, structure, and primarily select sources (cf. Weber 1973, 212). From the infinite complexity and diversity of past events, only specific and selected events are considered, in accordance with the scale of cognitive interest, though not all accessible events. The selection criteria distinguish the essential from the non-essential and, based on specific relevant aspects, present events in a sequential and expansive progression that appears significant and noteworthy to the historian. The cognitive achievement of history involves reaching a consensus about what was, during the acquisition of specific and selective knowledge.

The term "history" implies a specific method of understanding and conceptualization, which the subject of knowledge already employs when evaluating a given phenomenon historically. Johann Gustav Droysen claimed that what occurred in the

past, because it is truly completed, is presented only on the basis of the present's reflexive, conscious memory. "History" for us is only what has been investigated, known, and made accessible. "History is not the sum of events, not the course of everything, but the knowledge that something happened and how what happened is known in this way." (Essen 1995, 206; cf. Droysen 1977)

As an object of the past, history is the result of the present's conceptual processing, which we understand as "event comprehension," and thus as a "known event." The so-called "subject of history" is always a "knowledge project," a fundamental construction comprised of *a priori* conditions. These conditions define and justify all specific knowledge according to the method used and the researcher's investigative intent. The thesis that reflection is a constructive moment of history also implies that historical knowledge is the transcendental (defining) achievement of the searching subject, who primarily represents the historical object in thought. Here, thought must be understood as the condition of possibility for the process of concept formation, which transforms "interest" into "history." In other words, thought assembles the elements of past reality into a context and structure of meanings, thereby transforming them into a narrative form. With this constructive approach, history "emerges" as a transcendently formed and substantively determined narrative (Essen 1995, 207).

Let us also point to a dual clarification:

- 1) The comprehension of history occurs with a practical intention and is (both as a visualization of the past and as the foundation of historical continuity) an interpretative, meaning-conferring ability that is motivated and grounded in action-orientation, in an effort to ensure self-understanding and identity. It is based on human *a priori* interest and their knowledge of rationality and meaning. Historical knowledge must first and foremost be understood in practical terms and subjected to human freedom. Otherwise, it appears more as an uncertainty, a barrier, rather than a preliminary definition of the present. The condition of possibility for a relationship between the person in question and the world, in cognition and knowledge, in will and action, appears in a *transcendental reduction*, which ultimately addresses "transcendental freedom" (the unconditional possibility of action, judgment, attitude), as an absolutely unquestionable prerequisite. Although this possibility is not factual, it nevertheless determines factual reality. Within it, an absolutely unquestionable condition creates an authority of action, which does not determine the direction of history, but orients and normalizes human thinking. It is a principle of significance that judges and critically substantiates the actual real-historical conditions and figures.
- 2) On the other hand, systematization of past events occurs through a collected and meaningful sequence of events within the medium of *narration*. Past objects are systematized and organized within a temporal totality through an original

narrative synthesis. In this regard, the formation of history, a constructively unified image, emerges as a narrative discourse construct (Essen 1995, 209).

Describing historical knowledge represents a response and analytical process that develops in a regulated procedure from question to answer. In the first phase, a “historical question” is formed, which captures present interest and then turns to the past. The latter occurs in the second phase, and it aims to connect the question to sources and obtain the necessary information to answer current questions. In the final phase, a historical response is ultimately shaped, through which the question is answered and the revitalized past is thus integrated into the life practices of its addressees. The historical research process, through which knowledge is connected to empirical, fundamental givenness, can be divided into several distinct stages that correspond to a constructive transformation process. This process encompasses three stages: “heuristics,” “criticism,” and “interpretation.”

Heuristics differentiate and determine preconditions; criticism distinguishes between false and true evidence and checks for explanatory plausibility; and interpretation invokes patterns, paradigms, or examples that explain a given phenomenon. By these three factors, historical objects are formed, not through their sequential expansion, but through mutual overlapping and interdependence. Without a detailed analysis, we can summarize the following procedures that define the hermeneutical character: (1) perspective outline, which is motivated by practical intention; (2) selection, narrative organization, where no continuous and direct progression in time exists; (3) retrospection, which examines the organized result; (4) hermeneutical construction of a lived fact from the past world; and (5) historical event—a hypothetical-descriptive discourse that is temporary and subject to revision.

After comprehending this complex process, and in opposition to the naivety of positivist historical theories that assert the existence of “pure facts,” emphasis must be placed on the fact that they: (1) ignore the regressive-analytical character of their own methodology, which manifests itself in these five steps; (2) suppress the logical distinction between objectivity (confirming reference to an object) and truth (proving correctness). The researcher is interested in reality, has their own interest in it, and transforms this interest into history; that is, by forming an interest in the past within the historical narrative, they place themselves in a qualified relationship with the past. However, this does not mean that past facts can be “eliminated”; they remain definitively in the past, closed and inaccessible. But by establishing this relationship, the character of a fact as a simple occurrence is dissolved. Facts do not exist as “pure facts” (*factum brutum*) but rather appear as a symbolically structured history. Their factuality is dissolved in favor of history. Through historical cognition, the researcher places themselves in a qualified relationship with the inaccessible factuality of the past. Past events, if they are interpreted as historical and defined according to their

“what” and “how,” remain not simply facts, but according to their “that” (“this”). In this respect, factuality is a constitutive part of the historical event. History implies and requires factuality, and not the fictional character of reality.

Access to factuality (substantive definition) is formed through a methodological approach that can be analyzed and has its validity substantiated through transcendental analysis. Through transcendental analysis, the significance of the methodological approach must be demonstrated, and the “layered” formation of the cognitive process must be shown. However, the status of transcendental analysis must be clear: it aims to reveal the formal, *a priori* conditions of the constitution of historical knowledge, and not to determine the content of cognition. A fact understood as “this givenness” can be defined both positively and negatively. Positively, because it constitutes completed content. A fact has priority over reason: it is pre-given, “inviolable” and “inalienable.” It is more eloquent than a logical and cohesive image. Negatively, as a logically indecipherable content, still unfinished and context-dependent (Essen 1995, 281). We can attribute any content to a “Fact” (*Factum*), insofar as there is no basis for legitimizing a question about it, or if such a basis exists, then this question remains unanswered. However, the term “fact” is “late,” because it can be defined within transcendental logic itself as a “construction” that emerges from an intellectual-reflexive initiative toward what a human has experienced or undergone. Since factuality is content-wise defined only through the act of reflection, as conclusively and unequivocally judged, what we experience or undergo are not “facts,” but interpreted content, which is identified as a “fact” precisely to the extent that it resists interpretation (Essen 1995, 282). There is never a separation between establishing facts and drawing conclusions, because the existence of every fact is already the result of a process of judgment (Essen 1995, 283).

To clarify once again the status of transcendental philosophical thinking; because the analysis occurs *post factum*, transcendental philosophy cannot explain the event whose condition of possibility it merely reflects. Transcendental analysis is:

- 1) A subsequent reflection that reconstructs the process of understanding a historical object, but in no way generates it. Transcendental philosophy is “completely materially poor.” It can substantiate any content but it cannot determine it. What it needs to substantiate must be provided by history. Referring to the “something” provided as a fact is only the result of a determination of content, which transcendently precedes the historical research process and must itself be evaluated in terms of how substantiated this determination is.
- 2) Transcendental analysis attempts to reveal the *prior understanding* of historical research, specifically, as a limitation of the historical-critical method, that is, as a change in the conditions of its application. It revises this method and aims to “halt” the inherent dynamics and laws (even false paradigms) that are used in research and require substantiation, especially the correlative and analogical

principles that relativize and nivellate. These principles are employed in the analytical process of historical cognition. Accordingly, in this context, the question is raised whether the status of *prior understanding* is correctly determined. Any historical narrative is not *a priori* true but requires substantiation of the correctness of its own *prior understanding*. Since the conceived “preliminary” understanding is initially “prior,” it requires testing and is, in principle, falsifiable. *Prior, preliminary understanding* awaits reflexive determination, through which it is extracted into consciousness and methodologically disciplined. It is necessary that the *prior understanding* of historical research, since it is directed towards a certain content, be justified (Essen 1995, 325). If it has a normative, universal, and generally obligatory claim to truth, which must inevitably be demonstrated argumentatively, then it must be substantively expressed and discursively liberated (Essen 1995, 326). The question can be raised as to how this “prior” experience existing in everyday life justifies itself and how it can actually validate the knowledge of what truly occurred. The ability to convince oneself of the existence of an event can protect itself from accusations of subjective arbitrariness only by being open to communication and seeking the intersubjective validity of factual claims (Essen 1995, 334).

To emphasize the understanding process once again, it must be said that it implies the condition of its own possibility. Consequently, it also points to the fundamental similarity of all historical events; the formation of analogies is possible only due to the common similarity of the human spirit and its general historical activity. This fundamental perspective is now more precisely defined by the idea that the subject of understanding and the object to be understood also materially participate in a prior interpretative framework. They are represented as a specific individuality and an individual phenomenon of a general essence, and because of this common participation in the essence of history, they possess the same ontological structure. Herewith, reference is made to a fundamental philosophical theory that epistemologically reveals the corresponding basis as a cognitive and constitutive principle, which ensures the unity of the experiential space and defines the “essence” of history in its totality. On one hand, this defines the theoretical framework for establishing the essence of history, creates the space of historical experience, intellectually regulates and shapes it, and reflects the center that “assembles” the relationship with the object, and opposes the “chaotization of historical knowledge.” However, on the other hand, this foundation also ensures the guarantee of essential unity and structural identity between the cognitive subject and the historical object, which, in turn, primarily makes understanding possible. What is crucial in this context is that defining the essence of history (“the inevitability of the free flow of events”) includes a material prior conception that pre-determines both the constitution of the historical object and the theory of historical knowledge (Essen 1995, 396).

The categories (*idea*—in Wilhelm von Humboldt; *moral cosmos*—in Droysen; *life*—in Wilhelm Dilthey) indicate that there is no unchanging theory of reality. Moreover, through them, the given reality is assimilated and understood. In this respect, the material prior conception is revealed as a form of thinking, a paradigm that, as a specific structure of content, shapes the essence of history, the consequent connection of events, and accordingly, the horizon of history's possibility. It functions as a prior understanding that already determines the content of the entire historical comprehension. By using the categories of "humanity" or "salvation history," it became possible to demonstrate that the material prior understanding, which constitutes the object and guides historical knowledge, owes itself to the mediation of the real world, is given through worldly mediation, and in the corresponding experience of the present, it also grants an evaluative criterion of its expediency and correctness. Accordingly, the possible "material substrate" of history must be determined as an empirical fact, that is, as a spatio-temporal event. The material/substantive prior conception of history is revealed in the constitutive process of the historical object. In modern history, the dominant form of thinking shapes the cognitive and constitutive principle together with the regulative "humanity," which limits the possible in history to the horizon of what is humanly possible (Essen 1995, 397). In contrast to this, in the paradigm of "salvation history," the form of thinking is not limited by the "humanly possible," but its horizon is defined by God's creative act.

Human possibility also implies the incomprehensible, because otherwise the perception of the incomprehensible, even as something not yet known, would not be possible. That which exceeds the realm of human representation transcends the boundaries of human imagination. Both the worldly comprehensible and the incomprehensible are born within the horizon of human experience. Only a specific combination of the familiar and the unknown provides understanding, which makes them necessary and urgent. However, understanding implies the existence of a prior ongoing interpretative framework that makes the accessibility of reality possible and protects it. This is a referential, contextual framework within which something "foreign" and new, as such, can be perceived as something incomprehensible. Therefore, the "foreign" is also a rational category: something strange and incomprehensible is only incomprehensible in relation to the given interpretative framework. In another context, it might be comprehensible. However, during the process of understanding, what was previously incomprehensible becomes integrated into this "reference" framework. Accordingly, it is assimilated through understanding as something previously incomprehensible. On the other hand, the problem may also lie in the power of interpretative explanation and the capacity of thought itself. A certain incomprehensible, new contingency disrupts the stability and sustainability of the form of thought and the power of interpretative explanation. It is precisely through this constant stability and sustainability that the high level of integration of thinking ability and power is determined. This sustainability enables the classification

of encountered phenomena and affirms the capacity for integration. The ability to think is, in fact, a way of dealing with contingency (Essen 1995, 399). Through the cognitive system or “reference,” by means of a pre-existing ongoing framework, not only are problematic situations of cognition managed, but also the horizon that determines the possibilities of cognitive content is delineated.

From this, it can be clearly asserted how theological hermeneutics differs from philosophical hermeneutics. Not only does the prior assumption of God’s existence and activity in our lives provide an entirely different dialogue horizon, but it also introduces a transcendent reality into the cognitive process as the foundational and target condition, rather than developing within the subject-object schema. Accordingly, the creative process is not merely a search governed by human ability, but a horizon of possibilities opened by God’s grace, which creates a new dynamic that introduces open logical possibilities transcending human comprehension within the cognitive process. Consequently, the difference between theological and philosophical hermeneutics points to a transformation of self-understanding that is not satisfied with information flow but focuses on the subject’s co-creative potential and its new horizon. This cannot be merely a revealing of meaning, but a change in the mode of existence, described in a life of faith as determining freedom within earthly categories and the perspective of salvation. Even Augustine already indicated the importance of the practical dimension in the theological cognitive process, which acquires constitutional significance for theological hermeneutics. Knowing God and enriching consciousness with this knowledge raises human existence to a level where encountering meaning begins to impact people in the form of kerygma, initiating the liberation of freedom for divine co-existence.

Conclusion

Focusing on freedom as a universal landmark of the hermeneutic process should serve to define a paradigmatic approach that signals the necessity of shifting from categorical/ontological inversion toward relational justification. This shift does not imply a denial of the ontological dimension but rather sees the determinant of its identity in the perspective of absolute freedom, which does not represent the actual reality of creation (human freedom), but rather delimits it to its ultimate meaning and horizon of possibility. The hermeneutic process is formed within this domain, wherein the categorical/content-based definition of truth evolves through the principle of freedom, and its meaningfulness and persuasiveness are revealed solely in complete harmony or alignment with this principle, where freedom is recognized as a category of meaning.

Accordingly, within the hermeneutic process, alongside the phenomenological inquiry into truth, there must be a proposition of freedom as a criteriological foundation. This allows the act of cognition to be materially specified within a historical context through the recognition of other freedoms and the facilitation of their realization. In turn, this process emerges not merely with a persuasive and humanistic character but also enables a foundational (first-philosophical) justification of truth from a primary philosophical standpoint.

The discourse of the historical development of hermeneutic thought clarifies that placing comprehended meaning within the perspective of freedom constitutes a fundamental necessity that underlies the cognitive process. Thus, defining the comprehended meaning from the standpoint of freedom not only provides the criteriological potential for justification but also illuminates a new horizon in the form of the Absolute. This Absolute is not confined to human logic but instead opens up a realm of possibilities and expands the boundaries of philosophical cognition. Consequently, truth is revealed as freedom, and freedom as the enactment of truth.

Reasoning based on transcendental analysis in the hermeneutic process rationalizes truth and the unknowable, placing them within the horizon of the absolute in such a way that it is neither confined by rational order nor determines the known through the rational, but rather anticipates the universal manifestation of meaning. This does not signify a rationalistic reduction of truth but rather emphasizes its responsibility toward this order. Such consciousness of responsibility causes a transformation of self-understanding, which liberates human creative potential in the perspective of the absolute and portends new meaning in the form of the absolute. The result is a change in the form of thinking and way of life, which is concretized in the experience of faith and transmitted in the practical expression of belief.

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The Acts of the Apostles as a Portrayal of the Synodal Church?

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Abstract: This article explores the concept of synodality in the Acts of the Apostles. Although the term *σύνοδος* is absent from the New Testament, potentially leading to premature negative assumptions, an etymological analysis of its components (the preposition *σύν* and the noun *ἡ ὁδός*) yields more positive insights. Drawing on synodal documents and selected passages from Luke's second volume, the study establishes certain connections between the modern notion of synodality and the practices of the early Church, delineating essential criteria for the attitudes of members within today's synodal Church.

Keywords: synodality, etymology of *σύνοδος*, Acts of the Apostles, Lukan theology

The Synod on Synodality, convened by Pope Francis in 2021,¹ centered on his vision of synodality as a core principle of Church life. Its motto—communion, participation, and mission—highlighted three essential dimensions of the ecclesial community, while the process itself fostered an attitude of encounter, listening, and discernment. Pope Francis identified key sources of synodality: the *sensus fidei*, the Second Vatican Council's ecclesiology of the People of God, the Holy Spirit's bestowal of diverse charisms, and an anthropology rooted in relational participation. He framed evangelization as a vital context for synodality, enabling the Church to engage the world dynamically. Przemysław Sawa explores this theme in depth (Sawa 2023, 191–217). Among his conclusions on synodality in Francis's teaching, the Katowice dogmatic theologian emphasizes the role of Sacred Scripture, quoting the Pope: "Synodality is not a modern solution, as it has its roots in the Bible and the Tradition of the Church, as well as in the theology and experience of the various spaces of ecclesiastical life." (Sawa 2023, 211) Far from being Francis's invention alone, this perspective reflects a widely acknowledged truth,² evident throughout the synodal documents themselves.

¹ The 16th Ordinary General Assembly of the Synod of Bishops, widely referred to as the Synod on Synodality, convened from October 4, 2023, to October 27, 2024. Departing from the customary papal exhortation, Pope Francis approved the synod's official final document, published on October 26, 2024 (XVI Ordinary General Assembly 2024b).

² The bibliography of works reflecting on synodality is very abundant, but the vast majority includes studies that are texts in the field of systematic theology. In Poland, a particularly large number of studies on

Given that this study diverges from a conventional exegesis of biblical texts, its methodology requires adaptation. First, the lexical content and etymological roots of the Greek term *σύνοδος* will be examined. Next, relevant passages from the Acts of the Apostles—those linking the preposition *σύν* to ecclesiological contexts and the motif of the way—will be analyzed. This will lead to an exploration of the Synod on Synodality documents, identifying biblical motifs from Luke's second volume that resonate with the promoted concept of synodality. Finally, the research will culminate in an analysis of key pericopes from Acts referenced in the synodal texts, followed by conclusions tied to the central research question.

1. Lexical Meaning and Etymology of *σύνοδος*

A Greek-English Lexicon (Liddell et al. 1996, 1720) outlines several meanings for the term *σύνοδος*. Primarily, it denotes a gathering or meeting, often involving reflection. In classical texts, it also refers to national assemblies (e.g., for cultic purposes or celebrations), as well as specific groups such as craft guilds or religious associations. Rarer senses include the clash of hostile armies or sexual union. A distinct category encompasses ideas of unification or compression: the conjunction of planets, contracted muscles, a sea strait, or the combination of matter and form. Finally,

this issue were published in the journal *Teologia w Polsce* [Theology in Poland] in the years 2021–2023. Articles by Jarosław Kupczak (“Dziesięć tez o teologii synodalności”), Andrzej Proniewski (“Teologia laikatu i synodalność jako droga realizacji powszechnego powołania do świętości”), Artur Kasprzak (“Synodalność w teologii Soboru Watykańskiego II”), Andrzej Dobrzyński (“Synodalność w nauczaniu i pontyfikacie Jana Pawła II”), Tomasz Samulnik (“Synodalność w myśli Josepha Ratzingera”), and Jacek Froniewski (“Synod w Kościele katolickim w Polsce jako fundament doświadczenia jedności wspólnoty”) do not exhaust the rich list of publications. More items can be found in the database of the theological bibliography of Polish *theo-logos.pl*. The only Polish article that touches on biblical motifs in the context of synodality is the text by Monika Włoszczyk (2023, 37–50), who proposed a symbolic interpretation of Mark 2:18–22. The foreign-language bibliography is many times richer, but there is little biblical reflection. Marta García Fernández published an article in the journal *Religions* in 2024 that discusses the biblical background of synodality based on a document from the International Biblical Commission: “Notes on the Biblical Foundation of the Document of the International Theological Commission, ‘Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church.’” (García Fernández 2024, 1244) However, it contains only brief references to the texts of the Acts of the Apostles (pp. 2, 6, 8, 11), devoting a little more space to the question of the way in the paragraph entitled “Walking with: A Way of Being Church.” (p. 12) To some extent, an article by Peter J. McGregor (2024, 137–59) also contributes to biblical reflection on synodality. In the second part of his study, the Australian scholar analyzed the Church in the New Testament from the perspective of the terms *κοινωνία* and *ὁμοθυμαδόν*, seeing in them the motives of the synodal process, which can approach consensus through “listening” and “looking.” To these voices can be added an article by the Catalan theologian, Xavier Alegre Santamaria (2023, 37–61). The author searches for criteria for proper ecclesial discernment and concludes that such a fundamental criterion is the word of God itself, and especially the New Testament, read in the context of the Old Testament.

economic contexts evoke an influx of income. Early Christian usage diverges from these classical senses.³

Geoffrey Lampe's lexicon (Lampe 1969, 1334–35) prioritizes “travel companion,” aligning with the Greek συνοδοιπόρος, while secondarily noting meetings accompanied by reflection. It also introduces distinctly Christian connotations, such as cultic assemblies equivalent to ἐκκλησία. A third category addresses theological union, particularly hypostatic union.

The New Testament does not use the term σύνοδος⁴ explicitly. However, Luke's writings include two related terms. In the Infancy Narrative, ἡ συνοδία refers to pilgrims returning home after Passover (Luke 2:44). In Acts, the Evangelist describes Saul's companions on the road to Damascus as οἱ συνοδεύοντες (Acts 9:7). Despite their etymological link to σύνοδος, these terms do not directly align with its Christian usage, though the worship context in Luke's Gospel offers a potential connection.

Etymologically, σύνοδος combines the preposition σύν (“with”) and the noun ἡ ὁδός (“way”).⁵ While this etymology does not fully resolve the search for synodality in the Acts of the Apostles, it provides a foundation. Notably, Pope Francis and the Synod on Synodality (2021–2024) do not frame σύνοδος as a historically fixed term for solemn gatherings of Church leaders addressing doctrinal or liturgical matters. Instead, they emphasize a dynamic process of communal discernment, rooted in the Church's mission to proclaim the Gospel credibly (Sawa 2023, 192, 195). As explored in the next section, the Synod's documents further draw on these etymological associations to articulate synodality.

The preposition σύν appears frequently in the New Testament, precluding an exhaustive analysis here.⁶ Notably, it conveys a sense of community, indirectly evoking ecclesiality (McGavin 2023, 324). Luke emphasizes this theme in key passages of the Acts of the Apostles, drawing the reader's attention to communal dynamics.

The Acts of the Apostles frequently employs the preposition σύν to underscore the communal nature of early Christian gatherings. In the Upper Room, the community includes the apostles, disciples, women, Mary, and Jesus' brothers (σὺν γυναῖξιν καὶ Μαρίας ... καὶ τοῖς ἀδελφοῖς αὐτοῦ) (Acts 1:14). The apostle chosen to replace Judas is called to be a witness to the resurrection alongside others (μάρτυρα

³ The Greek-Polish Dictionary edited by Zofia Abramowiczówna (1958, 4:226) lists almost all of these meanings within one list, without dividing them into separate parts.

⁴ The Septuagint contains a few uses of σύνοδος: Deut 33:14; 1 Kgs 15:13; Neh 7:5, 64; Jer 9:1. Meanings range from meetings of various gatherings to a group of repatriates returning from exile. On the other hand, the author of Wis 6:23 uses the verb form συνοδεύω, which metaphorically expresses the common path of the author seeking wisdom with envy (οὔτε μὴν φθόνῳ τετηκότι συνοδεύσω).

⁵ Theological associations lead to the fourth Gospel: “I am the Way (ἡ ὁδός), the Truth, and the Life” (John 14:6), but this phrase has no direct equivalent in Luke's theology.

⁶ Luke's work contains a total of 74 instances of its use.

τῆς ἀναστάσεως αὐτοῦ σὺν ἡμῖν γενέσθαι) (Acts 1:22). Peter, though speaking alone at Pentecost, represents the community, particularly the apostles (Σταθεῖς δὲ ὁ Πέτρος σὺν τοῖς ἑνδεκά) (Acts 2:14), and collaborates with John in evangelistic efforts, where σὺν is often paralleled by καί (Acts 3:1–4,⁷ 11; 8:14). The Sanhedrin recognizes Peter and John as those who were with Jesus (σὺν τῷ Ἰησοῦ ἦσαν) (Acts 4:13). Early house churches also reflect this communal theme, as seen with Cornelius and his household (σὺν παντὶ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ) (Acts 10:2), the Philippian jailer's household (σὺν πᾶσιν τοῖς ἐν τῇ οἰκίᾳ αὐτοῦ) (Acts 16:32), and Crispus, the synagogue leader in Corinth (σὺν ὄλῳ τῷ οἴκῳ αὐτοῦ) (Acts 18:8). After their first missionary journey, Paul and Barnabas remain in community with the Antioch church (σὺν τοῖς μαθηταῖς) (Acts 14:28). The Jerusalem Council's decision is made in unity with the entire church (σὺν ὄλῃ τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ) (Acts 15:22), and Paul prays communally with the Ephesian elders (σὺν πᾶσιν αὐτοῖς προσηύξατο) (Acts 20:36). These examples, among others, highlight the centrality of communal bonds in Luke's ecclesiology.

The noun ὁδός (“way”) plays a significant role in Luke's writings, as explored by numerous scholars. In the Gospel, the motif of the “way” is most evident in Jesus' itinerary to Jerusalem, spanning over a third of the narrative (Luke 9:51–19:28).⁸ Luke notes that even Jesus' opponents acknowledge he teaches “the way of God” (τὴν ὁδὸν τοῦ θεοῦ) (Luke 20:21). Paul Borgman argues that the “way” serves as a structural and thematic thread⁹ unifying Luke's Gospel and Acts (Borgman 2006, x). Similarly, Joseph Ratzinger observes that Jesus' public life is depicted as a journey toward Jerusalem, with the evangelist highlighting its ultimate purpose (Luke 9:31, 51).¹⁰

The Acts of the Apostles continues Luke's emphasis on the motif of the “way” (ὁδός). From the opening scene of Jesus' ascension, a geographical framework emerges (Acts 1:8), with the promise of his return “in the same way” he departed (ἐλεύσεται ὃν τρόπον ἔθεάσασθε αὐτὸν πορευόμενον) (Acts 1:11). Deok Hee Jung (2023, 533–35) argues that this reflects not conventional, two-dimensional cartography but a hodological space distinctive to ancient perspectives,¹¹ positioning Acts as “itinerary-based literature.” (Jung 2023, 533) While specific travel narratives

⁷ Preposition “with” appears only in Acts 3:4 (“and Peter looked at him with John and said”).

⁸ See Moessner 1983, 575–605; Matera 1993, 57–77. For an extensive bibliography, see the commentaries on the third Gospel: Fitzmyer 2008b, 830–832; Nolland 1993, 532; Mickiewicz 2011, 524.

⁹ According to the German exegete, the phrase “God's way” is Luke's kind of concluding phrase with which he reinterprets the Scriptures in relation to Jesus. “The way of God” is synonymous with “the way of salvation,” “the kingdom of God” and “the way of peace.” (Borgman 2006, x)

¹⁰ “In Luke's Gospel all of Jesus' public life is described in terms of an ascent toward Jerusalem; thus Jesus' whole life appears as the exodus in which He is at once both Moses and Israel.” (Ratzinger 1990, 75)

¹¹ In the first part of his study, Jung (2023, 528–33) included an interesting panorama of the hodological concept based on Greco-Roman literature. The very concept of hodological space (spazio odologico) was written by the Italian historian Pietro Janni (1984, 82). See also an article by Sylvie Vilatte (1991, 209–34).

abound, the motif of the journey shapes the theological and structural fabric of the entire work.

Luke portrays the witnesses of the resurrection as dynamic travelers, their journeys forming the narrative “skeleton” upon which individual scenes are built. Two central figures in Acts, Peter¹² and Paul, are particularly mobile, with Paul covering vast distances through his evangelizing paths. Luke consistently emphasizes the motif of the “way” (ὁδός) in Paul’s actions, framing his movements as both literal and metaphorical.

From his first appearance, Saul (later Paul) is linked to the “way.” He initially persecutes the “followers of the way” (Acts 9:2), a term for Jesus’ disciples that recurs throughout Acts (19:8, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22). Jesus himself appears to Saul on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:17). After Barnabas brings him from Tarsus (Acts 11:26), the Holy Spirit sets Paul on a missionary path (Acts 13:2), initiating a series of expeditions across biblical lands, from Palestine to Achaia and ultimately Rome. Luke’s narrative draws readers into this journey, encouraging them to adopt the model of the disciple-pilgrim through a mental map of Paul’s movements (Alexander 1995, 18). Rather than a conventional two-dimensional map, this is a network of trails—a hodological space that unfolds linearly, guiding Paul ever forward (Jung 2023, 534). Luke provides minimal geographical detail, focusing instead on Paul’s ὁδός, with time-stamps marking the apostolic journey’s progression (e.g., Acts 14:20; 16:11; 17:10; 18:11, 18, 23; 19:10; 20:3; 21:1, 8, 15; 22:30; 24:1, 24; 27:19; 28:11).

The term ὁδός carries both literal and metaphorical meanings in Acts, often tied to the church (McGavin 2023, 318). It first appears in Peter’s sermon, quoting Ps 15:11 (LXX), where “the ways of life” (ὁδοὺς ζωῆς) (Acts 2:28) reflects an Old Testament metaphor for a righteous, dynamic life. Similarly, Paul in Iconium speaks of peoples who “went their own ways” in past generations (Acts 14:16), and a seer in Philippi proclaims Paul and Silas as preaching “the way of salvation” (Acts 16:17).

Literally, ὁδός describes physical travel, as when Philip’s convert, the Ethiopian official, “went his way with joy” after baptism (Acts 8:39). It also underscores perilous journeys, such as the plot to kill Paul on the road from Caesarea to Jerusalem (Acts 25:3) or his transformative encounter with divine light en route to Damascus (Acts 26:13). Metaphorically, ὁδός defines the Christian movement. Saul’s mission to arrest “those of the way” in Damascus (Acts 9:2) introduces this usage, echoed when Priscilla and Aquila teach Apollos “the way of God” (Acts 18:26). The “way” sparks conflict in Corinth (Acts 19:9) and Ephesus (Acts 19:23), and Paul defends his adherence to it before the Sanhedrin (Acts 22:4) and Felix, who knows “the way” well (Acts 24:14, 22).

¹² The Apostle Peter, even disappearing from the narrative, sets out on his way (ἐπορεύθη εἰς ἕτερον τόπον) (Acts 12:17).

While Luke's use of *óδóç* carries ecclesial significance, it stops short of John's explicit declaration that Jesus is "the Way, the Truth, and the Life" (John 14:6). Nonetheless, Luke's nuanced application of *óδóç* invites readers to see the Christian life as a dynamic journey, both physical and spiritual, woven into the narrative of Acts.

2. Synod Documents on Synodality

This study examines all official Synod on Synodality documents,¹³ for references to the Acts of the Apostles. While many documents do not directly engage with Luke's second volume, several include references, with some explicitly quoting and analyzing specific passages from Acts in detail.

2.1. Pre-Synodal Documents

The official documents of the Synod on Synodality serve as the primary source for analyzing the use of Luke's traditions in relation to synodality. However, preparatory theological works published shortly before the Synod's inauguration, frequently referenced in the Synod documents, are also significant. A key text is the International Theological Commission's *Synodality in the Life and Mission of the Church* (March 2, 2018), which extensively engages with the Acts of the Apostles (International Theological Commission 2018).

In para. 19, the document highlights pivotal moments in the apostolic Church when the community discerns the will of the Risen Christ together, emphasizing the Holy Spirit's role in guiding this process (cf. Acts 2:2–3; 5:19–21; 8:26, 29, 39; 12:6–17; 13:1–3; 16:6–7, 9–10; 20:22). It cites specific examples, such as the election of deacons (Acts 6:1–6) and the mission to the Gentiles (Acts 10). Paragraph 20 describes the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15) as a "synodal event," embodying the Church's vocation in the presence of the Risen One, a theme revisited in para. 42, where synodality is framed as a dynamic expression of the Church's life and mission, beyond mere procedure.

Further, para. 44 interprets the Pentecost assembly (Acts 2:11) as a prefiguration of the universal gathering of God's people. Paragraph 45 illustrates the Church's apostolicity through the Apostles' teaching and the governance of their successors

¹³ The list of official documents includes a total of 28 texts of a very different nature published between 2021 and 2025 (in English they are also available in chronological order, see <https://www.synod.va/en/resources/documents/documents-chronological-order.html>). Some of them are of a working/instructive nature, some of them are pastoral, and some are official synodal statements. The texts in Polish have been made available on a separate page www.synod.pl.

(Acts 20:19). The pilgrim nature of the Church is discussed in para. 49, referencing Pentecost (Acts 2:1–9) and the Jerusalem meeting (Acts 15:14).

The document also connects synodality to the term “way” (ὁδός). In para. 3, it notes that Christ’s disciples were called “supporters of the way” (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22),¹⁴ linking the etymology of “synod” (σύνδοδος: “common way”)¹⁵ to this motif. Paragraphs 50–51 elaborate, describing Christians as the “People of the Way” (Acts 9:2; 18:25; 19:9) and emphasizing the missionary mandate to bear witness “to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8). In para. 62, the role of the Holy Spirit and the Apostles (Acts 2:42) and their successors (Acts 20:28) is underscored in the context of apostolic tradition.

The document concludes by highlighting Luke’s concept of *παρηρησία*¹⁶ (Acts 2:29; 4:13, 29, 31; 9:28; 13:46; 14:3; 18:26; 26:26; 28:31),¹⁷ symbolizing bold proclamation of salvation (para. 121), and noting Mary’s presence among the disciples awaiting Pentecost (Acts 1:14).

In 2014, the International Theological Commission published *Sensus Fidei in the Life of the Church*, which explores the biblical roots of synodality (International Theological Commission 2014). In the paragraph addressing biblical teaching and faith, it highlights the Gospel of God’s grace (Acts 20:24) and the apostolic mission (Acts 2:38–42) as responses to the Word, alongside prayer as a cornerstone of Christian life (Acts 2:42) (paras. 9, 12, 16). Paragraph 15 examines the universal gift of the Spirit, referencing key texts from Acts (2:11, 17; 1:8). Paragraph 17 discusses communal decision-making, citing the election of deacons (Acts 6:1–6) and the inclusion of Gentiles in the community (Acts 15). Finally, para. 45 underscores the universal exercise of Christ’s prophetic office through all the faithful, supported by Acts 2:17–18.

¹⁴ The *Vademecum* for the Synod on Synodality (Synod of Bishops 2021b) again returns to the definition of “way” in relation to Christian practices, invoking the same *sigla* (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22), but this is a reference to the above-mentioned document of the International Theological Commission on Synodality. Access on the Polish-language website of the Synod: <https://synod.org.pl/docs/materii-aly-dotyczace-synodu/broszury-dokumenty-prezentacje-dotyczace-synodu-ogolnie-po-polsku/vademecum-synodu-o-synodalnosci>. Accessed October 15, 2025.

¹⁵ The full field of meaning of this term, which refers to both assembly/meeting and astronomical conjunction, can be found in the entry: “σύνδοδος.” (Liddell et al. 1996, 1720)

¹⁶ The dictionary meaning of this term ranges from freedom of expression or promiscuity in speech (negatively), through freedom in action, to an attitude of generosity and sumptuousness; see *παρηρησία* (Liddell et al. 1996, 1344).

¹⁷ Several of the texts listed here contain the verb form: *παρηρηιάζομαι*.

2.2. Synodal Documents

2.2.1. Preparatory Document of the Synod

The synodal preparatory document entitled *For a Synodal Church: Communion, Participation, and Mission* (Synod of Bishops 2021a) serves as the primary official source for synodal materials, dedicating two paragraphs to Acts 10 as an example of evangelization and the dual dynamics of conversion.¹⁸ It also defines Christians as “followers of the Way” (Acts 9:2; 19:9, 23; 22:4; 24:14, 22), describing this as “the specific *modus vivendi et operandi* of the Church, the People of God, which reveals and realizes its communion through collective journeying, gathering, and active participation in its evangelizing mission.” (Synod of Bishops 2021a, para. 10) For Luke, Jesus exemplifies this impartial action (Acts 10:34), guided by the Father’s will and the Holy Spirit’s inspiration (para. 17).

2.2.2. Biblical Sources on Synodality

On April 2, 2022, the Synod Secretariat’s Commission for Spirituality published *Biblical Resources on Synodality (BRS)*¹⁹, offering commentary on three key pericopes from the Acts of the Apostles: Acts 1:13–14; 10:1–11:18; and 15:1–35.

1) **Church of the Upper Room (Acts 1:13–14) (BRS, pp. 53–59)**—Luke’s summary depicts the early Christian community’s perseverance in prayer. The document highlights the Church’s apostolic nature, its bond of love, prayerful zeal, desire for the Holy Spirit’s gift, and Mary’s active presence. In the section “Implications for Synodality” (BRS, pp. 56–57), five points are outlined, though not strictly biblical:

- “Ecclesial Spirit”: Emphasizes the community’s inclusive character, noting Mary’s maternal mediation, though not directly supported by Acts 1:13–14.
- “Mary’s intimate relation with the Holy Spirit”: Highlights Mary’s intimate relationship with the Spirit, drawing on Lukan Mariology from the Gospel.²⁰
- “Mary, the Listener of the Word”: presents Mary’s attentiveness to the Word as a paradigm for discernment.
- “Mary, Queen of the Apostles”: references Acts 1:13–14 but requires broader doctrinal context.
- “Mary is walking with us in our Synodal process”: pictures Mary as Mother of the Church and links Acts 1:14 with John 19:25–27.

¹⁸ It is about the beginning of the third part (Listening to the Holy Scriptures) covering points 16 to 24 from the paragraphs entitled, respectively: “Jesus, the Crowd and the Apostles” and “The Double Dynamics of Conversion: Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10).”

¹⁹ On that day (April 2, 2022), the same commission published another document entitled *Towards a Spirituality for Synodality* prepared by a subgroup of the Commission on Spirituality in 2022. However, this text contains only one reference to Acts 20:28, where Paul applies the important title of “Church of God” (ἡ ἐκκλησία τοῦ θεοῦ) to the local community of the Ephesian church (TSS, p. 22).

²⁰ For more on the Mariology of the evangelist Luke, see Mielcarek 2020, 599–614.

- 2) **The Gentiles' Way to the Church (Acts 10:1–11:18) (BRS, pp. 61–73)**²¹—The reflection underscores Peter's transformation through openness to the Holy Spirit, moving from ministry among Jewish disciples (e.g., healing Aeneas, Acts 9:33–34; raising Tabitha, Acts 9:36–41) to evangelizing Gentiles (Acts 10), as affirmed at the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15:7–11). This process involved reshaping Peter's decision-making criteria, bridging the divide between Peter (a Jew) and Cornelius (a Roman) and their respective communities.
- 3) **Gentiles in the Church (Acts 15:1–35) (BRS, pp. 75–79)**—The Council of Jerusalem, as a continuation of the Peter-Cornelius narrative, is presented as a key example of synodality, illustrating communal discernment and decision-making.

2.2.3. *Instrumentum Laboris: How to Be a Missionary Synodal Church*

The working document prepared for the second session of the Synod, *How to Be a Missionary Synodal Church* (July 9, 2024) (XVI Ordinary General Assembly 2024a), includes several references to Acts. In discussing formation for a missionary Church in collaboration with the Holy Spirit, it cites the Risen Christ's call to apostolic witness "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8) (para. 55). The principles of ecclesial discernment toward mission highlight Mary as a model of synodal spirituality, referencing her prayerful presence in the Upper Room (Acts 1:14) alongside her attentiveness to the Word in Luke's Gospel (Luke 1:26–38; 2:19, 51) (para. 59). Communal discernment is further explored through the Apostolic Assembly in Jerusalem, where decisions were made "with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 15:28) (para. 62). The theme of communal responsibility is illustrated by the Jerusalem community's response to Peter's baptism of Gentiles after his return from Caesarea (Acts 11:2–3).

The Synod's documents primarily draw on three passages from the Acts of the Apostles to illustrate aspects of synodality: Acts 1:13–14; 10:1–11:18; and 15:1–35. Additionally, the International Theological Commission references the election of deacons (Acts 6:1–6), expanding this list. From the perspective of Luke's narrative in Acts, are these the only relevant texts? At least two further examples appear to demonstrate communal decision-making and conflict resolution, resonating with the spirit of synodality:

- 1) **The Selection of Judas' Successor (Acts 1:15–26)**: This passage depicts the early Christian community's collaborative process in choosing Matthias to replace Judas, reflecting synodal discernment.
- 2) **Paul's Ministry and the Church in Antioch (Acts 13:1–3)**: The commissioning of Paul and Barnabas by the Antioch community, guided by the Holy Spirit, exemplifies collective mission-oriented decision-making.

²¹ A reference to Acts 15 is also contained in the Letter to the Priests about Synodal Journey of March 19, 2022 written by Cardinal Mario Grech, Secretary General of the Synod of Bishops, and Lazzaro You Heung-sik, Archbishop Emeritus of Daejeon and Prefect of the Congregation for the Clergy (Grech 2022, 2).

Although the term “synodality” is absent from these texts, their content embodies its spirit, as will be elaborated in paragraph three.

3. Key Texts of the Acts of the Apostles

3.1. Mother Church in Jerusalem (Acts 1:13–14)

The account of the Apostolic Church gathered in the Upper Room (Acts 1:14) is brief but rich in detail. In addition to listing the apostles, it mentions the women, Jesus’ brothers, and specifically names His Mother, Mary. Verse 14 introduces two key terms that resonate with Pope Francis’ concept of synodality: ὁμοθυμαδόν²² often translated as “unanimity,” and προσευχή i.e. “prayer.”²³

The term ὁμοθυμαδόν is a favorite of Luke. Of its eleven occurrences in the New Testament, ten appear in the Acts of the Apostles.²⁴ Typically translated as “unanimously,”²⁵ “together,” or “in agreement,” the word derives from the Greek θυμός,²⁶ meaning “passion” or “strong emotion.” Beyond mere intellectual consensus, ὁμοθυμαδόν suggests an emotional harmony, reflecting a community united in both heart and purpose. This aligns with Luke’s depiction of the early Church as having “one heart and soul” (καρδία καὶ ψυχή μία) (Acts 4:32), emphasizing not only shared thought but also a profound emotional unity.

Of Luke’s uses of ὁμοθυμαδόν, four specifically describe the bonds among Christ’s disciples (Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12). The first three instances portray a community united in prayer: in the Upper Room, in the Temple, and in an unspecified household. Luke’s emphasis on prayer in the context of ὁμοθυμαδόν underscores a unity that extends beyond interpersonal relationships to a deep communion with God (McGregor 2024, 155). This prayerful unity reflects obedience to the Risen Christ’s command to await the Father’s promise—the Holy Spirit—who will empower the disciples to witness “to the ends of the earth” (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–8).

In the second instance, ὁμοθυμαδόν describes the disciples’ shared life in the Temple, marked by the Eucharist, joy, simplicity of heart, communal sharing of goods, and praise of God (Acts 2:46–47). In the third instance, it signifies their collective resolve to fulfill the Risen Christ’s will despite the Sanhedrin’s prohibitions

²² As McGregor (2024, 154) argues, this term allows us to look at relationships in the church and with God from the perspective of reaching a consensus. It is therefore essential for the exercise of authentic synodality.

²³ In addition to the meaning of prayer practice, this noun can also mean a place of prayer (cf. Acts 16:3).

²⁴ Acts 1:14; 2:46; 4:24; 5:12; 7:57; 8:6; 12:20; 15:25; 18:12; 19:29.

²⁵ The dictionary edited by Abramowiczówna (1958, 3:279) gives only the first meaning.

²⁶ Hans Wolfgang Heidland (*TDNT* 5:185–86) lists texts where, in addition to anger, other emotions such as fear (Jdt 15:2) or gratitude (Wis 10:20) are also possible.

(Acts 4:24). In this prayer, the disciples acknowledge God's sovereignty, grounding their faith in His power to enable bold proclamation of the Gospel, regardless of opposition (Acts 4:29).

3.2. Discerning the Place of the Gentiles in God's Salvific Plan (Acts 10)

Chapter 10 of the Acts of the Apostles, as highlighted in the synodal biblical materials, vividly illustrates the Holy Spirit's guidance of Peter and Cornelius. Both are depicted as individuals in constant, attentive communion with God, yet their encounter is not driven by a deliberate motive to meet or discern God's will together through prayer. Instead, the Holy Spirit orchestrates their actions in an expansive, sovereign manner, transcending their circumstances and preconceptions (Acts 10:5–6, 19–20).²⁷ This divine initiative culminates in the outpouring of the Spirit upon a Gentile community, previously outside the Mosaic covenant (Acts 10:44).²⁸ Peter's evangelistic declaration (Acts 10:34) reflects his recognition of God's will to include Gentiles in the community of believers, a realization shaped by a series of divinely coordinated events (Keener 2020, 308).

As noted in the synodal biblical materials, "Peter's transformation was a shift in his decision-making criteria regarding the Gentiles, as he recognized and overcame his own cultural and historical prejudices. Consequently, his understanding of God's work in the world changed profoundly." (*BRS*, p. 67) Notably, the materials do not explicitly address the requirements of Judaism in this context. Religious obligations, however, are distinct from cultural or historical influences. Judaism traditionally excluded from the community those who did not observe the Law's fundamental precepts. By proclaiming God's will, discovered through personal experience, Peter effectively challenges a core tenet of Judaism: the separation of believers from non-observers.

The pivotal term in Peter's declaration is the Greek verb καταλαμβάνομαι (Acts 10:34), translated in some versions as "I am convinced" but literally meaning "I grasp" or "I apprehend." This term does not suggest individualism or presumption. Rather, Peter, guided by the Holy Spirit, reflects on recent events and discerns that they are God's initiative (Fitzmyer 2008a, 470). Yielding to divine inspiration, he cooperates with God's plan, confronting and abandoning his prior assumptions about God's purposes.

The synodal biblical materials rightly emphasize that Acts 10 serves as a prelude to a broader ecclesial assembly and collective discernment of God's will (*BRS*, p. 69).

²⁷ See Joseph A. Fitzmyer's comment: "The story of Cornelius's conversion and that of Peter's justification of his missionary activity both stress the heavenly direction now being given to this spread." (Fitzmyer 2008a, 448)

²⁸ A broader background of the role of the Holy Spirit in the context of the work of evangelization was dealt with in his time by Włodzimierz Cyran (1993–94, 21–22, 15–36).

Thus, this chapter highlights the individual qualities of Peter and Cornelius that enable them to fulfill God's plans. Under the Holy Spirit's guidance, each follows a converging path, leading to their divinely appointed encounter. While both undergo significant transformation, Peter's change is more pronounced, as he must overcome the barriers Judaism imposed against the uncircumcised. In both figures, we see a readiness to heed God's promptings and a humility to relinquish personal assumptions about divine will. This openness and transformation are key to their shared journey toward fulfilling God's purpose (*BRS*, pp. 69–70).

3.3. Determination of the Presence of Pagans in the Church (Acts 15:1–35)

Luke prepares the theme of Gentile inclusion in the Church through two distinct narratives (Pervo 2009, 368). The first is the “Pentecost of the Gentiles” (Acts 10, discussed previously) (Keener 2020, 294), and the second involves Paul's evangelistic successes and the controversies surrounding the mixed communities of Acts 13–14. These missionary efforts were preceded by the community's prayerful discernment and the Holy Spirit's confirmation through the laying on of hands (Acts 13:3). The “Council of Jerusalem” (Acts 15) represents both a continuation and a culmination of this issue, as the early Church shapes its identity, rooted in the Jewish heritage of its members, Jesus' teachings, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The tension arising from the Church's emergence as a mixed community prompts a discernment process that offers a model for resolving such conflicts.

The apostolic assembly is neither a rabbinical debate, a sociological analysis, nor an arbitrary decision. Its participants are driven by a shared commitment to discern God's will for the Church.²⁹ While it is unclear whether the meeting had a formal chair or how it began, Luke provides key details about its composition and purpose. The gathering included apostles and elders (οἱ ἀπόστολοι καὶ οἱ πρεσβύτεροι) (Acts 15:6), who convened to “examine the matter” (ἰδεῖν περὶ τοῦ λόγου τούτου) (Acts 15:6). The verb ὁράω carries a metaphorical sense of thoroughly investigating or discerning the issue. This is reinforced by Luke's note that the meeting began with “much discussion” (πολλῆς ζητήσεως) (Acts 15:7; lit. “many inquiries”), highlighting the rigorous exploration of critical issues. The noun ζήτησις is significant, appearing earlier in the Antioch controversy (Acts 15:2) and later in Festus' description of the Pharisees' dispute with Paul (Acts 25:20).

Following this introduction, Luke gives the floor to Peter, Paul, and Barnabas, who share their experiences in Gentile missions. Rather than recounting these events in detail—already familiar to the reader—Luke focuses on the core issue:

²⁹ For more on this context, see Nolland 1991, 30–34.

the conditions for admitting non-Jews into the community.³⁰ The next stage of discernment features James, who interprets these events in light of Old Testament prophecies (Acts 15:13–18), a common Jewish practice of contextualizing contemporary events within God’s salvific history. James then proposes four minimal obligations³¹ for Gentile Christians to maintain unity with the Judeo-Christian community (Acts 15:19–21).

The entire community (σὺν ὅλῃ τῇ ἐκκλησίᾳ) (Acts 15:22), not just the apostles and elders, participates in the final action: selecting and sending emissaries to communicate the discernment’s outcome to local churches. This collective decision, expressed through the verbs δοκέω (decide), ἐκλέγω (choose), and πέμπω (send), reflects the broader Church’s involvement. The letter’s preamble further underscores this discernment’s alignment with God’s will: “It seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (ἔδοξεν³² γὰρ τῷ πνεύματι τῷ ἀγίῳ καὶ ἡμῖν³³) (Acts 15:28), where “us” represents the Church through its apostles and elders.³⁴

Luke’s use of ὁμοθυμαδόν (Acts 15:25) highlights the transformation from initial discord to unity, a process driven not only by human effort but by the Holy Spirit’s guidance, as seen in Acts 10 and 13–14. The Spirit’s outpouring on Gentiles, akin to that on Jewish believers, led Peter and the assembly to recognize that salvation comes to all “by the grace of the Lord Jesus” (Acts 15:11). The decision-making process—rooted in the testimonies of witnesses, scriptural reflection, and attentiveness to God’s will—makes Acts 15 a profound illustration of communal discernment in the early Church.³⁵

³⁰ According to Fitzmyer (2008a, 552): “Luke presents the event, the ‘Council’ dealt with two issues: (1) circumcision of Gentiles and their obligation to observe the Mosaic law; and (2) dietary and other restrictions for Gentile Christians living among Jewish Christians.”

³¹ For more on the Jacob clauses, see Fitzmyer 2008a, 556–58; Pervo 2009, 376–79; Barrett 2004a, 730–736; Keener 2020, 369–71.

³² *A Greek-English Lexicon* (Liddell et al. 1996, 441–42) gives a number of meanings of this verb. In the first place, it means the act of waiting, expecting or supposing. It can refer to the expression of a specific intention, judgment or impression (I think so...), and in the passive voice it means the object/or matter being taken into account. In the second sense, it refers to the judicial sphere in which someone turns out to be guilty of a crime, for example, or to the sphere of making an impression on others, as well as to public decisions/decisions, in the sense of considering something right or decided. Similarly, the dictionary edited by Abramowiczówna (1958, 1:592–93). On the other hand, Gerhard Kittel (*TDNT*, 2:232–33) emphasizes above all the meaning: “to believe,” “to have conviction/think,” “to appear.” However, he also points out other possible uses, such as “to hope for something,” “to have a good reputation.”

³³ Fitzmyer (2008a, 566) juxtaposes this ecclesial formula with the decree of Caesar Augustus quoted by Josephus: “I and my advisors have decided under oath....” (A.J. 16.6.2 §163)

³⁴ Interestingly, Barrett (2004a, 744) seems to emphasize the secondariness of the Holy Spirit’s action towards the apostles and elders, which does not fit at all with the story: “The apostles and elders are now joined in their decision by the Holy Spirit.” Paraphrasing his words, one could rather say that it was the apostles and elders who joined the decision of the Holy Spirit. Cf. Fitzmyer 2008a, 566.

³⁵ For more on the early Church decision-making process, see Luke Timothy Johnson (1996, 78, 89–106).

This discernment is deeply prayerful, echoing the early Church's practice before Pentecost, when the Risen Jesus instructed the disciples to await the Father's promise in Jerusalem (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4–8). Empowered by the Spirit, they became witnesses "to the ends of the earth." The Council of Jerusalem mirrors this prayerful waiting, ensuring the fulfillment of God's plans.

Although the term *σύνοδος* is absent, Acts 15 embodies synodality through the participants' shared commitment to prayerful reflection on God's current initiatives and His Word. This process involves both a select group of leaders and the wider community, with its outcomes shared to resolve tensions in other churches. The ultimate goal is God's peace and unity, grounded in a pilgrimage aligned with the Holy Spirit's salvific plan (McGregor 2024, 156–57).

3.4. Seven Chosen to Serve (Acts 6:1–6)

The controversy over the care of widows in the early Jerusalem church, as described in Acts 6,³⁶ exemplifies prayerful reflection and spiritual discernment. Luke highlights the tension through the term *γογγυσμός* (Acts 6:1), which evokes the Israelites' grumbling against God in the wilderness (Exod 16:7–12; Num 17:20–25).³⁷ This term frames the issue as not only a social challenge but also a spiritual crisis requiring resolution to maintain the community's unity and apostolic witness. The existing system for meeting the needs of the most vulnerable proved inadequate (Acts 6:1),³⁸ necessitating corrective measures that addressed both material needs and the spiritual cohesion essential to the Church's credibility.

The apostles initiated the response but did not decide in isolation. Instead, they invited the "entire multitude of disciples" (*τὸ πλῆθος τῶν μαθητῶν*) (Acts 6:2) to participate in the discernment process. The Greek term *πλῆθος* indicates a broad group, though the exact number is unspecified. The apostles delegated responsibility, instructing the community to "select" (*ἐπισκέψασθε*³⁹) (Acts 6:3; lit. "consider" or "choose") candidates while they focused on prayer and preaching (Acts 6:2, 4). This delegation is not rooted in apathy or superiority but in their conviction that God called them to prioritize proclaiming the Word. The community responded

³⁶ Polish libraries will find many biblical studies of this passage, although the aspect of the decision-making process is usually not particularly emphasized. Cf. the article by Roman Pindel (1995, 263–82).

³⁷ The wise men of Israel also warned against the attitude of murmuring (see Sir 46:7; Wis 1:10–11).

³⁸ Craig S. Keener (2020, 219) points out that ancient sources often mention the imperfections of charitable service in antiquity.

³⁹ Barrett (2004b, 312) points out that *ἐπισκέπτομαι* is a typically Luke term, although the Evangelist uses it in different senses: in Acts 15:14 (cf. Luke 1:68, 78) to refer to God who salutarily visits his people, in 15:36 in the sense of checking (someone), or as in the passage under study in the sense of seeking someone for a specific function. In a similar sense, the Old Testament uses the related term *ἐπισκοπεῖν*; cf. in LXX: Num 27:1, 16–18; and especially in Exod 18:21.

by choosing candidates and presenting them to the apostles for approval (Acts 6:6) (Fitzmyer 2008a, 349).

In the initial stage, the apostles' role was limited to proposing the initiative and defining selection criteria: candidates should be of "good repute," "full of the Spirit," and "wise" (Acts 6:3). After the community selected the candidates, the apostles confirmed the choice through prayer and the laying on of hands (Acts 6:6). This process exemplifies communal discernment, involving both the apostles and the wider community in a collaborative decision-making effort that balanced practical and spiritual priorities (Pervo 2009, 160–161).⁴⁰

3.5. Choosing the Successor of Judas (Acts 1:15–26)

In the opening of Acts Luke describes the first crisis resolved through communal prayer and reflection. Following the Risen Christ's command, about 120 disciples gathered in the Upper Room to await the Father's promise—the gift of the Holy Spirit. Luke notes the presence of the apostles, Mary the Mother of Jesus, Jesus' brothers, and, as was his custom, women, though he does not name them individually.

Peter initiates the need to replace Judas to restore the Twelve (Acts 1:15), citing Pss 68:26 and 108:8 (LXX) to support his proposal. He emphasizes that the chosen individual must be a witness to Christ's resurrection alongside the Eleven (Acts 1:22). The phrase "they put forward" (ἔστησαν, v. 23)⁴¹ is ambiguous, as verse 15 implies the involvement of all present,⁴² not just the apostles.⁴³ Luke, however, does not clarify this point.

The decision-making process unfolds as follows: the disciples gather, Peter proposes the action, they seek God's guidance through Scripture, select candidates, pray (προσευξάμενοι) (Acts 1:24), and cast lots (ἔδωκαν κλήρους) (Acts 1:26) to choose Matthias. This communal approach to discernment and selection likely involved broad participation, reflecting a collective reliance on prayer and divine guidance.

⁴⁰ The American exegete emphasizes that within this procedure "the church [is] taking action as a totality and exhibits an ecclesial orientation."

⁴¹ Western tradition (the Codex Beza – D and some Latin manuscripts) attempts to limit the choice of the twelfth apostle to the decision of Peter himself, retaining the singular form of the verb: ἔστησεν = he (Peter) placed (see Nestle and Nestle 2012, 380). Richard I. Pervo (2009, 55) comments on the tendency of the author of the Western text to present Peter as a *μονεπίσκοπος*.

⁴² Barrett (2004b, 102): "The community as a whole put forward (ἔστησαν) two candidates for the vacant position."

⁴³ Keener (2012, 770) speculates that those gathered in the upper room should be identified with the larger group of disciples that Luke has already presented in the Gospel (Luke 10:1).

3.6. Paul's Ministry and the Church in Antioch (Acts 13:1–3)

The final example unfolds in the vibrant, diverse Christian community of Antioch, comprising believers of Jewish and Gentile origins. From this dynamic church, Paul and Barnabas embark on their missionary journey, commissioned and sent by the local community. According to Luke, this mission was not the apostles' independent decision but stemmed from a profound spiritual connection with God⁴⁴ through fasting and prayer.⁴⁵ As seen in the encounter between Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10), the Holy Spirit initiates⁴⁶ the missionary endeavor, revealing His will during a liturgical assembly. The community responds with further fasting, prayer, and the laying on of hands—a gesture of blessing and commissioning⁴⁷—before sending Paul and Barnabas on their mission (Acts 13:3). While verse 3 does not specify who performed the sending, the immediate context of verse 1 highlights the prophets and teachers of the Antioch church, likely indicating a group of leaders, though broader community involvement remains plausible.⁴⁸

Unlike the collective decision-making in Acts 6 or 15, this scene emphasizes the Antioch church leaders' openness and responsiveness to the Holy Spirit's guidance, representing the entire community. The process underscores active communal participation, rooted in prayerful preparation, attentiveness to divine inspiration, and obedience to God's discerned will—principles central to the concept of synodality.

⁴⁴ Fitzmyer (2008a, 497) emphasizes that the term *κύριος* used by Luke (v. 2) refers to the God of Israel, not to the Risen One.

⁴⁵ Fasting and prayer are essential elements of spiritual discernment in the early Church. The Old Testament does not contain much mention of fasting. The custom of fasting in mourning was known (2 Sam 1:12; 3:35); or as part of the military operations of the Holy War (1 Sam 14:24). The Jewish liturgy commanded fasting on the Day of Atonement (Lev 16:29).

⁴⁶ The mission of the Holy Spirit is an obvious continuation of the work of Jesus, see Keener 2020, 330; Fitzmyer 2008a, 497. Pervo (2009, 322) reduces the role of the Holy Spirit to "some sense of revealed approval." Barrett (2004b, 605), on the other hand, guesses the charismatic ministry of a prophet, but stipulates that the second volume of Luke's work knows examples of the direct intervention of the Holy Spirit in the actions of the apostles (Acts 8:29; 10:19; 11:2; 19:1).

⁴⁷ Many decades ago, Eduard Lohse (1951, 73, n. 1) pointed out that the laying on of hands on Paul and Barnabas could not be interpreted as a kind of Jewish ordination. The correct interpretation of this scene is certainly a kind of mission giving: "a Spirit-guided commission." (Fitzmyer 2008a, 497)

⁴⁸ Regardless of the identification, the group of those responsible who sent Barnabas and Paul represents the entire Church of Antioch. Hence, Fitzmyer can write that "the Antiochene community acts in the name of the Spirit and designates two individuals for a specific task in the Christian church." (Fitzmyer 2008a, 497)

Conclusion

An etymological analysis of the term “synodality,” coupled with an examination of its constituent elements in the second volume of Luke’s corpus (the Acts of the Apostles), reveals several key insights into its ecclesial dimensions. The primary objective—to unearth the biblical foundations of synodality as championed by Pope Francis—was first addressed by surveying the contexts in which the Third Evangelist employs the preposition σύν (“with”) and the noun ἡ ὁδός (“way”). This was followed by pinpointing passages from Acts that synodal documents cite as exemplars of synodality. These passages feature pivotal Greek terms that align with modern understandings of synodality, including ὁμοθυμαδόν (“unanimity”), προσευχή (“prayer”), καταλαμβάνομαι (“to be seized or compelled”), ζήτησις (“inquiry”), δοκέω (“to seem or decide”), ἐκλέγω (“to choose”), and ἐπισκέπτομαι (“to oversee or visit”). A broader review of Lukan texts further demonstrates that, while the noun σύνοδος itself is absent, the thematic content resonates deeply with synodality. The selected pericopes portray ecclesial unity alongside participatory and missionary dynamics. Indeed, the early Church’s practices in Acts mirror contemporary synodality through processes of discernment and decision-making that involve not only leaders but also rank-and-file members, all illuminated by the Holy Spirit’s guidance. This convergence highlights essential criteria for participants in today’s synodal Church, foremost among them the pursuit of God’s will. These findings, however, do not foreclose ongoing theological debate on whether “synodality” aptly encapsulates these biblical attitudes.

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Chrystologiczna interpretacja psalmów w księdze brackiej *Tron królewski* Jakuba Pawła Radlińskiego: wymiar teologiczny, historyczny i duchowy na tle epoki

The Christological Interpretation of the Psalms in the Confraternity Book *The Royal Throne* by Jakub Paweł Radliński: Theological, Historical, and Spiritual Dimensions in the Context of the Era

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Streszczenie: Autorzy artykułu podejmują problem oryginalności i znaczenia chrystologicznej interpretacji pięciu psalmów (Ps 2; 20[19]; 45[44]; 99[98]; 110[109]) włączonych przez ks. Jakuba Pawła Radlińskiego do dzieła *Tron królewski*, które zostało wydane w 1735 roku na potrzeby Bractwa Kapłańskiego w Sanoku. Księga została przygotowana jako podręcznik formacyjny. Z tego powodu podczas jej lektury rodzą się pytania o kryteria doboru tekstów, cel chrystologicznej interpretacji psalmów, oryginalność edycji w relacji do innych tego typu dzieł, a także o specyfikę przesłania teologicznego i duchowego. Z racji interdyscyplinarności badań autorzy korzystają z różnych metod i podejść. Na początku prezentują specyfikę przekładu psalmów Radlińskiego na tle innych polskich tłumaczeń Psałterza z XIV–XVIII wieku. Badanie kontekstualne jest ważne także z punktu widzenia hermeneutyki, ponieważ pozwala ocenić poprawność teologiczną i zasadność kryterium chrystologicznego w tłumaczeniu psalmów. Następnie teksty psalmów zostają poddane analizie egzegetycznej uwzględniającej podejście kanoniczne. W kolejnym etapie księga bracka zostaje zestawiona z innymi tego typu tekstami, odkrytymi na potrzeby badań w różnych bibliotekach i archiwach w Polsce. Zastosowanie metody porównawczej pozwala określić jej walory historyczne oraz specyfikę biblijną i teologiczną, a ostatecznie wskazać cel zastosowania kryterium chrystologicznego w tłumaczeniu psalmów w odniesieniu do formacji kapłanów, będących adresatami księgi. Owocem przemyślanego doboru psalmów oraz ich interpretacji jest ukazanie Jezusa Chrystusa jako Najwyższego Kapłana i Króla, zachęta do przyjęcia przez duchownych postawy adoracyjnej wobec Niego, a w konsekwencji do naśladowania Jego cnót. Wyakcentowanie

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godności Chrystusa oraz Jego władzy nad całym światem było bardzo ważne po reformacji, która znacząco obniżała wartość sakramentu kapłaństwa.

Słowa kluczowe: Księga Psalmów, chrystologia, księga bracka, kapłaństwo, formacja duchowa

Abstract: The authors of the article address the question of the originality and significance of the Christological interpretation of five psalms (Ps 2; 20[19]; 45[44]; 99[98]; 110[109]) included by Fr. Jakub Paweł Radliński in his work titled *The Royal Throne*, published in 1735 for the needs of the Priestly Confraternity in Sanok. The book was prepared as a formation manual. For this reason, its reading prompts questions about the criteria for selecting the texts, the purpose of the Christological interpretation of the psalms, the originality of the edition in relation to other works of this type, as well as the specific theological and spiritual message it conveys. Due to the interdisciplinary nature of the research, the authors employ various methods and approaches. They begin by presenting the particular features of Radliński's translation of the psalms in comparison with other Polish translations of the Psalter from the 14th–18th centuries. This contextual study is also important from a hermeneutical perspective, as it allows one to assess the theological correctness and the legitimacy of the Christological criterion in the translation of the psalms. Next, the psalm texts are subjected to an exegetical analysis that takes the canonical approach into account. In the next stage, the confraternity book is compared with other similar texts discovered in various libraries and archives in Poland for the purposes of the study. The use of the comparative method makes it possible to determine its historical value, biblical and theological distinctiveness, and ultimately to indicate the purpose of applying the Christological criterion in the translation of the psalms with reference to the formation of priests, who were the intended recipients of the book. The fruit of the thoughtful selection of psalms and their interpretation is the presentation of Jesus Christ as High Priest and King, an encouragement for the clergy to adopt an attitude of adoration toward Him and, as a consequence, to imitate His virtues. The emphasis on the dignity of Christ and His authority over the entire world was particularly important in the post-Reformation context, which had significantly diminished the value of the sacrament of Holy Orders.

Keywords: The Book of Psalms, Christology, confraternity book, priesthood, spiritual formation

Na przełomie XX i XXI wieku Księdze Psalmów poświęcono wiele uwagi. Obok badań ściśle egzegetycznych kontynuowano dyskusję nad jej integralnością. Zainteresowanie historią redakcji Psalterza wzmożło się po publikacji dokumentu Papieskiej Komisji Biblijnej *Interpretacja Biblii w Kościele*, w którym po omówieniu różnych metod analizy naukowej tekstów biblijnych zaprezentowano także inne sposoby (podejścia – *approche*) interpretacji tekstu natchnionego, pozwalające odkrywać w nim sens teologiczny. Jednym z nich jest podejście kanoniczne¹. Zastosowanie takiej ścieżki interpretacji Księgi Psalmów nie jest łatwe z racji jej kompozycji². Psalterz składa się z utworów powstałych na przestrzeni kilku wieków w różnym kontekście religijnym i społecznym³. Mimo tego, że nie jest jednolity pod względem gatunków poszczególnych utworów i sposobów ekspresji, to w swej ostatecznej formie stanowi całość. Dyskusje nad historią redakcji Księgi Psalmów oraz korzystanie z różnych

¹ Oprócz badań diachronicznych potrzebna jest interpretacja teologiczna, ponieważ „Kościół czyta Stary Testament w świetle wydarzenia paschalnego – śmierci i zmartwychwstania Chrystusa Jezusa – które wprowadza radykalną nowość i nadaje, suwerennym autorytetem, decydujące i ostateczne znaczenie Pismom” (IBK 42). Zob. też Claissé-Walford 2000, 93–110.

² Zob. obszerne opracowanie na ten temat: Tronina 2011, 75–87.

³ Zob. Ravasi 2007, 1:24–25.

metod egzegetycznych prowadzą do wniosku, że Psalterz „nie jest przypadkowym zbiorem modlitw Izraela”, a „poszczególne kolekcje psalmów miały tworzyć spójną księgę” (Tronina 2011, 82)⁴. Ksiądz Antoni Tronina postawił nawet tezę, że „kanoniczne podejście do Psalterza jest już czymś oczywistym” (2011, 84). Zasadniczo przyjmuje się podział Księgi Psalmów na pięć części (Jüngling 2000, 678). Nie istnieje przy tym definitywne stanowisko naukowe, które określałoby kryterium teologiczne decydujące o ostatecznej kompozycji księgi oraz wyznaczało kierunek jej interpretacji (Flint and Miller 2005, 1)⁵. To otwiera możliwość czytania i wyjaśniania psalmów w perspektywie historycznej (monarchia w Izraelu, obietnica mesjańska, historia przymierza), liturgicznej (kult, świątynia, święta pielgrzymkowe) i duchowo-egzystencjalnej (modlitwy błagalne, ufnie inwokacje, hymny dziękczynne, wyznania wiary)⁶, a jednocześnie pozwala zastosować kryterium profetyczne w kluczu chrystologicznym⁷. Taki pogląd prezentuje Tronina: „Układ dramatyczny Psalterza pozwala łatwo przejść do lektury profetycznej [psalmów – P.K.], w którą wprowadzają nas autorzy ksiąg Nowego Testamentu” (2011, 87)⁸. Lektura profetyczna w kluczu chrystologicznym oraz podejście kanoniczne stanowią kryterium doboru i interpretacji psalmów w księdze brackiej ks. Jakuba Pawła Radlińskiego *Tron królewski* (1735)⁹. Radliński we wstępie do swojego dzieła objaśnia tytułowy motyw. Według niego tron królewski miał być ustawiony w świątyni jerozolimskiej dla podkreślenia królowania

4 Nieco inaczej do tego zagadnienia podchodzi James Nogalski (2000, 54), który twierdzi, że kwestia redakcji Księgi Psalmów jest ciągle otwarta i niewyjaśniona.

5 Twierdzenie, że Księga Psalmów jest dziełem spójnym, zakłada kierowanie się podczas ostatecznej redakcji jasno określoną koncepcją literacką oraz zmysłem wiary, natomiast nie dowodzi istnienia jednego kryterium teologicznego. Wskazuje na to wielu egzegetów, a wśród nich Teodorico Ballarini: „Będziemy unikać zobowiązującej nazwy «teologia psalmów», która mogłaby zasugerować istnienie jedności kierunków, których faktycznie nie ma” (1978, 280; tł. P.K.). Podobnie twierdzi Ravasi: „We wszystkich komentarzach do Psalterza znajdujemy wyznanie niemożności rekonstrukcji zwartej teologii psalmów” (2007, 1:26).

6 Zob. obszernie opracowanie na ten temat: Ravasi 2007, 1:14–70.

7 Ravasi (2007, 1:36), prezentując Psalterz jako „mikrokosmos chrześcijański”, zaznacza, że już pierwotna wspólnota chrześcijańska znalazła dla psalmów „nowe zastosowania” i „nową hermeneutykę”. O związku psalmów z liturgią zob. Gilbert 2002, 481–85.

8 Kryterium chrystocentryczne nie było jedyną ścieżką interpretacyjną Księgi Psalmów, czego przykładem może być średniowieczny *Psalterz Maryjny* autorstwa św. Bonawentury (2023). Księga ta powstała na potrzeby kultu maryjnego: „W tym celu przerobił tekst psalmów tak, by każdy z nich glosił cnoty Maryi, składał u jej stóp prośby i dziękczynienia” (Kossowska 1969, 2:229). Łaciński tekst *Psalterza Maryjnego* wydrukowano w Polsce dopiero w 1747 roku w Krakowie, ale przekład polski zatytułowany *Psalterzyk Bogarodzice Najświętszej Maryey Panny Polsk. Królestwa Patronki przez św. Bonawenturę* wydano już w 1624 roku w Warszawie. Kossowska (1969, 2:229) zaznacza, że „był bardzo poczytny”, co pokazuje, jak popularne były różne parafrazy Psalterza tworzone na potrzeby pobożności pozaliturgicznej.

9 Jakub Paweł Radliński urodził się ok. 1680 roku w województwie sandomierskim w rodzinie szlacheckiej herbu Gryf. Kształcił się w krakowskim kolegium jezuickim, a następnie wstąpił do zakonu bożogrobców. W 1713 roku został profesorem filozofii i teologii w studium bożogrobców w Krakowie, a w 1718 roku uzyskał doktorat na Akademii Krakowskiej. W 1738 roku został prepozytem generalnym zakonu. Utrzymywał kontakty naukowe ze środowiskiem krakowskim i warszawskim, zwłaszcza z osobami związanymi z bpem Józefem Andrzejem Załuskiego, którzy tworzyli wówczas publiczną Bibliotekę Załuskich, dającą początek Bibliotece Narodowej. Radliński zmarł w 1762 roku.

w Izraelu jedyne Boga JHWH¹⁰. Jednak wraz z przyjściem na świat Jezusa Chrystusa, Mesjasza i Króla, który dokonał dzieła zbawienia, nowym tronem królewskim stało się serce człowieka:

Ponieważ tedy serce ludzkie jest Tronem Królewskim, więc ażebyśmy do Niego, Króla Nieba i ziemi oraz Najwyższego Kapłana CHRYSYUSA JEZUSA sprowadzili, należy Go temi, którym dopiero namieniał, przyozdobić cnotami: łatwo Go zaś przyozdobimy kiedy się w adoracji i uszanowaniu Królewskiego Kapłaństwa JEZUSOWEGO ćwiczyć będziemy, dla którego ćwiczenia podaję Godzinki, Koronkę i Psalmy o Świętym i Najwyższym Kapłaństwie Chrystusowym¹¹ (Radliński 1735, 26).

Radliński, myśląc o tym, postanowił przygotować dla Bractwa Kapłańskiego podręcznik życia duchowego, który wychodzi poza teksty dewocyjne, odwołując się do argumentów biblijnych. Jako podstawę do medytacji starannie wyselekcjonował kilka psalmów, a tłumacząc je na język polski, zastosował kryterium chrystologiczne. Wsluchując się w brzmienie psalmów w wersji Radlińskiego, rodzi się kilka pytań. Pierwsze dotyczy ich oryginalności na tle innych polskich przekładów Psalterza. Drugie zwraca uwagę na zgodność interpretacji dokonanej przez Radlińskiego z katolicką hermeneutyką biblijną, a trzecie odnosi się do celu i znaczenia zastosowania kryterium chrystologicznego w edycji tekstów starotestamentowych. Poruszone zagadnienia stanowią przedmiot badań translatoryki i proforystyki biblijnej. Aby odpowiedzieć na postawione pytania, najpierw zaprezentujemy przekład psalmów Radlińskiego w kontekście historycznym oraz zestawimy go z innymi polskimi tłumaczeniami Psalterza wydanymi przed 1735 rokiem. Następnie psalmy włączone do księgi brackiej zostaną poddane analizie egzegetycznej. Z racji specyfiki badanych utworów wykorzystamy w niej elementy metody historyczno-krytycznej oraz podejście kanoniczne. Ponieważ *Tron królewski* należy do polskich źródeł historycznych, dlatego w drugiej części artykułu zestawimy dzieło Radlińskiego z podobnymi księgami brackimi odkrytymi w archiwach i bibliotekach na potrzeby tej publikacji. Dzięki temu będziemy mogli określić oryginalność dzieła autora. W badaniach krytycznych trzeba bowiem dla rzetelności dokonać założenia, że modlitewnik może

¹⁰ Radliński pisze: „Między różnymi strukturami, które Król Salomon fundował na Chwałę BOGA naszego, wystawił też i wielki Tron Królewski z kości słoniowej, szczerem i wyborym złotem pokryty. Do tego Tronu przydane były sześć stopni szczerozłotych, i podnózek podobnym sposobem szczerozłoty. Na tym tronie z obydwu stron było dwóch lwów, na sześciu zaś stopniach było dwanaście lewków stojących z obydwu stron; i takiego Tronu nie było nigdzie, w żadnym Królestwie jako świadczy Pismo Święte” (1735, B2r). Radliński cytuje tekst 2 Krn 9,17–19, w którym jest rzeczywiście mowa o tronie z kości słoniowej i złota, ale z kontekstu nie wynika wprost, a jedynie pośrednio, że był on przeznaczony do świątyni. W komentarzu do Drugiej Księgi Kronik Tronina pisze: „Salomon w wyszukany sposób ozdobił swój tron (*Kiccē*) jako najważniejsze insygnium królewskiej władzy. Obraz tronu łączy się z podstawowym motywem biblijnym: panowania Boga wśród swego ludu” (2016, 118).

¹¹ Transkrypcje tekstów staropolskich zgodnie z zasadami podanymi w: Górski et al. 1955.

być jedynie kopią innych tego typu ksiąg albo zwykłą kompilacją dostępnych form. Ostatnim punktem naszych badań będzie zaprezentowanie wartości teologicznej starodruku dla teologii sakramentu kapłaństwa oraz dla formacji duchowieństwa w epoce potrydenckiej.

1. *Psalmy o Świętym i Najwyższym Kapłaństwie Chrystusowym* Jakuba Pawła Radlińskiego na tle innych polskich edycji Psałterza w XIV–XVIII wieku

Chociaż hermeneutyka biblijna w XVIII wieku, gdy Radliński pisał *Tron królewski*, nie była tak szczegółowo opracowana jak obecnie, to jednak podejście kanoniczne było brane pod uwagę w odniesieniu do Psałterza już od czasów ojców Kościoła (Flint and Miller 2005, 2), a w średniowieczu stało się zjawiskiem powszechnym¹². Jednocześnie sposób tłumaczenia Księgi Psalmów nie był ściśle określony, przez co powstawały parafrazy pisane prozą, tłumaczenia poetyckie i rymowane¹³. Ich celem było zaspokojenie potrzeb duchowych różnych kręgów odbiorców. Z czasem – zwłaszcza w dobie reformacji – pojawiły się wierne tłumaczenia z języków oryginalnych opatrywane komentarzami.

1.1. Polskie przekłady Psałterza w XIV–XVIII wieku – pomiędzy dosłownością a parafrazą

Najstarszym zachowanym przekładem Księgi Psalmów na język polski jest *Psałterz floriański*, który powstał na przełomie XIV i XV wieku¹⁴. Istnieją różne hipotezy na temat genezy tekstu. Według większości historyków tłumaczenie psalmów początkowo było przygotowywane w skrytorium kanoników regularnych w Kłodzku jako prezent dla królowej Jadwigi z okazji narodzin potomka. Prace przerwano w związku ze śmiercią Jadwigi i dziecka w 1399 roku, po czym wznowiono je w Krakowie. *Psałterz floriański* ostatecznie powstał dzięki wcześniejszym tłumaczeniom w języku polskim, łacińskim oraz niemieckim (Pietkiewicz 2016, 152). Kolejnym świadkiem średniowiecznych przekładów Księgi Psalmów jest *Psałterz puławski*. Prawdopodobna data jego edycji to 1470 rok. Jest to kompletny psalterz średniowieczny, który oprócz tekstu biblijnego zawiera komentarze w postaci tzw. argumentów. Są to

¹² Ravasi, traktując o perspektywie chrześcijańskiej w lekturze i interpretacji Księgi Psalmów, przywołuje komentarz Hugona od św. Wiktora (zm. 1141 rok), który w dziele *De Arca Noe morali* napisał: „Wszystkie święte pisma stanowią jedną księgę i tą jedyną księgą jest Chrystus, dlatego całe Pismo mówi o Chrystusie i w Chrystusie znajduje swoją pełnię” (Ravasi 2007, 1:36).

¹³ Zob. m.in. *Secretum Psalterii*, który prezentuje Tronina 2018.

¹⁴ Na temat polskich przekładów biblijnych powstałych do 1638 roku zob. Pietkiewicz 2016.

objaśnienia o nachyleniu chrystologicznym¹⁵. Innym ważnym przekładem Psalterza, m.in. z racji apologetycznych, jest *Żołtarz Dawidów* w tłumaczeniu Walentego Wróbla. Najwcześniejszy ze znanych rękopisów dzieła pochodzi z 1528 roku (Pietkiewicz 2013, 39), natomiast drukiem wydał go Andrzej Glaber w 1539 roku¹⁶. Zamiarem Wróbla było wydobyć z tekstów sensu duchowego, czemu służyła interpretacja alegoryczno-chrystologiczna. Rozważanie psalmów miało prowadzić do umocnienia wiary w Jezusa Chrystusa jako jedyne Pana, a jednocześnie pomagać w kształtowaniu cnót chrześcijańskich (Brückner 1903, 37–42). Kontekst powstania *Żołtarza Dawidów* (teren Wielkopolski przy granicy z Niemcami) miał istotny wpływ na jego rolę w szerzeniu ortodoksji katolickiej wobec szerzącej się reformacji.

Chrystologiczna lektura psalmów była częstym zjawiskiem w polskich przekładach od średniowiecza do baroku. Widać to w *Psalterzu Dawidów* Mikołaja Reja, wydanym ok. 1546 roku. Aleksander Brückner w swoim opracowaniu poświęconym twórczości Reja przytacza fragment *Postylli*, który świadczy o chrystologicznym kluczu hermeneutycznym w interpretacji psalmów: „Tam najdziesz prorocstwa o Panu swoim i o ś[więtym] odkupieniu Jego. [...] A co nadnawyższe, tam najdziesz wszystkie kształty wszytkiej chwały Jego, jakie On potrzebuje od człowieka nędznego” (Brückner 1905, 44). Bezpośrednim potwierdzeniem tego jest komentarz do Ps 110:

Dixit Dominus Domino meo. Psalm 110. Argument. Tu prorok Duchem Świątym wysławia błogosławieństwo Pana naszego, jako miał sieć na prawicy Ojca swego, wzięwszy zwierzchność od Niego nad wszem przeciwniki swymi, i jako on nastał od wieków i wiele tajemnic o wcieleniu Jego. Psalm setny dziesiąty (Brückner 1905, 45–46).

Na marginesie obok tłumaczenia Rej pisze: „Słowa Boże ku Chrystusowi, jako jii przejrzał od wieków”. Natomiast pod tłumaczeniem psalmu dodaje modlitwę:

Pomni na to miły Panie, żeś Ty jedyne Syna swego od początku świata dziwnie sobie sprawił w społeczności bóstwa swego a nameś jii raczył dać za Króla i za Pasterza, i za onego miłosiernego Kapłana, który by się ustawicznie ofiarował za nami przed oblicznością świętego bóstwa Twego. Pomni też miły Panie na onę wdzięczną ofiarę ciała Jego, którą On Tobie za nas ofiarował na krzyżu Bogu Ojcu swemu, a daj nam tego miłościwie użyć i dostąpić, co nam u Ciebie wysłużył pokorną cierpliwością swoją za występki nasze. Amen (Brückner 1905, 46).

¹⁵ Pietkiewicz pisze: „Można tam znaleźć głównie argumenty wprowadzające w duchową lekturę psalmów (alegoriczno-chrystologiczną oraz tropologiczną i anagogiczną), choć występują również inne, np. odnoszące się do historycznego tła powstawania poszczególnych utworów” (2016, 159).

¹⁶ Toczy się dyskusja odnośnie do roli Glabera podczas druku dzieła Wróbla. Wydaje się jednak, że praca redakcyjno-edytorska Glabera miała charakter stylistyczny i nie wpłynęła znacząco na teologię tekstu Wróbla, co jest istotne z punktu widzenia niniejszych badań. Z tej racji w pracy porównawczej zestawiamy dzieło Radlińskiego z edycją drukowaną Glabera z 1539 roku. Zob. więcej na ten temat w: Charzyńska-Wójcik and Klimek-Grądzka 2022.

Inne tłumaczenia Księgi Psalmów, które pojawiły się na przełomie XVI i XVII wieku, zostały obszernie opisane przez Brücknera (1902), Marię Kossowską (1968–69) i ks. Rajmunda Pietkiewicza (2016, 227–332). Do nich należą takie arcydzieła literackie, jak *Psalterz Dawidów* Jana Kochanowskiego (wydany od 1579 roku)¹⁷ oraz przekład ks. Jakuba Wujka pod tym samym tytułem (od 1594 roku)¹⁸. Te dwie edycje z racji piękna języka zyskały ogromną popularność, zwłaszcza w wyższych warstwach społecznych. Przy tym nie przerwały innych prac translatorskich i komentatorskich¹⁹.

W 1688 roku pojawił się nowy przekład zatytułowany *Paraphrasis na Psalterz Dawidów*. Autorem dzieła, które początkowo było przeznaczone dla kleryków kolegów jezuitów, był ks. Wojciech Tylkowski SJ. Całość została opracowana według metody czterech *summ*, z których każda miała na celu wydobyć z tekstu jednego z czterech sensów: literalnego, alegorycznego, duchowego oraz egzystencjalnego. Kossowska w swoim opracowaniu zaznacza, że pomimo ambitnego początku Tylkowski bardzo szybko odszedł od przyjętych założeń metodologicznych w kierunku „przekładu–parafrazy” i „tworzył parafrazę Psalterza wierną w oddaniu myśli dzieła, popularną w wyrazie słownym, dla odbiorcy łatwiejszą w rozumieniu aniżeli tekst przekładu Wujka” (Kossowska 1969, 2:246)²⁰. Generalnie tekst psalmów Tylkowskiego jest nie tyle tłumaczeniem, co raczej czymś w rodzaju chrześcijańskiego midraszu²¹.

¹⁷ Pietkiewicz podkreśla, że Kochanowski oddał sens wyrazowy i historyczny psalmów w „pięknej, klasycznej szacie”, gdyż „zadaniem poety było udostępnienie czytelnikowi tekstu, a nie jego interpretacji” (Pietkiewicz 2016, 273).

¹⁸ Cały tytuł brzmiał następująco: *Psalterz Dawidów. Teraz znowu z łacińskiego, z greckiego i z żydowskiego na polski język z pilnością przełożony i argumentami, i annotacjami objaśniony*. Wujek dążył do jak najwierniejszego oddania sensu wyrazowego tekstu biblijnego, co zaznaczono w pierwszym wydaniu *Psalterza*: „staraj się co najwierniej i nawłaśniej, i najjaśniej, a ile być mogło, słowo od słowa z łacińskiego na polski przełożyć” (Wujek 1594, 12 według pierwszej paginacji). Jednak „gdzie słowo od słowa przełożywszy, nie masz jasnego sensu, tam z potrzeby nieco od własności słów” odchodził, „folgując sensowi” (Pietkiewicz 2016, 460). Analizując przekład Wujka pod kątem techniki translatorskiej, nie sposób nie dostrzec nachylenia chrystocentrycznego. W przedmowie napisał: „[Psalmy – P.K.] mają w sobie nie tylko wszystkie tajemnice o Panu Chrystusie i o Kościele Jego, które wszystkim czasom i świętom chrześcijańskim nadobnie są przystosowane, ale nadto zamykają w sobie sumę, albo krótkie zebranie wszystkiego Pisma Świętego” (Wujek 1594, 17 według pierwszej paginacji). Kryterium chrystologiczne znalazło wymowny wyraz w tłumaczeniu Ps 2,12: „Przyjmijcie naukę Chrystusową, by snadź nie rozgniewał Pan, abyście nie poginęli z drogi sprawiedliwej” (Wujek 1594, 3–4 według drugiej paginacji). Trzeba zauważyć różnicę *Psalterza Dawidów* z 1594 roku w stosunku do Księgi Psalmów, która jest częścią całej Biblii Wujka wydanej w 1599 roku. Pietkiewicz podkreśla, że tekst późniejszy został „gruntownie zrewidowany przez jezuitką komisję cenzorów” (2016, 285).

¹⁹ Obok przekładów katolickich powstawały w tym czasie także edycje protestanckie, takie jak *Psalterz Dawida* w tłumaczeniu Jakuba Lubelczyka (1558 rok) oraz *Psalterz Biblii brzeskiej* (1564 rok), a w XVII wieku – *Psalterz Biblii gdańskiej* (1633 rok). Motywy ich powstawania były bardzo różne i niekoniecznie polemiczne. Zob. Pietkiewicz 2016, 254–66, 319–22.

²⁰ Kossowska dodaje: „Tylkowski nigdy nie utożsamia się z podmiotem lirycznym. Elementy wtrącone, zmagające prostą, czystą modlitwę pochodzą albo od Dawida, albo stanowią ponadimienne i ponadczasowe uogólnienia. Na tory zwierzeń subiektywnych autor nie schodzi” (1969, 2:246).

²¹ Zob. omówienie tego zagadnienia w: Bryłka-Baranowska 2023, 32–40.

Natomiast *summy* są pełne alegorycznych interpretacji z odniesieniem do Nowego Testamentu i nasycone aktualizacją chrystologiczną²². Pomimo tych cech dzieło Tyłkowskiego dobrze oddaje ducha epoki poprzedzającej działalność Radlińskiego. Był to czas reformacji i kontrreformacji, dwóch zjawisk wewnątrz chrześcijaństwa, które mobilizowały do pracy apologetycznej m.in. poprzez udostępnianie wiernym tłumaczeń Biblii bazujących na tekście oryginalnym i opatrzonych dobrymi komentarzami. Jednocześnie Księga Psalmów była traktowana w sposób wyjątkowy. Dla wielu osób stanowiła ważny podręcznik życia duchowego. Z tej racji psalmy włączano do rozmaitych modlitewników, kancjonałów i katechizmów (Pietkiewicz 2016, 322–32). W zależności od potrzeb odbiorców tłumaczenia przeobrażały się w dowolne parafrazy albo były wzbogacane o nieistniejące w tekście hebrajskim wątki teologiczne.

Chociaż od połowy XVII wieku można zauważyć ograniczenie wznowień przekładów psalmów, to nadal pojawiały się nowe próby oddania w pięknej polszczyźnie sensu wyrazowego oraz poetyckiej rytmiki tych starożytnych utworów hebrajskich. Dobrym tego przykładem jest *Psalterz Dawida* w tłumaczeniu Franciszka Karpińskiego wydany w latach 1786–1806²³. Jest to przekład poetycki, a jednocześnie pozbawiony nieuzasadnionych interwencji w tekst. Psalterz Karpińskiego jest dowodem na to, że o charakterze translacji decydował warsztat naukowy tłumacza, kontekst historyczny i społeczny oraz potrzeby religijne odbiorców²⁴. Przykładem zastosowania tych kryteriów może być księga bracka Radlińskiego (Radliński 1735).

Psalmy, które Radliński włączył do modlitewnika przeznaczanego dla sanockiego Bractwa Kapłańskiego, zostały dobrane w taki sposób, żeby odpowiadały założeniom zaprezentowanym na początku księgi²⁵:

Jako wszystkie insze bractwa mają swój koniec, do którego zmierzają, i na którym się stanowią, tak i Bractwo Kapłańskie bez wątpienia, ma swój koniec, do którego zmierza, i w którym się przez różne w cnotach ćwiczy postępki; koniec tedy pierwszy, pryncypialny, osobliwy, i konnaturalny Bractwa Kapłańskiego, jest adoracja, cześć, i uszanowanie Najwyższego Kapłaństwa Chrystusowego (Radliński 1735, D1r).

Za wyjątkiem Ps 99(98), który jest pieśnią poświęconą królowaniu Boga (Jüngling 2000, 734), pozostałe cztery utwory wykorzystane przez Radlińskiego należą do rodziny psalmów królewskich. Gianfranco Ravasi (2007, 1:96–97) wyróżnia

²² Analizując *summy* do Ps 1, Kossowska pisze: „Celem następnej, drugiej z kolei summy jest wyjaśnienie tajemnic psalmu. Treść tego psalmu wyjaśnia autor alegorycznie, mianowicie chrystologicznie. Wyjaśnia każdy jego werset, co w skrócie podaje: 1. Przyjdzie Chrystus ze sprawiedliwą nauką. 2. Będzie pełnił wolę Ojca. 3 i 4. Będzie drzewem, sprawiedliwi – gałązkami. 5. Niewierni Żydowie rozproszeni będą po świecie. 6. Sprawiedliwi z Chrystusem sędzić będą” (1969, 2:244). Inne przykłady interpretacji chrystologicznej omawia Bryłka-Baranowska 2023, 69–73.

²³ Omówienie dzieła w: Reginek 2005, 1–34.

²⁴ Więcej na temat przekładu Karpińskiego w: Kossowska 1969, 2:262–76.

²⁵ W modlitewniku znalazło się pięć psalmów w następującej kolejności: Ps 2; 99(98); 110(109); 20(19); 45(44).

wśród nich kilka typów: psalmy intronizacyjne (m.in. Ps 2 i 110), modlitwy króla (m.in. Ps 2,1–9), modlitwy za króla (m.in. Ps 20,10a), pieśni ku czci króla (m.in. Ps 20 i 45) oraz pieśni przypisywane królowi. Psalmi królewskie w tradycji żydowskiej eksponują kilka ważnych tematów teologicznych, takich jak „król – mesjasz”, „król – syn Boży”²⁶, doskonale rządy sprawowane na drodze „prawa i sprawiedliwości”, a co się z tym wiąże – wieczna władza²⁷. Radliński nie ograniczył się do edycji psalmów w języku polskim. Dla niego istotne było zinterpretowanie tekstów biblijnych w kluczu chrystologicznym, aby ich lektura pobudzała do kontemplowania tajemnicy Jezusa Chrystusa, Najwyższego Kapłana, który na krzyżu złożył doskonałą ofiarę za zbawienie świata, a przez to został wywyższony przez Ojca na Jego prawicę jako Król całego stworzenia. Aby osiągnąć zamierzony cel, zastosował metodę trzech kroków: (1) tłumaczenie psalmu na podstawie Wulgaty (albo własna redakcja przekładu Wujka); (2) interpolicje chrystologiczne (zgodne z eksponowanymi tematami teologicznymi; być może na podstawie komentarzy w Psalterzach Wujka, Wróbla oraz Tylkowskiego); (3) glosy wyjaśniające. Wskutek zastosowania tej metody teksty psalmów zaprezentowane przez Radlińskiego w modlitewniku kapłańskim stały się bardziej interpretacją i aktualizacją utworów starotestamentowych niż ich przekładem.

1.2. Aspekty chrystologiczne w tłumaczeniu psalmów Jakuba Pawła Radlińskiego

Psalm 2, który w księdze brackiej Radlińskiego otwiera część medytacji opartych na Psalterzu, to królewski psalm koronacyjny (Ravasi 2007, 1:147). Pierwotnie był dedykowany władcom Izraela, ale z czasem, za sprawą rozpowszechniania się idei królestwa mesjańskiego, zamienił się w tekst o wymiarze profetycznym i eschatologicznym. W tradycji Izraela był postrzegany jako zapowiedź spełnienia nadziei rozbudzonych przez otrzymanie obietnic Boga. Ponieważ w Nowym Testamencie eschatologia ma wymiar chrystologiczny, dlatego w chrześcijaństwie bardzo szybko dokonała się relektura psalmów w duchu nowej hermeneutyki (zob. Dz 4,25–26; 13,30.32–33; Hbr 1,5.8–9; 5,5–6; Ap 2,26–27; 12,5; 19,15). Według Ravasiego „chrystologia zakładana przez relekturę Ps 2 jest głównie funkcjonalna: Chrystus jest synem przez Paschę lub przez paruzję, albo przez swoją funkcję

²⁶ Ravasi podkreśla, że na tle kultur pozabiblijnych „w Izraelu koncepcja ta została odmitologizowana jako niezgodna z monoteizmem i transcendencją Jahwe: król był synem przybranym, a nie potomkiem Boga; był tylko namiestnikiem Jahwe i dziedzicem dynastii” (2007, 1:95).

²⁷ Wyjaśniając naturę tego tematu teologicznego obecnego w psalmach królewskich, Ravasi prezentuje stanowisko, które nawiązuje do wielowiekowej tradycji interpretacji chrystologicznej Psalterza w chrześcijaństwie: „Gdy monarchia upadnie to samo napięcie stanie się znakiem, już nie hiperbolicznym, lecz oczekiwanym, królestwa doskonałego, ostatecznego Mesjasza, kapłana i sprawiedliwego króla, a zgodnie z Nowym Testamentem, Syna Bożego we właściwym sensie słowa, a nie syna przybranego” (Ravasi 2007, 1:95).

kapłańską” (2007, 1:187). Ingerencja Radlińskiego w tekst, którą widać w interpolacjach obecnych w wersetych 2 i 6, idzie po linii znanych z innych przekładów interpretacji Ps 2, czego wyrazem może być kryterium chrystologiczne zastosowane w tłumaczeniu Wróbla. Tym, co jednak charakteryzuje ujęcie Radlińskiego, jest wyakcentowanie funkcji kapłańskiej Chrystusa, którą realizował przez ofiarę z życia i nauczanie (zob. tabela 1).

Tabela 1. Psalm 2 – zestawienie wariantów

w.	Jakub Paweł Radliński	Wulgata ²⁸	Jakub Wujek (B) ²⁹	Walenty Wróbel ³⁰
2	Powstali Królowie ziemscy i Książęta zgodzili się na jedno, przeciwko Panu i przeciwko Chrystusowi (to jest Pomazańcowi i Kapłanowi) Jego.	Astiterunt reges terrae, et principes convenerunt in unum adversus Dominum et adversus Christum eius:	Stanęli wespół królowie ziemscy a książęta zesłi się w gromadę przeciw Panu i Chrystusowi jego.	Królowie byli Herod pierwszy, który dał dziatki pobić. Drugi Herod, który na śmierć Pana Jezusowe przyzwolił [...].
6	Ja zaś (CHRYSTUS) postanowiony jestem Królem od Niego na Syjonie, górze Świętej jego i <i>jestem postanowiony</i> ³¹ opowiadającym <i>Kapłanem</i> przykazanie Jego.	Ego autem constitutus sum rex ab eo super Sion montem sanctum eius, praedicans praeceptum eius.	A jam jest postanowion królem od niego nad Syjonem, Górą Świętą jego, opowiadając przykazanie jego.	Słowa Pana Chrystusowe. Aczkolwiek oni myśleli i chcieli moją pamiątkę zgładzić, wszakoż to Bóg Ociec inaczej obrócił, bowiem Mnie Królem i kaznodzieją swym ustawił. Oto jawne prorocstwo, iż Chrystus miał zakażać na górze Syjon, która jest nad Jeruzalem.

Źródło: opracowanie własne.

Kolejny tekst biblijny w modlitewniku Radlińskiego to Ps 99(98). W Księdze Psalmów zamyka on serię pieśni poświęconych królowaniu Boga³². Aklamacja *yhwh mālāk* („JHWH panuje jako król”) na początku psalmu jest wyrazem radości ludu, który zgromadził się w świątyni, aby doświadczyć obecności i działania Boga (Witczyk 1997, 268). Objawieniu Boga towarzyszy moc, sąd i siła, przez co psalmista ukazuje pełną władzę Boga nad światem i człowiekiem. Bóg jest jednocześnie ukazany jako król, który „zasiada na cherubach” (*yōšēḅ kērūḅîm*). To z kolei oznacza Jego panowanie w niebie, gdyż tron mający formę cherubów symbolizował „najwyższy tron świata” (Witczyk 1997, 262). W Ps 99 Bóg spotyka się z Izraelem jako Bóg

²⁸ Tekst za: *Biblia* 1592.

²⁹ Przekład typu B to wydanie zgodne ze współczesną interpunkcją i sposobem zapisu liter. Tekst za: Frankowski 2000.

³⁰ Transkrypcja edycji drukowanej: Wróbel 1539.

³¹ Kursywa oryginalna, zgodna z edycją księgi brackiej (Radliński 1735).

³² Należą do nich Ps 47; 93, 96–99. Zob. Jüngling 2000, 734.

Przymierza, który kocha prawo i sprawiedliwość (ww. 1–5). Jednocześnie jest to Bóg okazujący swojemu grzesznemu i słabemu ludowi przebaczenie. Druga część psalmu (ww. 6–9) to objawienie Boga Króla, który jest wierny przymierzu przez miłosierdzie (Brzegowy 2003, 87–88).

Gatunek literacki oraz przesłanie Ps 99 sprawiły, że Radliński mógł poszerzyć już istniejące interpretacje chrystologiczne (Chrystus – Pan i Król), dodając do nich wątek kapłaństwa Chrystusa. W swoim przekładzie nie odszedł od sensu literalnego, ale pokazał swój kunszt biblijny. Interpolacja Radlińskiego była uzasadniona odwołaniem się psalmisty do postaci Mojżesza, Aarona i Samuela (w. 6), którzy w czasach Starego Testamentu wstawiali się do Boga za Jego ludem i „On ich wysłuchiwał”³³. Tak samo kapłaństwo Chrystusa najpełniej wyraża się w miłosiernym „wstawianiu się za ludźmi do Ojca” (por. Hbr 7,25; 9,24) i odpuszczaniu im grzechów, stanowiąc wzór do naśladowania dla duchownych (zob. tabela 2).

Tabela 2. Psalm 99(98) – zestawienie wariantów

w.	Jakub Paweł Radliński	Wulgata	Jakub Wujek (A) ³⁴	Jakub Wujek (B)	Walenty Wróbel
1	Pan (<i>nasz JEZUS Chrystus Król i Najwyższy Kapłan</i>) odebrał Królestwo (<i>przy zmartwychwstaniu swoim</i>) niechaj się gniewają Narody (<i>jako chcą</i>) który zasiada na Herubinach niechaj się poruszy ziemia.	Dominus regnavit: irascantur populi; qui sedet super cherubin, moveatur terra.	„Wysławia Chrystusa, jako Pana [...]” ³⁵ .	Pan królował: niech się gniewają narodo- wie, który siedzi na Cherubinach: niech się trzęsie ziemia.	Królował – czusz ³⁶ wieczne według bóstwa, a czesnie ³⁷ po zmartwychwstaniu, ale się królowanie Jego nie dokona. Będą się gniewać – czusz niektórzy na swe grzechy, a niektórzy na niewinnego Pana Jezusa.
2	Pan <i>ten</i> na Syjonie jest wielki: i wysoki nad wszystkie Narody.	Dominus in Sion magnus, et excelsus est super omnes populos.	–	Pan wielki na Syjonie i wywyższony nad wszystkie narody.	<i>Tłumaczenie:</i> Pan Bóg ten na górze Syjon jest wielki [...].
3–4a	Niechaj wychwalają Imię twoje wielkie, ponieważ straszne i Święte jest i honor Króla [<i>i Kapłana CHRYSUSA</i>] sąd kocha.	Confiteantur nomini tuo magno, quoniam terribile et sanctum est, et honor regis judicium diligit.	–	Niech wyznawają imieniowi twemu wielkiemu, albowiem straszne i święte jest, a cześć królewska sąd miłuje.	Czusz Pana Jezusowe ³⁸ , na które wszelkie kolano kłęką.

³³ Więcej na temat funkcji kapłańskiej Mojżesza, Aarona i Samuela w: Brzegowy 2003, 77–78.

³⁴ Przekład typu A to pierwsze wydanie tłumaczenia *Psalterza* Wujka wraz z komentarzem. Zob. Wujek 1594.

³⁵ Nagłówek do Ps 98.

³⁶ W języku staropolskim: mianowicie.

³⁷ W języku staropolskim: docześnie.

³⁸ Nawiązanie do „imienia” w wersecie, który Wróbel tłumaczy w następujący sposób: „Bądź chwalono imię twoje, bo straszliwe, a święte jest”.

w.	Jakub Paweł Radliński	Wulgata	Jakub Wujek (A) ³⁴	Jakub Wujek (B)	Walenty Wróbel
4b	Ty (<i>jako Najwyższy Kapłan</i>) podałeś przykazania [<i>według których żyć powinniśmy</i>], sąd i sprawiedliwość w Jakubie ty uczyniłeś.	Tu parasti directiones, iudicium et iustitiam in Iacob tu fecisti.	–	Tyś nagotował prostowania, tyś uczynił sąd i sprawiedliwość w Jakub.	–
5	Wychwalajcie Pana BOGA naszego [<i>JEZUSA Chrystusa jako Króla i Kapłana</i>] i szanujcie podnózek nóg Jego, ponieważ Święty jest.	Exaltate Dominum Deum nostrum et adorate scabellum pedum eius, quoniam sanctum est.	–	Wywyższajcie Pana Boga naszego, a kłaniajcie się podnóżkowi nóg jego, bo święty jest.	–
7b	Zachowali prawa Jego i (<i>obrzędki Kapłańskie</i>) i przykazanie, które im podał.	Custodiebant testimonia eius et praeceptum quod dedit illis.	–	Strzeżli świadectw jego i przykazania, które im podał.	–
9	Wychwalajcie Pana BOGA naszego [<i>JEZUSA Chrystusa jako Króla i Najwyższego Kapłana</i>] i oddajcie mu pokłon na górze Świętej Jego, ponieważ Święty Pan BÓG nasz.	Exaltate Dominum Deum nostrum et adorate in monte sancto eius, quoniam sanctus Dominus Deus noster.	–	Wywyższajcie Pana Boga naszego i kłaniajcie się Górze Świętej jego: albowiem święty Pan Bóg nasz.	–

Źródło: opracowanie własne.

Radliński po Ps 2 i 99 umieszcza w księdze brackiej Ps 110(109). W tradycji chrześcijańskiej utwory te były bardzo często zestawiane obok siebie (zwłaszcza Ps 2 i 110). Ten przemyślany układ psalmów jest dowodem, że Radliński był osobą dobrze przygotowaną pod względem wiedzy biblijnej. Psalm 110, podobnie jak Ps 2, należy do psalmów królewskich i zawiera elementy charakterystyczne dla ceremonii dworskich: ogłoszenie władcy synem Boga, obrzęd intronizacji oraz aspekt militarny. Tym, co wyróżnia Ps 110 spośród tego typu utworów, to przynależność króla do sfery kapłańskiej (w. 4). Zastanawia jednak fakt, że autor psalmu odwołuje się do figury Melchizedeka i wychodzi poza tradycję związaną z Aaronem i służbą lewicką³⁹.

W całej kompozycji psalmu największe problemy egzegetyczne sprawia werset 3, który w wersji hebrajskiej wydaje się niezrozumiały, wskutek czego tłumaczenie LXX zawiera liczne rekonstrukcje⁴⁰. Z punktu widzenia chrześcijańskiego na uwagę zasługuje zwrot „w blasku świętości” (*b^ehadrê-qōdêš*), który podkreśla splendor (jasność) szaty króla oraz jego przybocznej gwardii albo świetlistość szat króla i jego orszaku w dniu Bożej teofanii. Z tym wyrażeniem koresponduje ostatnia część wersetu 3: „z łona jutrzenki jak rosę Cię zrodziłem” (*mērehem mišhār l^ekā tal yaldutekā*). Fraza *mērehem mišhār* wskazuje na początek nowego życia, pełnego światła. Dla króla (*l^ekā*), który pełen splendoru wstępuje na tron, Bóg stwarza (rodzi) *tal*, „rosę”.

³⁹ Więcej na ten temat w: Ravasi 2007, 4:106–8.

⁴⁰ Różne propozycje tłumaczenia tego tekstu prezentują: Dafni 2010, 241–59; Ravasi 2007, 4:118–23.

Rzeczownik ten z kolei symbolizuje młodych wojowników oraz pełen życiodajnego wigoru lud⁴¹.

Patrząc na przekład Radlińskiego na tle tekstu hebrajskiego, można dostrzec, że autor *Tronu królewskiego*, tłumacząc Ps 110, nie skupiał się na zachowaniu sensu literalnego. Intencjonalnie opowiedział się za interpretacją chrystologiczną, którą znał z innych przekładów⁴². Wskutek tego wersja Radlińskiego jest bardziej parafrazą niż tłumaczeniem. Według niego Ps 110 ukazuje preegzystencję Chrystusa, Syna Bożego, który jest Królem i Kapłanem pełnym boskiego światła⁴³. Jako Kapłan, który przez ofiarę z siebie rodzi nowy lud Boży, stanowi najwyższy punkt odniesienia w procesie kształtowania duchowości kapłańskiej (zob. tabela 3).

Tabela 3. Psalm 110(109) – zestawienie wariantów

w.	Jakub Paweł Radliński	Wulgata	Jakub Wujek (A)	Jakub Wujek (B)	Walenty Wróbel
3	Z tobą <i>jestem</i> początkiem <i>jednym współistotnym</i> w dzień mocy twojej w jasności Świętych, z żywota przed Luciferem zrodziłem cię.	Tecum principium in die virtutis tuae in splendoribus sanctorum, ex utero ante luciferum genui te.	„Narodzenie przed wieki P[ana] Chrystusowe: «Siedemdziesięciu tłumaczy tak to miejsce wiernie z duchem prorockim przełożyli / ku objaśnieniu tajemnice bóstwa Chrystusowego / i przedwiecznego narodzenia jego» ⁴⁴ .	Przy tobie przodkowanie w dzień możliwości twojej w jasnościach świętości. Z żywota przed jutrzrenką zrodziłem cię.	Początek – to jest Słowo wieczne zawsze z Tobą złączono. A to mówić Bóg Ociec do Syna według Jego człowieczeństwa. Tak się też rozumie ten trudny wierszyk. Mówi Bóg Ociec: mój miły Synu Jezu z Twoim człowieczeństwem zawsze jest złączon początek, to jest bóstwo Twoje, mój najmilszy Synu, a jest złączono dnia mocy Twojej, to jest jakoś rychło stał się człowiekiem mocą Twoją i gdyś moc ukazywał czyniąc cuda, krzesząc martwe, i niemocne uzdrawiając. A też to bóstwo złączono z człowieczeństwem Twym i w jasności świętych, to jest po zmartwychwstaniu Twoim, gdyś uznał chwałę i jasność na się i na święte Twoje. O mój miły Synu, ja ciebie rodzę z żywota, to jest z istności mojej od wieków niż było słońce i wszystko stworzenie.

⁴¹ W taki sposób tekst hebrajski interpretuje Weiser 1984, 764–65; Ravasi 2007, 4:108. Także Ulrike Bail tłumaczy werset 4 w tym samym duchu: „Dein Volk steht freiwillig zu dir (ist Freiwilligkeit) am Tag deiner Stärke; in heiligem Schmuck aus dem Schoß der Morgenröte [ist – U.B.] dir der Tau deiner Jugend” (2003, 101).

⁴² Chrześcijańską hermeneutykę Ps 110 wraz z obszerną literaturą przedmiotu prezentuje Ravasi 2007, 4:163–70.

⁴³ Relacje pomiędzy Ps 110 i Listem do Hebrajczyków, który wywarł bardzo mocny wpływ na chrystologiczną interpretację, ukazuje m.in. Jordaan and Nel 2010, 229–40.

⁴⁴ Komentarz „d” do Ps 110,3.

w.	Jakub Paweł Radliński	Wulgata	Jakub Wujek (A)	Jakub Wujek (B)	Walenty Wróbel
4	Obiecał Pan i żałować tego nie będzie: <i>Ty jesteś Kapłanem na wieki, według porządku Melchisedecha.</i>	Iuravit Dominus et non paenitebit eum: Tu es sacerdos in aeternum secundum ordinem Melchisedech.	„Bo któryż więcej jest kapłanem Boga najwyższego, jako Pan nasz Jezus Chrystus? Który ofiarę Bogu Ojcu ofiarował: to jest chleb i wino, zwłaszcza ciało i krew swoje” ⁴⁵ .	Przysiągł Pan, a nie będzie mi żal: ty jesteś kapłanem na wieki według porządku Melchisedechowego.	Albowiem jako Melchisedech, który był i król i kapłan, ofiarował Panu Bogu chleb i wino, tak też ta była figura, iż Pan Jezus miał sam siebie ofiarować pod osobą wina i chleba.

Źródło: opracowanie własne.

Kolejny tekst umieszczony w księdze brackiej to Ps 20(19). Ma on charakter modlitwy za króla (Jüngling 2000, 693)⁴⁶. Jednak to nie król jest postacią główną. Na pierwszym planie znajduje się Bóg JHWH. Chociaż Jego imię nie pojawia się wprost w tekście, to ewidentnie JHWH jest adresatem prośb wypowiedzianych przez psalmistę oraz tym, który „posyła pomoc” (w. 3). Od Niego zależy powodzenie misji wojennej władcy. Modlitwie psalmisty towarzyszy zaangażowanie samego króla, które wyraża się m.in. w składaniu ofiar. Efektem tego współdziałania jest profetyczna obietnica ocalenia (zbawienia) króla – mesjasza (w. 7: *‘attâ yāda ‘tî kî hōšîa ‘ yhw h m^ešîhō*), która w chrześcijaństwie została zinterpretowana jako zapowiedź dzieła Chrystusa, a zwłaszcza Jego ofiary złożonej na krzyżu. Jezus na Golgocie stoczył ostateczną walkę z szatanem i pokonał go dzięki temu, że był namaszczony Duchem Świętym (Łk 4,18). Zestawienie postaci króla z Ps 20 z osobą Jezusa Chrystusa pozwalało pisarzom chrześcijańskim dokonywać parafrazy tekstu w kluczu chrystologicznym. Widać to w komentarzach Wróbla zamieszczonych w jego edycji Psalterza. Radliński wpisał się w tę tradycję. Bazując na łacińskim i polskim tłumaczeniu, wprowadził do Ps 20 własne interpolacje chrystologiczne. Dzięki temu starotestamentowy hymn wojskowy zamienił w medytację o Chrystusie Kapłanie, który złożył swoje życie na ofiarę całopalną i przez to stał się Mesjaszem i Królem nowego ludu Bożego (zob. tabela 4).

Tabela 4. Psalm 20(19) – zestawienie wariantów

w.	Jakub Paweł Radliński	Wulgata	Jakub Wujek (B)	Walenty Wróbel
4	Pamiętny niech będzie na wszelką ofiarę twoję <i>Kapłańską</i> i ofiara twoja niech będzie obfita.	Memor sit omnis sacrificii tui et holocaustum tuum pingue fiat.	Niechaj pomni na wszelką ofiarę twoję a całopalenie twoje niech tłuste będzie.	Ofiara twoja – to jest miły Jezu. Niechaj więc Pan Bóg Ociec Twój pamięta na Twoją ofiarę, gdy się za nas wszystkich na krzyżu ofiarujesz [...].

⁴⁵ Komentarz „d” do Ps 110,3.

⁴⁶ Ravasi (1981, 1:371) określa go mianem królewskiego hymnu wojskowego (*Inno militare regale*).

CHRYSOLOGICZNA INTERPRETACJA PSALMÓW W KSIĘDZE BRACKIEJ

w.	Jakub Paweł Radliński	Wulgata	Jakub Wujek (B)	Walenty Wróbel
7	Niechaj wypełni Pan wszystkie prośby twoje; teraz poznałem, ponieważ wyba- wił Pan Chrystusa, to jest <i>Pomazańca swego i Kapłana</i> . Wysłuchała go z Nieba Świę- tego swego, w mocarstwach zbawienie prawicy jego.	Impleat Dominus omnes petitiones tuas; nunc cognovi quoniam salvum fecit Dominus Christum suum. Exaudiet illum de caelo sanc- to suo, in potentatibus salus dexteræ eius.	Niechaj wypełni Pan wszystkie prośby twoje. Terazem poznał, iż Pan zbawił pomazańca swego, zbawienie w siłach prawicy jego.	<i>Tłumaczenie:</i> Terazem poznał, iż Pan Bóg zbawi Chrystusa swego. <i>Komentarz:</i> Terazem poznał – duchem prorockim; iż zbawi Pan Bóg – to jest, gdy Jego po śmierci z martwych wskrzesi.

Źródło: opracowanie własne.

Po Ps 20 w księdze brackiej został zamieszczony Ps 45(44). Jest to pieśń z gatunku hymnów pochwalnych na cześć króla i jego małżonki. Psalm ten od starożytności był interpretowany w chrześcijaństwie w kluczu mesjańskim. Przyczyną takiej relektury jest naszkicowany w nim portret władcy, który otrzymał „wszystkie ideały teokratyczne i monarchiczne” (Ravasi 2007, 2:240). Psalm 45 został wykorzystany przez autora Listu do Hebrajczyków (1,8–9), który na jego podstawie uzasadnia panowanie Chrystusa Króla nad całym światem widzialnym i niewidzialnym (Attridge 2004, 202), a także ukazuje zbawczy i eschatologiczny wymiar ofiary paschalnej Chrystusa Kapłana złożonej na krzyżu⁴⁷. Radliński wykorzystał te dwa motywy, nadając całemu poematowi wymiar chrystocentryczny. W swojej interpretacji nie był oryginalny. Świadczy o tym komentarz do psalmu Wujka zamieszczony w pierwszym wydaniu jego przekładu Psalterza. Tym jednak, co charakteryzuje wersję Radlińskiego, jest radykalizm w stosowaniu kryterium chrystologicznego w odniesieniu do psalmów królewskich oraz akcentowanie kapłaństwa Chrystusa (zob. tabela 5).

Tabela 5. Psalm 45(44) – zestawienie wariantów

w.	Jakub Paweł Radliński	Wulgata	Jakub Wujek (A)	Jakub Wujek (B)	Walenty Wróbel
2a	Wydąło Serce moje słowo dobre, poświęcam ja sprawy moje Królowi i Kapłanowi Chrystusowi Panu.	Eructavit cor meum verbum bonum, dico ego opera mea regi.	„Ten Psalm nie o Salomonie, ale o Mesjaszu mówi” ⁴⁸ .	Wydąło serce moje słowo dobre, opowiadam ja czyny moje królowi.	Mówi to Bóg Ociec. Słowo moje – to jest: ja rodzę od wieków z mej istności boskiej Słowo, to jest Syna mego. Uczynki moje, to jest wszystko stworzenie, którym przezeń stworzył. A przez króla rozumie Syna swego, Pana Jezusa.

⁴⁷ Wymiar eschatologiczny jest obecny w wyrażeniu „znienawidziłeś nieprawość” (Hbr 1,9: μισησας ἀνομίαν). Według Ravasio (2007, 2:252) termin „anomia” ma charakter eschatologiczny.

⁴⁸ Zob. komentarz do Ps 44.

w.	Jakub Paweł Radliński	Wulgata	Jakub Wujek (A)	Jakub Wujek (B)	Walenty Wróbel
5	Ozdobą Twoją i pięknoscią Twoją: przypilnuj tego, <i>abyś zbawił Naród ludzki, szczęśliwie postępuj i Króluj.</i>	Specie tua et pulchritudine tua et intende, prospere procedet et regna,	–	Z sličnością twoją i z pięknoscią twoją naciągni, fortunnie postępuj i króluj...	Szczęśliwie – to jest na szczęście zboru krześciańskiego.
6	Strzały Twoje <i>Ewangelii bardzo ostre i przenikające</i> , i dlatego poddadzą się narody; i te strzały w serca samych nieprzyjaciół <i>Chrystusa Króla przelotną.</i>	Sagittae tuae acutae, populi sub te cadent, in corda inimicorum regis.	–	Strzały twoje ostre, narody pod cię upadną, w serca nieprzyjaciół królewskich.	Strzałki – to jest kazanie apostołów Twych.
7	Tron Twój, Boże, na wieki wieków; różga rządu, różga Państwa Twego.	Sedes tua, Deus, in saeculum saeculi; virga directionis virga regni tui.	–	Stolica twoja, Boże, na wieki wieków, łaska prawości, łaska królestwa twego.	Na którymeś posadzon od Boga Otcza ku sążeniu.
8	Pokochałeś sprawiedliwość i nienawidziłeś nieprawość, dlatego namazał Cię <i>BÓG Kapłanem i Królem</i> , <i>BÓG Twój</i> olejem radości, nad współuczestników Twoich.	Dilexisti iustitiam et odisti iniquitatem, propterea unxit te Deus Deus tuus, oleo laetitiae prae consortibus tuis.	„Bo Chrystusa Boga pomazał Bóg, Ojciec Jego, olejkim wesela, to jest Duchem Ś[więtym] albo pomazaniem Ducha Ś[więtego], aby był Królem i Kapłanem naszym” ⁴⁹ .	Umiłowałaś sprawiedliwość, a nienawidziłaś nieprawości, przeto cię pomazał, Boże, Bóg twój olejkim wesela nad uczestniki twoje.	To jest Bóg Otciec ciebie Boże Synu, Panie Jezu, pomazał olejem weszołości to jest Duchem Świątym który uwesela i pociesza dusze.
13	I Córki Tyru przez różne dary przepraszać Cię będą; wszyscy bogacze pospółstwa.	Et: filiae Tyri in muneribus vultum tuum deprecabuntur: omnes divites plebis.	–	I córki Tyru z upominkami obliczu twemu będą się modlić, wszyscy bogaci z ludzi.	O mój miły Synu Mesjaszu, tako szcześnie położie Twe królestwo i wiara po świecie, iż też i bogaczi będą żądać Twe oblicze widzieć.
15b	Przyprowadzone będą po niej Królowi Chrystusowi <i>Panny niewinne</i> pobliskie jej ofiarowane będą Tobie.	Adducentur regi virgines post eam, proximae eius, afferentur tibi.	–	Przywiodą królowi panny za nią, przyniosą do ciebie bliskie jej.	–
16	Ofiarowane będą w radości i w weselu; przyprowadzone będą do Kościoła <i>Króla Chrystusa i Kapłana.</i>	Afferentur in laetitia et exultatione, adducentur in templum regis.	–	Przyniosą je z weselem i z radością, przyniosą je do kościoła królewskiego.	–

Źródło: opracowanie własne.

⁴⁹ Komentarz „c” do Ps 44,8.

2. Edycja psalmów w dziele Jakuba Pawła Radlińskiego na tle ksiąg innych bractw kapłańskich

Księgi brackie należą do druków rzadkich. Niektóre zostały odkryte na potrzeby tego artykułu w zaledwie jednym egzemplarzu. Niewiele z nich zostało odnotowanych w *Bibliografii polskiej* (Estreicher et al. 1891–). Te, które nawet zostały odnotowane, są często błędnie opisywane. Błędy dotyczą niewłaściwego określenia autora albo świadczą o braku zaangażowania na rzecz wskazania twórcy dzieła. Część starodruków znana jedynie z literatury przedmiotu nie została odnaleziona. Często w bibliotekach, które podawano jako miejsca ich przechowywania, nie można aktualnie ich zlokalizować. Skomplikowane identyfikowanie tej grupy druków zasługuje na odrębny artykuł⁵⁰. Jeden ze starodruków (zachowany w Bibliotece Raczyńskich) okazał się drukiem ulotnym składającym się z pojedynczej strony, a w związku z tym nieprzydatnym do zaplanowanych analiz porównawczych (*Pactum*, n.d., 2°). Na potrzeby niniejszych badań zostanie przeprowadzona praca porównawcza nad dotychczas odnalezionymi starodrukami. Podjęta kwerenda archiwalna pozwala ocenić krytycznie edycję psalmów Radlińskiego zawartych w księdze brackiej w świetle innych tego typu dzieł.

2.1. Księgi dla bractw kapłańskich na terenie Małopolski

Posiadamy trzy starodruki bractwa kapłańskiego w Pilźnie, które leżało w granicach ówczesnej diecezji krakowskiej. Ksiądz Gabriel Węgrzynowicz w 1679 roku wydał pierwszy druk w języku łacińskim (Węgrzynowicz 1679, 2°). Zachował się on w czternastu egzemplarzach m.in. w Bibliotece Jagiellońskiej oraz Ossolineum. Księga została podzielona na dwie części: w pierwszej zostały umieszczone rozważania teologiczne o bractwie kapłańskim, w drugiej teksty prawne dotyczące bractwa (dokumenty władz diecezji krakowskiej oraz dokumenty odpustowe wydane w Rzymie). W pierwszym wydaniu księga nie zawierała modlitw. Wydanie drugie zostało opracowane w języku polskim i wydrukowane w 1680 roku (Węgrzynowicz 1680, 8°). Starodruk ten zachował się w co najmniej pięciu egzemplarzach: w Bibliotece Uniwersyteckiej w Warszawie, Ossolineum, Bibliotece Klasztoru Norbertanek w Imbramowicach, Bibliotece Narodowej oraz Bibliotece Diecezjalnej w Sandomierzu. To wydanie zostało nieco uproszczone w części pierwszej, do której zostały włączone skrócone wiadomości o bractwie, będące streszczeniem dokumentów prawnych stanowiących w pierwszym wydaniu drugą część księgi. W konsekwencji do drugiej części dzieła w jego drugim wydaniu autor włączył modlitwy za umierających i zmarłych. Kierunek ewolucji doprowadził do rozbudowy części dewocyjnej. Po 78 latach od pierwszego wydania powstała trzecia księga dla bractwa pilzneńskiego

⁵⁰ Przykładowe nieodnalezione starodruki: *Bractwo* 1756, 8°; Zieliński 1719, 16°.

(Paulusiński [1756 or 1757], 8°). Zachowany egzemplarz znajduje się w Bibliotece Głównej oo. Franciszkanów Reformatów w Krakowie. Jej autorem był ówczesny senior bractwa, doktor filozofii ks. Antoni Józef Paulusiński, a jednocześnie proboszcz w Dobrkowie (Szczepaniak 2008a, 145; 2008b, 223, 227, 280). Jej pierwsza część została oparta na drugim wydaniu księgi brackiej Węgrzynowicza i zawiera rozważania teologiczne o bractwie kapłańskim. Część druga to zbiór modlitw, ale różnych od kolekcji zamieszczonej w drugim wydaniu Węgrzynowicza. U Paulusińskiego są to modlitwy poranne i wieczorne, modlitwy przed spowiedzią, godzinki o Męce Pańskiej, litanie o Męce Pańskiej, modlitwy św. Brygidy i medytacje o Męce Pańskiej, modlitwy o dobrą śmierć, modlitwy do Matki Bożej Bolesnej, a w końcowej części różne modlitwy do świętych. Większość tekstów dotyczy pobożności pasyjnej. Jest to oryginalny rys, który do duchowości kapłańskiej w Pilźnie wprowadził Paulusiński. Ponadto dobra śmierć została przez niego ukazana w kontekście Męki Pańskiej i kultu Matki Bożej Bolesnej. Księgi brackie z Pilzna powstały na terenie diecezji krakowskiej w niewielkiej odległości od Krakowa i miejscowego uniwersytetu. Zapewne to było przyczyną ich walorów teologicznych.

2.2. Księgi dla bractw kapłańskich na terenie Wielkopolski

Znane XVII-wieczne księgi z terenu Wielkopolski posiadały nieobecną w Małopolsce prawidłowość drukowania składu personalnego bractwa. Tym, co je łączy, jest barokowa ewolucja w kierunku wanitatywnym. Ksiądz Stanisław Alojzy Ciołek Zieliński, proboszcz bieżdrowski i jednocześnie dziekan lwówecki, wydał w 1703 roku księgę bracką duchowieństwa dekanatów Grodzisk, Zbąszyń i Lwówek, wchodzących w skład archidiaconatu śremskiego na terenie diecezji poznańskiej (Zieliński 1703, 4°). Zachowany egzemplarz znajduje się w Archiwum Archidiecezji Poznańskiej. Treść księgi zawiera ody do cudownego krzyża w Bieżdrowie, rozprawkę na temat istoty bractwa kapłańskiego, statuty oraz rozważania o śmierci (w tym rozważania podzielone na siedem dni tygodnia), w których występują m.in. cytaty z poezji Kochanowskiego. W rozważaniach końcowych znalazły się odniesienia do Męki Pańskiej i kultu Matki Bożej Bolesnej. Po rozważaniach zamieszczono obszerny wykaz członków bractwa, w tym zakonników i osób świeckich. Na końcu został jeszcze zaprezentowany wzór testamentu kapłańskiego. Kolejne wydanie tej księgi miało miejsce w 1713 roku (Zieliński 1713, 8°). Zachowany egzemplarz znajduje się w Bibliotece oo. Paulinów w Krakowie Na Skałce. Wydanie to niewiele różni się od wcześniejszych. Zmiany polegają m.in. na usunięciu ody do krucyfiksu bieżdrowskiego i dodaniu modlitw do św. Weroniki oraz św. Augustyna. Ponadto modlitwa do św. Barbary zyskała większe dostosowanie do modlitw brewiarzowych.

Kolejny przykład to księga bractwa kapłańskiego w dekanacie krobkim na terenie diecezji poznańskiej, którą opracował ks. Stanisław Żarnowiecki ([1789], 4°). Zachowały się dwa egzemplarze starodruku w Archiwum Archidiecezjalnym w Poznaniu

oraz w Bibliotece Kórnickiej. Druk zawiera edycję statutów bractwa i wykaz członków, a na końcu modlitwy za żywych i zmarłych członków. Największą część druku zajmują rozważania o śmierci podzielone na 31 dni miesiąca. Medytacje nazywane przez autora „uwagami” są tematycznymi rozważaniami o poszczególnych aspektach śmierci. Autor posługuje się w argumentacji cytatami biblijnymi.

Tematyka przygotowania do śmierci była dominująca w księdze wieluńskiego bractwa kapłańskiego z terenu archidiecezji gnieźnieńskiej. Obecnie dysponujemy kolejnym wydaniem księgi (co najmniej piątym)⁵¹. Zachowany egzemplarz znajduje się w Bibliotece Uniwersyteckiej w Warszawie. Wstępna część starodruku obejmuje pouczenia. Posiadają one ciekawą formę rozbudowanych definicji streszczeń i odnoszą się do informacji o istocie organizacji oraz sensie przynależności do niej osób duchownych i świeckich. Następnie w księdze znalazł się opis odpustów oraz dokumentów papieskich i diecezjalnych na temat odpustów. Największą całością treściową starodruku jest część poświęcona przygotowaniu do śmierci. Zawiera ona *Litanie loretańską do Najświętszej Marii Panny*, Ps 129 (*Z głębokości wołam do Ciebie Panie*), rozważanie mające na celu zmniejszenie lęku przed śmiercią, pytania jakie należy stawiać umierającemu, aklamacje wypowiedziane przez umierającego do Anioła Stróża, modlitwę o skruchę, modlitwę przed krucyfiksem, modlitwę przed Bogiem *Nie pogardzaj mną o Ojczyźnie niebieski* oraz specjalną modlitwę skierowaną do Matki Bożej.

Z terenu diecezji gnieźnieńskiej pochodzi księga bracka dla dekanatów Gniezno, Żnin i Łekno (Szczepański 1754, 4°). Zachowany egzemplarz występuje w Bibliotece Diecezjalnej w Sandomierzu. Autor księgi ks. Wojciech Szczepański był kanonikiem w kolegiacie św. Grzegorza w Gnieźnie, dziekanem w Łeknie oraz proboszczem w Szubinie. W jej początkowej części znalazła się rozprawa w języku łacińskim na temat godności chrześcijanina jako dziedzica królestwa Bożego. Następnie rozprawę tę zamieszczono w języku polskim, a w dalszej części dzieła Szczepański umieścił podzieloną na rozdziały rozprawę o wanitatywnym aspekcie życia ludzkiego, nieuchronności śmierci i konieczności przygotowania się do niej. Zawarte w tekście aspekty teologiczne stanowią uzasadnienie dla istnienia bractwa kapłańskiego. Ta część przetłumaczona oraz wydana w języku polskim została opatrzona różnymi wzwianiami do członków bractwa. Świadczy to o zastosowaniu kaznodziejskim polskiego tłumaczenia. Zbiór w języku polskim jest swobodnym tłumaczeniem mocno przeredagowanym koncepcyjnie. Ponadto w końcowej części zostały przytoczone w języku polskim punkty na temat bractwa kapłańskiego autorstwa św. Karola Boromeusza. Obok cennych aspektów teologicznych księga zawiera wykazy duchownych i świeckich członków bractwa oraz zmarłych członków, jak również modlitwy za żyjących i za zmarłych. Po tych całościach następuje zbiór medytacji w języku polskim o rzeczach ostatecznych podzielony na siedem dni tygodnia, łaciński zbiór rozpraw teologicznych o kapłaństwie, obowiązkach kapłana i życiu ascetycznym. Ostatnia

⁵¹ Autor tekstu jest nieznaną: *Bractwo* 1786, 8°.

część starodruku to zbiór informacji na temat siedmiu sakramentów. W argumentacji Szczepański posługuje się tekstami z Pisma Świętego i ojców Kościoła oraz przytacza stanowiska teologów chrześcijańskich.

Z terenu archidiecezji gnieźnieńskiej pochodzi starodruk z 1762 roku dotyczący trzech spośród ośmiu dekanatów archidiaconatu śremskiego – Koźmina, Nowego Miasta oraz Borka (Przybylski 1762). Zachowany egzemplarz znajduje się w Bibliotece Wyższego Metropolitalnego Seminarium Duchownego w Warszawie. Księga ta zawiera statuty miejscowego bractwa kapłańskiego, modlitwy za zmarłych, w tym do Matki Bożej i św. Wawrzyńca jako patrona dusz czyścowych. Specyfiką tego dzieła są liczne wezwania do Imienia Jezus, rozważania o Imieniu Jezus oraz litanie do Imienia Jezus. Znalazły się w nim także treści pasyjne zatytułowane *Tres gratiarum actiones*. Teksty te zostały zaczerpnięte z twórczości bł. Mechtyldy i bł. Gertrudy. Dodano również modlitwy do Matki Bożej, Anioła Stróża, Michała Archanioła i św. Dyzmy. Specyficznym elementem tych modlitw jest całość tekstu zawierająca uwielbienie Najświętszego Sakramentu. Końcowa część to wykaz członków bractwa. Ten starodruk jest ewenementem koncepcyjnym. Oryginalność świadczy o warsztacie autora – ks. Sebastiana Józefa Przybylskiego.

Pod koniec epoki staropolskiej i po rozbiorach Polski księgi brackie na terenie Wielkopolski ulegały uproszczeniu. Zubożenie polegało na ograniczeniu się do części urzędowej podającej wykaz członków. Zaniedbywano część kształceniową, zmniejszając do rozmiarów śladowych rozważania. Ksiądz Franciszek Grochowski (1777, 8°) wydał księgę bractwa kapłańskiego trzech archidiaconatów diecezji poznańskiej – Poznania, Śremu i Pszczewa⁵². Wartość tego druku polega na obszernym wykazie członków. Ponadto dodano krótkie modlitwy za zmarłych. Informacje o istocie bractwa są bardzo skromne i można je znaleźć we wstępie oraz w uroczystym akcie zatytułowanym *Declaratio pacti philadelphici*. Grochowski pominął zwykłą i obowiązkową edycję statutów. Główną treść księgi stanowi wspomniany wykaz członków, cenny z punktu widzenia historycznego. Część formacyjna została zredukowana do modlitw za zmarłych i niewielkich uwag o śmierci.

Podobnie skromne elementy teologiczne znajdują się w księdze brackiej z 1801 roku, którą odnalazł i wydał ks. Łukasz Krucki (2014, 67–99). Księga ta została dedykowana bractwu kapłańskiemu z pięciu dekanatów archidiecezji gnieźnieńskiej. Jej zasadniczą treść stanowi obszerny i cenny wykaz członków, który poprzedza edycja statutów. W końcowej części druku zamieszczono rozważania na temat dobrej śmierci. Jest to zbiór cytatów z Pisma Świętego o nieuchronności śmierci wraz z medytacją przygotowująca na ten szczególny moment, zachęty do modlitwy za zmarłych oraz teksty tychże modlitw. Podobna prawidłowość występuje w drugim wydaniu księgi krobskiej z 1808 roku według schematu wypracowanego przez Żarnowieckiego (1808, 4°). W nowej edycji uaktualniono spis członków i dodano wykaz

⁵² Druk został wydany współcześnie: Weiss 2003, 97–125.

zmarłych od ostatniego spisu zamieszczonego w wydaniu z 1789 roku. Z pierwszego wydania zachowano modlitwy za zmarłych, ale wyłączono to, co stanowiło główną część pierwszego wydania, a mianowicie rozważania na temat dobrej śmierci.

2.3. Oryginalność dzieła Jakuba Pawła Radlińskiego na tle innych ksiąg brackich

Na tle przeanalizowanych ksiąg brackich ukazuje się wartość edycji psalmów Radlińskiego. W duchowości brackiej dominowała tematyka wanitatywna. Zdarzały się oczywiście inne treści ważne z punktu widzenia ascetyki kapłańskiej, co pokazuje księga bracka Przybylskiego (1762). Kult Imienia Jezus łączony z uwielbieniem Najświętszego Sakramentu stanowi pewnego rodzaju *votum separatum* z tematyki wanitatywnej. Ponadto jego cechą charakterystyczną jest bezpośrednie zwracanie się kapłana do Jezusa, a nie medytacja nad Jego naturą i godnością, jak to ma miejsce w dziele Radlińskiego. Jest jeszcze jeden ważny aspekt, który sytuuje *Tron królewski* na innym poziomie w porównaniu z księgami brackimi powstałymi od XVII do XIX wieku. Analizując dostępne źródła, można zauważyć, że poza Radlińskim żaden autor dzieł dewocyjnych nie zaproponował rozważań o kapłaństwie, opierając się na psalmach w interpretacji chrystologicznej. Odnosi się to zarówno do tekstów o charakterze rozpraw, jak i do tekstów medytacyjnych. Autorzy ksiąg pisanych dla bractw kapłańskich, jeżeli korzystali z Pisma Świętego, to ograniczali się jedynie do cytowania fragmentów potrzebnych do argumentacji teologicznej. Tym, co może wyjaśniać styl księgi brackiej Radlińskiego, jest jego warsztat teologiczny i biblijny. Ponieważ miał dostęp do dzieł wybitnych pisarzy chrześcijańskich oraz potrafił analizować teksty biblijne, do medytacji psalmów zastosował kryterium chrystologiczne, znane w Kościele już od starożytności. Jednocześnie pokazał, w jaki sposób duchowni mogą korzystać z Psalterza dla osobistej formacji duchowej⁵³.

3. *Tron królewski* w służbie sakramentu kapłaństwa

Na strukturę i treść dzieła Radlińskiego duży wpływ wywarły wydarzenia w Kościele katolickim, które bezpośrednio poprzedziły czas jego działalności, a szczególnie ustalenia Soboru Trydenckiego dotyczące tworzenia w diecezjach seminariów duchownych. Konsekwencją powstania ośrodków kształcenia dla kandydatów do stanu

⁵³ Do bractwa zasadniczo należały osoby reprezentujące stan duchowny. Jednak istniała możliwość przynależności także osób świeckich. Pisze o tym wyraźnie sam Radliński: „A lubo do Bractwa Kapłańskiego przyjmowani bywają więc nie tylko sami Kapłani, ale i osoby świeckie” (1735, 33). Członkowie świeccy mieli własne zadania i powinności, o czym także Radliński (1735, 31, 33) informuje w księdze brackiej.

kapłańskiego było lepsze przygotowanie teologiczne. To z kolei umożliwiało wprowadzanie nowych form rozwoju duchowego prezbiterów.

3.1. Adoracja Chrystusa Kapłana w formacji seminaryjnej i kapłańskiej po Soborze Trydenckim

Znaczenie reform Soboru Trydenckiego bardzo dobrze zrozumiał św. Wincenty a Paulo (zm. 1660). Dlatego jednym z najważniejszych zadań, które wyznaczył powołanemu do istnienia w 1625 roku Zgromadzeniu Księży Misjonarzy, było zaangażowanie w prowadzenie formacji seminaryjnej. Początkowo działalność zgromadzenia ograniczała się do terytorium dzisiejszej Francji, ale z czasem Księża Misjonarze dotarli do innych państw, w tym do Polski⁵⁴. W połowie XVIII wieku prowadzili oni aż 18 seminariów duchownych na terenie Rzeczypospolitej, co stanowiło połowę spośród wszystkich istniejących (Rospond 2012, 7–26). W seminariach ważne było umiejętne połączenie właściwej formacji intelektualnej z duchową. Wincenty a Paulo zabiegał o kształtowanie duchowości kapłańskiej zorientowanej wokół adoracji Jezusa Chrystusa, Jedynego i Najwyższego Kapłana⁵⁵. W bibliotece Wyższego Metropolitalnego Seminarium Duchownego w Lublinie, które od 1714 roku było prowadzone przez Księży Misjonarzy, zachował się tekst modlitwy, w którym widać, jak ważnym elementem duchowości kapłańskiej była ofiarność na wzór Chrystusa:

Wiem dobrze, o Boże mój, iż przyjdzie kiedyś umrzeć, a podobno niedługo. O, jak miła rzecz człowiekowi natenczas będzie pamiętać na to, żem Tobie, póki zdrowie służyło, dobrze i wiernie służył; póki tedy żyć będę, chcę wiernie służyć, abym szczęśliwie umarł, a Ciebie Boga Stworzyciela mego w chwale niebieskiej na wieki oglądał (ASL, *Modlitewnik*, Rps 326, k. 7–9).

Po Soborze Trydenckim w Kościele katolickim podjęto wysiłki, by kapłaństwu sakramentalnemu nadać właściwą głębię poprzez ukazanie jego ontycznej jedności z kapłaństwem Chrystusa⁵⁶. Ważną rolę w tym zadaniu odegrał kard. Stanisław

⁵⁴ Księża Misjonarze trafili do Polski w 1651 roku za sprawą królowej Ludwiki Marii Gonzagi.

⁵⁵ Warto zauważyć, że św. Wincenty a Paulo podejmując dzieło odnowy Kościoła w duchu Soboru Trydenckiego, był czynnym kontynuatorem idei kapłaństwa, które kształtowało się w tzw. szkole francuskich odnowicieli kapłańskiej duchowości. Należeli do niej m.in. kard. Pierre de Bérulle, Charles de Condren, Jean-Jacques Olier oraz św. Jan Eudes. Paul Cochois, badacz dokonań de Bérulle, tak oto komentuje jego ideę nowej wizji kapłaństwa: „Poprzez kapłaństwo Chrystusa przyoblekamy się w Osobę Chrystusa i działamy w Jego imię [...]. Realizuje się w ten sposób cudowne wchłonięcie naszej osoby w osobę Chrystusa, tak że dokonujemy cudownych dzieł Chrystusa” (Cochois 1963, 129; tł. J.P.). Wydaje się, że św. Wincenty nie starał się pojmować tak bardzo mistycznie powołania i realizacji misji kapłańskiej. Jednak on także akcentował potrzebę zapatrzania się w Chrystusa, który unżył się poprzez swoje wcielenie, dając w ten sposób przykład adoracji Ojca (Coste 1923, 9:392; tł. J.P.).

⁵⁶ Wyraźnie akcentują tę prawdę ustalenia Soboru Trydenckiego. Ojcowie soborowi podkreślają bowiem, że „Ofiara i kapłaństwo z Bożego zrządzenia są ze sobą złączone [...]. W Nowym Przymierzu Kościół

Hozjusz, biskup warmiński, a równocześnie zagorzały przeciwnik reformacji. W jednym ze swoich dzieł *Confessio fidei* Hozjusz zauważył, że władzę uświęcania ludzi mają tylko ci, którzy uczestniczą w kapłaństwie sakramentalnym. Takiej władzy nie posiadają osoby świeckie, nawet cesarze (Hozjusz 1584, 1:40)⁵⁷. Hozjusz podkreślał godność każdego kapłana, której źródłem jest Jezus Chrystus. Wskutek tego ofiara składana przez prezbitera podczas Mszy Świętej jest tą samą, którą złożył Chrystus jako Najwyższy Kapłan. Tym, co je łączy, są słowa konsekracji i dar ofiarny (Hozjusz 1584, 1:184). Hozjusz zaznaczał, że skoro prezbiter jest ontycznie złączony z Jezusem Chrystusem, Najwyższym Kapłanem, to „pełni swą misję za Chrystusa jako Głowę Mistycznego Ciała” (1:337). Wszelka bowiem moc i skuteczność posługi kapłańskiej zależą od „wiekuistego i nieśmiertelnego Pana” (1:337). Ponadto z tej racji, że prezbiterzy pełnią posługę w imię Jezusa Chrystusa, który, składając swoją ofiarę na krzyżu, pojednał ludzi z Bogiem, Hozjusz nazywał ich „ministrami pojednania” (1:337).

3.2. Tron królewski jako dzieło podkreślające wartość sakramentu kapłaństwa oraz uświęcenia samych kapłanów

Zainicjowane w XVII wieku bractwa kapłańskie, będące albo reaktywacją dawnych, albo nowo powstałe, stanowiły owoc Soboru Trydenckiego. Ich zadaniem było ożywienie i pogłębienie życia wewnętrznego duchownych, a nadrzędnym celem uczczenie kapłaństwa Jezusa Chrystusa⁵⁸. Radliński w *Tronie królewskim* pisze: „Tytuł tedy Bractwa Kapłańskiego jest Najwyższy, i Najpierwszy w Nowym Testamencie Kapłan Chrystus Jezus, który bowiem z dobroci swojej postanowił, fundował, i erygował Bractwo Kapłańskie” (1735, 13). Tym samym wyraźnie sugeruje potrzebę dowartościowania etosu prezbiterów oraz samego sakramentu kapłaństwa, który w pewnym sensie został poniżony i zredukowany przez reformację. Ponadto podkreśla, że istotą Bractwa jest „miłość prawdziwa”, którą należy

katolicki otrzymał z ustanowienia Pana widzialną świętą ofiarę Eucharystii to trzeba także wyznawać, że jest w nim nowe, widzialne i zewnętrzne kapłaństwo” (Bokwa 2007, 541). Kontynuując przywołaną prawdę o kapłaństwie sakramentalnym, w dalszej części postanowień soborowych czytamy, iż „Pismo św. wykazuje i Tradycja Kościoła zawsze uczyła [kan. 1], że jest ono ustanowione przez samego Pana, Zbawiciela naszego [kan. 3], oraz że Apostołowie i ich następcy w kapłaństwie otrzymali władzę konsekracji, ofiarowania i podawania Ciała i Krwi Jego, jak również odpuszczania i zatrzymywania grzechów” (Bokwa 2007, 541).

⁵⁷ Por. Misiurek 1994, 91–93.

⁵⁸ Trzeba zaznaczyć, że organizacje skupiające i służące rozwojowi i ugruntowywaniu duchowości kapłanów diecezjalnych istniały w Kościele już od połowy IX wieku. Ich powstanie i rozwój wynikał z troski (duchowej i materialnej) o formację członków, a po śmierci dawał gwarancję modlitwy całej wspólnoty. Pierwsze bractwa powstawały na terenie Galii, później także dzisiejszych Niemiec oraz w Rzymie. Renesans w powoływaniu nowych bractw związany był głównie z reformą Kościoła, zapoczątkowaną przez Sobór Trydencki, oraz działalnością jej wielkiego zwolennika, Karola Boromeusza, który w 1578 roku w Mediolanie założył Bractwo św. Ambrożego. Por. Kuźmiak 2000, 704–9.

okazywać Jezusowi Chrystusowi, Jedynemu i Najwyższemu Kapłanowi. Ten aspekt duchowości stanowi „szczególny tytuł” (*titulus specificativus*) Bractwa Kapłańskiego (Radliński 1735, 17)⁵⁹. Bezpośrednia relacja do Chrystusa Kapłana miała w zamyśle Radlińskiego wyróżniać i zarazem odróżniać członków Bractwa od innych istniejących w tym czasie bractw, takich jak Bractwo Przemienienia Pańskiego czy Bractwo Grobu Chrystusa (Radliński 1735, 17)⁶⁰. Poza podstawowym odniesieniem do Jezusa Chrystusa, Najwyższego Kapłana, duchowni należący do Bractwa mieli także pielęgnować nabożeństwo do Najświętszej Maryi Panny, którą obrali sobie jako „osobliwą Opiekunkę, Protektorkę, Obrończynię” (Radliński 1735, 23). Ten rys duchowości wynikał przede wszystkim z roli Maryi jako „Matki Najwyższego Kapłana” (Radliński 1735, 24).

Każda duchowość, w tym także duchowość Bractwa Kapłańskiego, dla osiągnięcia określonych celów wymaga zastosowania odpowiednich narzędzi⁶¹. Zgodnie z założeniami, o których pisze Radliński, celem, który wyróżnia Bractwo Kapłańskie, jest ćwiczenie się w cnotach, a wśród nich najwyższą jest „adoracja, cześć i uszanowanie Najwyższego Kapłaństwa Chrystusowego” (Radliński 1735, 25). Osiągnięciu takiej predyspozycji duchowej miały służyć stosowne modlitwy, do których Radliński zaliczał „Godzinki, Koronkę, Psalmy i Litanię o Najwyższym Kapłaństwie Chrystusowym” (1735, 26). W czasach po Soborze Trydenckim adorowanie Jezusa Chrystusa jako Najwyższego Kapłana Nowego Testamentu było wymownym znakiem kapłańskiego etosu. Radliński był przekonany, że wysoki status Bractwa Kapłańskiego oraz jego członków wpływa z ich szczególnej relacji do Jezusa Chrystusa „Zbawiciela i Odkupiciela całego świata”, którego prepozyt miechowski określa „Głową Bractwa” (Radliński 1735, 31).

W formacji duchowej członków Bractwa szczególnie miały pomagać regularne spotkania. Zgodnie z przyjętym regulaminem odbywały się one raz na kwartał w dekanatach, do których przynależeli prezbiterzy. Istotny element spotkań stanowiła wspólna recytacja liturgii godzin (nieszporów) albo *Officium Defunctorum* za zmarłych „fundatorów, Dobrodziejów” oraz „Braci i Sióstr”, którzy przynależeli do Bractwa (Radliński 1735, 33). Następnego dnia prezbiterzy celebrowali Mszę Świętą według określonego porządku oraz pełnili posługę w konfesjonale

⁵⁹ W tym miejscu trzeba zaznaczyć, że Radliński znał i zapewne doceniał dokonania kard. Hozjusza, którego przywołuje dla potwierdzenia swojej wizji kapłaństwa (Radliński 1735, 32). Hozjusz bowiem także zaznacza, że rolą prezbitera jest prawdziwa miłość do Chrystusa „Jedynego Kapłana Nowego Przymierza”. Tego rodzaju relacja miłości winna być traktowana jako podstawowy cel życia każdego prezbitera.

⁶⁰ Warto zauważyć, że Radliński, jako członek zakonu, a także przełożony generalny bożogrobców, w swoim bogatym dorobku pisarskim poświęcił wiele miejsca duchowości zakonu, do którego przynależał. Pisze o tym Misiurek 2016, 33–44, 127–40.

⁶¹ Radliński zaznacza to bardzo wyraźnie, określając główne aspekty duchowości zakonu oraz wskazując środki, które mają służyć osiągnięciu doskonałości zakonnej. Zob. Popławski 2020, 321–27.

(Radliński 1735, 33)⁶². W ten sposób podkreślali swoje uczestnictwo w Kapłaństwie Chrystusa. Z racji przynależności do Bractwa duchowni posiadali szczególne przywileje przyznane prawem, które jeszcze bardziej wyrażały ich relację do Chrystusa, Najwyższego Kapłana. Jednym z nich była możliwość rozgrzeszania z przypadków zarezerwowanych biskupom. Innym bardzo cennym przywilejem była możliwość celebracji Mszy Świętej w domu chorego prezbitera. Dzięki temu – jak zaznacza Radliński – chory i cierpiący kapłan mógł złączyć się z ofiarą Najwyższego Kapłana Jezusa Chrystusa (Radliński 1735, 42).

W kształtowaniu duchowości członków Bractwa Kapłańskiego ważną rolę odgrywały także różne formy pobożności. Do najważniejszych Radliński (1735, 46–67) zalicza *Godzinki o świętym i Najwyższym Kapłaństwie Chrystusowym*. Godzinki zaproponowane w *Tronie królewskim* mają strukturę i podział analogiczne do *Godzinek ku czci Najświętszej Maryi Panny*, ale w centrum stawiają Osobę Jezusa Chrystusa jako Najwyższego Kapłana Nowego Testamentu⁶³. Kolejną ciekawą i oryginalną formą kształtującą duchowość członków Bractwa Kapłańskiego była zaproponowana przez Radlińskiego (1735, 92–100) litania *O świętym i Najwyższym Kapłaństwie Chrystusowym*. Zawiera ona 78 wezwań, spośród których wiele zostało zaczerpniętych czy inspirowanych tekstami biblijnymi (np. inwokacja *Jezu Kapłanie wywyższony nad Królów ziemskich*, której źródłem jest Ps 88,28). Niejako zwieńczeniem form medytacyjnych w modlitewniku Radlińskiego (1735, 83–92) są *Psalmy o Świętym i Najwyższym Kapłaństwie Chrystusowym*. Autor książki precyzyjnie wyselekcjonował utwory spośród psalmów królewskich tak, by na ich podstawie duchowni członkowie Bractwa mogli docenić wartość sakramentu kapłaństwa oraz znaleźć w nich paradygmat i wzór do naśladowania. Dzięki chrystologicznej interpretacji Radliński pozwolił prezbiterom zachwycić się udziałem w zbawczym dziele, które Bóg realizuje w świecie dzięki Najwyższemu Kapłaństwu Chrystusa. Jego panowanie nad mocami zła (zob. interpretację Ps 110[109],3, w której Radliński pisze o dominacji Chrystusa nad Lucyferem) uobecnia się zawsze, ilekroć duchowni sprawują oficjum, a jeszcze bardziej wtedy, gdy naśladowują cnoty swego Mistrza.

Pragnienia, które towarzyszyły Radlińskiemu przy przygotowaniu *Tronu królewskiego*, a także wówczas, gdy zdecydował się włączyć do swojego dzieła psalmy

62 Pierwsza Msza Święta winna być sprawowana o Wniebowzięciu Najświętszej Maryi Panny, druga – żałobna za fundatorów i dobrodziejów oraz członków Bractwa, natomiast trzecia winna być celebrowana jako wotywna o Duchu Świętym. Radliński wspomina także, że w tym samym czasie powinien być wystawiony Najświętszy Sakrament. Całość zaś, niczym swoistego rodzaju „duchowa klamra”, zamykała sprawowana Eucharystia o Najświętszym Sakramencie, by w ten sposób uczcić Jezusa Chrystusa Najwyższego Kapłana, który „sam ten sakrament ustanowił”.

63 Radliński jest również autorem *Godzinek o Bożym Grobie*, które posiadają taką samą strukturę i podział na poszczególne części jak *Godzinki ku czci Najświętszej Maryi Panny*. Są one tematycznie osadzone w tekstach biblijnych, które autor chętnie wykorzystuje, aby podkreślić nie tylko symboliczne znaczenie Grobu Bożego, ale także jego duchowy wymiar i wartość. Zob. Popławski 2022, 55–63.

królewskie zawierające interpretacje chrystologiczne, odsłania modlitwa zapisana w księdze:

O Najwyższy Kapłanie, Jezu dobrotliwy Boże, Człowieku, Królu, zupełnie prawdziwy [...]. Przyjmijże woli naszej i serca ochotę, i w nas racz miłościwie tę sporządzić cnotę, abyśmy Cię Kapłanem wiernie wyznawali, i w Tobie ten charakter wiernie szanowali (Radliński 1735, 65).

Radliński jako prepozyt miechowski i generał bożogrobców, a jednocześnie dobry teolog i miłośnik Pisma Świętego wiedział, że drogą uświęcenia prezbiterów oraz dobrego przygotowania się do ostatecznego spotkania z Bogiem w tajemnicy śmierci jest pogłębianie komunii z Jezusem Chrystusem, Kapłanem i Królem. To przekonanie wyraził w antyfonie wieńczącej medytację nad tekstami psalmów:

[...] Jezus zaś że żyje na wieki, wieczne ma Kapłaństwo. I stąd zbawić może na wieki przystępujących przez siebie do Boga, zawsze żyjąc do przyczynienia się za nami (Radliński 1735, 91).

Zakończenie

Analiza treści księgi brackiej Radlińskiego miała na celu ukazanie jej wartości teologicznej i oryginalności na tle innych tego typu edycji. Same księgi brackie stanowią rzadkość w kulturze teologicznej. Do dzisiaj przetrwało zaledwie kilkanaście tego typu tekstów. Pośród nich *Tron królewski* jawi się jako dzieło przemyślane pod względem tematycznym, metodologicznym i pastoralnym. Kryterium chrystologiczne, które charakteryzuje przekład psalmów włączonych do księgi, stanowi *Leitmotiv* całości. Można go określić jako kapłańską duchowość „adoracyjną”, która realizuje się w kontemplowaniu Jezusa Chrystusa, Jedynego i Najwyższego Kapłana, uobecnianiu Jego ofiary zbawczej oraz naśladowaniu Jego cnót i przymiotów. Trzeba zaznaczyć, że autorski przekład psalmów włączony do księgi brackiej, będący efektem lektury profetycznej, jest zgodny z chrześcijańską hermeneutyką. Radliński posiadał odpowiedni warsztat potrzebny do przeprowadzenia pracy translacyjnej i teologicznej, której się podjął na potrzeby edycji fragmentu Psalterza w księdze Bractwa sanockiego. Już wcześniej, na przełomie XVII i XVIII wieku, był bardzo aktywny na polu naukowym (Jedynak 2014, 153; Kwaśniewski 2025, 115). Pozostawił po sobie dzieła o charakterze teologicznym i historycznym. Szczególnie miejsce w jego twórczości piśmienniczej zajmuje księga *Sepultura viventium* (Radliński, 1732, 8°), która została opublikowana trzy lata przed edycją *Tronu królewskiego*. *Sepultura viventium* to rozważania o Grobie Bożym oparte na psalmach i ewangeliach. Radliński nie zaprezentował w niej jednak własnego przekładu tekstów biblijnych, a jedynie przytoczył je za Wulgatą i uczynił punktem wyjścia do medytacji i modlitwy. Biblia odgrywała w pracy piśmienniczej

Radlińskiego szczególną rolę (Grzebień 1982, 479–81). Z przeprowadzonych badań porównawczych *Tronu królewskiego* w relacji do innych ksiąg brackich wyłania się oryginalność pracy Radlińskiego, która wyraża się w konsekwentnym, niemalże modelowym zastosowaniu kryterium chrystologicznego. Wyakcentowanie królewskiej i kapłańskiej godności Chrystusa zyskało w księdze Bractwa sanockiego charakter paradygmatu, którego źródłem nie były jedynie spekulacje teologiczne, ale natchnione Słowo Boże. Dzięki temu kapłani katoliccy otrzymali wzniosły i pewny wzór do naśladowania. W interpolacjach dodanych do psalmów widać kontynuację wielowiekowej tradycji chrześcijańskiej, którą najlepiej wyraża myśl św. Augustyna: „Novum in Vetere latet et in Novo Vetus patet” (Augustinus, *Quaestiones* 2.73 [PL 34, 623]). Dalsze badania nad warsztatem biblijnym Radlińskiego, zapoczątkowane w niniejszym artykule, pozwolą jeszcze lepiej zrozumieć i docenić znaczenie chrystologicznej interpretacji psalmów dla duchowości kapłańskiej.

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The *Fermentum* in the Historical Context of the Roman Liturgy

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Abstract: This contribution is a historical study of the ancient Roman practice of *fermentum*, which was already established and attested in the city of Rome at the beginning of the 5th century. Despite the scarcity of documentation relating to this liturgical practice, a critical study of the sources, together with their broader context, offers a more complete view of the phenomenon. Our study offers a critical re-evaluation not only of the liturgical sources themselves, but also of the opinions of leading scholars of the past regarding the Roman practice of *fermentum*.

Keywords: *fermentum*, roman mass, roman liturgy, papal liturgy, history of the liturgy

The practice of sending bread consecrated by the pope to other assemblies within the city of Rome, known as *fermentum*, is one of the peculiar features of ancient liturgy that continues to arouse scholarly interest. It has been the subject of numerous studies and commentaries by various authors, including some of the most renowned historians of the liturgy in the 20th century.

Approximately twenty years ago, John Baldovin (2005) proposed a departure from the traditional interpretation of the *fermentum* adopted by most earlier scholars of liturgical history, including Josef Andreas Jungmann, Mario Righetti, Antoine Chavasse, Robert Cabié, and Vincenzo Raffa (Baldovin 2005, 43). These authors maintained that the *fermentum* was destined for Eucharistic celebrations presided over by presbyters in the *tituli*. Baldovin, by contrast, drawing on the insights of distinguished scholars such as Pierre Nautin, Victor Saxer, and Robert Taft, raised a number of significant objections to this view, suggesting that the assemblies to which the *fermentum* was sent were not, in fact, full Eucharistic celebrations.

The present contribution takes as its point of departure the objections raised by Baldovin. In its first part, it offers a critical comparison with the positions of Nautin, Saxer, and Taft, based on a careful examination of the literary sources concerning the ancient use of the *fermentum*, in order to determine the precise nature of the assemblies to which it may have been directed. The second part seeks to trace a possible development of the ancient notion of sending Eucharistic bread to other celebrations as a sign of communion. The third part undertakes a critical analysis of the sources

This article is a slightly expanded version of the part of my study published in Italian (Celiński 2020, 325–46).



dealing with a highly specific issue—namely, the idea of continuity between successive Eucharistic celebrations—a concept first articulated by Jean Mabillon and still echoed by some modern scholars, such as Janusz Mieczkowski (2010, 159–60).

Amid divergent opinions among major scholars on this subject, the aim of this historical investigation is to re-examine the available literary evidence critically, not only to clarify the nature of the assemblies for which the *fermentum* was intended (Part I), but also to assess its theological function within a broader liturgical context (Part II). Finally, this study seeks to underscore the problematic aspects of certain interpretations that have arisen from an insufficiently critical evaluation of the sources (Part III).

1. *Fermentum* as a Sign of Ecclesial Communion

The oldest certain testimony concerning the use of *fermentum* is dated March 19, 416. It is the Decretal of Innocent I to Decentius, bishop of Gubbio.¹

De fermento vero quod die dominica per titulos mittimus, superflue nos consulere voluisti, cum omnes ecclesiae nostrae intra civitatem sint constitutae. Quarum presbiteri, quia die ipsa propter plebem sibi creditam nobiscum convenire non possunt, idcirco fermentum a nobis confectum per acolitos accipiunt, ut se a nostra comunione maxime illa die non iudicent separatos. Quod per parrochias fieri debere non puto quia nec longe portanda sunt sacramenta nec nos per cimiteria diversa constitutis presbiteris destinamus et presbiteri eorum conficiendorum ius habeant atque licentiam (Innocentius 1983, 26–28 [Innocent I, March 19, 416]; “About the *fermentum*, which we send on Sunday by way of the titular churches, it is worthless to consult us in this matter for all of our churches are within the city. But the presbyters of these churches—who cannot assemble with us on this day because their people need them—receive from the acolytes the *fermentum* that we consecrated, so that they do not find themselves separated from our communion on that great day I do not think that this needs to be done in the parishes because the sacraments [Eucharist] are not to be carried far nor should we send presbyters through different cemeteries; moreover, the presbyters are themselves, by law and license, able to consecrate” [Connell 2010, 39]).

The paucity of evidence on the Roman liturgy of the time of the Decretal of Innocent I creates, almost necessarily, many ambiguities in understanding the text. The fundamental problem, about the meaning of the quoted text, concerns the typology of the synaxis presided over by presbyters in the *tituli*, to which the pope’s

¹ On March 18, 2016 in Rome, at the Athenaeum of Sant’Anselmo in Rome, an international conference was held on the occasion of the 1600th anniversary of the Decretal Letter of Innocent I to Decentius. The proceedings of this conference were edited by Professor Matteo Monfrinotti (2017).

fermentum was sent. Beginning in the 1980s, some scholars began to question the hitherto accepted idea (Baldovin 2005, 38–39) that is, in 5th-century Rome, presbyters regularly presided at Mass in the *tituli*. Among them Nautin (1982, 511–12) and, after him, also Taft (2000, 415) opted for the idea that the *tituli* synaxis, mentioned by Innocent in the Decretal, was rather configured as a Liturgy of the Word for assemblies consisting of catechumens and penitents who, therefore, were not admitted to Eucharistic communion. According to Nautin (1982, 512–13), this would also result from an albeit uncertain record in the *Liber Pontificalis*² which, in attributing the creation of the *tituli* to Pope Marcellus (308–309), does not name the Eucharist among the functions of their employment. It states that, Marcellus

XXV titulos in urbe Roma constituit, quasi diocesis, propter baptismum et paenitentiam multorum qui convertebantur ex paganis et propter sepulturas martyrum (Duchesne 1886, 164 [*Liber Pontificalis*, ca. 530]; “Appointed 25 parish churches as dioceses in the city of Rome to provide baptism and penance for the many who were converted among the pagans and burial for the martyrs” [Loomis 1916, 38]).

Similarly, the explanation by which Innocent I justifies not sending the *fermentum* to the churches attached to the cemeteries, because there are presbyters in them who possess the *ius et licentia conficiendi*, also suggests that the presbyters of the *tituli*, located *intra civitatem*, did not possess this privilege (Taft 2000, 415). Saxer (1989, 930) even claimed that the presbyters of the *tituli*, not having the right to consecrate, celebrated in them a kind of *missa sicca* or a Liturgy of the Presanctified such as that of Good Friday. As a result, acolytes brought from the papal mass sufficient of the consecrated bread for the communion of all, while the wine was consecrated *per contactum* with the immixtion of the *fermentum* in a chalice of unconsecrated wine.

Behind these assumptions is an idea that in ancient times, even in Rome, the rule of one Mass by the bishop, surrounded by presbyters, was observed. Thus, the *fermentum* would be nothing more than a way of preserving this ancient rule (Nautin 1982, 511–18). According to Nautin (1982, 515–17), this custom is referred to in a letter dated 444 or 445, which Leo the Great (died in 461) addressed to Dioscurus of Alexandria (died in 454). In it, the pope responds to the problem of the impossibility of the participation of all the faithful in the mass in the basilica because of their overabundance.

Ut autem in omnibus observantia nostra concordet, illud quoque volumus custodiri, ut cum solemnior quaeque festivitas conventum populi numerosioris indixerit, et ea fidelium multitudo convenerit, quam recipere basilica simul una non possit, sacrificii oblatio indubitanter iteretur; ne his tantum admissis ad hanc devotionem, qui primi advenerint,

² On issues relating to the dating of the *Liber Pontificalis*, it is useful to consult Lidia Capó's study (2009).

videantur hi, qui postmodum confluerint, non recepti, cum plenum pietatis atque rationis sit, ut quoties basilicam, in qua agitur, praesentia novae plebis impleverit, toties sacrificium subsequens offeratur. Necesse est autem ut quaedam pars populi sua devotione privetur, si unius tantum missae more servato, sacrificium offerre non possint, nisi qui prima diei parte convenerint (Leo I, *Epistulae*, 9.2 [Leo I, 444/445]; “Now, in order that all our practices may be in harmony, we want this observance kept, also: Whenever any more solemn festival indicates a larger concourse of people and such crowds of the faithful come together that a basilica cannot hold all of them at once, the offering of the sacrifice should unquestionably be repeated. Otherwise, with only those who came first admitted to this sacrifice, the others who came later may seem rejected. Yet it is quite in keeping with devotion and reason to have a later repetition of the sacrifice as often as a new group of people is present to fill the basilica being used. On the contrary, if the custom of having but one Mass is kept and only those who came early in the day can offer the sacrifice, then, of necessity, some part of the people will be deprived of their religious devotion” [Hunt 1957, 35–36]).

Although Nautin wanted to see in the quoted text a kind of confirmation of the idea of a single mass in the Church of Alexandria, still in the mid-5th century,³ the other data of history do not allow one to share this idea. In fact, as early as the time of Bishop Dionysius (247–265), as reflected in his correspondence preserved by Eusebius of Caesarea (died in 399), in addition to the ordinary assemblies of Christians in the city, there were also particular assemblies, which met in the peripheries (Eusebius Caesariensis, *Historia ecclesiastica*, 7.11.17). According to Annic Martin (1984, 211, n. 3), although these were meetings of only a part of the faithful, they formed Eucharistic synaxis presided over by presbyters. Epiphanius of Salamis (315–403) also attests that in his time there were several churches in Alexandria, entrusted to presbyters, one of whom was Arius (died in 336) (Epiphanius Constantiniensis, *Panarion* 68.1–2).⁴ It was around 351–353, in the context of the conflict provoked by Arius, that Bishop Athanasius (died in 373) sought to organize large communal assemblies on major feasts, using larger, though not yet completed, premises for this purpose (Martin 1989, 1136–37; Metzger 2015, 225). Historically speaking, it is, therefore, a process from multiplicity of assemblies toward unification and not *vice versa*. Moreover, the custom referred to by Leo the Great in his letter to Dioscurus (*mos unius tantum missae*) would be, instead, that of the celebration of a single mass on the same day on the same altar (Martin 1989, 1137, n. 11). A Coptic

³ “L’évêque d’Alexandrie observait donc strictement ‘la coutume d’une messe unique.’ D’après tout ce qui précède, il ne s’agissait pas seulement de célébrer une seule messe par basilique mais une seule messe par ville” (Nautin 1982, 515–56; “The bishop of Alexandria therefore strictly observed ‘the custom of a single mass.’ According to all the above, it was not just a matter of celebrating one mass per basilica, but one mass per city” [my own translation]).

⁴ See also Metzger 2015, 224.

text,⁵ probably from the 5th century, attributed to Peter of Alexandria, speaks of it. In the West, this rule appears in the Acts of the Diocesan Synod of Auxerre, held between the 6th and 7th centuries.

Non licet super uno altario in una die duas missas dicere (Sinodus Autisioderensis 561–605, 10 [Synod of Auxerre, 6th–7th century]; “It is not permissible to say two masses on one altar on the same day” [my own translation]).⁶

The rule, therefore, does not exclude the possibility of celebrating another Eucharist at another altar on the same day.

Even in Rome the pastoral situation between the 4th and 5th centuries was so diverse that there was no possibility of thinking of a single Eucharistic celebration in the city, presided over by the pope. This state of affairs already goes back to the very origins of Christianity in Rome, as Marcel Metzger notes:

Rome n'était pas un lieu de naissance du christianisme et celui-ci ne s'y est pas implanté à partir d'une souche unique et primitive, qui aurait été comme la maison-mère de tous les chrétiens de la cité. Dans cette mégalopole, des groupes de chrétiens se sont établis en colonies, dont les maisons-mères se trouvaient à Jérusalem, Antioche, Alexandrie, Éphèse, Corinthe, etc. De ce fait, dès les débuts, l'Église de Rome se caractérisait par la multiplicité de ses lieux de synaxe (Metzger 2002, 198; “Rome was not the birthplace of Christianity, and Christianity did not take root there from a single, primitive stock, which would have been like the motherhouse of all the city's Christians. In this megalopolis, groups of Christians established themselves in colonies, with mother-houses in Jerusalem, Antioch, Alexandria, Ephesus, Corinth, etc., and so on. As a result, from the very beginning, the Church of Rome was characterized by the multiplicity of its synaxis locations” [my own translation]).

Confirmation of this initial situation can be found in Eusebius of Caesarea (died in 399). In his Ecclesiastical History (ca. 260–340), he mentions a letter that Irenaeus of Lyons (died in 202) addressed to Pope Victor (189–199) around the year 190. The letter concerned the problem of the Churches of Asia Minor celebrating Easter on the 14th of Nisan, regardless of the day of the week on which it occurred. Faced with the pope's hostile stance toward those who did not celebrate Easter on Sunday, Irenaeus appealed to Victor's predecessors who accepted this diversity of traditions, and to a custom of sending the Eucharist, as a sign of communion, to those communities that observed the 14th of Nisan (Metzger 2015, 335).

⁵ “Break (κλασματίζειν) not (bread) twice upon the same altar (θυσιαστήριον) on the same day.” (Crum 1903, 390) See also Riedel 1990, 102.

⁶ See also Martène 1967a, 292–93.

οἱ πρὸ σοῦ πρεσβύτεροι τοῖς ἀπὸ τῶν παροικιῶν τηροῦσιν ἔπεμπον εὐχαριστίαν (Eusebius Caesariensis, *Historia ecclesiastica* 5.24.15) [Eusebius of Caesarea, ca. 260–340]; “the presbyters before you [those who were observing the fourteenth day] sent eucharist to those from the parishes” [my own translation]).

The sending of the Eucharist to a synaxis, as a sign of communion, is mentioned here. As Metzger (2015, 335) notes, it is unimaginable to think that the Eucharist could have been sent to the Churches of Asia Minor at that time, because of the distance and slow transportation. The custom recalled in Irenaeus’ letter must, therefore, have referred to groups (παροικιαί = parishes) of Christians from those Churches, sojourning in Rome, who celebrated according to their own customs (Metzger 2002, 198–99).

At the starting point, therefore, we have a multiplicity of communities, quite autonomous, as Metzger also points out:

Dans cette diaspora initiale, comment les pasteurs sont-ils parvenus à nouer des relations entre les multiples groupes de chrétiens, puis à fédérer les groupes à l’intérieur de la mégalopole? Il n’est pas dans notre propos de répondre à cette question, mais de reconnaître que la diversité initiale a façonné les institutions ecclésiastiques de la ville de Rome. Même après la Paix de l’Église, lorsque le christianisme est devenu majoritaire, les difficultés n’ont pas disparu. Vu la taille de la ville, l’unification d’une telle population devait surmonter les divisions internes propres à toute grande cité. Ces divisions, dont les factions du cirque constituent une des expressions les plus manifestes, ont traversé la communauté chrétienne elle-même et peuvent expliquer l’origine des schismes au moment des élections à l’épiscopat (Metzger 2002, 198–99; “In this initial diaspora, how did pastors manage to forge relationships between the multiple groups of Christians, and then federate the groups within the megalopolis? It is not our intention to answer this question, but to recognize that initial diversity shaped the ecclesiastical institutions of the city of Rome. Even after the Peace of the Church, when Christianity became the majority, the difficulties did not disappear. Given the size of the city, unifying such a large population had to overcome the internal divisions typical of any large city. These divisions, of which the circus factions are one of the most obvious expressions, cut across the Christian community itself and may explain the origin of schisms at the time of elections to the episcopate” [my own translation]).

According to the testimony of Eusebius of Caesarea (died in 399),⁷ even before the Edict of Constantine (313), a sign of communion was the sending of the Eucharist even to groups that followed customs other than those of the pope (Metzger 2015, 335–36).⁸

⁷ See above Eusebius Caesariensis, *Historia ecclesiastica* 5.24.15.

⁸ The Book VIII of the *Apostolic Constitutions*, speaking of the ministries of the bishop and presbyter, also mentions the custom of sending and receiving eulogy (= blessed bread) as a sign of communion among various communities (*Constitutiones Apostolorum* 8.28.2–4). On this issue see also Stuijver 1996, 922–23;

In this context, the centralization of church government came later and was the result of a long process of regrouping Christians. It included the establishment of *tituli*, or neighborhood churches, entrusted to presbyters and endowed with the authority of *quasi dioecesis* in the field of Christian initiation.⁹ This type of organization would correspond to the oldest structure of the pastoral system of *Urbe*. In it, presbyters in the *tituli* played the role of presidency of a quasi-episcopal type, which, therefore, inevitably presumes Eucharistic presidency as well. Indirectly, a certain authority of presbyters over the titular church could be inferred from some indications scattered in sources of various kinds and not always entirely reliable. On the one hand, e.g., in an entry concerning Pope Sylvester, in the second edition of the *Liber Pontificalis*, it says: “constituit beatus Silvester in urbe Roma titulum suum” (*Liber Pontificalis* 34; “the blessed Silvester established his titular church in the city of Rome” [my own translation]). Moreover, speaking of the Lateran Basilica, the popes referred to it as *ecclesia nostra* (“our church” [my own translation]) (Metzger 2015, 219; Chavasse 1993, 263–64). On the other hand, however, when *Ordo Romanus XXXB* (ca. 770–800) states that during the Easter Vigil the presbyters do not attend the papal mass but preside in titles, the expression is used: “unusquisque per titulum suum facit missam” (each one has Mass in his own titular churches [my own translation]) (*Ordo Romanus XXXB* 64).

In this view, it is neither surprising that Irenaeus (died in 202) qualifies the predecessors of Pope Soterius (166–175) with the title of presbyters,¹⁰ nor what Ambrosiaster writes about the relationship between the bishop and presbyters (Metzger 2002, 202):

quare, nisi quia episcopi et presbyteri una ordinatio est? uterque enim sacerdos est, sed episcopus primus est, ut omnis episcopus presbyter sit, non tamen omnis presbyter episcopus. hic enim episcopus est, qui inter presbyteros primus est (Ambrosiaster 1969, 267 [Ambrosiaster 4th century]; “Why does he do this, except that there in one ordination of both bishop and presbyter? Both are priests, but the bishop comes first, so that while every bishop is a presbyter, not every presbyter is a bishop. The bishop is the one who is first among the presbyters” [Bray 2009, 3014]).

In regard to the Eucharistic celebration there is, in fact, a title that historically unites the bishop and the presbyter and that is that of *sacerdos*.¹¹

In the face of these data, it is quite unlikely to support Nautin’s hypothesis (1982, 511–12), taken up by Taft (2000, 415), or Saxer’s hypothesis (1989, 930) about the fact

Taft 2000, 404–12. In the West, in the early 5th century, the custom of sending eulogy is attested by Paulinus of Nola (died in 431) (Paulinus Nolanus, *Epistulae* 5.21).

⁹ See above *Liber Pontificalis* 34. See also Metzger 2002, 199–202.

¹⁰ See above, the text regarding the note 7.

¹¹ More specifically on the issue see Metzger 2015, 595–98; Hunter 2017, 495–510.

that, even in the time of Innocent I, presbyters did not have the right to preside at the Eucharist. Indeed, this can be inferred from the text of Canon 18 of the Council of Nicaea (325), which states that:

Ἦλθεν εἰς τὴν ἁγίαν καὶ μεγάλην σύνοδον, ὅτι ἔν τισι τόποις καὶ πόλεσι, τοῖς πρεσβυτέροις τὴν εὐχαριστίαν οἱ διάκονοι διδόνασιν, ὥσπερ οὔτε ὁ κανὼν οὔτε ἡ συνήθεια παρέδωκεν, τοὺς ἐξουσίαν μὴ ἔχοντας προσφέρειν τοῖς προσφέρουσι διδόναι τὸ σῶμα τοῦ Χριστοῦ (*Concilium Nicaenum I* 1990, 14 [First Council of Nicaea, 325]; “It has come to the attention of this holy and great synod that in some places and cities deacons give communion to presbyters, although neither canon nor custom allows this, namely that those who have no authority to offer should give the body of Christ to those who do offer” [Tanner 1990, *14]).

Also, the Roman decretal *Ad Gallos Episcopos*, which would date back to Pope Damasus (366–384), already speaks of it.¹² In it, about the various ministries in the Church it says:

Paschae tempore, presbyter et diaconus per parrochias dare remissionem peccatorum et mysterium implere consuerunt. Etiam praesente episcopo, in fonte quoque ipsi descendunt: illi in officio sunt, sed illius nominati facti summa conceditur. Reliquis uero temporibus, ubi aegritudinis necessitas consequi unumquemque compellit, specialiter presbyter licentia est per salutaris aquae gratiam dare indulgentiam peccatorum, quoniam et munus ipsi licet, causa emundationis, offerre. [De] diacono uero, nulla licentia inuenitur esse concessa; sed quod semel forte contigit usurpari, per necessitatem dicitur excusatum, nec postea in securitate commissum (*Ad Gallos Episcopos* 2005, 10 [Damasus I, 366–84]; “During Easter, the priest and deacon are accustomed to give remission of sins and perform the mystery in the parishes. Even when the bishop is present, they themselves also descend into the font: they exercise the office, but the whole of their action is attributed to him [the bishop]. But at other times, when the necessity of illness compels anyone to confer [the sacraments], the priest has special permission to grant the forgiveness of sins through the grace of the saving waters, since he is also permitted to offer the gift, for the sake of purification. [Regarding] the deacon, however, no permission is found to have been granted; the fact that one time perhaps [the permission] happened to be appropriated—this is said to have been excused by necessity, and does not mean that afterwards it is granted as a given” [my own translation]).

The quoted text, on the one hand, confirms the primary character of the bishop’s ministry (attended by the presbyter and deacon) in Christian initiation. On the

¹² Among recent scholars it was Duval (2005, 125–38) who pointed out the possibility of a strong influence of Jerome—secretary of Pope Damasus, on the text of the decretal. For a summary of discussions related to the authorship of the source see Duval 2005, 1–7.

other hand, however, it speaks of a *munus offerendi* of the presbyter. The *licentia* of baptizing on extraordinary occasions (outside the Easter season) is granted to the presbyter precisely because he possesses the proper *munus* of celebrating eucharist. While the act of baptizing in parishes during the Easter season, by the presbyter and deacon, is conceived as an extension of the bishop's ministry, that, on the other hand, of the presbyter baptizing outside the Easter season is justified precisely by the *munus offerendi* that belongs to him, regardless of the bishop's license. At that time the celebration of Christian initiation is still one and the same. Yves-Marie Duval, commenting on this passage from the decretal, writes:

A Pâques, lorsqu'ils officient avec l'évêque (dans le baptistère de la cathédrale), prêtres et diacres sont ses servants, ses ministres, ses aides, et ils agissent au nom de l'évêque; lorsqu'ils sont envoyés dans les paroisses – à un moment où l'évêque ne peut être partout à la fois – ils sont ses délégués. En dehors de ce temps, si se produit une urgence, seul, selon notre Lettre, le prêtre peut administrer ordinairement le baptême, parce qu'il a aussi par ailleurs le pouvoir de célébrer l'eucharistie. On notera que, tel qu'il apparaît ici, le pouvoir du prêtre ne lui vient pas d'abord de la permission de l'évêque, mais des droits qui découlent de son statut (*licet, licentia*) de prêtre (Duval 2005, 94; "At Easter, when they officiate with the bishop (in the cathedral baptistery), priests and deacons are his servants, his ministers, his helpers, and they act in the bishop's name; when they are sent to parishes—at a time when the bishop cannot be everywhere at once—they are his delegates. Outside this time, if an emergency arises, according to our Letter, only the priest can administer baptism, because he also has the power to celebrate the Eucharist. Note that, as it appears here, the priest's power does not derive primarily from the bishop's permission, but from the rights deriving from his status (*licet, licentia*) as a priest" [my own translation]).

Even when one starts from the model in which all ministries come, in some way, from the episcopal one, looking from the perspective of history at the order of the granting to presbyters of faculties concerning the administration of the sacraments, the celebration of the Mass is to be placed among the first, ahead of that of the reconciliation of penitents or preaching. In this light, one could already understand a passage from the *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* by Ignatius of Antioch (died in 107), in which he speaks of the legitimacy only of that Eucharist which is presided over by the bishop or those appointed by him.¹³

While the power of presbyters to celebrate the eucharist (Metzger 2015, 613–14) is undisputed, it cannot be ruled out that, at some point in the process of pastoral organization in *Urbe*, the pope might have censured the legitimacy of the presbyteral

¹³ "Ἐκεῖνη βεβαία εὐχαριστία ἡγείσθω, ἢ ὑπὸ ἐπίσκοπον οὐσα ἢ ὑπὸ ἄνδρα ἀπὸ αὐτοῦ ἐπιτρέψη" (Ignatius Antiochenus, *Ad Smyrnaeos* 8.1; "Let that celebration of the Eucharist be considered valid which is held under the bishop or anyone to whom he has committed it" [Kleist 1949, 93]).

eucharist in the *tituli* with the obligation of the *fermentum*. According to a report in the *Liber Pontificalis*,¹⁴ this custom would date back to the time of Pope Miltiades (311–314) of whom it is said that:

Ab eodem die fecit ut oblationes consecratas per ecclesias ex consecratu episcopi dirigerentur, quod declaratur fermentum (*Liber Pontificalis* 33; “He appointed that consecrated offerings should be sent throughout the churches from the bishop’s consecration; these are called the leaven [*fermentum*]” [Loomis 1916, 41]).

Whereas, of Pope Siricius (384–399) the same source asserts:

Hic constituit ut nullus presbyter missas celebraret per omnem ebdomadam nisi consecratum episcopi loci designati susciperet declaratum, quod nominatur fermentum (*Liber Pontificalis* 40; “He ordained that no priest could perform masses during all the week, unless he received from the bishop of the particular district the consecrated sign which is called the leaven [*fermentum*]” [Loomis 1916, 41]).

Rather than questioning the presbyter’s right to celebrate Mass, the issue here would be to establish, for the *tituli*, a celebratory norm requiring the use of the *fermentum*.¹⁵ In other words, it is not that the *fermentum* was sent so that presbyters would not have the right to consecrate, as Nautin (1982, 521) thought, but presbyters were not to consecrate except by the use of the *fermentum*. It should also be noted that in both of the cited passages from the *Liber Pontificalis* there is an allusion to the Eucharistic celebration. In the first case it speaks of *oblationes consecratas per ecclesias* while, in the second case, of the presbyter celebrating masses throughout the week. The two texts, however, speak of a continuation link between the bishop’s Mass and the presbyteral Mass.

A confirmation from the recipients’ side that the *fermentum* was intended for the Eucharistic synaxis of the *tituli* is *Ordo Romanus* II (750–780). It also indicates the ritual moment when the *fermentum* is placed in the chalice.

Quando dici debet: Pax domini sit semper uobiscum, deportatur a subdiacono oblationario particula fermenti, quod ab apostolico consecratum est et datur archidiacono. Ille vero porrigit episcopo. At ille, consignando tribus vicibus et dicendo: Pax domini sit semper uobiscum, mittit in calice (*Ordo Romanus* II 6 [*Ordo Romanus* II 750–780]; “When it is time to say Pax domini sit semper vobiscum, a particle of the *fermentum*, which was

¹⁴ This is a kind of chronicle of the bishops of Rome and their activities, the first edition of which seems to have been made for Pope Felix IV, around 530. Reports contemporary with the compilation’s editors begin around 496. For earlier ones, however, there is a tendency to anticipate the origin of the various orders (Metzger 2015, 180).

¹⁵ Baldovin (2005, 49–50) also admits, as possible, this interpretation.

consecrated by the pope, is brought by the subdeacon oblationarius and is given to the archdeacon. He hands it to the bishop. And the bishop, signing [with it] three times and saying Pax domini sit semper vobiscum, puts it into the chalice.” [my own translation]).

The rite takes place, therefore, before the fraction of bread. In fact, in the next provision, the *ordo* gives the norms regarding the *fractio*.¹⁶ As the same *ordo* later confirms, an identical procedure is also observed when the Mass is presided over by a presbyter.

Similiter etiam et a presbitero agitur, quando in statione facit missas, preter Gloria in excelsis Deo, quia a presbitero non dicitur nisi in pascha (*Ordo Romanus* II 9 [*Ordo Romanus* II 750–780]; “It is done in a similar way also by the presbyter when he celebrates Masses in the station [churches], except for the Gloria in excelsis Deo, because it is not said by the presbyter except on Easter” [my own translation]).

Ordo Romanus IV (760–790) also alludes to the same rite, although the term *fermentum* does not explicitly appear there.

Et, dum dixerit: Pax domini sit semper vobiscum, tenet subdiaconus de Sancta cum corporale ad cornu altaris, quod pontifex consecravit, et accipit eam diaconus et tradit eam episcopo aut presbitero (*Ordo Romanus* IV 106 [*Ordo Romanus* IV 760–790]; “And while he says Pax domini sit semper vobiscum, the subdeacon holds the Sancta, consecrated by the pontiff, with the corporal at the corner of the altar, and the deacon receives it and hands it to the bishop or presbyter” [my own translation]).

Also reinforcing the idea that presbyters *in the tituli* presided over Eucharistic celebrations with the use of the *fermentum* is *Ordo Romanus* XXXB (ca. 770–800).

Ipsa nocte, omnes presbiteri cardinales non ibi stant, sed unusquisque per titulum suum facit missam et habet licentiam sedere in sede et dicere Gloria in excelsis Deo. Et transmittit unusquisque presbiter mansionarium de titulo suo ad ecclesiam Saluatoris et expectant ibi usquedum frangitur sancta, habentes secum corporales. Et uenit oblationarius subdiaconus et dat eis de sancta, quod pontifex consecrauit, et recipiunt ea in corporales et reuertitur unusquisque ad titulum suum et tradit sancta presbitero. Et de ipsa facit crucem super calicem et ponit in eo et dicit: Domnus uobiscum. Et communicant omnes sicut superius (*Ordo Romanus* XXXB 64–65 [*Ordo Romanus* XXXB, ca. 770–800]); “On that night, all the cardinal presbyters do not stay there, but each one says mass at his titular [church],

¹⁶ “Nam et hoc dissimiliter facit, quod apostolicus non confrangit; ipse vero super pallam, quae corporalis dicitur, in altare confrangit” (*Ordo Romanus* II 7 [*Ordo Romanus* II, ca. 750–780]; “For he does this differently, in that the *apostolicus* does not break it; he [the bishop] however, breaks it at the altar on the cloth which is called a corporal” [my own translation]).

and has permission to sit in the chair and say Gloria in excelsis Deo. And each presbyter sends the mansionarium from his titular [church] to the church of the Savior and [they] wait there until the sancta is broken, having corporals with them. And the subdeacon oblationarius comes and gives them of the sancta which the pontiff has consecrated, and they received it in the corporals and each one returns to his titular [church] and hands the sancta to the presbyter. He then, with the sancta, makes the sign of the cross over the chalice and places [the sancta] in it and says: Domnus vobiscum. And all communicate as indicated above” [my own translation]).

In this case it is an *ordo* describing the conduct of the Easter Vigil, which, according to the law of the preservation of ancient customs in the celebrations of more solemn liturgical seasons, would reflect a very ancient usage (Baumstark 1927). Despite the absence in the *ordo* of the term *fermentum*, the reference to the same practice is clear, however. What makes the ministry of presiding clearly explicit is the fact that presbyters in the *tituli* may occupy the chair and sing the *Gloria*.¹⁷

In the motivation for sending the *fermentum* to the presbyters in the *tituli*, Pope Innocent I says in his Decretal: “ut se a nostra comunione maxime illa die non iudicent separatos” (Innocentius 1983, 26–28 [Innocent I, March 19, 416]; “so that they do not find themselves separated from our communion on that great day” [Connell 2010, 39]). It is, therefore, a sign of communion between him and the presbyters. It is guaranteed through the *fermentum*. As noted by Metzger (2015, 383), in the context of the Church of Rome, the manifestation of communion between the bishop and the presbyters was important because of the heterogeneity of the Christian communities present in the city and the influx of various religious groups. In fact, the two cited *Liber Pontificalis* records also contain some clues about conflicting situations: alongside the mention of the *fermentum*, dissidents called Manicheans are mentioned.¹⁸

Innocent I, responding to Decentius on the issue of *fermentum*, says that this practice should not be applied in the extra-urban context.¹⁹ The clear distinction between *tituli* and *parrochiae* appears in the Decretal. These are two different modes of ecclesial organization. The former is typically urban,²⁰ while the latter is rural

¹⁷ On this see also Parenti 2008, 201–12.

¹⁸ For example, the part of the *Liber Pontificalis* that refers to Pope Siricius, after speaking of the *fermentum*, says: “Hic invenit Manicheos in Urbe, quos etiam exilio deportavit; et hoc constituit ut si quis conversus de Manicheis rediret ad ecclesiam nullatenus communicaretur, nisi tantum religatione monasterii die vitae suae teneretur obnoxius et ut ieiuniis et orationibus maceratus, probatus sub omni examinatione usque ad ultimum diem transitus sui, ut humanitatem ecclesiae viaticum eis largiatur” (*Liber Pontificalis* 40; “He found Manicheans in the city and dispatched them into exile and ordained that if any Manichean were converted and returned to the church he should in no wise be admitted to communion, except he were kept in the restriction of a monastery as one guilty every day of his life, that so he might afflict himself with fastings and prayers and prove himself under every trial until the day of his death and thus through the clemency of the church might obtain his viaticum” [Loomis 1916, 84]).

¹⁹ In fact, the pope tells Decentius that all his churches are located within the city (Innocentius 1973, 26–28).

²⁰ On this type, see e.g., Baldovin 1987.

(Metzger 2015, 235–36; Burini De Lorenzi 2017, 20, n. 45). The *fermentum* concerns only the *tituli* and they are all located within the city. What can be deduced from Innocent's Letter to Decentius is that the link of the bishop of Rome with the presbytery of the *tituli* is, in a way, more direct, than that of the bishop of a rural area with the parishes.²¹ The idea of a particular (more direct) dependence of the titular churches on the pope is discernible from the source. In Rome this link was manifested in the stationary liturgy (Metzger 2015, 376–79; Chavasse 1993, 231–46; Baldovin 1987, 105–66) and through the use of the *fermentum*.

The complex sociocultural and religious situation in *Urbe* leads us to think that this kind of direct jurisdiction of the pope originally concerned only the titular churches and then also the common basilicas. Meanwhile, on the other hand, monasteries as well as other places of worship, such as churches attached to cemeteries or in rural areas, were managed more autonomously.

According to Metzger (2002, 204; 2015, 383), the practice of sending the *fermentum*, as it was linked to the pope's presence at the Eucharistic synaxis, must certainly have been interrupted for various reasons, especially during times of the *sede vacante* or periods when more than one pretender claimed the right to the See of Peter. However, the gloss to the *Decretal* of Innocent I to Decentius in a Regensburg manuscript found by Mabillon (Andrieu 1971, 62) seems to suggest that, at least from a certain period onward, the consecration of the *fermentum* throughout the year took place during five solemn masses. It cannot be ruled out that this practice was designed to ensure a reserve of the *fermentum* for the *sede vacante* periods as well.

De fermento quod dicit [Innocentius], mos est Romanis, ut de Missa, quae cantatur in Coena Domini, et in Sabbato sancto, et in die sancto Paschae, et in Pentecosten, et in Natali Domini die sancto per totum annum servatur, et ubicumque per stationes, si ipse Papa ad Missam praesens non fuerit, de ipsa Missa mittitur in calicem, cum dicit: Pax domini sit semper vobiscum. Et hoc dicitur Fermentum (Mabillon 1685, 60–61) [manuscript of Regensburg found by Mabillon]; “About the *fermentum*: [Innocent] says that it is the custom of the Romans, just as in the Mass that is sung on Holy Thursday, and on Holy Saturday, and on the holy day of Easter, and on Pentecost, and on the holy day of the Nativity of the Lord, and throughout the entire year, and in any of the stationary [churches] if the pope himself is not present at Mass, that from the same Mass [it] is placed in the chalice when he says: Pax domini sit semper vobiscum. And this is called *fermentum*” [my own translation]).

As time went on, the practice would be restricted to major occasions only. Its preservation in the Easter Vigil, in addition to *Ordo Romanus XXXB* (64–65), still

²¹ In the early Middle Ages, a certain independence of the parishes is known. In their case, in order to understand with which bishop, they were in communion, it was necessary to see from where the provost priest of a parish took the Sacred Chrism. I thank Professor Claudio Ubaldo Cortoni for this suggestion.

results from the same gloss in the Regensburg manuscript, found by Mabillon (Andrieu 1971, 62).

Tamen Sabbato sancto Paschae nullus Presbyter per ecclesias baptismales neminem communicat, antequam mittatur ei de ipsa Sancta, quam obtulit dominus Papa (Mabillon 1685, 61) [manuscript of Regensburg found by Mabillon]; “However, on Holy Saturday of Easter, no priest gives communion to anyone in the baptismal churches, before there is sent to him that which le lord pope offered, frome the same sancta” [my own translation]).

A record found in the Roman *Capitulare evangeliorum* (ca. 740–755) could be considered an indirect confirmation of this. It preserves, in fact, a particular rubric that speaks of the distribution of *fermentum* at the Lateran on the Saturday before Palm Sunday:

Sabbato datur fermentum in consistorio Lateranensi (Klauser 1972, 69; 110) [*Capitulare evangeliorum*, ca. 740–755]; “On Saturday, the *fermentum* is given in the Lateran consistory” [my own translation].²²

In all likelihood, this distribution was in preparation for the celebration on Easter night, which still maintained the ancient use of *fermentum*.

2. A Special Custom in Ordination Rites: Later Development of the Same Idea?

Although the rite of *fermentum* is linked to the specific kind of the rite of *commixtio* within the Roman ecclesiastical organization, the idea that consecrated bread could serve to be destined for later celebrations also spread outside of *Urbe*. At first it is attested in the ancient *ordines* concerning the rite of episcopal ordination. Thus, *Ordo Romanus XXXIV* (first half of the 8th century), speaks of a portion of the altar oblations being reserved by the newly ordained, after taking communion, for communion during the next 40 days.

Dum vero venerit ad communicandum, domnus apostolicus porrigit ei formatam atque sacratam oblationem et, eam suscipiens, ipse episcopus ex ea communicat super altare et caeterum ex ea sibi reservat ad communicandum usque ad dies quadraginta (*Ordo Romanus XXXIV* 44 [*Ordo Romanus XXXIV*, mid 8th century]; “When [the bishop] comes to receive communion, the apostolic lord hands him the large and consecrated oblation, and

²² See also Jungmann 1962, 444–45.

receiving it, the bishop communicates from it on the altar, and reserves the rest of it for himself for communicating for 40 days” [my own translation]).

Since this is an episcopal ordination mass, according to the law of preservation of ancient customs in the most solemn celebrations (Taft 2001, 206–8), the antiquity of this custom can be assumed. A Roman-Franco adaptation of the same *ordo* from the first half of the 10th century contains a reworking of this arrangement.

Cum autem venerit ad communicandum, domnus pontifex porrigit ei formatam atque sacram oblationem integram, suscipiensque eam episcopus ipse ex ea communicat super altare. Quod vero residuum fuerit, sibi reservat de eo quoque die usque quadraginta dies expletos (*Ordo Romanus XXXV* 73 [*Ordo Romanus XXXV*, ca. 900–950]; “But when he comes to receive communion, the lord pontiff hands him the entire large and consecrated oblation, and the bishop receiving it, communicates from it on the altar. But what remains, he reserves for himself from that day until forty days have elapsed” [my own translation]).

In this form it entered the 10th-century Roman-Germanic Pontifical (*Pontificale Romano-Germanicum* 1963, 63.58). In contrast, a further reworked version appears in almost all recensions of the Roman Pontifical of the 12th century.

Cum autem venerit ad communicandum, domnus pontifex porrigit ipsi [ei] consecrato sacram oblationem integram, suscipiensque eam episcopus ex ea communicat super altare. Quod vero residuum fuerit, sibi reservat denuo ad communicandum unoquoque die, usque XL dies expletos (*Pontificale Romanum saeculi XII* 1938, 10.36 [*Roman Pontifical*, 12th century]; “But when he comes to receive communion, the lord pontiff hands him the entire sacred oblation, and the bishop receiving it, communicates from it on the altar. But what remains, he reserves for himself for communicating again every day until 40 days have elapsed” [my own translation]).²³

This version of the rubric was transcribed in the first edition of the Pontifical of the Roman Curia in the 13th century although, as Michel Andrieu (1974, 587–88) notes, the provision was no longer observed. In fact, it was permanently omitted in the second edition of this liturgical book (*Pontificale Romanae Curiae* 1938, 11.37). In some 12th-century pontificals, this practice is indicated as optional (Andrieu 1974, 588).

The custom of reserving a portion of the oblations from the ordination mass for communion on the following days is also attested in the case of newly ordained presbyters. In fact, as early as the late 8th century, *Ordo Romanus XXXIX* stipulates

²³ See also Tymister 2017, 86–88.

that the newly ordained receive oblations from the altar from the bishop for communion during the next 40 days.

Deinde offerunt pontifici ante omnes presbiteros et communicant similiter eodem die ante omnes. Et accipit unusquisque a pontifice firmata oblata de altare, unde et communicat XL diebus (*Ordo Romanus XXXIX* 25 [*Ordo Romanus XXXIX*, late 8th century]; “Then they offer [it] to the pontiff before all the presbyters and they communicate in the same way on that day before all the rest. And each one receives from the pontiff a firmata oblata from the altar, from which he communicates for forty days” [my own translation]).

Fulbert of Chartres (died in 1028), in a letter addressed to his friend Eginard in 1006, confirms the actual implementation of this practice. Responding to the question, posed to him by Eginard, regarding the reasons for such a custom,²⁴ he states that it is the general usage in the province²⁵ and reports the case of a newly-ordained priest who, imprudent as he was, one day, while clearing the altar after Mass, lost the consecrated bread, received on the day of his ordination, only realizing it the next day, when he was to take communion.²⁶ The bishop,

24 “Ante hos paucos dies ut meminisse licet, mihi vespertinis horis supervenisti, et repentina inquisitione me permovisti, de hostia quam paulo ante promotus ad sacerdotium de manu episcopi suscepisti: quae ratio sit, videlicet usque ad quadragesimam diem usu quotidiano consumere, vel quos huius rei auctores haberemus” (Fulbertus Carnotensis, *Epistula* 3 [PL 141, 193a] [Fulbert of Chartres, 1006]; “A few days ago, as I may recall, you came to me in the evening hours, and disturbed me with an unexpected inquiry concerning the host which, shortly before, promoted to the priesthood, you received by the hand of the bishop: what the reason is, namely, for the daily custom of consuming [it] up until the fortieth day, and whom we should consider the originators of this custom?” [my own translation]).

25 “Nostri enim episcopi provinciales in huiusmodi ritum omnes consentiunt” (Fulbertus Carnotensis, *Epistula* 3 [PL 141, 193c] [Fulbert of Chartres, 1006]; “For our provincial bishops all agree about this kind of rite” [my own translation]).

26 “Porro nostro tempore quidam inter caeteros ad sacerdotalem gradum admissus, hostiam quoque sicut et alii de manu episcopi suscepit, quam in pergamento, in hos usus parato involutam quotidiana celebratione solvebat, et portiuunculam parvam, iuxta instantium dierum numerum computatam sumebat. Accidit vero ut quadam die expletis mysteriis dum vestimenta cum sindone altaris incautius colligeret, inmemor hostiae sacrae diligentiam nequaquam adhibens thesaurum coelestem infelix amitteret. Veniens ad diversorium, quaeque necessaria curat, transigitur dies in crastinum, repetita celebratione frater ille instante hora communicandi hostiam sanctam non inveniens, turbatus nimium et consternatus, sursum deorsum cursitans, nec etiam signum aliquod invenire potuit” (Fulbertus Carnotensis, *Epistula* 3 [PL 141, 193–94] [Fulbert of Chartres, 1006]; “Moreover, in our time, a certain [person] among the others admitted to the priestly rank, also received the host from the hand of the bishop, like the others, which he used to keep wrapped in a parchment, prepared for this purpose, for the daily celebration, and he would take a small piece, calculated according to the number of the passing days. Now it happened that on a certain day, the mysteries having been completed, while he carelessly gathered together the vestments with the altar cloth, forgetting the sacred host, nor taking any care, he unhappily lost the heavenly treasure. Arriving at the inn, he takes care of the necessary business, and the day passes to the next. The celebration having been

in that case, had to impose a penance on him. It was on that very occasion that Fulbert questioned the bishop about the significance of the practice of the newly ordained priest's use for 40 days of the bread consecrated by the bishop on the day of his ordination. The bishop replied to Fulbert that this usage is related to the Risen One who, before sending his disciples on their preaching mission, appeared to them for 40 days. So too did the bishop, sending priests to the mission, offer them the Eucharistic bread.²⁷ To Fulbert's next question whether this bread provided by the bishop could be replaced by the bread consecrated by the same presbyter in the daily celebration,²⁸ the bishop replied:

Perpende, ait, sicut, fili mi, multae Ecclesiae sunt per universum orbem terrarum, propter diversa loca, et tamen una sancta est catholica Ecclesia, propter unam fidem: sic et multae oblatae propter vota offerentium, unus panis est propter unitatem corporis Christi. Nam panis ab episcopo consecratus, et panis a presbytero sanctificatus in unum et idem corpus Christi transfunditur, propter secretam unius operantis potentiae virtutem (Fulbertus Carnotensis, *Epistula* 3 [PL 141, 194c] [Fulbert of Chartres, 1006]; "Consider my son, he said, that just as there are many churches throughout the world, because of diverse places, and yet there is one, holy and catholic Church because of one faith: so also, while there are many oblations because of the prayers of those offering, there is one bread because of the

repeated, that brother at the very moment of communicating, not finding the holy host, was greatly troubled and distressed, running up and down, but he could not find any sign of it" [my own translation]).

²⁷ "Si discipulis quos ad praedicationis officium Dominus missurus in mundum fuerat, si illis inquiring, adhuc tardis et dubitantibus potuisset sufficere resuscitati corporis speciem semel vidisse, quam semel visam noluit ab eis repente subtrahere, sed per quadragenos dies complacitis horis glorificati corporis revelata specie eos tanquam panis coelestis suavitate refecit. Nam et episcopus qui vices Christi tenet, sacerdotales viros in plebem subiectam missurus, sacri corporis eucharistiam per quadragenos dies sumendam distribuit, ut dum, verbi gratia, quotidie coelestis panis alimonia reficiuntur, tempus illud in mentem habeant, quo per quadraginta dies Dominus discipulis apparens, et convescens desideratae visionis satietate refecit" (Fulbertus Carnotensis, *Epistula* 3 [PL 141, 194] [Fulbert of Chartres, 1006]; "The Lord, talking with those, slow [to believe] and doubting, whom he was about to send into the world for the office of preaching—if only it had been sufficient for them to have seen once for all the form of his risen body! [But] once having been seen, he did not want to suddenly take away it from them. For forty days, at suitable times, in a revealed form, he refreshed them as if by the sweetness of heavenly bread. Now the bishop who holds the place of Christ, about to send his men, the priests, among the people subject [to him], distributed the Eucharist of the sacred body to be received for forty days, so that while, e.g., they are daily refreshed by the nourishment of heavenly bread, they might keep in mind that time, in which for forty days, the Lord, appearing to his disciples and eating with them, refreshed [them] with the abundance of the desired vision" [my own translation]).

²⁸ "Ad hoc episcopi responsum, cum ego familiaritatis ausu studiosus perquirerem num idem mysterium supplere potuisset panis a presbytero quotidiana celebratione sacratus, uti in eo passionis Dominica et resuscitati corporis et manifestati discipulis species, satis fuisset nobis" (Fulbertus Carnotensis, *Epistula* 3 [PL 141, 194c] [Fulbert of Chartres, 1006]; "To this the response of the bishop would be sufficient for us: when I, eager with the boldness of familiarity asked whether the bread consecrated by the presbyters [priests] in the daily celebration could accomplish the same mystery as in that [consecrated by the bishop]: [namely] the Lord's form [species] of the passion, [and] the body resurrected and manifested to the disciples" [my own translation]).

unity of the body of Christ. For the bread consecrated by the bishop and the bread sanctified by the presbyter are transformed into one and the same body of Christ, because of the secret force of the one operating power” [my own translation]).²⁹

The theme of the unity of the Church, which is expressed in the Eucharist, emerges in the explanation. Fulbertus also confesses the provenance of these explanations from the *scrinium* of Rome.³⁰ As Andrieu (1974, 588) notes, the influence of Fulbertus’ Letter can be recognized in some later liturgical books.

In fact, a 12th-century manuscript of the *Pontifical of Soissons* contains the following rubric:

Debent presbiteri portiones Dominici Corporis ab episcopo accipere, de quibus percipiant communionem per quadraginta dies in exemplum Domini Nostri Iesu Christi, qui quadraginta diebus cum suis discipulis conversatus est post resurrectionem suam (ms. Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, lat. 17334, f. 140 [*Pontificale Suessionense*, 12th century]; “Priests should receive portions of the Lord’s Body from the bishop, from which they receive communion for forty days, according to the example of Our Lord Jesus Christ, who spent forty days with his disciples after his resurrection” [my own translation]).³¹

A variant of the custom, attested as early as the late 9th century in *Ordo Romanus XXXVI*, stipulates, however, that the oblations received from the bishop, are to serve the newly ordained priests only for 8 days.

Tollit vero pontifex oblatas integras et dat singulis noviciis presbiteris et inde communicantur usque dies VIII (*Ordo Romanus XXXVI* 23 [*Ordo Romanus XXXVI*, late 9th century]; “The bishop then takes the whole oblations and gives them to each of the newly-ordained priests, and from there they receive communion until the eighth day” [my own translation]).

In the same period, a similar practice would also be attested in the case of the consecration of virgins, as evidenced by a Pontifical of Saint-Aubin d’Angers also from the late 9th century (Leroquais 1937, 30).³² The prescription appears again in

²⁹ See also Fulbertus Carnotensis, *Epistula* 3 [PL 141, 195c].

³⁰ “Haec pauca de multis, quae repetita memoria, et multo ex tempore dissuta licet recitasse, ad praesens sufficient, dum ego codicem de eiusmodi exemplaribus a Romano scrinio prolatum perlegam” (Fulbertus Carnotensis, *Epistula* 3 [PL 141, 195d] [Fulbert of Chartres, 1006]; “Let these few (out of many) [examples] which have been recounted, repeated from memory, and unused for a long time, suffice for now, while I examine the book taken from the roman archives from exemplars of this kind” [my own translation]).

³¹ See also Martène 1967b, 141. The same rubric also appears a century later, in a Pontifical of Châlons-sur-Marne of the late 13th century (Leroquais 1937, 123).

³² Later this usage also appears in some 10th-century Roman-Germanic Pontifical (Andrieu 1974, 590–591).

the Roman Pontifical of the 12th century.³³ It will, then, be omitted in the Pontifical of the Roman Curia of the 13th century (Andrieu 1974, 591; Jungmann 1962, 450–451).

3. *Fermentum* in the Papal Mass?

The *recensio longior* of the oldest *ordo* of the solemn papal mass, contained by *Ordo Romanus* I (Andrieu 1971, 7–27), in addition to the *commixtio* that the pope performs between communion at the bread and communion at the chalice (already present in the short recension of the same *ordo*), includes another *immixtio*, which the pope performs before the breaking of the bread, at the words *Pax domini sit semper vobiscum*.³⁴

The provision suggests, then, that the pope, in addition to sending a fragment of the bread to the other Eucharistic assemblies, ritually reproduced the use of the *fermentum* in the Mass he presided over. Despite the fact that the text of *Ordo Romanus* I does not contain the term *fermentum*, however, the rite turns out to be entirely parallel to that mentioned in *Ordo Romanus* II.³⁵ Being placed before the fraction, the rubric assumes the use of a fragment of the bread consecrated at an earlier Mass. This possibility cannot be ruled out since, as *Ordo Romanus* I itself states, at the beginning of the Mass, at the moment of the entrance, the pope or deacon is presented with the *Sancta*.

Et tunc duo acolyti, tenentes capsas cum Sancta apertas, et subdiaconus sequens cum ipsis tenens manum suam in ore capsae ostendit Sancta pontifici vel diacono qui processerit. Tunc, inclinato capite, pontifex vel diaconus salutatur Sancta et contemplatur ut, si fuerit superabundans, praecipiat ut ponatur in conditorio (*Ordo Romanus* I 48 [*Ordo Romanus* I, first half of the 8th century]; “Then two acolytes approach, holding open pyxes containing the holy sacrament. The subdeacon in attendance takes them, holding them by the rim of

³³ “Postquam communicet [virgo], reseruet de ipsa communione unde communicavit usque in diem octavam” (Pontificale Romanae Curiae 1938, 12.35 [Pontifical of the Roman Curia, XIII sec.]; “After [the virgin] receives communion, let her reserve [a part] from that communion from which she communicated, until the eighth day” [my own translation]).

³⁴ “Cum dixerit: Pax domini sit semper vobiscum, mittit in calicem de Sancta” (*Ordo Romanus* I 95; “When [the pope] says *Pax domini sit semper vobiscum*, he places [a piece] from the *sancta* into the chalice” [my own translation]).

³⁵ “Quando dici debet: Pax domini sit semper vobiscum, deportatur a subdiacono oblationario particula fermenti, quod ab apostolico consecratum est et datur archidiacono. Ille vero porrigit episcopo. At ille, consignando tribus vicibus et dicendo: Pax domini sit semper vobiscum, mittit in calice” (*Ordo Romanus* II 6 [*Ordo Romanus* II 750–780]; “When he says *Pax domini sit semper vobiscum*, a particle of the *fermentum* which was consecrated by the apostolic [pope], is brought by the subdeacon oblationario, and is given to the archdeacon. He in turn offers it to the bishop. And he, signing with it three times and saying *Pax domini sit semper vobiscum*, places it in the chalice” [my own translation]).

the pyx and shows the sacrament to the pope or to the deacon who precedes him. Then the pope or deacon venerate the sacrament with a bow of the head and he inspects it, so that if there are too many fragments, he will direct that they be placed in the vessel for reservation” [Griffiths 2012, 39]).

In addition to this, the short recension of *Ordo Romanus* I also contains a rule by which it explains the fact that when the oblations are taken away from the altar, the piece of bread broken by the pope is still left behind.

Et archidiaconus, evacuato altare oblationibus, preter particulam quam pontifex de propria oblatione confracta super altare reliquit, quia ita observant, ut, dum missarum sollemnia peraguntur, altare sine sacrificio non sit (*Ordo Romanus* I 105 [*Ordo Romanus* I, recensio brevior, first half of the 8th century]; “[The archdeacon] once the altar has been cleared of the loaves, except for the fragment which the pope himself broke off his own loaf and left on the altar they do this so that, while the mass is being celebrated, the altar should not be without the sacrifice” [Griffiths 2012, 53]).

In this configuration, however, the custom cannot be explained by the words of Innocent I, who justified sending the *fermentum* to the presbyters in the *tituli* by saying, “ut se a nostra comunione maxime illa die non iudicent separatos” (Innocentius 1983, 26 [Innocent I, March 19, 416]; “so that they do not find themselves separated from our communion on that great day” [Connell 2010, 39]). Unlike that practice, the rite present in the long recension of *Ordo Romanus* seems to emphasize the link between one Mass and the next, with a view to a continuity of the Eucharistic celebration. Already Mabillon³⁶ read this provision in such a way.

It should be noted that the *recensio longior* of the *Ordo Romanus* I turns out to be the only attestation of the *immixtio*, in the mass presided over by the pope, of a piece of the bread consecrated in the previous mass, before the *fractio*, at the words *Pax domini sit semper vobiscum*. In fact, the short (primitive) recension of the same *ordo*, does not provide for any *commixtio* at this point of the Mass, but only a triple sign of the cross with the hand (*Ordo Romanus* I 95).

The long recension of *Ordo Romanus* I is the one that became most widespread, as evidenced by the multiplicity of manuscripts collected by Andrieu (1971, 4–5). It is this one, which Amalarius of Metz (died in 859) also comments on in his *Liber*

³⁶ “Constat itaque duplice Eucharistiae particulam fuisse immisam in calicem, unam ex priori (ut quidem opinor) consecratione, alteram ex praesente. Cur autem particula ex Eucharistia asservata immissa fuerit in calicem? fortasse ut sacrificii unita set perpetuitas hoc ritu inculcetur” (Mabillon 1862, 869–70; “It is certain, then, that a double part of the Eucharist was placed into the chalice: one from the first consecration (as I think), the other from the present [consecration]. Why then is a particle from the reserved Eucharist placed into the chalice? Perhaps so that by this rite, the unity and perpetuity of the sacrifice might be emphasized” [my own translation]).

officialis. However, on the basis of our considerations (Celiński 2020, 314–25), it would appear that the double *immixtio* present in the *recensio longior* of *Ordo Romanus* I was the result of a fusion of two distinct traditions of the Mass: of the papal and the non-papal. The operation could be the consequence of a compilation into which various types of sources converged—an entirely plausible hypothesis in the case of the formation of the *Roman ordines*. In fact, while *Ordo Romanus* IV 106–7 glosses over the existence of any *commixtio* at this point of the Mass, *Ordo Romanus* VII, compiled during the 8th century, explicitly says that the pope does not perform any *commixtio* at that time as, on the contrary, some priests do.

Dum vero dominus papa dicit: Pax domini sit semper vobiscum, non mittit partem de Sancta in calicem, sicut caeteris sacerdotibus mos est (*Ordo Romanus* VII 22 [*Ordo Romanus* VII, 8th century]; “Now when the lord pope says: Pax domini sit semper vobiscum, he does not place part of the sancta in the chalice, as is the custom for other priests” [my own translation]).

In this, as well as in other cases, *Ordo Romanus* VII explicitly agrees with the primitive version of *Ordo Romanus* I.

The papal liturgy did not preserve, even later, any trace of the *commixtio* before the fraction of bread. While *commixtio* immediately after the *Pax domini sit semper vobiscum* was widespread in the non-papal Mass, even in the 14th century the papal Mass retains only *commixtio* after the pope’s communion of the bread and explicitly excludes any admixture to the *Pax domini*, as the Missal of Clement V (died in 1314) attests (Celiński 2022, 118–20).

On the one hand, it is difficult to determine whether the *commixtio* at the *Pax domini* in the *recensio longior* of the *Ordo Romanus* I is only a textual variant, or whether this practice was also ritually performed in the papal mass, at least at one period in history. On the other hand, however, confirming the doubt from the very beginning is Amalarius of Metz (died in 859) himself, who showed serious difficulties in understanding the double *commixtio* of the long recension of *Ordo Romanus* I (Amalarius Metensis 1948, 3.31.7; Celiński 2020, 314).

Conclusions

In light of the arguments advanced by Baldovin, which draw upon the positions of Nautin, Saxer, and Taft, a critical re-examination of the relevant sources does not support the claim that presbyters in 5th-century Rome were unable to preside at the Eucharist, and consequently that the *fermentum* was not intended for Eucharistic assemblies. On the contrary, the broader evidence indicates that the presbyter’s faculty

to celebrate (or offer) the Eucharist was acknowledged from the earliest tradition of the Church.

The reflections presented in the first part of this study have made it possible to identify the defining characteristics of the use of the *fermentum*. In general, it consisted in sending a portion of the Eucharistic bread consecrated by the bishop to a celebration presided over by a presbyter, as a sign of communion within the local Church. On the basis of these criteria, the second part examined several examples of later extra-urban customs which, although differing in form, appear to have conveyed a similar idea.

The third part addressed the hypothesis of a presumed continuity between successive celebrations in the ancient papal Mass. This notion, originally proposed by Mabillon, was thought to rest upon the practice of a double *commixtio*: first, the mingling of a fragment of Eucharistic bread from the preceding celebration, and subsequently, that of a fragment consecrated during the ongoing liturgy. A critical analysis of the sources, considered within their broader context, leads to the rejection of this hypothesis. The practice of a double *commixtio* is attested in no other liturgical tradition and in no external source independent of the *recensio longior* of the *Ordo Romanus* I. The latter, rather, appears to contain a textual interpolation, which may be explained by the coexistence of two distinct modes of *commixtio* within ancient Roman liturgical practice.

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Intergenerational Transmission of Values Among Three Generations of Polish Women: The Moderating Role of Religiosity

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Abstract: This article examines the intergenerational transmission of values in Polish families, focusing on three generations of women: grandmothers, mothers, and daughters. The point of departure is the axiological transformations observed in European societies, particularly the processes of secularization and individualization. The study involved 417 women from 139 three-generational families, in which the hierarchy of values was analyzed using Max Scheler's theory. The findings reveal an increase in the importance of hedonistic and esthetic values across successive generations, accompanied by a decline in the significance of religious and secular sacred values. In religious families, however, the pace of these changes proved slower, with greater intergenerational similarity in value systems. Religiosity emerged as a significant moderator in the dynamics of axiological transformation. On this basis, the article draws pastoral conclusions that emphasize the need to support families in the process of religious and moral education. The results contribute to the broader discourse on value change in post-traditional societies, providing both a foundation for pastoral reflection and a point of departure for further interdisciplinary research.

Keywords: intergenerational transmission, values, religiosity, three-generational family, family pastoral care

The issue of social and cultural change is an area of contemporary interdisciplinary research. A particular focus of this research is the transformation of the value system and the related life-changing decisions of successive generations (Hofstede 2007, 12). The older generation is concerned with passing on the principles and rules of social, civic, and family functioning to the younger generation, which for centuries has determined the path and conditioned both the existence and identity of individual communities, societies, and nations (Budzyńska 2016, 23; Sikora and Górnik-Durose 2013).

The existing living conditions are associated with the rapid acceleration of civilizational progress, as expressed in the rapid exchange of information concerning the achievements of individual cultures in terms of world view, religion, beliefs, values, and priorities (Budzyńska 2016, 23; cf. Rudnik 2014; Popielski 2008, 7–9). The transmission of values formerly passed on within the family in isolation from the rest of the world is becoming unstable, having to compete with conflicting messages and,

as a result, ceasing to be the seed of fundamental truth developed over generations (cf. Farnicka and Liberska 2014, 185–202; Liberska and Matuszewska 2014, 115–19). Currently, Polish society prefers the nuclear family model to the multigenerational family model of the past, which further weakens the transfer of values from the grandparents' generation to the grandchildren's generation (Liberska and Matuszewska 2014, 117).

For this reason, in pastoral theology and its subdiscipline, family ministry (Kamiński 2013, 24), it is necessary to empirically verify the current mechanisms of value transmission. Determining both the direction of changes in the hierarchy of values and the importance of religiosity for the stabilization of intergenerational transmission is valuable knowledge on the basis of which we can formulate pastoral conclusions concerning a better understanding of the directions in which the younger generation is heading, the importance of particular values in their lives, and the role of previous generations in their transmission. It is imperative to understand the mechanisms of transmission by women in order to adequately plan educational and development programs in the work of family counselors and pastors, and for the exercise of pastoral ministry as necessary in situations of intergenerational crises expressed by the radical break of the younger generation from the moral and religious values that have been meticulously cultivated by previous generations of Polish families (Wałęcka-Matyja 2022, 65).

This article aims to deepen knowledge about the changes occurring in the intergenerational transmission of values and to outline the basis for creating programs that support families in effectively transmitting values and fostering intergenerational cohesion.

1. The Sociocultural Significance of Values: An Interdisciplinary Approach

Values are beliefs that relate to desired goals or behaviors that extend beyond routine, everyday situations (Wojciszke 2014, 546). They shape both the decision-making and the evaluation of events or attitudes, and are organized into a hierarchy that reflects their relative importance to the individual. Values are the subject of various philosophical and theological concepts and the focus of empirical research in the social sciences. Values play a fundamental role in shaping individual and collective identity, form the basis of moral norms, regulate social relations, and guide human actions (Frankl 1984, 19).

Philosophers ask questions about the nature of values, their origin, hierarchy, and role in the lives of individuals and communities (Gołaszewska 2008, 81). Axiological discourse was undertaken as an attempt to organize the categories of values,

developing increasingly complex classifications of values. Max Scheler considered values to be ideal entities, existing objectively, independently of the cognizing subject. He proposed a classification that divided values into four broad categories: (1) hedonistic values (pleasures and pains); (2) utilitarian values (related to life and health); (3) spiritual values (truth, beauty, moral good); and (4) religious values (the highest, concerning holiness). The author believed that this hierarchy is objective and that the cognition of values requires appropriate emotional and spiritual “openness.” (Scheler 1973, 9) Referring to this theory, Józef Tischner noted that values continually organize an individual’s relationship with God and other people. Values are not abstract entities, but always embody a specific life situation (cf. Tischner 1993, 7–16).

The popes of our time have emphasized the need to cultivate universal human values as the essence of pastoral work. The resulting encyclicals and papal works address moral, social, and spiritual values in both individual and social dimensions. In his encyclicals *Veritatis Splendor* (cf. John Paul II 1993) and *Evangelium Vitae* (cf. John Paul II 1995), John Paul II presents moral values as inalienable, emphasizing, above all, the dignity of the human person and the value of life as the foundation of morality. *Fides et Ratio* (cf. John Paul II 1998) further organizes the relationship between faith and reason in today’s world, emphasizing the importance of truth, knowledge, and meaning, as well as the value of dialogue between science, which serves humanity, and faith, which safeguards its dignity. The successors of John Paul II emphasize Christian values as the core of European culture, while acknowledging the threat posed to them by pervasive relativism (cf. Benedict XVI 2005; Francis 2015, 2016, 2020).

In Christian theology, values are primarily associated with ethics and the revealed truth about human dignity. Values are understood as moral signposts leading to the ultimate good, which is God, who is the ultimate value (Szymik 2008, 97–99).

Values in social sciences are treated as stimuli for all actions, motivations, belief systems, and cultural norms. In psychological terms, Milton Rokeach proposed dividing values into: (1) terminal values (life goals, e.g., happiness, freedom); (2) instrumental values (ways of acting, e.g., honesty, responsibility) (Rokeach 1973, 11). Shalom H. Schwartz developed a universal theory of values, distinguishing ten types of universal values (including kindness, tradition, power, and self-transcendence), and characterizing their interrelationships (cf. Schwartz 1992, 46–65). In turn, the sociological approach, as represented by Talcott Parsons, analyzes values as an element of the cultural system that regulates the actions of individuals, or values as symbolic capital transmitted through habitus (cf. Parsons 2013, 536–45; Bourdieu 1990, 25–29). Determining the values of a given society allows us to define the direction in which that society is heading (Kapica-Curzytek 2024, 237). In an interdisciplinary context, it is also important to refer to the multitude of pedagogical concepts that highlight the role of education as a process of shaping a hierarchy of values in accordance with the norms and traditions accepted by society (Lewowicki 2015, 7).

To summarize the interdisciplinary perspective, it is worth noting that the realization of values is deeply rooted in the axiological structure of human beings, and this structure determines their understanding of the meaning of life. Philosophy, theology, and social sciences offer a rich conceptual apparatus for analyzing values. Their common denominator is the recognition that values shape human life, decisions, and relationships. The theories of Scheler, Schwartz, and Tischner are particularly useful for research on the intergenerational transmission of values, as they enable the analysis of both the objective hierarchy of values and their subjective experience and transmission. Scheler's model of values considers individual values universally as objective entities, known and discovered by a person through acts of intuition (cf. Perz 2020, 77–78). Piotr Brzozowski used Scheler's concept to construct a catalog of values and measure them using the Scheler Value Scale (SVS) (cf. Brzozowski 1995). Scheler's catalog of values, derived from philosophy, provides the original basis for describing the universalism of values in the context of interdisciplinary research methodology, thus providing greater opportunities for measuring and interpreting results.

2. Intergenerational Transmission of Secular and Religious Values in the Family

Intergenerational transmission is considered one of the fundamental processes shaping both individual and family identity. Many studies have shown significant similarities in the construction of identity between generations within a family, with the greatest similarities between parents and children, followed by grandparents and grandchildren (Sabatier and Lannegrand-Willems 2005, 378–79; Halicka 2014, 127–29).

The intergenerational transmission of values within the family is a complex process that involves not only parents and children, but also grandparents, who exert both direct and indirect influences. As Marinus H. Van Ijzendoorn points out, transmission within the family occurs both genetically and socially—through support, socialization, and modeling of behavior, which the author refers to as the “socialization of the socializing person.” (Van Ijzendoorn 1992, 76) Family values and identity can be transmitted from grandparents to grandchildren directly or through parents, and can also be transformed under the influence of sociocultural conditions. This phenomenon fits into a broader theoretical context, analyzed, among others, by Klaus Boehnke (2001), Ariel Knafo and Schwartz (2009, 240–242), and Ute Schönplflug (2001, 174–77), who point to diverse paths and ranges of value transmission—from religious and political values to family and cultural norms. Research also indicates that collectivist values are transmitted more effectively than individualistic ones, which may stem from their integrative function and their roots in community structures (Schönplflug and Yan 2013, 68–69).

Research conducted among French three-generation families reveals that in societies with a high level of family solidarity and a well-developed model of intergenerational contact, children and young people continue to actively participate in family support networks and declare their willingness to continue family traditions. Strong relationships between family members, frequent contact with grandparents, and the high value placed on the family as a community institution are conducive to maintaining values such as loyalty, care, and belonging (Sabatier and Lannegrand-Willems 2005, 392).

In summary, intergenerational transmission is not a simple process of copying patterns between generations, but a dynamic phenomenon in which values, norms, and family identity are simultaneously transmitted, transformed, and adapted to changing sociocultural conditions. The family remains the primary environment for shaping the identity of the individual and the community, providing a space where tradition meets the need for openness to change and the negotiation of meanings between generations based on a solid foundation of religiosity (McPhail 2019, 2). Based on the above assumptions, the following main hypotheses were formulated:

- H1: The importance of values changes across generations: The importance of religious values decreases (H1a), and the importance of secular values increases (H1b).
- H2: In religious families, changes in value preferences across generations occur more slowly than in less religious families.
- H3: In religious families, there is greater similarity in the hierarchy of values between generations compared to non-religious families.

3. Method

3.1. Measurement of Preferred Values

The SVS developed by Brzozowski (1995) were used to measure the preferred hierarchy of values according to Scheler's theory. The tool allows for the assessment of the subjective importance of 50 specific values/items that correspond to various aspects of human life. Based on these detailed assessments, six dimensions of values and corresponding scales are calculated: Hedonistic (H)—related to pleasure and individual satisfaction; Vital (V)—related to strength, health, and physical fitness; Esthetic (E)—related to experiences of beauty and harmony; Truth (T)—covering cognitive and intellectual values; Moral (M)—concerning goodness, justice, and ethics; and Sacred (S)—covering religious and secular values, higher goals, and ideals. Additionally, within the Sacred (S) value scale, two subscales were distinguished: Secular Sacredness (SS) and Religious Sacredness (RS). In turn, within the Vital Values Scale, the Physical Fitness (PF) and Endurance (En) subscales were distinguished.

Respondents rated each specific value on a 100-point scale from 0 (completely unimportant) to 100 (very important) by entering the appropriate number.

To determine the internal consistency of each scale and subscale within each of the three generations, Cronbach's alpha coefficients were calculated (see Table 1). Across all scales, these indicators suggest a very high reliability of the measures.

Table 1. Internal consistency of value scales (Cronbach's alpha)

Abbreviation	Scale/Subscale	Generation		
		Grandmother	Mother	Daughter
H	Hedonistic Values	0.825	0.891	0.859
V	Vital Values	0.865	0.831	0.850
PF	Physical Fitness	0.745	0.788	0.823
En	Endurance	0.774	0.765	0.741
E	Esthetic Values	0.861	0.841	0.863
T	Truth	0.869	0.868	0.847
M	Moral Values	0.883	0.873	0.907
S	Sacred Values	0.844	0.872	0.898
SS	Secular Sacredness	0.908	0.926	0.936
RS	Religious Sacredness	0.825	0.894	0.924

Source: own research.

3.2. Sample

A total of 417 women representing three generations within 139 families were examined. The sample allows for the detection of effects in a population of $\eta^2 > 0.015$ with a probability of $1 - \beta > 0.90$, at a significance level of $\alpha < 0.05$ with error $\alpha < 0.05$, and an assumed average correlation between generations $r = 0.50$. The average age of the entire sample was 47.4 years (median, 47 years; standard deviation, 21.5 years). Detailed characteristics of the sample by generations are presented in Table 2. Each generation was defined from the perspective of the youngest member (daughter, mother, grandmother).

The largest percentage of the oldest generation lived in rural areas (64.7%), while mothers (53.3%) and daughters (59.0%) reported residence in urban areas more often. The level of education among the respondents reflected the social changes that had occurred over the generations. Among grandmothers, primary education (44.9%) and vocational education (30.4%) were the most prevalent, while among mothers, secondary education (37.0%) and higher education (22.5%) were the most dominant. Daughters most often had secondary education (67.5%) and a bachelor's degree (18.0%).

INTERGENERATIONAL TRANSMISSION OF VALUES

Table 2. Properties of the sample

Variable/Statistic	Generation		
	Grandmother	Mother	Daughter
N	139	139	139
Age			
Min./Max.	60/94	38/64	18/22
M/Me	72.8/72.0	47.6/47.0	22.0/22.0
SD	7.30	5.58	2.62
Place of residence			
Rural area	64.7%	46.7%	41.0%
Urban area	35.3%	53.3%	59.0%
Marital status			
Single (unmarried)	0.7%	2.2%	84.1%
Married	15.3%	35.0%	8.7%
Divorced	21.9%	44.5%	0.7%
Separated	4.4%	7.3%	0%
Widowed	28.5%	3.6%	0%
Informal relationship	28.5%	7.3%	6.5%
Education			
Primary	44.9%	6.5%	6.5%
Vocational	30.4%	26.8%	0.7%
Secondary	15.2%	37.0%	67.5%
Bachelor's degree	2.2%	6.5%	18.0%
Master's degree	7.2%	22.5%	8.2%
Employment status			
Employed	0.7%	67.6%	10.9%
Unemployed	1.5%	14.0%	5.1%
Pensioner	97.1%	9.6%	1.5%
Student	–	1.5%	77.4%
Other	0.7%	7.4%	5.1%
Number of siblings			
0	4.3%	5.8%	11.5%
1	15.1%	22.3%	36.0%
2	25.2%	27.3%	28.8%
3	21.6%	22.3%	15.8%
4 or more	33.8%	22.3%	7.9%
Religiousness			
1—Deeply religious	51.1%	24.5%	12.2%
2—Religious	45.3%	62.6%	66.2%
3—Undecided, but attached to a religious tradition	2.1%	8.6%	10.8%
4—Searching	1.4%	1.4%	2.9%
5—Indifferent	0%	1.4%	5.0%
6—No specific views on religion	0%	1.4%	1.4%
7—Non-religious	0%	0%	1.4%
8—Strongly opposed to religion	0%	0%	0%

Source: own research.

An analysis of the number of siblings indicates that older generations were more likely to have grown up in large families—33.8% of grandmothers had four or more brothers and sisters. Among the mothers, this percentage was 22.3%, while among their daughters, it was only 7.9%. In the generation of daughters, the number of only children in the family increased threefold compared to the generation of grandmothers.

The highest level of declared religiosity was found among grandmothers, with more than half (51.1%) describing themselves as deeply religious, and another 45.3% as religious. In the youngest generation, there was an increase in the percentage of people who described themselves as undecided, indifferent, or non-religious (a total of 20.1% of daughters compared to 3.5% of mothers and 3.5% of grandmothers). For statistical analysis, two groups were distinguished based on the daughters' responses: religious (deeply religious and religious; 78.4%) and not very religious (undecided, but attached to a religious tradition, searching, indifferent, without a specific view on religion, or non-religious; a total of 21.6%).

3.3. Research Procedure

The research was conducted between 2023 and 2025. To qualify for the study, a family had to include at least three adult women in the direct female line, specifically the grandmother, mother, and daughter. This criterion enabled the capture of the dynamics of intergenerational value transmission within a single family. Respondents were recruited by interviewers who reached out to families from various sociocultural backgrounds (large cities, towns, and rural areas). The interviewers made direct contact by visiting the families in their homes in person.

The data were collected via a hand-delivered survey. The questionnaires were completed using the paper-and-pencil interview (PAPI) method, after which the interviewer reported for collection. Respondents answered the questions themselves, and if they had difficulty understanding any terms, they could ask for help from trained interviewers, who explained their doubts without suggesting answers. The duration of a single interview was approximately 30 minutes on average, ranging from 20 to 40 minutes, depending on the respondent's age and individual predispositions. A total of 140 three-generation families were involved. The final study group consisted of 139 families who met the condition of data completeness in all three generations (99% return rate).

4. Results

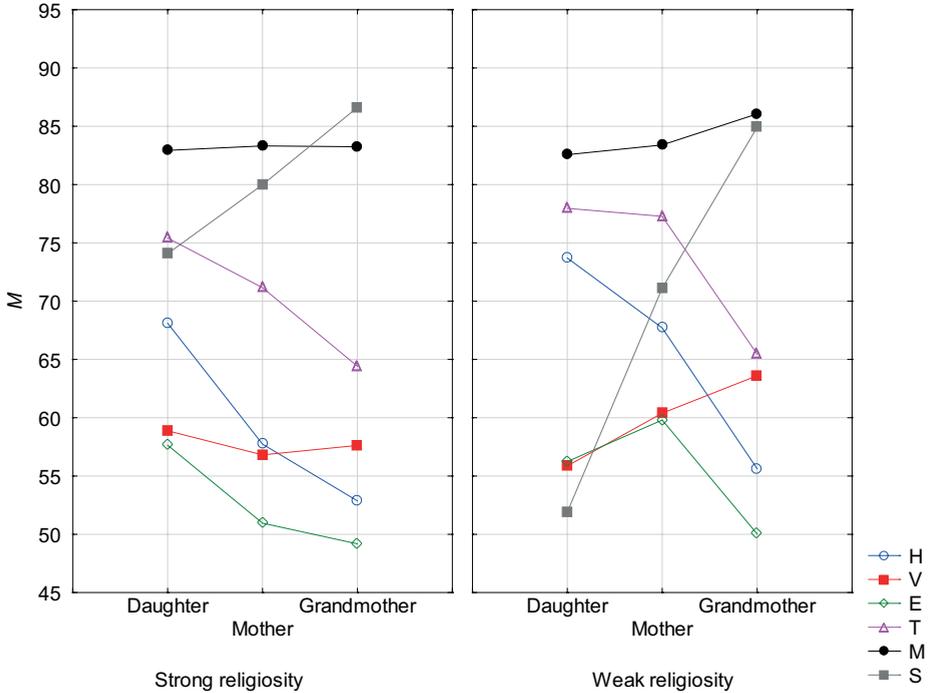
4.1. Dynamics of Intergenerational Changes in Preferred Values Depending on Religiosity

In order to test the hypothesis that the value system changes in successive generations of women from the same family (H1) and that religiosity moderates these changes (H2), a two-factor multivariate analysis of variance was employed. Both generation ($F(12, 126) = 23.21, p < 0.001, \eta^2_p = 0.688$), religiosity ($F(6, 132) = 32.794, p < 0.001, \eta^2_p = 0.199$), and the interaction between generation and religiosity ($F(12, 126) = 3.882, p < 0.001, \eta^2_p = 0.270$) were significant sources of variance in value preferences at the multivariate level. To determine for which specific values these effects occurred, univariate tests were applied. The effects are illustrated in Figure 1.

First, the influence of generation on values was examined, which is independent of a woman's level of religiosity. It was found that the younger the generation, the greater the attachment to hedonistic values (H: $F(2, 274) = 36.613, p < 0.001, \eta^2_p = 0.211$), truth (T: $F(2, 274) = 30.140, p < 0.001, \eta^2_p = 0.180$), esthetic values (E: $F(2, 274) = 9.099, p < 0.001, \eta^2_p = 0.062$) and a decrease in sacred values (S: $F(2, 274) = 74.439, p < 0.001, \eta^2_p = 0.352$). Analysis of the results in the subscales additionally showed that the importance of both secular values ($F(2, 274) = 33.062, p < 0.001, \eta^2_p = 0.194$) and religious values ($F(2, 274) = 67.229, p < 0.001, \eta^2_p = 0.329$) systematically decreases in younger generations. However, no intergenerational differences were found in terms of vital values (V: $F(2, 274) = 1.292, p = 0.276, \eta^2_p = 0.009$) and moral values (M: $F(2, 274) = 1.142, p = 0.321, \eta^2_p = 0.008$).

The influence of religiosity on the dynamics of intergenerational changes in recognized values was found in the case of only two values (moderation effects) (see Figure 1). As mentioned earlier, the younger the generation, the lower the preference for sacred values (S), except that the decline in attachment to this category of values is slower in families where high transmission of religiosity was observed in three generations of women (from $M = 86.62$ to $M = 74.32$) and faster in families where intergenerational transmission of religiosity has been disrupted (from $M = 84.92$ to $M = 51.91$; $F(2, 274) = 15.423, p < 0.001, \eta^2_p = 0.101$). A detailed analysis based on subscales showed that this effect is particularly evident in the case of religious sacredness ($F(2, 274) = 25.585, p < 0.001, \eta^2_p = 0.157$): among daughters with low religiosity, the dynamics of the systematic decline in the importance of religious values across generations was significantly higher (from $M = 89.55$ to $M = 47.74$) than in more religious families (from $M = 93.82$ to $M = 83.56$). The moderating influence of religiosity on the dynamics of intergenerational changes in value preferences was also noted in the case of esthetic values (E): A sharp increase in this value occurred already in the generation of mothers in the families of less religious daughters, while in the families of daughters who maintained religiosity, such an increase occurred

only in the youngest generation ($F(2, 274) = 4.420, p < 0.05, \eta^2_p = 0.031$). In the case of the other values, religiosity did not moderate their generational changes.



Note: H—Hedonistic alues, V—Vital Values, E—Esthetic Values, T—Truth, M—Moral Values, S—Sacred Values.

Figure 1. Religiosity and intergenerational differences in values

4.2. Religiosity and Similarity of Value Hierarchies

In order to determine the similarity of value hierarchies between generations within the same family, Spearman’s rho correlation was calculated between the value profiles of each pair of generations in each family (daughter vs. mother, mother vs. grandmother, grandmother vs. daughter): the higher the positive correlation, the greater the similarity of value hierarchies. Next, families of religious daughters vs. less religious daughters were compared in terms of the similarity of value hierarchies within each generation pair using the Mann–Whitney U test, as nonparametric correlation coefficients measure the strength of the relationship between variables on an ordinal scale.

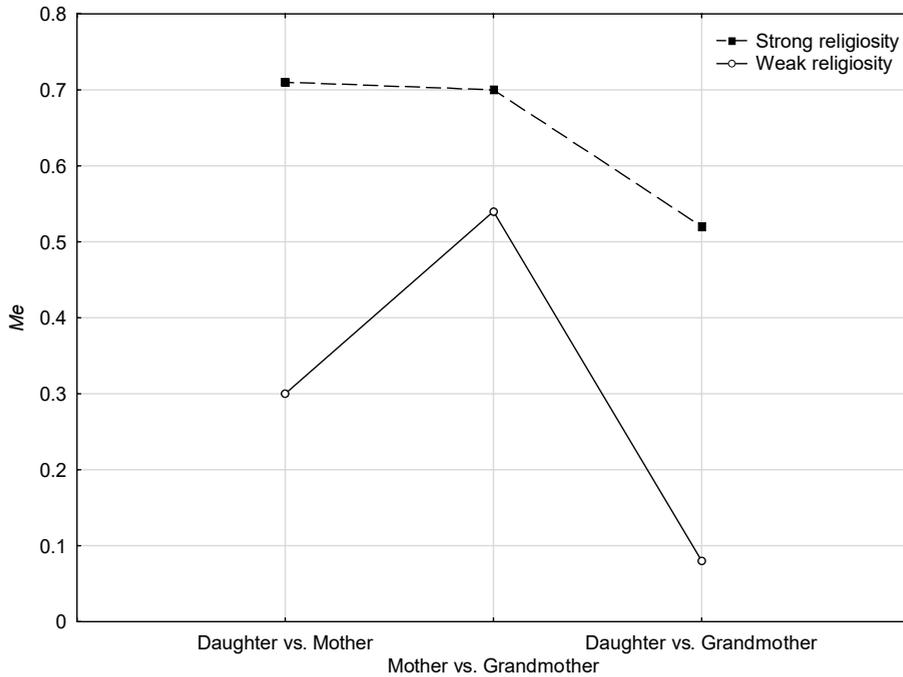


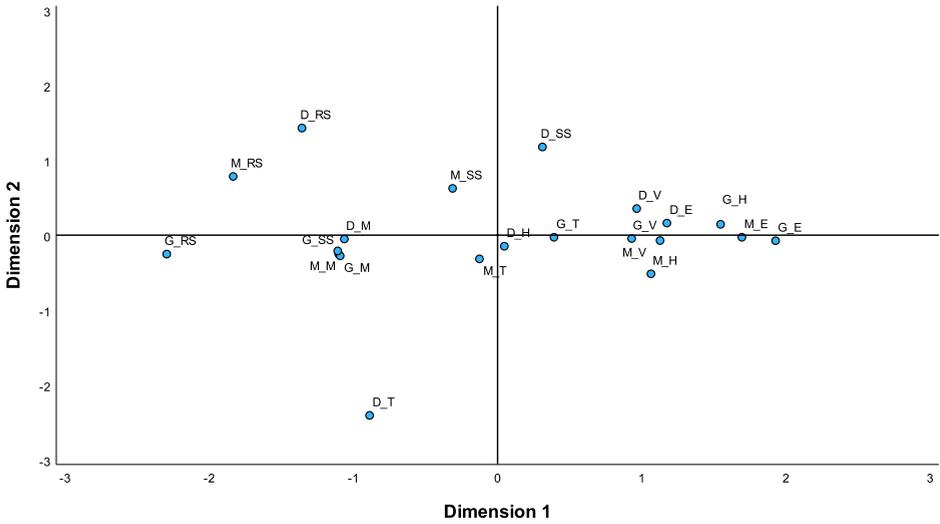
Figure 2. Religiosity and the similarity of value hierarchies across generations

In religious families, greater similarity in value hierarchies was found between each pair of generations compared to non-religious families (see Figure 2): daughter vs. mother ($Me = 0.705$ vs. $Me = 0.300$; $z = 2.554$, $p < 0.05$, $r = 0.217$), mother vs. grandmother ($Me = 0.700$ vs. $Me = 0.540$; $z = 2.388$, $p < 0.05$, $r = 0.203$), and daughter vs. grandmother ($Me = 0.522$ vs. $Me = 0.079$; $z = 2.952$, $p < 0.01$, $r = 0.250$). The differences found (r) should be considered small but statistically significant.

It is worth noting that in the case of families with religious daughters, the similarity in the hierarchy of values between grandmother vs. mother and mother vs. daughter (see Figure 2) was approximately 50% ($\rho^2 \times 100\%$). This ultimately results in a similarity between grandmother vs. daughter (granddaughter) of approximately 27%. In the case of families with less religious daughters, however, the similarity in the hierarchy of values between grandmother vs. mother was approximately 29%, and between mother vs. daughter was 9%. Consequently, the similarity of values between grandmother and granddaughter is less than 1%, and thus almost completely disappears, indicating clear disruptions in the transmission of values between generations.

4.3. Multidimensional Value Space across Three Generations of Women

Multidimensional scaling was employed to simultaneously visualize the psychological space of value preferences across three generations and their interrelationships. The resulting configuration (Figure 3) captures both the generational dynamics of values and the psychological distance between values.



Note: D—Daughter, M—Mother, G—Grandmother; H—Hedonistic Values, V—Vital Values, E—Esthetic Values, T—Truth, M—Moral Values, SS—Secular Sacredness, RS—Religious Sacredness.

Figure 3. Psychological space of value preferences of three generations of women

Dimension 1 represents a continuum from lower-order values (hedonistic, vital, and esthetic) to higher-order values (religious sacredness, secular sacredness, morality, and truth). The arrangement of values along this main dimension is very characteristic of the older generation. In contrast, among younger generations (mothers and daughters), the distance between secular and religious values, as well as other values, especially truth, increases, creating a second dimension in this space. It can be concluded that, in the case of the older generation, the structure of values is determined by a simple opposition between lower-order values and higher-order values, whereas in younger generations, the structure becomes more complex and multidimensional.

The analysis reveals a growing gap between generations in terms of religious values and secular sacredness, reflecting weak correlations between generations in these areas. We can therefore observe both the direction and the shift of certain

values in a multidimensional space from a group of higher-order values to a group of lower-order values. This suggests a growing diversity in the value systems of younger generations and, simultaneously, their increased axiological pluralism.

5. Discussion

The results of the study confirm that in Polish families, the value system undergoes dynamic intergenerational changes, with religiosity playing an important moderating role in this process. Verifying hypothesis H1, it was found that in successive generations, there is a decline in the importance of religious values and secular sacredness and an increase in the importance of hedonistic and esthetic values. This phenomenon is consistent with numerous studies on secularization and individualization in European societies (Inglehart and Welzel 2005, 11–20). In the Polish context, it is particularly significant that despite the historically strong roots of Catholicism in social structures, younger generations are increasingly adopting value patterns characteristic of post-traditional societies, where the importance of autonomy, self-fulfillment, and individual experiences prevails over community and religious values (Marianiński 2012, 26).

Hypothesis H2, which treats religiosity as a factor stabilizing the transmission of values within the family, has been partially confirmed. The study results indicate that religiosity slows the rate of decline in attachment to both religious and partially secular values. These findings are consistent with the concept of “religiousness as a buffer,” (Pargament 2001, 201–8) according to which strong religious identification strengthens intergenerational continuity by offering narratives of the meaning of ritual traditions and the social context of these practices in the family. The data from this study indicate that in religious families, there is a higher degree of similarity in the hierarchy of values between individual pairs of generations. This observation corresponds to the conclusions of Van Ijzendoorn, who drew attention to the role of the family in the “socialization of the socializing person,” where parents and grandparents act not only as a source of transmission but also as participants in the process of shaping values (cf. Van Ijzendoorn 1992, 76–99). The closest generations, i.e., parents, play a special role in this transmission, while the grandparents’ generation only plays a corrective role. At the same time, it is worth noting that religiosity does not completely eliminate generational changes—the similarity of value hierarchies in religious families decreases with increasing generational distance. This is consistent with Boehnke’s theory (Boehnke 2001, 241) of dynamic value transmission, which posits that intergenerational transmission is not a simple copying, but rather a negotiation of meanings within the context of new sociocultural conditions (Schönpflug 2001, 175).

Another conclusion from this study is that in the older generation, the relationships between values were arranged in a simple opposition between higher-order values and lower-order values. In contrast, younger generations go beyond this simple opposition, and the configuration of values becomes more complex, and thus also determined by other factors. In particular, we observe a growing importance of esthetic and hedonistic values in younger generations. This phenomenon can be interpreted in the light of Schwartz's theory (Schwartz 1992, 64), which suggests that values related to self-transcendence and conservatism are more prevalent in older generations, whereas values of openness to change and hedonism are more prevalent in younger generations. This transformation is not only psychological but also cultural and social. Brzozowski's research (cf. Brzozowski 1995, 2007) using the SVS also pointed to the declining importance of religious values and the growing importance of pragmatic and esthetic values among young people, related to authenticity, individualism, and the fulfillment of individual needs.

Regarding the importance of sociocultural context, the results of this study confirm that the intergenerational transmission of values in Poland occurs under conditions of significant social change, including urbanization, globalization, and the weakening of traditional forms of multigenerational families. The disappearance of daily contact between grandparents and grandchildren, characteristic of nuclear families, weakens the possibility of direct transmission of values within these generations, despite the continuing solidarity, family ties, various forms of mutual assistance, and exchange of gifts (Attias-Donfut and Arber 2002, 21). This mutual support between generations has been referred to as the "generational contract" by Vern L. Bengtson and W. Andrew Achenbaum (Bengtson and Achenbaum 1993, 13) and is based primarily on moral values and truth.

Another factor that seems to be significant for the intergenerational transmission of values is that, in the reality of Polish family ministry, women more often choose partners who value Christian religious and moral values less than they do (cf. Goleń 2013, 219–21, 247, 348–51, 358–59). This fact may hinder not only respect for the religious and moral values they have adopted and cherish, but, above all, their transmission to the next generation.

In our research, the difference between the similarity of value hierarchies in religious and non-religious families proved to be significant. In families where the last generation lost its faith in God, the similarity of value hierarchies practically disappears over the course of three generations. This means that religion serves as an integrating and preserving force, maintaining a common axiological language. In this context, it is worth emphasizing that the transmission of values is not limited to declared beliefs but is rooted in everyday practices—religious rituals, forms of communication of religious content, educational models, and the testimony of one's own life, which is confirmed by the data—the values of truth and morality proved to be relatively stable in the generations analyzed.

In summary of this discussion of the results, it is important to note certain limitations of this study. First, the sample consisted exclusively of women, which was justified by the thesis that they are the primary channels for transmitting values within the family (Wałęcka-Matyja 2022, 65). However, this limitation restricts the generalizability of the results to the female population only. Second, the study was cross-sectional—the analysis of generational changes was based on a comparison of existing generations, rather than on observing processes over time within the same group of people who transition from one generation to another during the aging process. Further research could take a longitudinal approach to capture the dynamics of change through a biographical perspective. Third, the applied quantitative research methodology enabled the measurement of the hierarchy of values; however, it does not fully capture the qualitative aspects of how they are experienced, which narrative studies or family interviews could complement. Despite these limitations, the study results can make a significant contribution to both family psychology and pastoral theology. They indicate that the process of intergenerational transmission of values in Polish families is transforming but is not disappearing—its language, dynamics, and meaning are changing, and religiosity remains an integrating factor. However, it is increasingly negotiated by younger generations.

From the perspective of family ministry, the results suggest the need to pay special attention to generational differences in the hierarchy of values (Kluczka 2022; cf. Norris and Inglehart 2011). The fact that younger women show less attachment to religious values does not mean a complete loss of axiological orientation. On the contrary, esthetic and hedonistic values, as well as the value of truth, can constitute a new language of meaning and identity for them. The task of pastors and family counselors is not so much to return to the old model of communication, but rather to seek ways to integrate traditional religious values with the new existential orientations of the younger generation (cf. Tischner 1993). Pastors can encourage families to build bonds around universal values and to bear witness to a life consistent with the values they preach (cf. Goleń 2015, 423–58), rather than merely preserving the tradition of religious practices, which in today's cultural space often lose their *sacrum* (cf. Grabowska 2024, 57–91) in favor of esthetics.

From the perspective of family psychology, it is essential for family ministry to acknowledge that religiosity serves as a buffer in the process of transmitting values, but should not be viewed as the sole stabilizing factor. The quality of family relationships, mutual emotional support, and open communication are also important (Bugental, Corpuz, and Beaulieu 2015). In practice, this means that pastoral and counseling activities carried out as part of family ministry should be aimed at strengthening religiosity (cf. Goleń 2013, 351, 360), as well as strengthening marital and family bonds (cf. Kuczmarska 2024, 228–29) and developing the ability to engage in intergenerational dialogue based on respect for differences and generations (Pustułka 2023, 15–16; cf. Wnuk and Marcinkowski 2010, 458–62).

AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS

Julia Gorbaniuk: Methodology, Software, Investigation, Data collection, Data curation, Statistical analysis, Writing original draft, Project administration, Bibliography search | **Jacek Goleń:** Methodology, Data collection, Resources, Writing original draft, review & editing, Bibliography search.

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“No One Will Say Anymore: The Ark of the Covenant of YHWH.” Jeremiah 3:16 and Its Significance for the Tradition of the Ark of the Covenant

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Abstract: The statement in Jer 3:16–17 about the loss of the Ark of the Covenant and the assertion that there is no further need to think about it is unique in the prophetic texts. Its significance, however, is not the result of this uniqueness, but of the contents contained in it. The article compares the statistical interest in Ark in various theological circles from the times of the Old Testament. This data, along with an analysis of the potential roles assigned to the Ark, revealed a process in which it gradually lost its significance. The analysis of the potential historical circumstances allowed us to conclude that the statement of the prophet Jeremiah does not provide any information about how and when the Ark was lost. Diachronic analysis allows us to classify it as an editorial addition from the late period after the Babylonian exile. As such, it contains information about a significant change in Old Testament covenant theology. In the spirit of the post-exilic tradition of patriarchal promises, to the current vision of return of the diaspora and the renewal of the Kingdom of Israel (Jer 3:14–15, 18), there is now added the announcement of the pilgrimage of the nations to Zion and the inauguration of the universal Kingdom of God on earth.

Keywords: Jeremiah, Ark of the Covenant, the universal kingdom of God, eschatology

The laconic statement of the prophet Jeremiah concerning the disappearance of the Ark of the Covenant, and his explicit indication that there was no further need to concern oneself with it in the later history of the chosen nation, has long aroused—and continues to arouse—considerable interest among exegetes. This is due to several reasons. First, it is the only mention of this cultic object in the prophetic books. Second, the replacement of the Ark's role (Jer 3:16) by Jerusalem, described as “the throne of YHWH” (3:17), invites reflection on how the symbolism and theological significance of the Ark were understood during the monarchic period. Third and finally, the fact that the prophet refers to the Ark's disappearance raises questions concerning the time and circumstances under which this cultic object might have been lost. We intend to examine these three issues in greater detail in order to understand the meaning of the so-called “Jeremian tradition” associated with the Ark of the Covenant, as well as the transformation that took place in its cultic and theological significance throughout the history of ancient Israel.

1. Jeremiah in the Context of Other Texts Concerning the Ark

We know very little about the origins and early history of the Ark of the Covenant. If one seeks analogies, similar ceremonial and cultic objects can most readily be found in ancient Egypt. It cannot be excluded that these may have served as inspiration for the biblical Ark (Noegl 2015, 223–42). Nevertheless, in the texts traditionally regarded as the oldest that refer to the Ark (e.g., Num 10:29–36; Josh 3–4; 6; 1 Sam 4–6; 2 Sam 6), we are in fact dealing with later literary traditions and the theological concepts expressed therein (Lemański 2006, 27–146; Porzig 2009, 33–38, 98–99, 155–56). It is therefore difficult to assert that the Ark existed already in the late Bronze Age or the early Iron Age—a time suggested by, among others, Scott B. Noegl (2015, 236–37), though critically disputed by Peter Porzig (2009, 156). The earliest biblical tradition associates the Ark initially with the sanctuary in Shiloh (1 Sam 3:3; 4:4–5; cf. Dietrich 2010, 215–20). After its loss, and consequently the decline in the significance of that sanctuary (cf. Jer 7:1–15), the Ark became associated with the holiest part of the Jerusalem temple (1 Kgs 8:6), and its transfer to Jerusalem was attributed to David (2 Sam 6).

At first glance, the central role of the Ark as the main cultic object during the existence of the so-called Solomonic Temple (the monarchic period) seems obvious. However, when we examine the distribution of the texts mentioning this cultic object throughout the Old Testament, this impression is significantly weakened. As already noted, the prophet Jeremiah is the only representative of his milieu who makes any mention of the Ark. This fact is rather surprising. If the Ark was indeed of such importance during the monarchy, the absence of references to it among all other prophets throughout that period is highly thought-provoking. Equally puzzling is the barely traceable allusion to the Ark in the Book of Psalms (Ps 132:8; Lemański 2006, 195–201; Porzig 2009, 228–43), and its total absence in the wisdom literature. In the latter case, however, this omission can be explained by the distinct interests and thematic focus of the sapiential authors.

On the other hand, we have the Deuteronomistic milieu, in which the Ark is mentioned rather frequently, though two fundamental tendencies are discernible. If we seek the earliest traditions concerning this cultic object, they are found primarily within the so-called Deuteronomistic History (DtrH). This concerns, above all, the aforementioned association of the Ark with the sanctuary at Shiloh and its downfall following the capture of the Ark by the Philistines (1 Sam 4:1–7:1), as well as its later recovery and transfer to Jerusalem “in the time of David” (2 Sam 6) (Lemański 2006, 58–141; Porzig 2009, 104–76). In these texts, it is made evident that the Ark represents YHWH himself. As Gerhard von Rad once stated: “Where the Ark came, there came YHWH.” (1931, 123) The narrative of these events plays a significant theological and symbolic role within DtrH, marking the transfer of divine splendor from Shiloh to Jerusalem (Lemański 2002, 147–68) and linking these events with

the merits of David (cf. Ps 132). The utilization of these older traditions allowed the Deuteronomistic redactors to strengthen the Ark's role as a numinous symbol legitimizing the Davidic dynasty reigning in Jerusalem, while simultaneously elevating the status of the Jerusalem sanctuary—a development culminating in the account of Solomon's construction of the Temple on Mount Zion and the placement of the Ark in its central location (1 Kgs 6:19; 8:1–11, 21; cf. 2:26; 3:15; see Lemański 2006, 147–58; Porzig 2009, 186–205). Yet the later Deuteronomistic narrative concerning the monarchy contains no further references to this cultic object. Conversely, in their programmatic text (the Book of Deuteronomy), these same redactors reduce the Ark's function merely to that of a container or chest holding the tablets of the covenant (Deut 10:1–9; Lemański 2006, 159–70; Porzig 2009, 46–55), thereby clearly diminishing its earlier role as a symbol representing the very presence of YHWH.

This process of diminishing the Ark's significance was later continued by the Priestly authors of the post-exilic period, for whom the Ark again became only a container—the Ark of the Testimony (in contrast to DtrH's Ark of the Covenant [of YHWH])—placed at the center of the tent or temple, the portable sanctuary built by the Israelites in the wilderness. The description of its construction (Exod 25:10–22) served primarily to assign theological importance to another cultic object of the Second Temple period—the mercy seat (כַּפֹּרֶת *kappōret*). This element, described as the lid of the Ark, was thereby interpreted as the only part that survived the Babylonian exile (Exod 25:17–22; Lemański 2006, 171–87; Porzig 2009, 8–41).

The authors of Chronicles, much like their Deuteronomistic *Vorlage*, employ the Ark symbolically, presenting its history as a narrative leading towards the legitimization of the Jerusalem sanctuary as the final destination in the history of the chosen nation (Welten 1979, 169–83; Lemański 2006, 203–22; Porzig 2009, 244–55). For the Chronicler, Jerusalem and its temple—as the spiritual center—constitute the very meaning of Israel's history, and the people's attitude toward the sanctuary becomes the key criterion for evaluating individual rulers (Kalimi 2016, 135–54).

In summary, the greatest concentration of traditions concerning the Ark is found within Deuteronomistic literature, which, on the one hand, absorbs older traditions portraying the Ark as a numinous manifestation of YHWH's presence, and on the other, reduces its role to that of a container holding the tablets of the covenant (the Decalogue). Subsequent circles—Priestly and Chronicler—writing after the Babylonian exile, further develop this trend, solidifying the Ark's exclusively symbolic significance as a cultic object. Jeremiah's statement is situated between these two tendencies, indicating not only that the Ark had disappeared, but also that, as a result of new theological developments, it was no longer needed. This marks an essential transition from the situation of the monarchic period (the First Temple) to that of the post-exilic period (the Second Temple).

2. The Symbolic Meaning of the Ark

In biblical texts, the Ark is described as a wooden acacia chest, which is also the original meaning of the Hebrew term אֲרוֹן (*’ărôn*) (*HAL* 1:83; Lemański 2006, 15–16; cf. Gen 50:26: “coffin”; 2 Kgs 12:10–11; 2 Chr 24:8, 10–11: “collection chest”). In cultic usage, however, it initially acquired the significance of a symbol representing YHWH himself and his presence. Over time, however, this role was reduced to that of a container holding the testimony of the covenant (the Decalogue), and in this sense—as a symbol of the covenant—it is most frequently mentioned in the Hebrew Bible (cf. Lemański 2006, 21–24; Eichler 2021, 11–15, for various additional designations of the Ark).

The narrative context crucial for understanding the Ark’s role during the final period of the monarchy is found in the Deuteronomistic account of the construction of Solomon’s Temple (1 Kgs 6–8). The description itself, however, is inconsistent and has undergone numerous redactions (Porzig 2009, 186–212; Knauf 2016, 218). This suggests that it does not reflect a historical building plan from the late 10th century BCE. As Konrad Rupprecht observes:

The report concerns works whose execution presupposes the completed construction of the temple ... as a necessary condition. The only possible explanation is the absence of a coherent account of Solomon’s temple construction ... or the fact that the temple no longer existed. (Rupprecht 1972, 51–52)

In reality, this description contains an early Deuteronomistic core reflecting the cultic situation in Jerusalem at least since the late 8th century BCE, alongside numerous later updates that gradually idealized both the narrative and the associated sacred space (Würthwein 1985, 57–59, 89–91). From an archaeological perspective, however, the situation described there—particularly in 1 Kgs 8, depicting YHWH enthroned above the cherubim on an empty throne—is attested only by artifacts from the 7th century BCE (Lewis 2005, 69–107; Keel 2007, 299; Porzig 2009, 295; cf. Römer 2023, 445–59). It is with such a context that one must associate the Ark’s meaning as a numinous symbol representing the visible and symbolic presence of YHWH. What, then, preceded this stage? Was the holiest part of the sanctuary empty prior to this development? Many indications suggest that YHWH may originally have been represented by some kind of figural depiction (Niehr 1997; Köckert 2007, 281). We cannot, however, determine with certainty when this situation changed, as the biblical texts make no mention of the removal of such a presumed image of YHWH (Lemański 2021, 282–96).

Another issue concerns the role the Ark played in the Temple beyond representing the divine presence. At the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries, a hypothesis emerged suggesting that the Ark may have represented the throne of YHWH (Reichel 1897, 22–29, 33–34; 1902, 171–74; Dibelius 1906, 27–28). Initially, this

theory found many supporters (Lemański 2006, 239, n. 33; Eichler 2021, 138–40), and Jer 3:16–17 was frequently cited as a fundamental argument in favor of such an interpretation. Even today, many exegetes understand the prophet’s intended contrast in this way: the Ark, which no longer exists, versus Jerusalem, as the present “throne (כִּסֵּא *kissē*) of God”—that is, Jerusalem replacing the Ark in the role of God’s throne (Carroll 1986, 150; Holladay 1986, 121; McKane 1986, 74; Lundbom 1999, 314; Allen 2008, 58). However, both the shape of the Ark (a box) (Janowski 2004, 260, 262) and the absence of a direct reference to it as a throne lead to the conclusion that it was solely a container, a chest symbolizing (by virtue of its contents—the Decalogue) the covenant of YHWH. The role of the “throne,” by contrast, was more closely associated with Zion (cf. Jer 14:19, 21; see Lemański 2006, 240; Eichler 2021, 140).

Another hypothesis, related to the concept of an invisible throne of YHWH in the Jerusalem Temple, positions the Ark as the footstool of that throne (Cassuto 1967, 330; Haran 1959, 89–92; cf. Lemański 2006, 241; Eichler 2021, 141). Certain biblical passages may suggest this role of the Ark (Lam 2:1; Ps 99:5; 132:7; 1 Chr 28:2), as does the well-known ancient Near Eastern practice of placing important documents (e.g., loyalty treaties) at the feet of the patron deity of a nation. However, a close analysis of these passages again indicates that in this role it is Zion or the Temple situated there—rather than the Ark itself—that should be regarded as the divine footstool. This is further confirmed by the fact that artifacts identified as footstools in the ancient Near East never took the form of chests (Eichler 2021, 141–45).

What, then, was the actual role of the Ark in the Temple during the monarchy? From both the perspective of Israel’s religious development and literary evidence, the Ark—as a cultic object representing YHWH—becomes conceivable only after the implementation of the aniconic form of worship, that is, closer to the end of the monarchy in Judah than to its beginning (Porzig 2009, 296). Ultimately, however, rather than symbolizing God’s presence itself, the Ark came to represent—in Deuteronomistic thought and later theological traditions—the covenant as such. It functioned as a tangible “artifact” embodying and visualizing the covenantal relationship. Its loss could therefore deeply trouble the faithful, raising the question: What will become of the covenant and of YHWH’s presence in Israel? This very issue is addressed by the prophet—or, as we shall later note, by a subsequent redactor of the Book of Jeremiah—in the passage concerning the “Ark of the Covenant of YHWH” (Jer 3:16–17).

3. The Time and Circumstances of the Ark’s Disappearance

In his now-classic article, Menahem Haran (1963, 46–58) identified three historical situations in which the Ark might have been lost. The first possible occasion was the campaign of Pharaoh Shishak (1 Kgs 14:25–26) during the reign of

Rehoboam (late 10th century BCE). However, it must be noted that on the list of conquered sites from this 925 BCE campaign, Jerusalem does not appear (Schneider 2001, 320; Weippert 2010, 228–38). Moreover, there is no certainty that the “Ark narrative” contained in DtrH (from the late 7th century BCE) preserved an authentic memory of events from the transition between the Bronze and Iron Ages (11th–10th centuries BCE).

The second possible occasion was during the reign of Amaziah of Judah (early 8th century BCE), when the temple was plundered by King Jehoash of Israel (2 Kgs 14:14). Yet here, too, there is no mention of the Ark, which is surprising, given that it was still regarded in Jeremiah’s time as a crucial element of the Temple furnishings. Furthermore, the list of seized treasures (“gold and silver, and all the vessels found in the house of YHWH...” [2 Kgs 14:14]) raises doubts from the perspectives of both textual criticism (McKenzie 2021, 555, 565) and literary criticism (Würthwein 1984, 371). Many scholars suggest that this passage more accurately describes the Babylonian plundering of the Temple in 587 BCE rather than the event implied by the Masoretic text (McKenzie 2021, 565).

The third “occasion” is the Babylonian invasion of 587 BCE, during the reign of Nebuchadnezzar. Yet even here, in the list of plundered items (cf. 2 Kgs 24:13), the Ark is not mentioned. In this context, Jeremiah’s statement gains great importance, as it may indicate that the Ark was still present in the Temple during his time and fulfilled the role assigned to it by the Deuteronomistic milieu—that of a chest containing the tangible testimony of YHWH’s covenant with Israel, guaranteeing God’s presence among his chosen people. For this reason, many exegetes conclude that the disappearance of the Ark should be dated precisely to the time of the second Babylonian invasion (Fischer 2005, 195; Allen 2008, 58; Maier 2022, 109).

The only remaining issue to explain is the absence of the Ark from both the list of items carried off from Jerusalem by the Babylonians (2 Kgs 25:13–17; 2 Chr 36:18; Jer 52:17–23) and the later list of sacred objects returned by Cyrus (Ezra 1:7–11; cf. 5:13–15). The most straightforward explanation may be that the Ark was destroyed in the Temple fire (Maier 2022, 109). Later texts (*b. Yoma* 53b–54a; 4 Ezra 10:11) suggest that it was indeed believed to have been taken to Babylon. However, the returnees from exile, as we have already observed, did not bring it back with them. Neither the prophet Ezekiel, in his vision of the new temple (Ezek 41:3), nor the Chronicler, who replaces it with the mercy seat (1 Chr 28:11), mentions the Ark. Yet even the actual existence of the mercy seat is questioned by some scholars (Keel 2007, 1033). In any case, in order to authenticate it through archaization, the Priestly authors—as noted above—described it in the Pentateuch as the “lid” covering the Ark (Exod 25:17–22) (cf. Lemański 2007, 149–56). Nevertheless, much evidence suggests that the Holy of Holies in the Second Temple was in all likelihood empty (cf. 1 Macc 1:21–24; Josephus, *Ant.* 3,123, 125; *m. Yoma* 5:2).

Another tradition connected with the Ark links its disappearance to actions undertaken by the prophet Jeremiah. In 2 Macc 2:4–7, citing a written document, we read that this prophet, together with a group of companions, hid the Ark in a cave “on the mountain where Moses had gone up and [from which he] beheld God’s inheritance.” Despite attempts to mark the way to this place, Jeremiah is said to have declared that “the site shall remain unknown until God gathers his people together again and shows them mercy.” Historically, however, this legend is of dubious credibility, since the prophet did not enjoy recognition among his compatriots in his own time, and the aforementioned inventories of temple objects indicate that they were not hidden but carried off to Babylonia. The written source to which the author of 2 Maccabees appeals was probably some apocryphon now lost to us (Lemański 2006, 225; Laskowski 2017, 148). The *Paralipomena Jeremiae* (3:9–11, 18–19) (cf. Paciorek 1999, 6), in turn, report that Jeremiah, together with Baruch, deposited the temple valuables along with the Ark in the earth, which swallowed them up (Bar 6:1–10) (cf. Doran 2012, 56, where an angel replaces Jeremiah in this role). In another version of the legend (*Vita Jeremiae* 2:11), Jeremiah himself rescues the Ark and allows it to be swallowed by a rock (Hare 1985, 388). Both of these latter legends date from the 1st century CE and are most likely a further consequence of the fact that Jeremiah is the only prophet to mention the Ark.

4. Jeremiah 3:16–17 in Its Literary–Historical Context

Another essential question must be asked: Does the passage Jer 3:16–17 in fact originate with the historical prophet? Commentators agree that we are dealing here with a statement that should be read together with what precedes and follows it (Jer 3:14–18). The fundamental context of this utterance is Jeremiah’s programmatic call to conversion and to the return of the chosen people to YHWH (Jer 3:1–4:4) (Fischer 2005, 178–84; Goldingay 2021, 141–43), or—as Christl M. Maier (2022, 67–112) construes the context—a reflection on the significance of Israel’s apostasy for Judah (Jer 2:1–4:2). Bernhard Duhm (1901, 39–40; cf. Porzig 2009, 223, n. 3, with literature) maintained that the passage in question is “badly” connected with its broader context, which led him to conclude that it has a secondary, redactional character and—as many exegetes hold today—was composed in several stages of expansion (vv. 14–15; vv. 16–17; v. 18; e.g., Porzig 2009, 223). Beyond the authentic formula “in those days,” which points in this direction (Lundbom 1999, 314), we also find here a significant eschatological expansion beyond the promise of a David descendant in Jer 23:3–6. This time the promise concerns not only the scattered members of the chosen people but all humanity gathering in Jerusalem.

The key Jeremicanic term שׁוּב (*šûb*) no longer denotes “conversion” (cf. Jer 3:22a; 23:3) but “return.” (Schreiner 1981, 28) With this in mind, Maier (2022, 104, 109) points to an early exilic core in Jer 3, to which—in his view—verses 14–16, 18 were added only during the redaction of the Torah in the late post-exilic period, and verse 17 even later. Verse 18 surprises us with the mention of the “house of Judah” and the “house of Israel,” which could suggest that it falls outside the framework of verses 14–17. This can be explained, however, by supposing that the version in verses 14–15 was first supplemented by verse 18, and only subsequently by verses 16–17 (Levin 1985, 190; Porzig 2009, 223, n. 8). In fact, verse 16 cannot be understood without taking verse 17 into account. Thus, as Maier (2022, 109) himself concedes, the mention of the Ark is surprising at this juncture. It becomes intelligible, however, once verse 17 is included in the interpretation. Verse 16a alludes directly to Jer 23:3 (itself dependent on Priestly statements in Gen 1:21, 28—in reverse order; cf. Gen 9:1, 7 and Ezek 36:11). According to Jer 23:3, the time has come for the divine command to be fulfilled and for YHWH to bring his remaining “sheep” back to their pastures; this return is the subject of verses 14–15, 18. In Jer 3:16–17, the eschatological tenor of this utterance represents a subsequent stage of redaction and is extended to all nations (cf. Isa 2:2–4; 60:[1–]3; Mic 4:1–3) (Porzig 2009, 223–24). Let us therefore look at Jer 3:16–17 in its immediate context:

Return, faithless sons—Oracle of YHWH.

For I am your Lord / Husband (בעלתי *bā’altti*),

And I will take (לקח *lqh*) you, one from a city,

Two from a clan, and I will bring you to Zion (v. 14).

And I will give you shepherds (רעים *rō’im*) after my own heart,

Who will pasture you with wisdom and prudence (v. 15).

And when you multiply and are fruitful in the land,

In those days—oracle of YHWH—

Then they shall no longer say: “The Ark of the Covenant of JHWH,”
it shall not come to mind, nor shall they remember it, nor miss it, nor shall be made
again (v. 16).

At that time Jerusalem shall be called the Throne of YHWH,

and all the nations shall gather to it in the name of YHWH, to Jerusalem,

and they shall no longer walk after the stubbornness of their evil hearts (v. 17).

In those day the house of Judah shall go to the house of Israel,

and together they shall come from the land of north to the land

that I give as an inheritance to your fathers (v. 18).

The biblical author interprets verse 14 quite literally in light of Jer 3:22, reading the call to the return of the “rebellious sons” as the return of the dispersed diaspora. The term Ba’al—“lord” (cf. Jer 31:32; Hos 2:18–19), when applied to YHWH, may

also bear the sense of “husband” (Lundbom 1999, 313), which fits well with Jeremiah’s marital metaphors describing the YHWH–Israel relationship (Włodyga 2003).

The image of return (v. 14b) indicates that God will select each individual member of the diaspora from their city or clan and bring them to Zion. This need not imply a small number of returnees—as some scholars suppose—since the vision of Jer 31:8 suggests that the biblical author nonetheless has in mind a “great multitude.” (Lundbom 1999, 313) Such an interpretation is permitted as well by the standard “ $x + x + 1$ ” numerical formula (cf. Amos 1:3; Hos 6:2; Deut 32:30; Prov 6:16; see Roth 1962). Zion—the place of the events—will be renewed (cf. Jer 7:1–15 for the theology of Zion). This becomes possible through the “healing of the heart” (cf. Jer 7:24; 11:18; see Stipp 1998, 144) of Israel’s leaders, who earlier broke the covenant with YHWH (cf. Jer 31:32b). In contrast to the shepherds of the monarchic period (cf. Jer 23:1–2), shepherds will guide the people wisely and prudently (cf. Jer 23:3–4 for the promise). The later addition of the division “house of Israel—house of Judah” (v. 18) in turn evokes the prophetic theme of restoration of the old, united monarchy and the joint return of both communities (cf. Jer 50:4–5; Ezek 37:15–22; Isa 11:12; Hos 2:2; Zech 2:10–11; see Lundbom 1999, 315). Together they constitute an ideal “*ganze Gemeinschaft*.” (Fischer 2005, 196) The reference to the “north” here denotes both Assyria and Babylonia. We thus have before us an eschatological vision of the renewal of the chosen people (cf. Gen 15:1; 17:8). Once this situation comes true, a subsequent redactor announces a new way of YHWH’s presence among Israel, while significantly expanding this eschatological vision to include other nations (vv. 16–17; cf. Gen 12:3; 22:18).

5. What, in Essence, Does Jeremiah’s Statement Tell Us?

The designation “Ark of the Covenant of YHWH” is characteristic of Deuteronomistic theology. We encounter it above all in Deuteronomy, the DtrH, and later in Chronicles (Lemański 2006, 22; Eichler 2021, 14). Already within this theological milieu the Ark was regarded as a “mere” container for the tablets of the Decalogue (Deut 10:1–5, 8; 31:26; 1 Kgs 8:9). According to the description in Exod 25:10–22 (a Priestly text), however, it was simultaneously the central cultic element of the Tent of Meeting. In this case, as noted earlier, we are dealing with a retrospective projection whose task is to authorize the mercy seat (כַּפֹּרֶת *kappōret*)—a key feature of Second Temple cult, constituting the place of divine encounter (Exod 25:21–22). In Jer 3:16 the redactor of the Book of Jeremiah employs five negated verbs to underscore both the lack of significance of the Ark itself and the futility of remembering it or attempting to reconstruct it. In his view, there is no need even to think about it in light of what is new in Israel’s relationship with YHWH. The style is reminiscent of

Isaiah's proclamation of a new heavens and a new earth (cf. Isa 65:17). Such a radical dismissal of a central cultic element is without parallel in the history of ancient Near Eastern religions (Fischer 2005, 194). The prophetic declaration thus stands in sharp opposition to one of the key texts of the Torah (Utzschneider 1988, 261). Its roots lie in the simple fact that the Ark no longer exists.

What still requires clarification, however, is the issue that for the Deuteronomistic school constituted the crucial component associated with the Ark: namely, the tablets of the Decalogue (Deut 5 → Deut 10:1–9), the material witness to the covenant made with YHWH. To grasp the weight of this declaration—following Moshe Weinfeld's suggestion (1976, 26–27)—one must proceed to Jer 31:33, where the covenant is said to be written not on stone tablets but on the living tablets of the heart. Only in light of this latter text does Jeremiah's present statement concerning the Ark of the Covenant of YHWH become fully intelligible. The new role of Jerusalem (Jer 3:17) as the “throne of YHWH”—elsewhere only in 1 Chr 29:23 with reference to Solomon's enthronement (Knoppers 2004, 956), though the Chronicler consistently identifies the Kingdom of David and Solomon with the kingdom of YHWH—is now significant not only because of the return of the diaspora, but also as the gathering place of all the peoples of earth (cf. Isa 2:2–4; Mic 4:1–3; Isa 60:4–9). What is envisioned, therefore, is the inauguration of the universal kingship of YHWH perceived both in the perspective of Priestly universalism (cf. Gen 9:1–17 → Gen 17) and patriarchal promises concerning also the blessing for other nations of the earth (cf. Gen 12:3; 22:[17]–18). The statement thus does not concern any specific historical event (different opinion cf. Schäfer-Lichtenberger 2000, 229, 235); rather, it addresses the former cultic significance of the Ark, which has now been superseded by a new theological conception. Jeremiah 3:16 serves as a witness to an earlier understanding of the Ark's role (cf. Exod 25:10–22), while the Ark itself—by way of *pars pro toto*—symbolizes the former temple cult, in which objects served as visible guarantees of God's presence (Duhm 1901, 40; Porzig 2009, 224).

Within the eschatological conception, such a role for any cultic objects, of which the Ark is a representative, is no longer necessary. This is not a blanket critique of cultic objects as such; rather it is a response to doubts, complaints, or laments over the Ark's loss, or to discussions about the need to recreate it in the post-exilic period. The answer to such tendencies is found in verse 17, without which verse 16 would lack its proper context. The connection between the two verses is already suggested by the introductory formula “they shall no longer say” (v. 16; cf. Jer 23:7), which demands something new in relation to the past. That new element is the declaration identifying Jerusalem as the “throne of God.” Although Jer 3:16–17 requires reference to Jer 23 and 31, the idea of renewing the earlier covenant—which had been broken—is absent from those passages (Porzig 2009, 225, n. 23). Here, theological reflection goes one step further: the notion of the “shoot of David” (cf. Jer 23:5) disappears from the biblical author's field of view (Porzig 2009, 226), and the continuation

of the relationship with YHWH is determined solely by God's own action inaugurating his universal kingship on earth.

Weinfeld (1976) termed this genre of prophetic pronouncements in Jeremiah "spiritual metamorphosis." He identified texts in which the present and future states—often through quotation—are set in contrast to one another, thereby indicating a change that will occur or is already occurring in Israel's piety. They follow a similar pattern: a temporal formula ("on that day"); the words of YHWH ("they shall no longer...") + a citation—here concerning the Ark of the Covenant); an adversative introduced typically by "but"; and an indication of what should be said or done instead (cf. Jer 3:14–15; 23; 7–8; 31:29–30; and, in a somewhat different form, Jer 7:22–23; 31:31–24). All these texts signal a radical transformation in the faith of ancient Israel (Fischer 2005, 195).

Consequently, we may conclude that regarding the historical fate of the Ark, the prophet's statement contributes nothing substantive beyond asserting its disappearance. For him, the Ark functions representatively—symbolizing the cult of the old covenant and its linkage to the Davidic dynasty. For the redactor of the Book of Jeremiah—for it is to him (rather than to the historical prophet) that the primary importance now belongs: namely the eschatological message associated with a new reality. He proclaims not only the return of the exiles, members of the chosen people, but also the pilgrimage of all the nations to Jerusalem. The latter, as the "throne of God," becomes the new center of God's world, implying that earthly kingdoms and dynasties are no longer necessary for the realization of this eschatological ideal (Porzig 2009, 226).

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Media Competencies in the Communication of Faith in Pope Francis' Messages for World Communications Day (2014–2025). Part One: Cognitive and Ethical Competencies

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Abstract: The article offers partial results of research on media competencies in the communication of faith, reconstructed on the basis of Pope Francis' Messages for the World Communications Day (2014–2025). The research problem focuses on identifying the competencies deemed essential for the Christian proclamation within the digital culture and on analysing their theological and anthropological grounds in the face of such contemporary challenges as disinformation, social polarisation, and the development of artificial intelligence. A three-stage qualitative content analysis (exploration–categorisation–interpretation) was supported by contextual validation through comparison with the relevant literature and the teaching of the Church. The analysis helped to define five equivalent categories of media competencies: cognitive, ethical, relational, technical, and spiritual (each with four subcategories). This article discusses the first two of them, i.e. cognitive competencies (related to the search for truth, critical discernment, and reflection) and ethical competencies (responsibility, the culture of encounter, the ethics of technology, resistance to disinformation). Their mutual complementarity and deep grounding in Christian anthropology and Francis' theology of communication were demonstrated. The messages show communication of the faith as an act of love, witness, and community-building, in which cognition and ethics constitute two inseparable dimensions of the mature presence of Christians in the media. The article concludes with seven findings and formative recommendations for media education and pastoral ministry in the context of digital culture. The remaining categories (relational, technical, and spiritual) will be discussed in a separate publication.

Keywords: communication of faith, disinformation, media and digital competencies, media literacy, Pope Francis, World Communications Day

1. Introduction

In the era of accelerated digitization, the globalization of information, and the development of artificial intelligence, the media are not only a space for the exchange of content, but also an educational and formative environment that impact interpersonal relationships, value systems, and the identity of individuals and social groups. In this context, the communication of the Christian faith faces a great challenge, as it requires preserving the integrity of the Gospel message while simultaneously making use of the technological potential of contemporary media. By publishing annual Messages for the World Communications Day from 2014 to 2025, Pope Francis provided a coherent insight into the role of the media in evangelization. One of his

principal indications is the necessity of developing media literacy that combines the theological dimension, rooted in Revelation and the mission of the Church, with the anthropological aspect, which respects the dignity of the person and the dynamic social relations.¹ The pontiff's messages both comment on the changing reality of communication and offer a unique agenda of media formation. They thus contribute to the integral vision of the Church's presence in the digital environment. The subject is acutely topical in the face of mediatisation of social life; it offers opportunities as well as poses challenges, e.g., polarisation, disinformation, cyberviolence, new forms of addictions (cf. *ChV 88*). That is precisely why media literacy and digital competencies are the key skill set of present-day evangelisers.

1.1. The Theoretical Background and Definitions of Key Terms

Reflection on media competencies² in the communication of faith requires grounding in two complementary fields: media studies and theological-anthropological perspectives. In media-studies approaches, media competencies comprise the ability to use media consciously, critically, and ethically in both receptive and productive roles across three dimensions: cognitive (understanding media mechanisms and critical content analysis), operational (practical skills in content creation and digital navigation), ethical (awareness of ethical and social consequences) (Rivoltella 2017, 57–98).

Polish literature largely follows this tripartite structure while placing greater emphasis on digital-age challenges (Ptaszek 2019; Ogonowska 2013, 2016) and educational contexts (Drzewiecki 2013; Szajda 2021). Recent contributions, particularly concerning Generation Z, further highlight the importance of self-regulation and critical thinking in complex digital environments (Jabłońska 2024). Compared with Pier Cesare Rivoltella's model, Polish definitions reveal strong structural similarity but differ in their stronger focus on digital-specific issues and pedagogical applications.

Media competencies are the outcome of media education (media literacy). From an ethical viewpoint, media are rooted in the relational and personalist nature of the human person and the call to communion (Drożdż 2005, 266). According to Rivoltella, media education is systematic educational activity that integrates technical, critical, and ethical skills (Rivoltella 2017, 18), whereas in a theological perspective it constitutes formation of senders and receivers in the spirit of Christian values (Adamski and Łęcicki 2016, 18). Monika Jabłońska proposes a three-paradigm

¹ Francis, Messages for the World Communications Days (WCD) from 2014 to 2025, see <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/communications.html>. Hereinafter in the article references to the messages will be marked by the following abbreviation: WCD 2014/48. The first number indicates the year of the message, the second one its consecutive number. Numbers of the messages are continuous since the first document of this type, issued in 1967 for the World Social Communications Day.

² For the evolution of the concept of media, information, and digital competencies, see Gruhn and Brzózka-Złotnicka 2014; Chmielewski 2016; Ogonowska and Walecka-Rynduch 2024.

approach (transmission, critical, and practice-oriented) and stresses the need for their integration, especially for Generation Z (Jabłońska 2024, 35, 271, 293).

1.2. Review of Relevant Literature (*Status Quaestionis*)

Research on media competencies in the communication of faith as presented in Pope Francis's Messages for World Communications Day combines theological and media-studies perspectives. Józef Majewski (2020) analyses media in the family context (WCD 2015/49, 2018/52; *AL*), emphasizing balance between media use and direct relationships. Wojciech Misztal (2018) links the 2014–2017 messages to the presence of God, proposing competencies of conscious communication, critical information evaluation, and dialogue in hope (pneumatological dimension). Mateusz Podlecki (2017, 2018) examines fake news (WCD 2018/52), highlighting source credibility assessment, patience, and verification as responses to disinformation. Katarzyna Pokorna-Ignatowicz (2020) interprets new media as spaces of "culture of encounter" and "journalism of peace" (WCD 2014/48, 2018/52), underscoring competencies for dialogue and ethical journalism. Robert Nęcek (2016) explores media education in Francis's social teaching as formation for conscious reception and creation of content in line with Christian values. Marek Weresa (2019) studies the informational mission of media (2014–2017), stressing verification, combating disinformation, and promoting truth for the common good. Damian Koper (2024) examines the social role of digital media, showing their integration with pastoral mission and competencies supporting relationships, solidarity, and ethical technology use for evangelization.

More recent works broaden the scope: Noel Asiones et al. (2025) address intercultural dimensions and thematic evolution (from culture of encounter to AI and the "delicacy of hope"); Mario Knezović et al. (2020) identify coherent promotion of truth, hope, and relationships in the first six messages; Veronika Müllerová and Jaroslav Franc (2023) analyze adaptation to social media and digital leadership competencies (Francis on Twitter); Aldona Maria Piwko (2025) demonstrates coherence between the World Communications Day Messages and religious diplomacy in the Middle East, emphasizing intercultural dialogue skills.

The research gap consists in an absence of a systematic and comprehensive analysis of the full corpus of Pope Francis's Messages for the World Communications Day (2014–2025) exists from a theological-anthropological perspective on media competencies in the communication of faith. Existing studies are limited to selected messages or themes (e.g., dialogue, fake news) and do not cover the latest texts on artificial intelligence (WCD 2024/58) and the "delicacy of hope" in the face of technicism (WCD 2025/59). The present article fills this gap by reconstructing and offering a theological-anthropological interpretation of the media competencies articulated by Pope Francis.

1.3. Research Question, Objective and Topicality of the Subject Matter

The research question was defined as follows: which media competencies are promoted in Pope Francis' Messages for the World Communications Day in the years 2014–2025 as vital for the communication of faith in the digital culture, especially in the face of disinformation, social polarisation, and the development of artificial intelligence? How do these competencies reflect the theological (kerygma, hope, mercy, the evangelising mission) and anthropological (the dignity of the human person, relationality, dialogue, community-building) foundations of the Christian proclamation?

The overarching objective of the study is the identification, reconstruction, and a theological and anthropological interpretation of the key media competencies present in Pope Francis' Messages for the World Communications Day (2014–2025). The detailed aims include: to distinguish and systematise the media competencies postulated in the examined corpus of texts; to situate the reconstructed competencies in the broader context of the Church's teaching on the media and evangelisation; and to formulate practical recommendations for media education, catechesis, and communicational formation of clerics and lay persons in the digital culture reality.

At the theoretical level, the analysis may expand the discourse on religious communication by integrating the perspectives of theology and media studies. In the broader social context, the study may contribute to reflection on digital ethics, promoting communication grounded in Christian values for the sake of the common good. The outcomes of the study may contribute both to practical theology (theology of communication and media) and to Catholic media pedagogy, laying the groundwork for designing formation programmes addressing the current challenges of the digital civilisation.

1.4. Materials and Selection of Sources

The primary source material consists of Pope Francis' Messages for World Communications Day (2014–2025), published on the official website of the Holy See. The collection consists of 12 documents (approx. 55 pages), which will be reviewed together in order to capture the thematic continuity. It is complemented by the literature on the subject discussed in the review and Italian studies from a series of commentaries on Pope Francis' messages.³ The criteria for selecting literature included: (1) relevance to the issues of media competence and communication of the faith; (2) the time frame 2000–2025; and (3) analyses of the Church's teaching about the media from the perspective of theology and media studies.

³ It is a series of comments by Italian social scientists, theologians and philosophers to Pope Francis' Messages for World Communications Day. The series is published by Scholé – Morcelliana from Brescia, cf. Bibliography.

1.5. Theoretical Framework, Research Methodology and Analytical Procedure

1.5.1. Faith-Based Media Literacy as a Theoretical Framework of Media Competencies in the Communication of Faith

The concept of faith-based media literacy (FBML) serves as the primary theoretical and interpretative framework of this study, integrating media education with the theological understanding of the communication of faith. The term was introduced in American Christian education by Stephanie Iaquinto and John Keeler (2012, 20–24), who define FBML as the formation of media competencies in the light of Christian anthropology, ethics, and spirituality. Their model rests on five principles: (1) media actively shape human perception of reality; (2) media values often contradict Gospel values; (3) critical analysis is essential for discerning truth; (4) media education forms Christians for responsible social participation; and (5) media competencies foster spiritual and moral growth.

In the American tradition the model has been further developed by Heidi A. Campbell, who explores digital religion and spiritual formation (Cambell and Tsuria 2022); by Paul A. Soukup, who focuses on the theological and hermeneutical dimension (Soukup 2002); and Maria Rosalia Tenorio de Azevedo, who examines faith-based media literacy as education for social justice and ethical media engagement (Tenorio de Azevedo 2019). In Europe, Rivoltella (2017, 2020), a leading Catholic theorist of media education, proposes media education as a “pedagogy of values” (“educazione ai media come educazione ai valori”), in which media competencies are inseparable from moral and spiritual formation, leading to discernment in the Holy Spirit and community-building. All the above authors emphasise that faith-inspired media education is not defensive in character. Rather than being limited to protection against the influence of the media, it constitutes a positive proposal for spiritual and social formation within the culture of communication.

In the Polish context, parallel concepts have been developed independently by Bishop Adam Lepa, who proposed the iconosphere—logosphere—ethosphere triad (Lepa 2003, 2010); by Piotr Drzewiecki (2013, 45–68; 2024, 327); by Andrzej Adamski and Grzegorz Łęcicki, who work on media theology and inculturation of the Gospel (Adamski and Łęcicki 2016); by Łęcicki, who studies media education in the service of catechesis (Łęcicki 2011); and by Mirosław Chmielewski, who analyzes media competencies in the communication of faith (Chmielewski 2016, 2019, 2020). All these authors share the conviction that faith-inspired media education is not merely defensive but constitutes a positive proposal for the integral formation of the person, enabling responsible, creative, and evangelizing participation in digital culture.

In the current study, the FBML concept (broadly understood, beyond the literal sense) serves as a theoretical and interpretative framework, enabling the

reconstruction and theological-anthropological analysis of the media competencies present in Pope Francis' Messages for the World Communications Day (2014–2025).

1.5.2. Research Methodology and Analytical Procedure

This study will apply qualitative content analysis in a hermeneutical approach, in line with the approach of Mariette Bengtsson (2016). This means that the papal messages will be read not solely as linguistic material to be categorised, but as texts rooted in a specific ecclesial, theological, and historical context, while their interpretation will consider the author's intention and the researcher's awareness of pre-understanding. The analysis will be hermeneutically inspired, which means that—although it will not aim at a full reconstruction of meaning in the sense of Gadamer's "fusion of horizons"—it will preserve the essential elements of theological hermeneutics described by Werner G. Jeanrond: the dialogical nature of the interpretative process, openness to multilayered meanings, and the grounding of the text's reading in the experience of the faith community (cf. Jeanrond 1999, 142–68, 186–208).

The reliability of the analysis will be reinforced through contextual validation, consisting in comparing the results with theologically and thematically related Church documents, which will enable the verification and deepening of the interpretative accuracy. Such a research procedure is consistent with the methodological standards of qualitative research in the humanities and theological sciences, in which a theoretical interpretative framework, a transparent coding path, and interpretative coherence constitute the fundamental criteria of credibility (cf. Mayring 2014, 107–9).

The research procedure will follow a three-stage approach and will include:

- 1) Exploratory stage: the aim of this stage will be a preliminary mapping of the research field through a critical, focused reading of the full corpus of Pope Francis' Messages for the World Communications Day (2014–2025). During the analysis, a purposeful open coding procedure will be applied, aimed at identifying recurring theological and anthropological motifs as well as all passages explicitly or implicitly referring to media competencies. This stage will lead to the extraction of analytical units, defined as semantically autonomous fragments of text (a sentence, a few sentences, or a short paragraph) that express a coherent idea concerning one or more media competencies. These units will be further systematised in the subsequent stages of the study.
- 2) Categorisation stage: development and operationalisation of media competence categories through a multi-source comparative analysis of the papal messages, scholarly literature, and Church documents. The main categories will be elaborated into subcategories, after which the textual units will be coded into the appropriate (sub)categories, accompanied by the author's explanatory notes.
- 3) Interpretation stage: an in-depth theological and anthropological analysis of the categories of media competencies obtained in light of the relevant literature and the teaching of the Church on the media and evangelisation. This stage will help

anchor the outcomes in the broader Catholic reflection on the digital culture and formulate theoretical conclusions and practical recommendations for pastoral care and media education.

The designed research procedure will enable the reconstruction of media competencies present in the communication of faith in Pope Francis' Messages for the World Communications Day, as well as their thorough interpretation in a theological and anthropological perspective. The results of the content analysis (exploratory and categorial stages) will be presented in the "Results" section. Their significance, relation to the broader context of Church teaching, and the theological and pastoral conclusions (interpretative stage) will be developed and discussed in the Discussion and Conclusions sections.

2. Results

The presentation of the results of the qualitative content analysis of Pope Francis' Messages for the World Communications Day (2014–2025) is preceded by a description of the categorisation and coding procedure, which had a number of stages and was iterative (see Table 1). In the first stage, an in-depth, focused reading of the entire corpus of texts was carried out to identify recurring theological-anthropological motifs and passages relating to media competencies. The second, categorial stage, began with the adoption of Rivoltella's tripartite typology (cognitive, ethical, and relational competencies) as a preliminary coding framework. The iterative comparison of the data and the confrontation with the scholarly literature and Church documents⁴ helped to single out two additional emergent categories: technical competencies and spiritual competencies. Ultimately, a five-element model comprising 20 subcategories was developed.

In the third stage, 314 coding units were coded. Each unit was first open-coded and subsequently allocated to the categories and subcategories of the final pattern.

The reliability and credibility of the analysis were ensured through: iterative readings of the texts; consultation of the categories and interpretations with an independent expert in pastoral theology and pedagogy (peer debriefing); contextual validation by confronting the results with Rivoltella's model and with the teaching of the Church; and the researcher's systematic reflection.

⁴ *Directory for Catechesis* clearly indicated that the digital culture poses challenges for the Church in terms of critical, ethical, and spiritual formation (cf. DC 213–14; 359–72). *Antiqua et Nova* stresses the need to humanise communication in the age of AI (cf. AN 7–12), while *Towards Full Presence* recalls e.g., that the presence of Christians in the media cannot by any means be only technical, but should be an embodied form of the witness to faith.

Table 1. Analytical procedure diagram

Analysis stage	Procedure description	Numerical and descriptive result
Source corpus	Complete set of texts subject to analysis	12 messages of Pope Francis for the World Communication Day (2014–2025)
Analytical units	Object subject to content analysis—each message treated as a separate semantic whole	12 analytical units (one message per year)
Coding units	Semantic identification of autonomous text passages (most often one sentence or a short paragraph) applying to media competencies, code assignment	314 coding units
Main categories	Grouping 314 coding units into five main areas of competencies	5 categories: cognitive, ethical, relational, technical, spiritual
Subcategories	Precise definition of individual categories in line with highlighted aspects of competencies	20 subcategories (4 per category)

Source: own elaboration.

The results of the analysis indicate that Francis' teaching focuses on five main categories of key media competencies, each developing a crucial dimension of communicating faith in the digital age.

Table 2. Structure of the key media competencies in the communication of the faith in the messages Pope Francis (2014–2025)

Category	Subcategories
Cognitive Competencies, <i>n</i> = 78	(1) Awareness of the role of truth; (2) Critical analysis and discernment; (3) Understanding media mechanisms; (4) Reflection and silence
Ethical Competencies, <i>n</i> = 65	(1) Responsibility for content; (2) Culture of encounter; (3) Avoiding disinformation; (4) Ethics in the face of new technologies
Relational Competencies, <i>n</i> = 75	(1) Dialogue and openness to the other; (2) Empathy and sensitivity; (3) Inclusive language; (4) Building a community
Technical Competencies, <i>n</i> = 44	(1) Skilful use of digital tools; (2) Creating multimedia content in the spirit of mission; (3) Safety and protection of privacy; (4) Adaptation to new technologies
Spiritual Competencies, <i>n</i> = 52	(1) Rootedness in the Gospel; (2) Spiritual discernment in the media; (3) Witness and mission in the digital world; (4) Prayer and silence as a source of communication

Source: Author's own elaboration based on content analysis.

Due to the extensive nature of the results obtained, this article presents only a detailed analysis of the first two of the five main competence categories—cognitive and ethical—together with their corresponding subcategories. The analytical units selected from the messages for these two categories make up 46% of the full source corpus (with 314 units).

2.1. Cognitive Competencies (n = 78)

In the analysis of Pope Francis' messages from 2014–2025, four subcategories of cognitive competencies were identified: awareness of the role of truth, critical analysis and discernment, understanding media mechanisms, and reflection and silence. Each of these was present in the examined material in a recurring manner, confirmed by multiple textual units.

2.1.1. Awareness of the Role of Truth

The analysis of the messages shows that awareness of the role of truth in media communication constitutes one of the most frequently recurring motifs. Truth appears as a criterion of the communicator's authenticity and credibility, without which a media message loses its ethical and spiritual foundation. In conditions of increasing disinformation, the pope emphasizes that fidelity to the truth is a prerequisite for building community and social peace.

In the very first message of his pontificate, Francis recalled that “communication should be ... a reflection of the soul, the visible surface of a nucleus of love that is invisible to the eye.” (WCD 2023/57) He therefore demonstrated that the truth is no cold, intellectual category, but rather a dynamic relation which opens one up to the other person and makes one an interlocutor in the community of dialogue. In subsequent years, the pope would elaborate on this idea, especially in the context of threats related to fake news. The 2018 message reiterates the words of the Gospel: “*The Truth Will Set You Free*” (Jn 8:32): *Fake News and Journalism for Peace* (WCD 2018/52). This document stresses the crucial role of truth in journalism as Communication without truth becomes a tool of manipulation, and its goal is no longer encounter but domination.

From Francis' perspective, truth is not limited to the verifiability of facts; it is also a path for building relationships. As he emphasizes in the same message: “In Christianity, truth is not just a conceptual reality that regards how we judge things, defining them as true or false.... Truth involves our whole life.... Freedom from falsehood and the search for relationship: these two ingredients cannot be lacking if our words and gestures are to be true, authentic, and trustworthy.” (WCD 2018/52) Truth thus becomes the foundation of credibility and a bridge connecting people, even in a world divided and polarized by digital media.

In the 2024 message titled *Artificial Intelligence and the Wisdom of the Heart: Towards a Fully Human Communication* (WCD 2024/58), the pope demonstrates that in the digital age, when the boundaries between reality and its simulation become increasingly fluid, fidelity to the truth remains the foundation of the ethical and spiritual dimension of communication.

In summary, for Francis, awareness of the role of truth in media communication entails: (1) the courage to oppose false narratives; (2) rooting communication in the values of the Gospel; (3) treating truth as a space for encounter and community building; and (4) discernment regarding technological challenges that may blur the criteria of truth in digital culture.

2.1.2. Critical Analysis and Discernment

In Francis' teaching, critical analysis and discernment emerge as essential tools for participation in the media world. The pope repeatedly emphasizes that mere access to information is insufficient if the recipient lacks the ability to verify it and to distinguish truth from falsehood. A concept ingrained in Ignatian spirituality, discernment is part of the realm of media communication as a competence enabling full, responsible and conscious engagement with the media.

In the 2018 message, the pontiff highlights the necessity of exposing manipulation: "We need to unmask what could be called the 'snake-tactics' used by those who disguise themselves in order to strike at any time and place." (WCD 2018/52) This biblical image is used by Francis to demonstrate that false narratives are especially harmful when they ostensibly pose as truth. In turn, in the 2021 message Francis stresses the method of discernment based on an encounter: "*Come and See*" (*Jn 1:46*): *Communicating by Encountering People Where and as They Are* (WCD 2021/55). This means that discernment cannot be merely an intellectual process but demands empathy for the other's life experience.

In 2022, the pope highlights the spiritual aspect of this competence: *Listening with the Ear of the Heart* (WCD 2022/56). This metaphorical expression indicates that the analysis of media content requires not only the mind but also the heart, capable of discerning the truth amidst informational noise: "The true seat of listening is the heart... Saint Francis of Assisi exhorted his brothers to 'incline the ear of the heart.'" (WCD 2022/56) Finally, in 2024 Francis notes that profound discernment leads to the "Wisdom of the Heart" (WCD 2024/58) and the critical analysis cannot be reduced to technical procedures but must be supported by integral Christian anthropology.

2.1.3. Understanding Media Mechanisms

Another subcategory of cognitive competencies is the capacity for understanding media mechanisms. Pope Francis emphasizes that without reflection on how the media operate, how they impact narratives, prioritise information, and

influence social relationships, a Christian remains at the mercy of oversimplifications and polarization.

In the 2019 message, the pope stresses the role of the media in the formation of communities: “*We Are Members One of Another*” (Eph 4:25): *From Social Network Communities to the Human Community* (WCD 2019/53). When properly understood, the media may enhance ties rather than deepen divides. The following year, in 2020, the pope highlights the narrative function of the media: “*That You May Tell Your Children and Grandchildren*” (Ex 10:2): *Life Becomes History* (WCD 2020/54). Here media mechanisms are shown as narrative structures that impart meaning to the experience of individuals and communities.

In his messages from 2022 and 2023, Francis expands this perspective of understanding media mechanisms. In his view, the qualitative process of change in communication takes place when listening and speaking become self-giving (cf. WCD 2022/56, 2023/57). This means that the media both transmit information and impact the way people experience their relations and offer themselves to others. Therefore, the analysis of media mechanisms helps discern that the media are no neutral tools but a dynamic cultural environment with profound anthropological and ethical consequences.

2.1.4. Reflection and Silence

The final subcategory of cognitive competence involves reflection and silence. Francis notes that in the era of excess information and constant onslaught of stimuli, we must regain the capacity for silence, contemplation and deliberate pause. Silence does not imply a withdrawal from communication but deepens it. It enables authentic encounter and a finer understanding of content. In the 2014 message, the pope writes: “We need ... to recover a certain sense of deliberateness and calm. This calls for time and the ability to be silent and to listen,” (WCD 2014/48) demonstrating the need for distancing oneself to the pressure of the media. In 2021, he adds: “an account of reality, calls for an ability to go where no one else thinks of going ... [to] curiosity, openness, passion.” (WCD 2021/55) The above excerpt describes the work of journalists and emphasizes the need for patience and engagement in understanding human stories, which can be interpreted as requiring reflection and attentive listening. Furthermore, the pope’s idea shows that communication rooted in reflection is not a rapid transmission of data packets but a process that engages the whole person.

A similar concept recurs in later messages, where the pope emphasizes that only through reflection can one avoid superficiality and informational chaos. Silence and stillness are therefore not a luxury but a necessary component of media competencies in the process of communicating the faith.

2.2. Ethical Competencies (*n* = 65)

Ethical competencies in media communication, according to Pope Francis, include fidelity to the truth, responsibility for the message, opposition to disinformation, and the ability to foster a culture of encounter. The pope repeatedly emphasizes that the media are not merely a neutral channel of information but a space in which the consciences of participants in media communication and social relationships are shaped. As such, they require clear moral criteria.

2.2.1. Responsibility for Content

Francis consistently reminds us that each communicator, be it a journalist, content author or another user of social media, bears responsibility for the message. “All of us are responsible for the communications we make, for the information we share, for the control that we can exert over fake news by exposing it.” (WCD 2021/55)

In the 2016 message, the pope points out that communication is primarily “closeness” and emphasizes in the same message that it should serve the common good rather than particular interests: “In a broken, fragmented and polarized world, to communicate with mercy means to help create a healthy, free and fraternal closeness between the children of God and all our brothers and sisters in the one human family.” (WCD 2016/50) This implies that it is not merely a matter of adhering to professional rules, but of the ethics of communication, which concerns truth, the common good and the dignity of the other person. Responsibility for content is therefore not limited to factual accuracy but includes care for the meaning and purpose of communication. The pope emphasizes that every story affects life: it can destroy if it offers an illusion, or edify if it is rooted in truth (cf. WCD 2020/54, 2021/55). “Often on communication platforms, instead of constructive stories which serve to strengthen social ties and the cultural fabric, we find destructive and provocative stories that wear down and break the fragile threads binding us together as a society.” (WCD 2020/54) This awareness becomes the cornerstone of ethical participation in the digital space as the media content have the power to create social and individual reality.

2.2.2. Culture of Encounter

The second key ethical competence is the promotion of a “culture of encounter.” Francis warns against the polarization and fragmentation of social life, which are often consequences of media simplifications and manipulations. A “culture of encounter” is an alternative to the “cancel culture.”

In 2014, the pope develops the most concise reflection on a culture of encounter. He emphasizes that the media and communication help to overcome differences, build unity, and foster mutual understanding and respect. He points to the need for a capacity to give and receive. In this way, communication can help build bridges, fosters meeting one another in truth, and respects differences. Moreover, the internet

should serve as a tool for solidarity and encounter (cf. WCD 2014/48).⁵ The pope points out that the media and communication have the capacity to serve as tools that unite rather than divide communities. In 2016, the pope highlights the personalist and social aspect of communication and observes: “Communication has the power to build bridges, to enable encounter and inclusion, and thus to enrich society.”⁶ (WCD 2016/50) In 2019, in turn, he recalls that media may become platforms for creating communities: “*We Are Members One of Another*” (Eph 4,25), which means that be it online communities or human ones, we must strive for a profound understanding and solidarity (cf. WCD 2019/53).

The culture of encounter in communication is not only a moral ideal, but a specific competence, which requires that both the recipient and the sender should adopt a deliberate choice of a communications style, which respects diversity and promotes dialogue.

2.2.3. Avoiding Disinformation

Francis pays special attention to disinformation, which he calls in no uncertain terms a sin against the truth. Fake news, manipulation and one-sided narratives erode the foundation of social trust and thus the capacity for building peace.

In his 2018 message, Francis recalls the words of the Gospel in the title: “*The Truth Will Set You Free*” (Jn 8:32): *Fake News and Journalism for Peace* (WCD 2018/52). The document is a bona-fide ethical manifesto of the pope to the media. The pontiff indicates that fighting disinformation is not merely a technical verification of information, but first and foremost the formation of consciences: “I would like to contribute to our shared commitment to stemming the spread of fake news and to re-discovering the dignity of journalism and the personal responsibility of journalists to communicate the truth.” (WCD 2018/52)

Furthermore, Francis warns against the vicious character of manipulation: “Artificial intelligence systems ... can be a source of ‘cognitive pollution,’ a distortion of reality by partially or completely false narratives, believed and broadcast as if they were true. We need but think of the long-standing problem of disinformation in the

⁵ “In a world like this, media can help us to feel closer to one another, creating a sense of the unity of the human family which can in turn inspire solidarity and serious efforts to ensure a more dignified life for all. Good communication helps us to grow closer, to know one another better, and ultimately, to grow in unity. The walls which divide us can be broken down only if we are prepared to listen and learn from one another. We need to resolve our differences through forms of dialogue which help us grow in understanding and mutual respect. A culture of encounter demands that we be ready not only to give, but also to receive. Media can help us greatly in this, especially nowadays, when the networks of human communication have made unprecedented advances. The internet, in particular, offers immense possibilities for encounter and solidarity. This is something truly good, a gift from God.” (WCD 2014/48)

⁶ “Communication, wherever and however it takes place, has opened up broader horizons for many people. This is a gift of God which involves a great responsibility. I like to refer to this power of communication as ‘closeness.’” (WCD 2016/50)

form of fake news, which today can employ ‘deepfakes.’” (WCD 2024/58) In this way he indicates the “snake-tactics,” i.e. the deceptive methods of masquerading as truth, which must be exposed. In 2023, the pope emphasizes that *Speaking with the Heart: “The Truth in Love” (Eph 4:15)* is an alternative to false narratives (cf. WCD 2023/57).

In the 2023 message, the pope notes: “As Christians, we know that the destiny of peace is decided by conversion of hearts, since the virus of war comes from within the human heart. From the heart come the right words to dispel the shadows of a closed and divided world and to build a civilization which is better than the one we have received.” (WCD 2023/57)

2.2.4. Ethics in the Face of New Technologies

The final dimension of ethical competencies is moral discernment of new technologies, especially in the context of artificial intelligence, algorithms and automation of communication processes. Pope Francis is aware that these tools may serve the good and yet can potentially entail the risk of manipulation, depersonalisation and loss of truth and responsibility.

In the context of various medial narrative forms, in the 2020 message Francis warns us against the superficiality of information and communication: “Not all stories are good stories.... In an age when falsification is increasingly sophisticated. We need wisdom to be able to welcome and create beautiful, true and good stories. We need courage to reject false and evil stories.” (WCD 2020/54) This is a call for the critical use of new narrative forms, including those generated by technology, and the need for reflection and responsibility in the transmission of content.

Francis recalls that “the development of systems of artificial intelligence ... is radically affecting the world of information and communication, and through it, certain foundations of life in society.” (WCD 2024/58) He therefore points out the risk of the loss of truth and humanity due to the exclusive reliance on big data, which “ultimately entails a substantial loss of the truth of things, hindering interpersonal communication and threatening our very humanity.” (WCD 2024/58)

The pope stresses the fact that technology is to serve humans, not to replace them: “The use of artificial intelligence can make a positive contribution to the communications sector..., provided that it values the professionalism of communication, making every communicator more aware of his or her responsibilities, and enables all people to be, as they should, discerning participants in the work of communication.” (WCD 2024/58) In this context, the term “discernment” is of key importance as it indicates that people must be active, informed and critical recipients and authors of content rather than its passive consumers. First of all, the very title of the 2024 message, *Artificial Intelligence and the Wisdom of the Heart: Towards a Fully Human Communication* (WCD 2024/58), unmistakably indicates that even the most advanced technologies must be subordinated to rather than replace the wisdom of the heart. In the face of new technologies, such ethics is an indispensable competence

for the contemporary user of media culture, who must combine mastery of the technical operation of tools with profound moral reflection and responsibility for the message produced.

In the cognitive category, Francis emphasises the role of truth, critical analysis and reflection, which protect against manipulation and superficiality. Ethical competencies focus on responsibility for content, the culture of encounter and avoiding misinformation. An analysis of the first two categories of competencies and their subcategories helps formulate a conclusion to be verified in the next part of the study (“Discussion”), namely that the pope proposes a coherent vision of these two media competencies in communicating faith in the digital culture.

3. Discussion

3.1. Cognitive Competencies

The published messages of 2014–2016 stress the need for both an awareness of the role of truth in communication and a critical evaluation of information sources. After 2017, more complex aspects emerged, related to the interpretation of media narratives and the ability to analyse the cultural context of the message. In 2020 the stress shifted to the role of history in the transmission of meaning and significance, which was in 2022 and 2023 developed through reflection on more profound listening and understanding of the other person in the communication process. In turn, 2024 and 2025 bring an element of cognitive discernment with respect to artificial intelligence and its impact on public opinion.

The analysis of Pope Francis’ messages from the years 2014–2025 highlights the key components of cognitive competencies, which define a responsible participation in the digital culture. This reflection attempts to establish an interdisciplinary dialogue between theology, media studies and media pedagogy, focusing on the foundation of truth, critical discernment, comprehending the media mechanisms, and the importance of reflection and silence. Each of the elements is not only an individual skill but part of the integral vision of man as an active subject of the digital culture:

- Truth as the cognitive foundation. Francis prioritizes the truth, which is not solely an adequacy of facts, but first of all a relation-based foundation of trust and social unity. In the 2018 message, he stresses: “The truth will set you free” (Jn 8:32), demonstrating the moral and spiritual underpinnings of the problem of fake news, seen as a manifestation of a “moral and spiritual poverty” of contemporary communication (WCD 2018/52). From this perspective, truth is not a set of information and data but rather a meta-competence that informs all the other cognitive aspects. Media formation must be based on the virtues of truthfulness and ongoing verification of the sources (cf. *TFP* 14, 66). This echoes Rivoltella’s

approach to media education as a process of “formation to truth,” interpreted through the lens of anthropological and religious values (Rivoltella 2017, 49–52). Formation to the truth is a personalist process that links freedom with responsibility in the relation with God and the fellow human being (Goliszek 2017, 460–462).

- Critical analysis and discernment. Francis develops the idea of a critical approach to media content, extending it with interpersonal and contextual aspects. In his 2021 message, Francis calls: “*Come and See*” (*Jn 1:46*): *Communicating by Encountering People Where and as They Are* (WCD 2021/55). Discernment in this sense is not only a reliable analysis of facts, but also the capacity for empathetic encounter and interpretation of the contexts of communication. The aspect of “wisdom of the heart” is essential, integrating intellect with the practical virtue of discernment, protecting against manipulation and enabling authentic encounter (WCD 2024/58). This dimension of critical thinking is further confirmed in other Church documents, which call for the ability to critically interpret digital culture, distinguish threats from integral human development, and emphasise the importance of hermeneutic competence of interpretation (*DC 213*; Rivoltella 2017, 193–201).
- Understanding the mechanisms of the media. Another major aspect of cognitive competence is the awareness of the work of the media in shaping identity and social relations. Francis points to the impact of algorithms, which not only select content, but also shape the ways in which we learn about the world and form public opinion; this poses an ethical and spiritual challenge (WCD 2024/58). The authors of *Towards Full Presence* emphasise the importance of understanding narrative logics, of digital storytelling, which forge individual and collective identities (cf. *TFP 69–70*; Marcyński 2024, 23–87). This reflection fits into the anthropological dimension of media literacy, showing that the media are a structure rather than a neutral tool, which requires the development of critical discernment skills in digital ecosystems (Benanti 2016, 79; cf. *TFP 13, 58*).
- Reflection and silence. In his teaching, Francis attaches particular importance to silence and reflection as a space free from the overload of stimuli and data. As early as in his 2014 message he urges: “We need ... to recover a certain sense of deliberateness and calm,” (WCD 2014/48) and in 2020 he stresses the need for “patience and discernment” in the narrating of histories which will help us discover the truth of who we really are (cf. WCD 2020/54). Media pedagogy indicates that reflection prevents us from reducing media to pure consumption, while silence is not merely an element of digital hygiene, but also a spiritual space that fosters contemplation and dialogue with God (Rivoltella 2017, 63). The Vatican document *Towards Full Presence* elaborates on the above subcategory of cognitive competence, in particular when it comprehensively justifies the importance of the competence of reflection and silence (cf. *TFP 30–35*). It is thus

a major source of building an integral vision of cognitive competencies as a process of discernment that involves truth, critical approach, understanding media mechanisms, and silence.

The discussion of the research findings in this particular area indicates that cognitive competencies, as defined by Pope Francis, are not a set of isolated skills, but an integral process of discernment that enables free, responsible and spiritually profound participation in digital culture. Truth remains the foundation as a transcendental value that unifies such other aspects as critical thinking, conscious understanding of media mechanisms, and the ability to reflect and become calm and silent. Competencies understood in this way counterbalance risks like manipulation, over-stimulation and misinformation. Furthermore, they correspond to the Church's current reflection on media communication, opening up space for communication based on freedom and responsibility.

3.2. Ethical Competencies

Early on (2014–2015), communication ethics were strongly linked to truthfulness, transparency and the avoidance of manipulation. Starting in 2016, the concept of “communication ecology” emerged, which expanded the responsibility of the sender to involve the entire media space and its impact on culture. In 2018 and 2019, special emphasis was put on the need to counter disinformation and fake news, while at the time of the pandemic (2020–2021) ethic was linked to being mindful of solidarity and hope during a global crisis. In 2023–2025, the central question was that of a responsible use of new technologies, especially artificial intelligence, including its potential and threats to human freedom. Therefore, ethical competencies occupy the central position in Pope Francis' reflection on the media. The analysis of his messages from the years 2014–2025 shows that communication is no neutral technical tool, but rather a space of moral choices, whose stakes involve truth, responsibility and community. Francis distinguishes four key dimensions: responsibility for content, culture of encounter, avoidance of disinformation, and ethics in the face of new technologies:

- **Responsibility for content:** refers to the “ethics of truth.” In the 2018 message, the pope recalls: “*The Truth Will Set You Free*” (*Jn 8:32*): *Fake News and Journalism for Peace* (WCD 2018/52). Here, truth is not only an epistemological category but also an ethical requirement, the cornerstone of social trust and community unity (cf. Drożdż 2005, 509–33). Italian scholars Vincenzo Corrado and Stefano Pasta note that in the digital world, every user contributes to the “information ecosystem” in that every publication entails a moral responsibility (Corrado and Pasta 2024, 9). The authors of *Towards Full Presence* understand responsibility for published content in a multifaceted way: as the necessity for reflective and

ethical publishing, countering conflicts and disinformation, caring for the community, and being aware of the technological and algorithmic context that shapes the message (*TFP* 14, 56, 75).

The communicator's responsibility is therefore twofold: toward the recipient and toward the technological architecture that co-shapes the circulation of content. This theme is further developed in the document *Antiqua et Nova*, which addresses the use of tools based on artificial intelligence. It emphasizes the necessity of transparency, responsibility, and moral reflection in the design, implementation, and use of AI systems in order to prevent abuse and social harm (cf. *AN* 36–48).

- **A culture of encounter** is one of the recurrent elements of Pope Francis' messages. As early as 2014, the pope observed: "It is not enough to be passersby on the digital highways, simply 'connected': connections need to grow into true encounter." (WCD 2014/48) An encounter is an ethical imperative of respect, dialogue and relations-building. In turn, in the 2023 message, the pope indicates the most comprehensive *modus operandi* for the sake of building a culture of encounter: *Speaking with the Heart: "The Truth in Love" (Eph 4:15)* (WCD 2023/57). This urge transcends the cognitive perspective. It enters the ethical dimension, as it obliges respect for the other person in the process of communication. The pope wants the word to be constructive rather than destructive, which directly opposes the logic of hate and polarization. The document *Towards Full Presence*, in turn, stresses the fact that the online presence of Christians should support the logic of gift and solidarity rather than competition or violence (*TFP* 15). In this respect, Francis sees communication in the media as a space for bridge-building, or a shift from the sending "channel" to personal "relations": "Communication has the power to build bridges, to enable encounter and inclusion, and thus to enrich society." (WCD 2016/50; cf. Neček 2016, 51–52; Bojko 2017, 58) That is why the ethics of communication must be based on the logic of dialogue which, respectful of differences, nevertheless seeks the truth (cf. Drożdż 2019, 162–90).
- The pope regards **avoiding disinformation** as a moral duty. The entire 2018 message addressed this very problem. Francis warned then: "we need to unmask what could be called the 'snake-tactics.'" (WCD 2018/52) Disinformation is not only a cognitive error but a sin against the fellow human being, as it destroys community and freedom. The document *Antiqua et Nova* indicates that algorithms multiply the phenomena of fake and deep fake news, containing people in filter bubbles (cf. *AN* 87–89). Media education should prepare us to "read between the lines" and to analyse the different aspects of the media message, which helps the modern media user grasp the implicit intentions of the sender (Ptaszek 2019, 28–87). For "algoretics," combating disinformation calls not only for fact-checking as well as comprehending data, logic and risks related to systems linked to digital platforms (Fiorentino and Benanti 2024, 14, 18;

cf. Benanti 2020, 97–98; AN 38–48). The challenge posed by fake news can only be understood and addressed through multidisciplinary cooperation (Levy 2024, 116), including from the perspective of Christian anthropology and theology.

- **Ethics in the face of new technologies.** AI is central for this reflection. The pope's main idea is as follows: AI technologies must serve the human being (cf. WCD 2024/58). Francis does not reject technology yet demands that its development be subject to the common good and to the integral vision of the person. Paolo Benanti implies that the AI era calls for a “new anthropology” (*nuova antropologia*), where the human being would not become a tool of machines (Benanti 2016, 73–78). The rapid development of AI poses new ethical challenges for the protection of human dignity and freedom; it requires strengthening an ethical stance of responsibility in both the design and use of these tools (cf. Fabris 2024, 104–8; Corrado 2024, 30–34). The document *Antiqua et Nova* highlights the fact that ethical responsibility related not only to AI users, but also to its designers, producers and managers of its systems, which should enhance social relations rather than erode them and replace with technology. It is therefore vital that the development and use of AI take place in the spirit of responsibility, respect for the dignity of the human person and promotion of the common good (cf. AN 44–46).

To sum up, the ethical competencies indicated by Pope Francis include four interrelated aspects: ethics of truth, culture of encounter, fight against disinformation, and reflection on technology. Together, they form a coherent vision of communication that prioritises people, truth and the common good. Thus, not only does the pope respond to the challenges of the day, but he also anticipates the directions of media studies, pointing out that the future of digital communication depends on being rooted in Christian anthropology and relational ethics.

The analysis of cognitive and ethical competencies in Pope Francis' Messages for the World Communications Day (2014–2025) demonstrates a coherent vision of communicating the faith, where the knowledge of truth and ethical responsibility are an inseparable foundation of Christian presence in the digital culture. They confirm the continuity of the Pontiff's teaching with the most recent documents of the Church, in particular the 2023 document *Towards Full Presence* and the 2025 document *Antiqua et Nova*, while simultaneously furthering it in the new context of the challenges of the age of artificial intelligence. Francis calls for an ecosystem of communication ingrained in the dignity of the human person and in love, where the media cease to be merely a technical instrument and become a space of encounter, discernment, and witness.

The outcomes obtained are clearly aligned with Rivoltella's concept of integral media education (2017), Benanti's ethical approach to technology (2020), and Corrado's idea of digital discipleship (2024). They nevertheless add a distinct theological-anthropological aspect to these models, absent from many secular

approaches (cf. Ogonowska 2013). Cognitive and ethical competencies are the foundation on which relational, technical, and spiritual competencies may rest; their full analysis will be presented in the second part of the article.

Despite limitations resulting from the qualitative and interpretative character of the study, its exclusive focus on the corpus of the World Communications Day Messages, and the presentation of only two categories of media competencies, the results obtained allow one to conclude that Pope Francis' teaching constitutes an original paradigm of communicating the faith in the digital age. This paradigm may be described as a "hermeneutics of communication in the perspective of faith,"⁷ where cognition, ethics, relations, technology, and spirituality merge to offer an integral formation of a person and community. The proposed model makes an invaluable contribution to the Catholic theology of the media and media pedagogy, providing at the same time specific pointers for the formation of clerics, catechists, and lay persons engaged in evangelisation in the digital environment. Further research, involving methodological triangulation and analyses of the reception of the messages, would help verify and expand the range of conclusions drawn.

4. Conclusions

The analyses of Pope Francis' Messages for World Communications Day from 2014 to 2025, read in the light of selected documents of the Catholic Church and compared with theological, anthropological and media studies literature, allow us to formulate a number of key tentative proposals of a theoretical nature as well as practical conclusions and recommendations for the pastoral ministry of the Catholic Church.

- 1) The research findings show that media competencies constitute a form of response to the anthropological challenges of the digital age. Francis repeatedly emphasizes that in the face of disinformation, polarization and the algorithmicising of social life, the capacity for discernment and grounding in truth is necessary. Truth, as a cognitive foundation, should be understood as a meta-competence integrating knowledge and ethics. Truth is not merely a collection of facts but a relational foundation of trust that unites critical thinking, source verification, and cognitive reliability, thereby linking the subcategories of cognitive and ethical competencies.
- 2) Even this part of the research results reveals their significance for the theology of media, showing that the Church's reflection on the media constitutes an original

⁷ "Communicative hermeneutics of faith," at this stage of research connotes a theological and anthropological interpretation of communicative acts in the light of faith, integrating cognitive, ethical, relational, technical, and spiritual aspects.

proposal from theological, anthropological, and educational perspectives. Although the papal vision is not parallel to academic reflection, it enters into dialogue with it, giving it a prophetic and spiritual dimension.

- 3) Critical discernment and capacity for assessment of media texts is a dialogic competence, as the “wisdom of the heart” combines content analysis with the empathetic understanding of context and person. Reflection and silence are the protective shields against the pressure of immediacy and excess stimuli, fostering a more mature interpretation of information.
- 4) This section of the study indicates that the media are primarily structures, not only tools. Algorithms and narrative formats impact interpersonal perception and relations. Therefore, the ethics of communication (culture of encounter, responsibility for the word) and understanding the mechanisms of digital environments are inseparable from being a mature subject online. In this context, the communication of the faith, in particular as the teaching of religious education in Poland, must be taken into account in the new National Curriculum of the Catholic Religion in terms of discovering truth in the media space of post-truth and of shaping the ethical position of the young generation, who live in a hybrid information reality known as onlife (cf. *TFP* 69–70; Chmielewski 2024).
- 5) Algoritics and AI urgently require that the community of the Church develop a training programme for catechists, pastors, and lay leaders concerning the following areas: (a) rudiments of AI literacy; (b) transparency and designation of generative content; (c) phenomena of data bias and risk assessment; (d) need for a *human-in-the-loop*; and (e) good practice of AI use in catechesis, in the teaching of religious education in school and evangelisation (e.g., lesson plans, ethics-related checklists, guidelines and procedures to be used in parishes/dioceses).
- 6) Ethical competencies are communal and institutional in nature; they require some formation background. Given the limitations of religious education and the lack of a general subject called Ethics, the Church should intensify its activities as follows: (a) ongoing training of teachers (especially RE teachers) in media and AI competencies; (b) modules for parents, catechists, preachers, and evangelisation teams; (c) diocesan support centres (materials, consultations, micro-certificates); and (d) cooperation with universities and media centres, especially Catholic ones. In practice, we might take advantage of the formation measures implied in relevant literature, such Bilicka (2021) on religion in the digital culture, Kiciński (2015) on education programs for media leaders, and Chmielewski (2020) on media education for new evangelization.
- 7) In the face of dynamic shifts in the realm of digital technologies, there is an urgent need to teach media and digital competence of candidates to the priesthood, i.e. to modify the *Ratio studiorum pro Polonia*. The number of hours of instruction and work methods is insufficient now: the program includes only 30 hours of exercises in media education. What is necessary are lectures, seminars and

project-based learning, which would facilitate the presentation of a broad spectrum of digital issues in pastoral work. This is a *signum temporis* which necessitates a deeper formation in this area of the Church's social teaching.

Arising from the above research findings, the above conclusions confirm that the cognitive and ethical competencies as articulated by Pope Francis constitute a coherent theological and anthropological foundation for media literacy in the service of the Gospel. From schools to pastoral work, formation should be oriented toward personal freedom, the common good, and the integral communication of the faith. Directions for further research will be presented in the second part of the article, which will show the research outcomes related to the other three competence categories, i.e. relational, technical and spiritual, identified in Pope Francis' messages. The presentation of the first part of the research justifies an assertion that the future of media education in the Church does not lie in adapting to the logic of technology, but in the formation of people capable of communicating the truth in love (Eph 4:15). In this sense, the papal vision of media competencies is significant for both the Church and the broader reflection on the anthropology and theology of the media and their role in global culture.

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