

ACTA UNIVERSITATIS CAROLINAE  
**THEOLOGICA** 2023  
Vol. 13, No. 1

---

**THEME**

**Animal Ethics**

CHARLES UNIVERSITY  
KAROLINUM PRESS  
2023

## **Editor-in-Chief**

David Vopřada (Katolická teologická fakulta UK, Praha)

## **Executive Editor**

Barbora Šmejdová (Katolická teologická fakulta UK, Praha)

## **Editors of the Thematic Part**

Martin M. Lintner (Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule, Brixen, Italy)

Michael Rosenberger (Institut für Moraltheologie, Katholische Privatuniversität Linz, Austria)

## **Editorial Board**

Alejandro Bertolini (Facultad de Teología, Pontificia Universidad Católica Argentina, Buenos Aires, Argentina)

Alex Villas Boas (Centro de Investigação em Teologia e Estudos de Religião, Lisboa, Portugal)

Julie Clague (Theology & Religious Studies, University of Glasgow, UK)

Denisa Červenková (Katolická teologická fakulta UK, Prague, Czech Rep.)

Richard Čemus (Pontificium Institutum Orientale, Rome, Italy)

René Dausner (Institut für Katholische Theologie, Universität Hildesheim, Germany)

Slavomir Dluhoš (Katholisch-Theologische Fakultät, Universität Wien, Austria)

Reinhold Esterbauer (Institut für Philosophie, Katholisch-Theologische Fakultät, Graz, Austria)

Tomáš Halík (Filozofická fakulta UK, Prague, Czech Rep.)

Oleh Kindij (Ukrainskij katolickij universitet, Lviv, Ukraine)

Branko Klun (Teološka fakulteta, Univerza v Ljubljani, Slovenia)

Volker Leppin (Institut für Spätmittelalter und Reformation,

Evangelisch-Theologische Fakultät, Tübingen, Germany)

Miloš Lichner (Teologická fakulta Trnavskej univerzity, Bratislava, Slovakia)

Martin M. Lintner (Philosophisch-Theologische Hochschule, Brixen, Italy)

Ivana Noble (Evangelická teologická fakulta UK, Prague, Czech Rep.)

Čtirad Václav Pospíšil (Teologická fakulta JU, České Budějovice, Czech Rep.)

Michael Rosenberger (Institut für Moraltheologie, Katholische Privatuniversität Linz, Austria)

Jakub Sirovátka (Teologická fakulta JU, České Budějovice, Czech Rep.)

Petr Štica (Katolická teologická fakulta UK, Prague, Czech Rep.)

Gabriela I. Vlčková (Cyrilometodějská teologická fakulta UP, Olomouc, Czech Rep.)

Elias Wolff (Pontificia Universidade Católica da Paraná, Brasil)

Lubomír Žák (Cyrilometodějská teologická fakulta UP, Olomouc, Czech Rep.)

AUC Theologica

Univerzita Karlova

Katolická teologická fakulta

Thákurova 3, 160 00 Praha 6

Czech Republic

e-mail: [theologica@ktf.cuni.cz](mailto:theologica@ktf.cuni.cz)

[www.theologica.cz](http://www.theologica.cz)

© Charles University, 2023

ISSN 1804-5588 (Print)

ISSN 2536-3398 (Online)

## CONTENTS

---

INTRODUCTION .....	5
<b>THEME</b>	
<b>Animal Ethics</b>	
MARTIN M. LINTNER	
Just Good Enough to Eat? Animals in Theological Ethics Approaches .....	11
JAN ZÁMEČNÍK	
‘And When He Saw Him, He Had Compassion’: Following Jesus and Relationship to Non-Human Creatures .....	21
LUCIE KOLÁŘOVÁ	
The Animal within Creation: Thoughts from Christian Theology .....	43
MICHAEL ROSENBERGER	
Revival of Ancient Questions: Current Developments in Theological Animal Ethics.....	67
<b>VARIA</b>	
RENÉ DAUSNER	
Auch eine Geschichte der Offenbarung: Die Inspirationslehre als Herausforderung gegenwärtiger Theologie.....	77
PETR HAVLÍK	
Il volto mariano della Chiesa e il volto ecclesiale di Maria nel pensiero di Joseph Ratzinger-Benedetto XVI .....	91

JUAN R. VÉLEZ

Towards a Theology of Holiness in the Laity:

Newman, Escrivá and Wójtyła . . . . . 109

LENKA FÍLOVÁ

Le sophisme de la beaute chez Gregoire de Nysse . . . . . 135

**REVIEWS & NEWS**

Conference Report: 'The Pattern and the Image:

Insights from the Alexandrian Exegetical Tradition'

(Pavel Dudzik, David Vopřada). . . . . 161

## INTRODUCTION

---

There are few topics in which the official teaching of the Church is so far away from the everyday practice of the faithful as in the perception of and dealing with animals. While these traditionally are not at all addressed in church dogmatics, they play a major role both in popular piety and in the everyday life of believers. Animal blessings are becoming increasingly popular. At Christmas, ox and donkey are naturally positioned at the manger. And in biblical texts, especially in the Psalms, animals are mentioned so often and, as a matter of course, said to belong to the ‘universal family’ of God.<sup>1</sup>

Gradually, theology is also becoming aware of animals. Animal studies are taking on an increasingly important role not only in philosophy but also in theology in general and moral theology in particular. With his encyclical *Laudato si'*, in which he speaks of the ‘value proper to each creature’<sup>2</sup> and criticises an anthropocentric attitude<sup>3</sup> that does not respect the fact that all creatures have ‘intrinsic value’,<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis has provided an important impulse to deepen not only environmental but also animal ethical questions theologically and morally and to reflect anew on the human-animal relationship from the perspective of the Christian faith.

Inspired and motivated by the Pope, more and more Christian theologians deal with this subject and are perceived as important voices in

---

<sup>1</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si': On Care for Our Common Home*, 89, available at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>2</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 16.

<sup>3</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 115–136.

<sup>4</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si'*, 118, 140.

scientific and socio-political debates on a responsible human-animal relationship. Nevertheless, these contributions have not yet found much institutional expression and anchorage in the breadth of the discipline of moral theology, indeed of theology as a whole. Therefore, the present issue of *AUC Theologica* is dedicated to the topic of animal ethics. It aims to provide initial orientations, present the current state of the debate and point out perspectives for future discourses. Finally, it would like to encourage theology to turn to animals as our fellow creatures and to understand them as an important source of knowledge.

The opening article is by Martin M. Lintner, Professor of Moral Theology at the Philosophical-Theological College of Bressanone, and bears the title ‘Just Good Enough to Eat? Animals in Theological Ethics Approaches’. Departing from the ambivalent way humans treat animals, Lintner states that the use of animals and coexistence with them has shaped people’s lives from the very beginning. However, theology has long misjudged the importance of a reflection on animals. Lintner then examines not only important theological approaches that take animals into account, above all, those that seek to give respect to the intrinsic value of animals. They require a profound change in the human-animal relationship in the light of the Christian faith and call for more humane treatment of animals. The article presents the most important approaches from the German-speaking region and attempts to show both common concerns and different figures of argumentation. The paper was originally published in German under the title ‘Einfach zum Fressen gern. Tiere in der theologischen Ethik’.<sup>5</sup> For the English translation presented here, it has been expanded and actualised.

The second contribution comes from Jan Zámečník, Assistant Professor at the Department of Ethics of the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University Prague. His text is called “‘And When He Saw Him, He Had Compassion’: Following Jesus and Relationship to Non-Human Creatures’. The article explores how the concept of following Jesus can be ethically applied in the sphere of the treatment of non-human creatures. It shows three possibilities of grasping the theme: accommodating Jesus to a preconceived idea, using the sayings and actions of Jesus that involve non-human creatures or nature, and adhering to a characteristic feature of his approach. The article points

---

<sup>5</sup> ‘Einfach zum Fressen gern. Tiere in der theologischen Ethik,’ *Herder-Korrespondenz* 72 (2018): 28–31.

out the problematic character of the first two options and highlights the third – it proposes that the relationship to non-human creatures should be based on the criterion of compassion accompanied by care for the suffering. Thus, Zámečník coincides with Pope Francis, who in his encyclical encourages us ‘to grow in solidarity, responsibility and compassionate care’ (no. 210).

The third article was written by Lucie Kolářová, Assistant Professor at the Department of Theological Sciences of the University of South Bohemia České Budějovice. She contributes with the reflection ‘Animal as Creation: Suggestions from Christian Theology’. The article describes how Christian theology has reflected the status and significance of animals in historical development, which positions it has created or preferred in this matter, and how they have changed from biblical times until our post-modern present age. Kolářová shows that each period is conveyed in its basic features and presented through selected authors or texts of the given time. She also follows the principal question of the nature of the human–animal relation from a theological viewpoint to gain a basis for a morally justifiable relation of post-modern people to other living creatures.

Finally, we present an article by Michael Rosenberger, Professor of Moral Theology at the Catholic University Linz, under the title ‘Revival of ancient questions. Current Developments in Theological Animal Ethics’. Since the middle of the 19th century, animal husbandry has been industrialised and subdued to economic efficiency to an unsurpassable degree. Animals as living beings and fellow creatures have largely fallen by the wayside. Whereas philosophical ethics has reflected this situation critically since the 1970s, theological ethics entered the debate only with a notable delay in the 2010s and was enormously fostered by the encyclical *Laudato si’* in 2015. The article discusses different theological approaches to animal ethics and links them with the origins of Christian animal ethics in the patristic era. Finally, it focuses attention on the most debated controversy in animal ethics, namely meat consumption, and argues for postponing this question in favour of progress in animal welfare. The article is an English translation of ‘Allianzen für das Tierwohl. Gegenwärtige Entwicklungen der theologischen Tierethik’.<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> First published in *Herder-Korrespondenz* 75, no. 10 (2021): 35–37.

Finally, let us frankly admit that we had hoped for more papers for this issue when we launched the Call for Papers in January 2022. The relatively low response underscores how long the way is we still have to go. All the more, with this issue, we hope to advance the debate, to set in motion a process of reflection, search and discussion, and to convey new perspectives on old topics. For the psalmist confesses: ‘Your righteousness is like the mountains of God, / Your judgments are deep as the primordial flood. You save men and animals, O Lord’ (Psalm 36:7).

*Martin M. Lintner  
and Michael Rosenberger*

doi: 10.14712/25365398.2025.11



**THEME**

**Animal Ethics**

---



# JUST GOOD ENOUGH TO EAT? ANIMALS IN THEOLOGICAL ETHICS APPROACHES\*

MARTIN M. LINTNER

---

## ABSTRACT

The way humans treat animals is ambivalent: we bury our pets in animal cemeteries, and we slaughter and eat others. Even though the use of animals and coexistence with them has shaped people's lives since time immemorial, Theology has long misjudged the importance of a theological reflection on animals. This has also led to blind spots in theological ethics. In the meantime, there are not only important approaches to a theology that takes animals into account but also a range of approaches within Catholic moral theology has been developed that seek to do justice to the intrinsic value of animals. They require a profound change in the human-animal relationship in the light of the Christian faith and call for more humane treatment of animals. This article presents the most important of those approaches from the German-speaking region and attempts to show common concerns but also different figures of argumentation.

## Keywords

Animal ethics; Animals in theology; Proper value of animals; Human-animal difference

DOI: 10.14712/25365398.2023.12

After more than four decades of intensive animal ethics debates initiated by Peter Singer's groundbreaking work 'Animal Liberation',<sup>1</sup> social ethicists and moral theologians are increasingly dealing

---

\* This paper was originally published in German ('Einfach zum Fressen gern. Tiere in der theologischen Ethik,' *HerKorr* 72 (2018): 28–31). For this English translation, it has been edited and expanded to include the footnotes.

<sup>1</sup> Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals* (New York: Harper Collins, 1975; <sup>o</sup>2015).

with the topic and trying not only to work on the positions of Singer and others but to develop their own theological approaches. Animals have not only arrived in theology but also in theological ethics. The Anglican theologian Andrew Linzey, who is considered a pioneer of animal theology,<sup>2</sup> and (for the German-speaking world) the Institute for Zoological Theology in Münster, founded in 2009 by Anton Rotzetter (1939–2016) and Rainer Hagenkord,<sup>3</sup> play a crucial role in this respect. In this regard, also worth mentioning is a theological research group at the Ruhr University in Bochum.<sup>4</sup>

In addition to many relevant specialist articles, four theological-ethical monographs specifically on animal ethics in the German-speaking region by Michael Rosenberger, Clemens Wustmans, Kurt Remele, and the author of this paper have recently enlivened the debate. Also, the 2019 Congress of the International Association for Moral Theology and Social Ethics was dedicated to the topic of animal ethics.<sup>5</sup>

## 1. A Red Thread: The Call for More Humane Treatment of Animals

A common thread running through the debates on animal ethics is the ethical impetus to point out the often untenable conditions in animal husbandry, especially industrial livestock farming, and to call for more humane treatment of animals. In doing so, the ambivalence of our society's treatment of animals also comes into view. While some animals play an increasingly important social role in the lives of many

---

<sup>2</sup> See e.g. Andrew Linzey's books *Animal Rights: A Christian Perspective* (London: SCM Press, 1976); *Christianity and the Rights of Animals* (London: SPCK, 1987); *Animal Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1994); *Animal Gospel: Christian Faith as If Animals Mattered* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1999); *Animal Rites: Liturgies of Animal Care* (London: SCM Press, 1999); *Creatures of the Same God: Explorations in Animal Theology* (New York: Lantern Books, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> See e.g. Rainer Hagenkord's books *Wenn sich Tiere in der Theologie tummeln. Ansätze einer theologischen Zoologie* (Regensburg: Friedrich Pustet, 2010); *Die Würde der Tiere. Eine religiöse Wertschätzung* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2011); *Gott und die Tiere. Ein Perspektivenwechsel* (Regensburg: Topos plus, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Simone Horstmann, Thomas Ruster, and Gregor Taxacher, *Alles, was atmet. Eine Theologie der Tiere* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2018); Simone Horstmann, *Was fehlt, wenn uns die Tiere fehlen? Eine theologische Spurensuche* (Regensburg: Pustet, 2020); id. (ed.), *Religiöse Gewalt an Tieren. Interdisziplinäre Diagnosen zum Verhältnis von Religion, Speziesismus und Gewalt* (Human-Animal Studies) (Bielefeld: transcript, 2021).

<sup>5</sup> See Martin M. Lintner (ed.), *Mensch – Tier – Gott: Interdisziplinäre Annäherungen an eine christliche Tierethik* (Interdisziplinäre Tierethik Band 1) (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2021).

people and families as pets and domestic animals, millions of others are kept, slaughtered, and consumed as farm animals; while separate animal cemeteries are opened and burial rituals designed for some, the others end up in our stomachs or are disposed of and incinerated like rubbish. Just remember the mountains of animal carcasses and destroyed meat after the BSE, bird flu, rotten meat and other scandals. Whether as pets or livestock for slaughter, we like animals as ‘good to eat’, which is the telling, ambiguous title of a book by Bernhard Kathan.<sup>6</sup>

## 2. The Need for a New Theological Reflection

The most recent theological animal-ethical publications largely have in common that they demand a new approach to the animal-human relationship on the background of the biblical and exegetical insights.<sup>7</sup> The biblical view of humans and animals expresses a close communion of fate between them (see, in addition to the two creation accounts, also wisdom traditions such as Coh 5:19–21; Job 12:7–8; Ps 36:7; Mt 6:26). Humans, like animals, are vulnerable and each have their own needs that are to be taken into account in order to promote their well-being. The command to rule in Genesis 1:28 – ‘fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that creeps on the earth’ – does not entitle people to reduce animals to their utility value for them, but is to be seen as a mission of responsibility and care. This is concretised in the Bible not least in the special care for the weak and needy, to which animals often belong,<sup>8</sup> so that helping an animal in distress weighs more heavily than observing the Sabbath commandment (cf. Mt 12:11; Lk 14:5). Beyond the theological aspects of creation, it is also important to reflect on the inclusion of animals in the history of salvation. Animals are also to enjoy the Sabbath rest as an experience of participation in the completion of creation (cf. Ex 20:10; Deut 5:14). They are explicitly included

---

<sup>6</sup> Cf. Bernhard Kathan, *Zum Fressen gern. Zwischen Haustier und Schlachtvieh* (Berlin: Kulturverlag Kadmos, 2004).

<sup>7</sup> Notable authors include Erich Gräßer, Bernd Janowski, Othmar Keel, Hans Kessler, Silvia Schroer, Thomas Staubli, Peter Riede, Ute Neumann-Gorsolke and others.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. Julia Blanc, ‘Arme Tiere: die Option für die Armen als möglicher Anschlusspunkt einer christlichen Tierethik,’ in *Mensch – Tier – Gott: Interdisziplinäre Annäherungen an eine christliche Tierethik* (Interdisziplinäre Tierethik Band 1), ed. Martin M. Lintner (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2021), 219–259.

in the Noahide covenant (cf. Gen 9:10–15) and part of the vision of the messianic peace (cf. Isa 11:6–8; 65:25) that dawns in the salvific event of Jesus Christ. It is significant that the New Testament explicitly names the animals (cf. especially Mk 1:13) and speaks of the whole creation affected by the salvific event of Christ. Paul explicitly says in Romans that the entire non-human creation awaits participation in the glorification of the redeemed human being (8:18–22, cf. also Col 1:12–20).<sup>9</sup>

This last aspect, by the way, poses an interesting question to dogmatics as to whether animals also ‘go to heaven’.<sup>10</sup> The biblical finding is not only a theological justification but represents an ethical obligation to overcome the forgetfulness of animals that is inherent in the Christian tradition. It is necessary to develop a Christian animal ethic and to overcome the centuries-old deficits of theological ethics with regard to human responsibility for animals, which are still evidenced, for example, by the passages in the Catechism of the Catholic Church that are deficient from an animal ethics perspective (cf. no. 2415–2418). Pope Francis also provides impulses for this. In his Encyclical Letter *Laudato si’* (2015) he speaks of a ‘despotic’ and ‘misguided anthropocentrism’ that does not respect the intrinsic value of animals, the priority of their being over being useful (cf. LS 68–69). But Francis also emphasises that ‘human beings cannot be expected to feel responsibility for the world unless, at the same time, their unique capacities of knowledge, will, freedom and responsibility are recognised and valued’.<sup>11</sup> This shows that Christian animal ethics must go beyond the traditional anthropocentric debate and also consider fundamental anthropological questions and reflections on the place of humans in creation.<sup>12</sup>

---

<sup>9</sup> Cf. e.g. Martin M. Lintner, “Der Herr freut sich seiner Geschöpfe.” Anmerkungen zum Stellenwert der Tiere in der Liturgie, in *Mensch – Tier – Gott. Interdisziplinäre Annäherungen an eine christliche Tierethik* (= Interdisziplinäre Tierethik, Bd. 1), ed. idem (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2021), 241–266.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Christoph J. Amor, ‘Ist der Himmel auch für Tiere offen?’, *Geist und Leben* 89 (2016): 268–273; idem, ‘Eschatologische Vollendung der Tiere – Ein theologischer Versuch’, *Salzburger Theologische Zeitschrift* 21 (2017): 219–231.

<sup>11</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato Si’: On Care for Our Common Home*, 118, available at [www.vatican.va](http://www.vatican.va).

<sup>12</sup> For a critical discussion of *Laudato si’* from an animal ethics perspective, see: Charles C. Camosy, ‘Locating *Laudato Si’* Along a Catholic Trajectory of Concern for Non-Human Animals,’ *Lex Naturalis* 2 (2016): 1–20; Anatoly Angelo R. Aseneta, ‘Laudato Si’ on Non-Human Animals,’ *Journal of Moral Theology* 6 (2017): 230–245; Martin M. Lintner, ‘Respect for the Proper Value of Each Creature. An Animal-Ethical Rethinking of the Encyclical *Laudato si’*,’ *Louvain Studies* 45 (2020): 26–48.

### 3. Current Approaches of Theological Animal Ethics

Michael Rosenberger, author of various publications on animal ethics, takes a biocentric and contract-theoretical approach.<sup>15</sup> For him, the biblical finding that animals are co-inhabitants of humans and covenant partners of God is significant for Christian animal ethics. He sees animals as bearers of rights, but also of dignity and thus as addressees of justice. By dignity, he understands a value that is assigned to a living being independent of its aesthetic or utility value and which dictates that an animal should not be used merely as a means to an end. The author understands the Golden Rule as a ‘fictitious contract’ to which the Torah can be traced together with the animal ethics directives and considers the contract-theoretical animal ethics to be biblically justifiable. On the basis of John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*, he develops a theory of justice that includes animals. Critically, it remains to be asked whether this approach does not contain the problematic assumption that there is only a gradual but no qualitative difference between humans and animals. If, on the other hand, the fictitious contractual partners of rational or responsible actors are extended to those who potentially exhibit a sense of justice, the basic problem is not solved, but the boundaries of the divide between humans and animals are merely redrawn.

Clemens Wustmans wants to counter the prevailing animal ethics discourses with a theologically independent concept.<sup>14</sup> The programmatic title of his study, ‘Animal Ethics as Ethics of Protection of Species’, indicates that he is not concerned with the animal as an individual but with the species, i.e. with the single animal as representative of a species. Based on the understanding of responsibility in Hans Jonas, Karl Barth, and Dietrich Bonhoeffer, he develops the model of a situational ethics of responsibility for animals. The guiding principle of his approach is the interpretation of the biblical finding that humans are not responsible for the protection of individual animals but for the preservation of the succession of generations, i.e. the survival of an animal species (cf. Dt 22:6–7). The author interprets this as a symbol for

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Michael Rosenberger, *Der Traum vom Frieden zwischen Mensch und Tier. Eine christliche Tierethik* (München: Kösel, 2015); idem, *Christian Ethics of Creation. On the Path of Ecological Conversion* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2022).

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Clemens Wustmans, *Tierethik als Ethik des Artenschutzes. Chancen und Grenzen* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2015).

the protection of species as well as for the importance of biodiversity and genetic variance in the context of an ecological system. While the first conclusion can certainly be agreed with, the biblical conclusions leave some questions open. The concern to anchor animal ethics in the broader context of ecological ethics is to be supported. It remains questionable whether an animal ethics approach without looking at the animal as an individual is sufficient and whether the biblical texts are not overburdened if they are to serve as a rationale for theological animal ethics.

Kurt Remele, who is a Fellow of the Oxford Centre for Animal Ethics founded by Andrew Linzey in 2006, explains in detail the historical aspects of the position of the animal in Western Christian history, the development of different approaches to animal ethics and law, but also the position of the animal in other religions, especially the Indian ones.<sup>15</sup> He vividly describes the cruel fate of farm animals, but also animal-cruel Christian customs that stand in stark contradiction to the position of the animal in the Bible. Remele's book is characterised by an appealing basic tone and reads like a committed 'vegetarian-vegan imperative'. However, no systematic approach is ultimately unfolded. Even the concept of dignity, which at least appears in the book's title, is explicitly not reflected philosophically-ethically, but used 'counterfactually', i.e. in the sense of a decisive protest against the factual cruelties against animals, in order to subsequently plead for a minimised use of violence against animals. In addition to the lack of a systematic approach, it should also be pointed out that the pathocentric-utilitarian perspective is too narrow, aiming at the avoidance of unnecessary suffering of the animal. This perspective is correct and important but leaves many questions relevant to animal ethics, such as species protection or biodiversity, unanswered.

#### 4. What is the Human-Animal Difference?

According to the author's approach,<sup>16</sup> what distinguishes humans from animals, or in other words, what constitutes the 'anthropological

---

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Kurt Remele, *Die Würde des Tieres ist unantastbar. Eine neue christliche Tierethik* (Kevelaer: Butzon & Bercker, 2016).

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Martin M. Lintner, *Der Mensch und das liebe Vieh. Ethische Fragen im Umgang mit Tieren. Mit Beiträgen von Christoph J. Amor und Markus Moling* (Brixen/Innsbruck: Weger/Tyrolia, 2017).



difference', is the moral capacity. This has found biblical expression in man's mission of dominion over creation. This motif is the result of man's reflection on himself – and his potentially ambivalent (because he is both willing to use violence and to be caring and protective) relationship to his fellow human beings and to non-human creation. Moral capacity, which is founded on freedom of the will and the ability to distinguish between morally right and wrong, between good and evil, requires the responsibility to correspond to the recognisable potential for sense and meaning in reality – including that of animals.

Thanks to their capacity for empathy as well as objectively reflected observation, humans are able to sufficiently recognise the species-specific and individual needs of an animal as well as its sensory, emotional and cognitive abilities. Since moral insights have a binding force, this results in direct duties towards animals, so that one can speak of a categorical animal ethical imperative: In order to do justice to an animal, its needs and abilities must be respected. The animal must not be reduced merely to its utility or to its aesthetic or emotional value or to its ecological function. As a minimum requirement that cannot be undercut, this means respecting the needs and abilities of an animal as a whole in such a way that animal welfare is not jeopardised. In the respective context, it then remains to be weighed up how much is to be actively done to help animals fulfil their needs and capabilities. Here, different obligations and degrees of responsibility towards the wild, farm, and domestic animals can be justified, for example, with the help of a theory of justice.

This approach is intended to take into account the intrinsic value of an animal (determined in relation to species-specific and individual needs and abilities), which is to be distinguished from dignity in the sense of Kant's formula of human self-purpose.

There is a broad consensus that a radically anthropocentric perspective on animals, which measures their value only in terms of their function for humans, must be overcome. In the context of cultural studies and in the young discipline of Human-Animal Studies,<sup>17</sup> there is talk of the animal turn: animals are not only seen as objects of observation, use or protection, but as subjects in their own right with the power to act, which is not a free and consciously reflected action, but rather an

---

<sup>17</sup> See e.g. Gabriela Kompatscher, Reingard Spannring, and Karin Schachinger, *Human-Animal-Studies* (utb 4759) (Münster/New York: Waxmann, 2017).

ability to act and interact. What does this new view of the animal mean for theology and theological ethics?

Despite the human ability to observe the behaviour of an animal, to interpret it, and to put oneself in its place, an anthropocentric view cannot ultimately be overcome in terms of epistemology. It should also be borne in mind that, biblically and theologically, the special position of humans is not primarily to be reflected on the basis of their ability to reason but in terms of their potential openness to transcendence. However, this does not diminish the creatureliness of the human being and does not abolish it, but establishes his responsibility towards non-human creatures. According to Genesis 1:26–28, the image of God is to be understood less as a statement of essence than as a statement of function, namely to deal with all living beings in a caring and nurturing way in the name of God. The moral ability given with freedom and reason enables man to fulfil this task entrusted to him.

## 5. Dignity or Proper Value of Animals?

This is where the philosophical question of ‘anthropological difference’ comes in – for example, whether concepts such as dignity, subject, intentionality, or morality can be applied to humans and animals univocally or analogously. A central thesis in Kant’s ethics is that rational beings endowed with autonomy and purpose have an absolute value, i.e. dignity in the sense of an end in itself. Dignity as moral dignity is founded in the capacity for practical self-determination according to reasonable standards. Its recognition is not subject to social agreement.

The uniqueness of human beings can only be recognised when they are placed in the flow of evolutionary history.<sup>18</sup> The human capacity for morality has evolutionary roots, and some elements necessary for its development, such as empathy and a sense of justice, can also be observed in animals (especially those living in social associations). Frans de Waal metaphorically speaks of the fact that in the ‘tower of morality’ the lower floors are also inhabited by animals. There are, therefore, evolutionary and behavioural transitions between animal and human moral abilities, but at the same time, there is also

---

<sup>18</sup> Cf. Michael Tomasello, *A Natural History of Human Thinking* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2014); idem, *A Natural History of Human Morality* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2016).

a qualitative difference. Therefore – according to the author’s position – one can speak of morally analogous behaviour in animals but not of moral behaviour in the true sense of the word: namely, to consciously reflect on one’s own actions and behaviour under the difference of morally right or wrong, of good or evil, and to orientate oneself accordingly. The concept of analogy means that in addition to comparable similarities, there are always greater differences that need to be taken into account and which, in this case, also have an ethical relevance.

The challenge, therefore, is to establish a conceptualisation and fill it with content that fulfils two minimum requirements: On the one hand, it must take into account the human capacity for responsibility as an ethically relevant human-animal difference, without denying the evolutionary as well as behavioural proximity between the human and some animal species and without diminishing human responsibility for animals. On the other hand, it must also adequately take into account the enormous range within the animal kingdom, from the smallest creatures to highly developed animals.

## 6. The Integration of Animal Ethics into Systemic Contexts

An important issue is the integration of animal ethics into the broad field of systemic economic, ecological, and social aspects. In addition to the effects of intensive factory farming (caused by the high consumption of animal products, especially meat) on ecosystems and the climate,<sup>19</sup> the living and working conditions of people in agriculture and the area of processing animal products (especially in slaughterhouses), topics such as the preservation of biodiversity, the complex relationship between species protection and animal individual welfare, as well as wildlife and hunting ethics should be mentioned. It is also a matter of developing animal ethics in such a way that plant ethics,<sup>20</sup> which is still largely a desideratum, can be coherently linked to it.

---

<sup>19</sup> Cf. e.g. Martin M. Lintner, ‘The need for an “animal ethics turn” in animal husbandry,’ *Sustainable Organic Agric Syst* 70 (2020): 1, 17–22, doi:10.3220/LBF1590334788000.

<sup>20</sup> Cf. e.g. Sabine Odparlik, *Die Würde der Pflanze. Ein sinnvolles ethisches Prinzip im Kontext der Grünen Gentechnik?* (Angewandte Ethik 12) (Freiburg i. Br.: K. Alber, 2015); idem and Peter Kunzmann, eds., *Eine Würde für alle Lebewesen?* (ta ethica 4) (München: utzverlag, 2007); idem, Peter Kunzmann, and Nikolaus Knoepffler, eds., *Wie die Würde gedeiht. Pflanzen in der Bioethik* (ta ethica 6) (München: utzverlag, 2008).

Finally, in addition to these fundamental questions, many questions in the field of applied ethics need to be explored in greater depth: starting with consumer behaviour and lifestyle, the social significance of animals in the lives of many people and families, and ending with the question of animal burials.<sup>21</sup> The area of research and biomedicine should also be mentioned, where there are comparatively already more studies, for example, on animal experiments, transgenic animals and human-animal mixtures.

Animal ethics is neither a marginal area of applied ethics nor a mere field of ethics but deeply concerns the self-understanding of human beings. The fact that it is also increasingly discussed in the theological context can be interpreted as a sign of the times, whereby the new view of animals in sciences and human-animal studies, in animal rights and protection movements, but also the special significance of pets for many people seem like foreign prophecies for theology. The approaches presented are to be understood as an indication of problems but also as search processes. One can look forward to in-depth debates.

*Philosophical-Theological College Brixen  
Seminarplatz 4  
39042 Brixen  
South Tyrol, Italy  
E-mail: martin.lintner@pthsta.it*

---

<sup>21</sup> Cf. e.g. Michael Rosenberger, 'Tiere bestatten. Soziologische und theologische Überlegungen zu einem gesellschaftlichen Trend,' in *Räume der Mensch-Tier-Beziehung. Öffentliche Theologie im interdisziplinären Gespräch*, ed. Clemens Wustmans and Niklas Peuckmann (Leipzig: EVA, 2020), 307–317.

---

‘AND WHEN HE SAW HIM, HE HAD COMPASSION’:  
FOLLOWING JESUS AND RELATIONSHIP  
TO NON-HUMAN CREATURES

---

JAN ZÁMEČNÍK

---

**ABSTRACT**

This article explores how the concept of following Jesus can be ethically applied in the sphere of the treatment of non-human creatures. It shows three possibilities of grasping the theme: accommodating Jesus to a preconceived idea, using the sayings and actions of Jesus that involve animals, and adhering to a characteristic feature of his approach. The article points out the problematic character of the first two options and highlights the third – it proposes that the relationship to non-human creatures should be based on the criterion of compassion accompanied by care for the suffering.

**Keywords**

Following Jesus; Non-human creatures; Environmental ethics; Compassion; Parable of the good Samaritan

DOI: 10.14712/25363598.2023.13

Following Jesus is a theological topic that has been the subject of much reflection as well as a powerful inspiration for committed action throughout the history of Christianity. Both historical and biblical studies and contributions oriented theologically or ethically have been devoted to the question of following. The aim of this article is to show how this concept can be applied to a specific area of activity, namely the relationship of humans to non-human creatures. I will first introduce the theoretical foundations of the idea of following Jesus, which will form the starting point of this paper, and then discuss in more detail three possible ways of applying it.

The first way is a more or less strained attempt to fit Jesus into the framework of one's own ethical ideas. The second approach is to rely on the sayings and actions of Jesus that relate to animals.<sup>1</sup> I find both of these approaches problematic, though each for different reasons. While the first way exemplifies the triumph of a preferred thesis over probable reality, we run into many hermeneutical and other difficulties with the second. The contentiousness of these methods is the springboard for the proposal that the core of the appropriate treatment of non-human creatures, seen through the prism of following Jesus, should be a creative, imaginative application of a distinctive feature of his teaching and actions.

## 1. Theoretical Background

I base my reflections regarding the fundamental importance of following Jesus on biblical and theological-ethical foundations. In the area of biblical scholarship, I draw on the work of New Testament scholar Richard A. Burrige, who points out that the Gospels are close in genre to the ancient *bioi*. In depicting individual characters, the authors of these medium-length narratives provide basic biographical information (birth or arrival on the public scene and death) and fill out this framework by recounting deeds, words and anecdotes they find important. Death usually has a special significance in their works because they consider it to be the culmination, the sealing of a life, which reveals the true character of a particular person.<sup>2</sup>

The apparent analogy between the approach of the gospel writers and the biographers, the fruit of which is the formal similarity of their works, leads Burrige to the conclusion that the canonical Gospels should be interpreted in terms of the genre of *bioi*. That is to say, the Gospels cannot be considered merely as a collection of Jesus' teachings, but attention must be paid to the totality of Jesus' life, including his actions. It is precisely because the canonical Gospels do not focus

---

<sup>1</sup> This method is not, at least as far as I know, used in such a manner as to create a moral system on the basis of the biblical material. Theological works make use of particular words or actions of Jesus of this sort rather than a complete set of them. It should also be noted that this approach is an alternative to the former only up to a point, because here too we can encounter interpretations in which a strong preunderstanding is evident.

<sup>2</sup> See Richard A. Burrige, *Imitating Jesus: An Inclusive Approach to New Testament Ethics* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2007), 24.

only on Jesus’ teachings that they differ from writings which are pre-occupied, as in the Gospel of Thomas, with Jesus’ sayings rather than actions.

The second important implication of this perspective is that the gospel writers present Jesus to their readers as an exemplary figure. Burridge does not thereby limit the purpose of the Gospels to a moral-pedagogical ‘lesson’. The authors of the ancient *bioi* were attempting to show the character of the persons in question and to preserve their memory. Biographical accounts served, among other things, polemical and apologetic purposes (criticism or defense of the individuals whose lives they depicted). Central to the idea of following Jesus, however, is the fact that many *bioi* were also intended to serve the moral education and transformation of the reader by placing a particular person-role model before his or her eyes:

[...] many Lives were written explicitly to give an example to others to emulate: thus Xenophon composed his Agesilaus to provide a paradigm (παράδειγμα) for others to follow to become better people (ἀνδραγαθίαν ἀσκεῖν, 10.2). Equally, Plutarch aims to provide examples so that by imitating (μίμησις) the virtues and avoiding the vices described, the reader can improve his own moral character (*Pericles* 1; *Aemilius Paullus* 1).<sup>5</sup>

In addition to this approach to the Gospels, which interprets them in light of the ancient biographies, the theoretical background of my paper is formed by theological positions that are Christocentric. Specifically, I am referring to those conceptions that regard the life of Jesus as ethically normative. This, of course, does not mean, at least for me, the exclusion of other sources of moral knowledge. But these sources are always secondary in the sense that they are measured against the criterion of the basic features of Jesus’ teaching and actions.

Theologians who have emphasised the ethical normativity of Jesus include John Howard Yoder, William C. Spohn, and David P. Gushee with Glen H. Stassen. The first of the theologians listed above, Yoder, recognises that the idea of such normativity is far from self-evident and discusses the reasons raised against it. In his view, if the normativity of Jesus is rejected,

<sup>5</sup> Burridge, *Imitating Jesus*, 73.

there must be some kind of bridge or transition into another realm or into another mode of thought when we begin to think about ethics. [...] A certain very moderate amount of freight can be carried across this bridge: perhaps a concept of absolute love or humility or faith or freedom. But the substance of ethics must be reconstructed on our side of the bridge.<sup>4</sup>

It goes without saying that Yoder is one of those who do not want to approach ethics from ‘our side of the bridge’. On the contrary, he regards Jesus as the cornerstone and the point from which to start.

Like Yoder, William C. Spohn points out that the centrality of Jesus is by no means a shared position in theological ethics. For example, Roman Catholic theology, in his view, has long relied on the idea of natural law. He himself does not want to go down that path, nor does he want to go down the way of some evangelicals and fundamentalists who look to the New Testament for clear moral instruction based on the specific words of Jesus. Spohn’s intention is to navigate between the Scylla and Charybdis of these positions, and he comes up with a proposal ‘in which Jesus plays a normative role as the concrete universal of Christian ethics. Through faithful imagination his story becomes paradigmatic for moral perception, disposition, and identity’.<sup>5</sup>

David P. Gushee and Glen H. Stassen similarly insist that Jesus is central to moral reasoning. Whereas in the first edition of their *Kingdom Ethics* they attributed crucial importance to Scripture, in the second edition they revise this approach and argue that ‘Jesus Christ himself is the sun around which other sources of authority orbit’.<sup>6</sup>

I do not mean to suggest that Yoder, Spohn, Gushee and Stassen all have exactly the same views on ethics and moral issues. But I share their underlying premise, which is the ethically normative status of Jesus. In my view, this key position of Jesus follows from Christology. Although Jesus cannot be reduced to a mere moral exemplar, he is the definition of true, authentic humanity.<sup>7</sup> As Petr Gallus states, ‘Jesus fulfilled the determination, purpose, and goal of humanity: to be the

---

<sup>4</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus: Vicit Agnus Noster* (2nd ed., Grand Rapids – Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 1994), 8.

<sup>5</sup> William C. Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise: Jesus and Ethics* (New York – London: Continuum, 2007), 2.

<sup>6</sup> David P. Gushee and Glen H. Stassen, *Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context* (2nd ed., Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2016), 54.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Paul Ramsey, *Basic Christian Ethics* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995), 198–199.



place of God’s presence for the others. His humanity became the place of God’s presence *kat’ exochen*. And he did it in an exemplary way, being true human and living in common conditions of our world.<sup>8</sup>

Such a conception implies that Jesus is the fundamental measure or rule of ethics. While Christian ethical reasoning can and should gratefully draw from many sources, it already has its cornerstone. Values such as caring for the marginalised or loving one’s enemies are not guaranteed to be arrived at by mere rationality or experience, but they can be grounded in the way of Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> Christian ethics thus has a specificity that makes it a guide and inspiration for a life that has alternative features.<sup>10</sup>

Undoubtedly, the idea of Jesus’ ethical normativity involves a number of highly complicated hermeneutical issues, but these are beyond the scope of this article. What I want to focus on is a particular question: if we are to use the idea of this normativity to reflect on our relationship to non-human creatures, what approach should we take?

## 2. Vegetarian Jesus?

Some writers, for whom Jesus plays a central role and who at the same time advocate a kind relationship to animals, take the route of subordinating Jesus to the desired point. This is evident, for example, in the reflections of the Czech Christian humanist and pacifist Přemysl Pitter (1895–1976). Pitter is best known for his social action. In the 1930s, he organised the building of the Milíč House in Prague, named after the medieval reform preacher Jan Milíč from Kroměříž. Pitter worked there as an educator of children, whose difficult life situation affected him deeply. During World War II, he hid Jewish children, and after the war ended, he focused on helping German children, even

<sup>8</sup> Petr Gallus, *The Perspective of Resurrection: A Trinitarian Christology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021), 247.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Joseph Fletcher, *Situation Ethics: The New Morality* (2nd ed., Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1997), 46–50.

<sup>10</sup> The emphasis on the specificity of Christian ethics and the alternative life of Christian communities can be found, among others, in Jürgen Moltmann’s *The Way of Jesus Christ* and *The Ethics of Hope*. Moltmann expressed his view succinctly: ‘Christian ethics should first and foremost put its stamp on a form of living which accords with Jesus’ way of life and his teaching. That is where its identity lies. The question about general relevance then follows, but it cannot take first place.’ Jürgen Moltmann, *The Ethics of Hope* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2012), 26. Cf. Jürgen Moltmann, *The Way of Jesus Christ* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1995), 116–136.

though, during this tense time, caring for them aroused strong hostility in a part of Czech society. Later, in the 1950s, he worked in the very tough conditions of Valka refugee camp in Germany.

Less known is the fact that Pitter was a pioneer of animal protection and vegetarianism in Czechoslovakia, which he tried to defend from religious positions. To a certain extent, he could draw on his theological education, but the expertise he had acquired was only fragmentary. Because he wanted to devote himself to practical activities, he dropped out of his studies at what was then known as the Hus Czechoslovak Protestant Theological Faculty after two semesters. He took away from the faculty some thought stimuli (he was particularly interested in lectures on the New Testament), but also a distrust of too much theorising. As his biographer Pavel Kosatík writes,

whenever Pitter commented on the work of such abstract theologians as the Swiss pastor Karl Barth between the wars (with many followers also in the Czech lands), he spoke of them as people who rather did the faith a disservice: they made it an intellectual problem about which new and thicker books could be written all the time, but they took away its ability to help people in difficult life situations.<sup>11</sup>

In 1928, Pitter acquainted his readers with his impressions of the visit to the British Animal Defence and Anti-Vivisection Society and the conference it hosted,<sup>12</sup> as well as with his arguments for animal protection and vegetarianism.<sup>15</sup> In his appeal, he relied mainly on biblical

---

<sup>11</sup> Pavel Kosatík, *Sám proti zlu: život Přemysla Pittera (1895–1976)* [*Alone Against Evil: The Life of Přemysl Pitter (1895–1976)*] (Praha – Litomyšl: Paseka, 2009), 55.

<sup>12</sup> Přemysl Pitter, *Ve jménu zvířete: přátelům zvířat své londýnské dojmy líčí Přemysl Pitter* [*In the Name of the Animal: Přemysl Pitter Describes to Friends of Animals his Impressions from London*] (Praha: Hnutí pro křesťanský komunismus v Československu, 1928). In this brief work, Pitter made no secret of his criticism. What he found particularly repulsive was the dedication of the modern, mechanised abattoir at Letchworth, built by this organisation: ‘I wondered how tender-hearted ladies suddenly looked on calmly and with interest at these murders, and revelled in how nicely, smoothly, and supposedly painlessly the slaughter was going on. Nice theatre where you can’t see backstage. With what appetite will the pork roast be eaten now, when we know that the killing of the animal was done in a modern, humane way under the protection of the society for the “protection” of animals ... [...] After the tour there was a solemn dedication ceremony, during which there was to be much talk again. I then thought it better to disappear, as I would have been embarrassed to see a priest dedicating a slaughterhouse.’ Pitter, *Ve jménu zvířete*, 13–14.

<sup>15</sup> Přemysl Pitter, ‘Náš poměr k přírodě s hlediska náboženského a sociálního’, ‘Ježíš a vegetarismus,’ in Ctibor Bezděk and Přemysl Pitter, *Vegetarismus – pro a proti; Náš*

texts, such as the parable of the good Samaritan. Since in this story the neighbour is the one who shows mercy, Pitter concludes that animals must also be considered neighbours, as humans have depended on their help since the dawn of history.<sup>14</sup> What is more significant in terms of the theme of this article, however, are the author’s reflections on Jesus. Pitter sees Jesus as the saviour and liberator of all creation<sup>15</sup> and is convinced that he himself did not eat meat. In his view, Jesus grew up amongst the Essene community, which, he believes, was vegetarian and determined Jesus’ actions in this way. Biblical passages that might conflict with the notion of a vegetarian Jesus are not mentioned by Pitter or are interpreted symbolically.<sup>16</sup> He assumes that

we find in all the actions of Jesus something much deeper than we can understand with our fleshly reason. Hence the eating of the lamb with the disciples, or the distribution of the fish and loaves to the multitudes, has an allegorical, mystical meaning to which the gospel indirectly refers.<sup>17</sup>

Pitter’s lens in interpreting the New Testament is also evident in his commentary on Jesus’ statement that what defiles a person is what comes out of the mouth, and thus ultimately out of his or her heart – ‘evil thoughts, murder, adultery, fornication, theft, false witness, slander’ – not what goes into the mouth (Matt 15:18–19).<sup>18</sup> He concludes that the eating of meat would not in itself be objectionable; the problem lies in what precedes the act – namely, the slaughter of the animal, i.e., as he suggests, the very murder condemned by Jesus.<sup>19</sup>

Pitter does not refer to any authors on whom he bases his opinions. It is likely, however, that in some of his claims – for example, about the

---

*poměr k přírodě s hlediska náboženského a sociálního; Ježíš a vegetarismus* [Vegetarianism – Pros and Cons; Our Relationship to Nature in Religious and Social Terms; Jesus and Vegetarianism] (Praha: Hnutí pro křesťanský komunismus v Československu, 1928).

<sup>14</sup> See Pitter, ‘Náš poměr k přírodě s hlediska náboženského a sociálního,’ 44–45.

<sup>15</sup> See Pitter, ‘Náš poměr k přírodě s hlediska náboženského a sociálního,’ 49–50.

<sup>16</sup> It goes without saying that Pitter can draw on a long church tradition in symbolic or allegorical interpretation, and in some cases, including the miraculous multiplication of the loaves, such an approach may be plausible. However, Pitter seems to gravitate toward such an interpretation precisely because it fits a vegetarian image of Jesus that is close to his heart.

<sup>17</sup> Pitter, ‘Ježíš a vegetarismus,’ 52.

<sup>18</sup> All biblical quotations in this article are from RSV.

<sup>19</sup> See Pitter, ‘Ježíš a vegetarismus,’ 53

Essene origins of Jesus – he draws on other (albeit even then rather marginal and speculative) sources or creatively synthesises and elaborates them. The notion that the Essenes were vegetarians (which may have been influenced by Josephus Flavius’ comparison of the Essenes to the Pythagoreans<sup>20</sup>), that Jesus was educated by the Essenes,<sup>21</sup> or claims or even fictional evidence that Jesus was himself a vegetarian appeared before and after Pitter’s works. Two supposedly ancient gospels, in fact modern fictions, are proof of this. In the first of these, *The Gospel of the Holy Twelve*, the vegetarian perspective is so defining that it alters New Testament passages that conflict with it – Jesus does not multiply bread and fish, but bread and wine; at the return of the prodigal son, a calf will not be served at the feast, but bread, fruit, oil, and wine.<sup>22</sup> Richard Alan Young believes that this work was created by Gideon Jasper Ouseley (1835–1906), a vegetarian who worked for several years as an Anglican clergyman. Edmond Bordeaux Szekely (1905–1979), the author born a few decades later, in turn, claimed to have discovered *The Essene Gospel of Peace* in the 1920s. As Young notes, ‘Szekely alleges that this ancient Gospel is authentic and that the canonical Gospels are forgeries. However, no one besides Szekely has ever seen the manuscript. This and other reasons prompt scholars to conclude that *The Essene Gospel of Peace* is a disreputable forgery.’<sup>23</sup>

Pitter did not go as far as Ouseley or Szekely, but the views and interpretations found in his work seem to be determined by an interest in Jesus fulfilling the desired vegetarian ideal. Whether he was the conveyor, creator, or compiler of these views, his approach falls into

---

<sup>20</sup> Although the Pythagoreans espoused vegetarianism, Josephus makes no mention of the Essenes following the same practice. On Pythagorean practice, see, for example, Michael Rosenberger, *Wie viel Tier darf's sein?: die Frage ethisch korrekter Ernährung aus christlicher Sicht* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag, 2016), 54–55.

<sup>21</sup> See Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus* (London: SCM Press, 2000), 38 ff., 143 ff.

<sup>22</sup> See Richard Alan Young, *Is God a Vegetarian?: Christianity, Vegetarianism, and Animal Rights* (Chicago – La Salle: Open Court, 1999), 5. In this context, it is worth mentioning the view of the Ebionites and the *Gospel of the Ebionites*: ‘The Ebionites consistently refrained from eating meat and also attributed the same attitude to the leading figures of the Gospel. Instead of eating wild honey and locusts (ἀκρίς, Matt 3:4), John the Baptist eats only honey, “the taste of which was that of manna, as a cake (ἔγκρις) dipped in oil” (frag. 2). To their question where they are to prepare the Passover lamb the disciples receive the dismissive answer: “Do I desire with desire at this Passover to eat flesh with you?” (frag. 7).’ Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz, *The Historical Jesus: A Comprehensive Guide* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 53.

<sup>23</sup> Young, *Is God a Vegetarian?*, 5.

the category of subjective projections of Jesus that became the target of Albert Schweitzer’s critique.

The attempt to fit Jesus into the framework of a preconceived view of the proper relationship to non-human creatures is also found in Andrew Linzey, who, unlike the less-known Pitter, is widely considered to be one of the leading and most prominent theological defenders of animals. Linzey’s argument is more extensive and convincing in its main emphasis. Yet in one of his key works, *Animal Theology*, he puts forward a hypothesis that is quite problematic. His position differs from the basic premise of Pitter, Ouseley, and Szekely in that he considers Jesus’ vegetarianism unlikely. He bases his opinion on the gospel texts that depict Jesus eating fish. However, since he himself advocates vegetarianism, and the image of Jesus as a generous, compassionate Prince of Peace is crucial to his perspective, this fact is an obvious difficulty. In his view, the question of how to reconcile this image of Jesus with the gospel accounts can be addressed in four possible ways: (1) the canonical Gospels are wrong, (2) Jesus was not perfect in every way, (3) killing fish is not morally problematic, or at least not as serious as killing mammals, (4) in necessary cases, killing fish for food is justifiable. Linzey does not go down the road of questioning the canonical Gospels – he considers writings like *The Gospel of the Holy Twelve* to be modern fictions – nor does he attempt to cast doubt on Jesus’ moral exemplarity or belittle the moral status of fish. What he finds most convincing is the last proposition:

The fourth answer is that sometimes it can be justifiable to kill fish for food in situations of necessity. Such a situation, we may assume, was present in first-century Palestine where geographical factors alone seem to suggest a scarcity of protein. Such a view would on the whole be more consistent with the biblical perspective that we may kill but only in circumstances of real need. Hence we may have to face the possibility that Jesus did indeed participate in the killing of some life forms in order to live. Indeed we may say that part of his being a human being at a particular stage and time in history necessitated that response in order to have lived at all.<sup>24</sup>

In his later essay ‘Animals and Vegetarianism in Early Chinese Christianity’, in which he discusses the Xi’an Stele (also known as the

<sup>24</sup> Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1995), 134.

‘Nestorian Stele’ or ‘Nestorian Stone’), Linzey even muses on whether Jesus might have been a vegetarian after all. He acknowledges that he is aware of serious evidence to the contrary but nevertheless considers the debate still open. He assumes that ‘it is possible, at least *thinkable*, that early Jewish-Christian groups have faithfully preserved Jesus’ example of vegetarianism and his objection to animal sacrifice, and that is the same tradition which the Ebionites represent in their Gospel, and which in turn is reflected in the Jesus Sutras.’<sup>25</sup>

This and the previously quoted passage reveal that Linzey’s perspective is driven by a desire to have Jesus conform to his ethical view. He does not make any case that there was a protein shortage in Palestine, and the type of reasoning about having to kill animals only when necessary seems anachronistic given the Jewish environment in which Jesus grew up. As for the idea of a vegetarian Jesus, it is so unlikely that the notion of its *thinkability* seems to be mere speculation.<sup>26</sup> As I will point out later, the core of Linzey’s approach is much more plausible and theologically stronger than the hypotheses just mentioned. These are characterised by an effort to promote an idea that will make Jesus, in a very concrete sense, followable, or at least to show that such an idea is possible. Although Linzey is much more sober in his reflections than Pitter, the view of both authors is burdened with similar preconceptions. The way in which Linzey, Pitter – and even more so Ouseley and Szekely – address the issue I have outlined here exemplifies a path that is too ideologically loaded to be viable in terms of following Jesus.

### 3. Words and Deeds of Jesus

An alternative to the above approach would be to base the concept of following Jesus on his words and deeds that relate in some way to animals. It is these sayings and actions that New Testament scholar Richard Bauckham has addressed in his studies ‘Jesus and Animals

---

<sup>25</sup> Andrew Linzey, ‘Animals and Vegetarianism in Early Chinese Christianity,’ in Andrew Linzey, *Creatures of the Same God: Explorations in Animal Theology* (Winchester: Winchester University Press, 2007), 126.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. David G. Horrell, ‘Biblical Vegetarianism? A Critical and Constructive Assessment,’ in *Eating and Believing: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Vegetarianism and Theology*, ed. David Grumett and Rachel Muers (London: T & T Clark, 2008), 47–49.

I: What did He Teach?’<sup>27</sup> and ‘Jesus and Animals II: What did He Practise?’.<sup>28</sup> Bauckham takes into account Jesus’ Jewish background and shows the affinity of his views with the perspectives of the Hebrew Bible and later Jewish tradition. Regarding Jesus’ teachings, he focuses on three areas in particular: Jesus’ assumption that domesticated animals can be helped even on the sabbath (Matt 12:11–12; Luke 13:15–16; Luke 14:5), the belief that God provides for non-human creatures (Matt 6:26; Luke 12:24), and the view that God is mindful of even the sparrows, which are little valued by humans (Matt 10:29–31; Luke 12:6–7).

In his analysis, he presents a number of interesting details. For example, he points out that Jesus’ view on helping domestic animals on the sabbath – a view that he apparently assumes his listeners would share – is in sharp contrast to the attitude of the Qumran community. The *Damascus Document* explicitly forbids pulling an animal out of a pit on this day, and even opposes providing assistance to an animal while it is giving birth. What is particularly significant, however, is that Bauckham notes a common feature of the sayings of Jesus discussed by him, namely, that they

belong to a form of argument from the lesser to the greater (*a minore ad maius*, or, in rabbinic terminology, *qal wa-homer*). Since, it is stated or assumed, humans are of more value than animals, if something is true in the case of animals, it must also be true in the case of humans. If acts of compassion for animals are lawful on the sabbath, then acts of compassion for humans must also be lawful. If God provides for birds, then God can be trusted to provide for humans also. If not even a sparrow escapes God’s caring attention, then Jesus’ disciples can be sure they are in God’s care.<sup>29</sup>

That Jesus attributes a higher value to human beings than to animals is, in Bauckham’s view, reflected in the account of the exorcism of the possessed man in Gerasa (Mark 5:1–20; Luke 8:26–39; Matt 8:28–34).<sup>30</sup> As he argues, this narrative should be understood on the

<sup>27</sup> Richard Bauckham, ‘Jesus and Animals I: What did he Teach?’, in *Animals on the Agenda: Questions about Animals for Theology and Ethics*, ed. Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto (Urbana – Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 33–48.

<sup>28</sup> Richard Bauckham, ‘Jesus and Animals II: What did he Practise?’, in *Animals on the Agenda*, ed. Andrew Linzey and Dorothy Yamamoto, 49–60.

<sup>29</sup> Bauckham, ‘Jesus and Animals I,’ 44.

<sup>30</sup> While the Gospel of Mark and the Gospel of Luke mention Gerasa, the Gospel of Matthew refers to Gadara. The author of the latter Gospel was probably aware that

basis of demonological ideas of that age: the demons are looking for a suitable 'abode', and if they have been without one for a long time, they might return to the place from which they were cast out, i.e. back into the possessed; they are also connected to specific locations, and therefore see the pigs as a suitable refuge. Jesus, who allows or commands the demons to enter the pigs, according to Bauckham, 'permits a lesser evil'<sup>31</sup> in order to save a human person who is of greater value in his eyes.<sup>32</sup>

In his second study, which focuses on Jesus' actions, Bauckham addresses the question of whether Jesus ate meat and offers an interpretation of a short passage from the opening of the Gospel of Mark (Mark 1:13). He convincingly concludes that the hypothesis of Jesus' vegetarianism is highly unlikely and would have to be constructed against a number of plausible assumptions and gospel texts: a vegetarian Jesus would not have participated in a sacrificial cult, as was common in Judaism; he would not have eaten the Passover lamb with his disciples, as might be deduced from the Synoptic Gospels (but not

---

Gerasa was a geographically problematic location in terms of the story.

<sup>31</sup> Bauckham, 'Jesus and Animals I,' 48.

<sup>32</sup> Bauckham's interpretation did not go unchallenged. David G. Horrell critically comments that the story says nothing about Jesus noticing the suffering of the pigs and gives no indication that it was a 'lesser evil' (Horrell, 'Biblical Vegetarianism?,' 48). Alternative perspectives emphasise the symbolic or political elements contained in the narrative. For example, John Dominic Crossan points out that the demon is both one and many, bears the name 'Legion,' which can be seen as an allusion to Roman military power, enters pigs – considered unclean animals in Judaism – and finally drowns in the sea, which reflects the desires of Jewish opponents to Roman rule. Crossan believes that this story is not a true historical episode in the life of Jesus, but rather a critique of Roman colonial rule, depicted as demonic possession (See John Dominic Crossan, *Jesus: A Revolutionary Biography* [San Francisco: Harper, 1995], 90. Cf. Richard Dormandy, 'The Expulsion of Legion: A Political Reading of Mark 5:1–20,' *The Expository Times* 111, no. 10 (2000): 335–337, doi: 10.1177/001452460011101004). Regardless of whether we find Bauckham's or Horrell's view more persuasive, or whether we lean with some scholars toward a symbolic interpretation, it is worth noting that the eminent ethicist Peter Singer, in his groundbreaking work *Animal Liberation*, presents a simplistic and entirely one-sided view of the relationship to animals in the New Testament and he refers to this story in his argument. In his opinion, 'The New Testament is completely lacking in any injunction against cruelty to animals, or any recommendation to consider their interests. Jesus himself is described as showing apparent indifference to the fate of nonhumans when he induced two thousand swine to hurl themselves into the sea – an act which was apparently quite unnecessary, since Jesus was well able to cast out devils without inflicting them upon any other creature.' Peter Singer, *Animal Liberation: A New Ethics for Our Treatment of Animals* (New York: Avon Books, 1977), 199. Cf. Charles C. Camosy, *Peter Singer and Christian Ethics: Beyond Polarization* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 107.



from the Gospel of John);<sup>55</sup> the feasts to which he was invited would have been meatless; and the stories of multiplying fish or eating fish after the resurrection (Luke 24:42–45) would have been created in contradiction to his real attitude toward animals.

Thus, the idea of not killing non-human creatures for food can hardly be directly inferred from Jesus’ practice. Rather, the underpinning of the idea of non-violent coexistence could be the biblical passage which recounts that Jesus ‘was in the wilderness forty days, tempted by Satan; and he was with the wild beasts; and the angels ministered to him’ (Mark 1:13).

As Bauckham and other scholars point out,<sup>54</sup> the coexistence of Jesus with wild animals mentioned in this verse can be understood as an evocation and anticipation of the final, messianic peace (cf. Isa 11:6; 65:25).

But can these conclusions be related to a moral practice whose guiding idea is following Jesus? Bauckham, as a New Testament scholar, seeks only to reconstruct Jesus’ views and actions in these studies, not to apply them in a modern social and cultural context.<sup>55</sup> It is this application, however, as well as some hermeneutical difficulties, that confront us with serious problems:

- (1) Bauckham’s analysis shows that nature and animals are not a distinct theme in Jesus’ sayings but rather serve as a means of expressing another point, such as the character of the kingdom of God or the appropriate relationship to fellow human beings.

<sup>55</sup> However, the question of whether the last supper was a Passover meal is disputed. According to Gerd Theissen and Annette Merz ‘Jesus probably celebrated a farewell meal with his disciples on the day before the Passover – in the awareness that his life was in danger, but also in the hope that the imminent breaking in of the kingdom of God would perhaps save it. In so doing he interpreted a simple meal (probably not a Passover meal) as the celebration of a “new covenant” with God, aimed at impressing God’s will directly on human hearts.’ Theissen and Merz, *The Historical Jesus*, 436.

<sup>54</sup> Erich Grässer, for example, does not assume that the animals in this episode are merely a part or feature of the wilderness, that they underline its or Satan’s hostile nature, or that they represent Jesus’ enemies. In his view, ‘Jesus’ sojourn with the animals in Mark 1:13 is a reference to the paradisiacal state of the end time.’ Erich Grässer, ‘KAI HN META TON ΘΗΡΙΩΝ (Mk 1,13b): Ansätze einer theologischen Tierschutzethik,’ in *Studien zum Text und zur Ethik des Neuen Testaments: Festschrift zum 80. Geburtstag von Heinrich Greeven*, ed. Wolfgang Schrage (Berlin – New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1986), 152. Cf. Michael Rosenberger, *Der Traum vom Frieden zwischen Mensch und Tier: eine christliche Tierethik* (München: Kösel-Verlag, 2015), 124–125.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Richard Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology* (Waco: Baylor University Press, 2011), 78.

- (2) Although some of Jesus' ideas about the proper treatment of animals can be inferred from the Synoptic Gospels, these views are conditioned by time and cultural environment. They do not answer contemporary issues such as intensive factory farming, genetic engineering, zoos, vegetarianism, or veganism.
- (3) If we focus only on Jesus' actions and sayings that somehow relate to animals or nature, we may be blind to the above questions because Jesus' words and deeds do not directly address these issues. On the contrary, we risk overlooking other gospel texts, such as some parables, which can be creatively applied in this area.
- (4) In at least some, if not all, of Jesus' actions and words of this kind, it is not clear what is the historical core and what is the literary and theological expression of a particular 'claim'. Among the episodes in which the theological dimension is particularly evident are the sojourn in the wilderness with the wild animals, the story of Gerasa, and the eating of the fish after the resurrection.

#### 4. Essential Feature(s) of Jesus' Teaching and Actions

The approach I present here as an alternative is based on two ideas. The first is that following Jesus does not mean imitating his specific deeds and actions, but it does imply a key inspiration for moral practice. Some theologians, such as Jon Sobrino, have emphasised that following – as opposed to imitating – takes into account the ever-new historical context in which it takes place.<sup>56</sup> Jesus can thus be understood as a normative paradigm for imaginative following, not copying. In this vein, William C. Spohn speaks of an 'analogical imagination' whose

---

<sup>56</sup> See Peter J. M. A. van Ool, *Befreiende Praxis der Nachfolge: biblische, historische, und befreiungstheologische Impulse zur Nachfolge Jesu, des Christus* (Würzburg: Seelsorge Echter, 2000), 147–148. Of course, one must always pay attention to how the terms 'following' and 'imitation' are defined and in what context they are discussed. Many theologians understand 'imitation' in a dynamic sense. For example, when Jason B. Hood writes about the apostle Paul, he emphasises the creative, not slavish and unimaginative, nature of imitation: 'In the Bible imitation is rarely about precise copying. Consider how Paul uses imitation. He does not imitate the Messiah by fishing, wearing his hair in a particular fashion, fasting forty days in the wilderness or collecting precisely a dozen disciples. He rarely speaks Jesus' native language, Arameic. Even when he recommends celibacy (1 Cor 7), Paul does not appeal to Jesus' celibate lifestyle as a model.' Jason B. Hood, *Imitating God in Christ: Recapturing a Biblical Pattern* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2015), 11–12.

application would allow Christian ethics to remain both faithful and creative.<sup>37</sup> Seen in this way, the analogical imagination is

the main bridge between the biblical text and contemporary ethical practice. Jesus did not come teaching timeless moral truths or a uniform way of life to be replicated in every generation. Rather his words, encounters, and life story set patterns that can be flexibly but faithfully extended to new circumstances. These patterns lead us to envision analogous ways of acting that are partly the same and partly different.<sup>38</sup>

The second idea that I am drawing on is that we need to start from some more general feature of Jesus’ attitude. Returning to Andrew Linzey, the theological strength of his position does not lie in the hypotheses I discussed above; it lies in his imaginative application of what he understands to be characteristic of Jesus in general. This perspective is well reflected in his words: ‘If we are to ask how it is that we humans are to exercise our dominion or God-given power over non-human animals, then we need to look no further than to Jesus as our moral exemplar: of power expressed in powerlessness and of strength expressed in compassion.’<sup>39</sup>

A similar view, namely, that the relationship to nature is to be based on the pattern of Jesus’ life of service, not tyrannical violence, can be found in other theologians such as Douglas John Hall and Norman Habel.<sup>40</sup> This kind of approach is fruitful as it allows us to avoid the problems I have outlined in the previous section and provide a basic criterion for relating to non-human creatures. My own view is that such a fundamental criterion, derivable from the body of gospel material, may be *compassion accompanied by care for the suffering*.<sup>41</sup>

---

<sup>37</sup> See Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 56.

<sup>38</sup> Spohn, *Go and Do Likewise*, 49. For the relationship between analogy and normativity see page 55.

<sup>39</sup> Linzey, *Animal Theology*, 71.

<sup>40</sup> See Douglas John Hall, *The Steward: A Biblical Symbol Come of Age* (rev. ed., Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans – New York: Friendship Press, 1990), 210–211; Norman Habel, *An Inconvenient Text: Is a Green Reading of the Bible Possible?* (Adelaide: ATF Press, 2009), 74–77.

<sup>41</sup> The question of compassion, sympathy, empathy or ‘fellow-feeling’ in relation to animals has been reflected by several theologians. These include Martin M. Lintner, Daniel K. Miller or Michael Rosenberger. See Martin M. Lintner, *Der Mensch und das liebe Vieh: ethische Fragen im Umgang mit Tieren* (Innsbruck: Tyrolia-Verlag, 2017), 21, 104–105; Daniel K. Miller, *Animal Ethics and Theology: The Lens of the Good*

The Synoptic Gospels repeatedly recount Jesus' compassion when confronted with human affliction. Jesus is touched when he meets a leper (Mark 1:41) and two blind men (Matt 20:34). He is moved when he looks at a mother mourning the death of her only son (Luke 7:13), or at a crowd of people who are like sheep without a shepherd (Mark 6:34; Matt 9:36; Matt 14:14) and starving (Mark 8:2; Matt 14:14). In all these cases the verb *σπλαγγίζομαι* is used to indicate that Jesus is inwardly affected by the suffering of others.<sup>42</sup> The same verb occurs in some parables, such as the parable of the prodigal son, where it expresses the father's emotion when he sees his son from afar (Luke 15:20), or in the parable of the unforgiving servant, where it denotes the master's compassion for the debtor (Matthew 18:27).

Jesus, as New Testament scholar Dale C. Allison, Jr. asserts,

did not proclaim the wonderful things to come and then pass by on the other side of the road. He rather turned his eschatological ideal in an ethical blueprint for compassionate ministry in the present, which means that, in addition to saying that things would get better, he set about making it so.<sup>43</sup>

E. P. Sanders even argues that 'the overall tenor of Jesus' teaching is compassion towards human frailty'.<sup>44</sup> Similarly, Marcus J. Borg notes that compassion played a crucial role for Jesus. In his view, 'for Jesus, compassion was the central quality of God and the central moral quality of a life centered in God'.<sup>45</sup> Borg refers to Luke 6:36, which he views as an early tradition, and suggests that this verse should be translated as 'be compassionate as God is compassionate' rather than 'be merciful as God is merciful'. As he observes, in English, 'mercy' and 'merciful' usually connote a relationship of superiority and

---

*Samaritan* (Abingdon – New York: Routledge, 2012), 62–66, 70–71; Rosenberger, *Der Traum vom Frieden zwischen Mensch und Tier*, 143–147. Michael Rosenberger also points to research showing that ethically motivated vegetarians and vegans feel more compassion and have a better ability to empathise with animals than meat-eaters. See Rosenberger, *Wie viel Tier darf's sein?*, 40–42.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Donald P. McNeill, Douglas A. Morrison, and Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Compassion: A Reflection on the Christian Life* (Garden City: Image Books, 1982), 16–17.

<sup>43</sup> Dale C. Allison, Jr., *The Historical Christ and the Theological Jesus* (Grand Rapids – Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans, 2009), 113.

<sup>44</sup> E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (2nd ed., London: Penguin Books, 1995), 202.

<sup>45</sup> Marcus J. Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again, for the First Time: The Historical Jesus & the Heart of Contemporary Faith* (New York: HarperCollins, 1995), 46.

subordination, as well as a situation where a person has done something wrong, while ‘most commonly compassion is associated with feeling the suffering of somebody else and being moved by that suffering to do something’.<sup>46</sup> However, I believe that the meaning of ‘mercy’ depends on the specific context in which it is used and that the term ‘compassion’ can sometimes denote a mere emotion that does not lead to acts of practical help. In my proposal for the basic criterion, I prefer the formulation ‘compassion accompanied by care for the suffering’ precisely to avoid this misunderstanding.

In setting this criterion, I find myself not only close to Andrew Linzey’s position but also to that of liberation theologian Jon Sobrino, for whom mercy is a characteristic feature of Jesus and therefore of crucial, guiding importance for Christians and the church.<sup>47</sup> Sobrino’s concept of mercy is in many ways similar to how I understand compassion accompanied by care for the suffering. He himself explicitly writes that for Jesus, mercy (*miseriordia*) or *compassion* (*compasión*) is central, and he regards mercy not only as a feeling but also as an action that is aimed at helping and defending victims.<sup>48</sup>

Sobrino focuses primarily on the poor, but his approach can – and, I believe, should – be extended to non-human creatures. Again, it was none other than Andrew Linzey who stated that ‘there can be no liberation theology without the liberation of creation itself [...]’.<sup>49</sup> And Sobrino himself leaves the door open to this idea as he writes that ‘the place of the church is with “the other”, and with the most radical otherness of that other – his suffering – especially when the suffering is massive, cruel, and unjust’.<sup>50</sup>

<sup>46</sup> Borg, *Meeting Jesus Again for the First Time*, 47.

<sup>47</sup> See Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1994), 15–26; Jon Sobrino, *Jesus the Liberator: A Historical-Theological Reading of Jesus of Nazareth* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1993), 90–92.

<sup>48</sup> Jon Sobrino, ‘Jesus of Galilee from the Savadoran Context: Compassion, Hope, and Following the Light of the Cross,’ *Theological Studies* 70, 2 (2009): 454, doi: 10.1177/004056390907000211.

<sup>49</sup> Linzey, *Animal Theology*, 72. Several authors have recently addressed liberation theology in relation to environmental issues or specifically to animals. See, for example, Daniel P. Castillo, *An Ecological Theology of Liberation: Salvation and Political Ecology* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2009); Clair Linzey, *Developing Animal Theology: An Engagement with Leonardo Boff* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2022); Julia Blanc, ‘Arme Tiere: die Option für die Armen als möglicher Anschlusspunkt einer christlichen Tierethik,’ in *Mensch – Tier – Gott: Interdisziplinäre Annäherungen an eine christliche Tierethik*, ed. Martin M. Lintner (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2021), 219–239.

<sup>50</sup> Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy*, 21.

Compassion accompanied by care for the suffering is such a general value that it leaves ample room for ethical creativity and imagination but at the same time provides a very clear optic or filter for looking at particular problems. Its use does not mean the exclusion of specific words and stories from the Gospels. These are not only the source from which such compassion is drawn but also serve as an inspiring and evocative supplement to ethical reflection based on this criterion.

An example of a biblical story with such evocative and inspirational potential is the parable of the good Samaritan. The Samaritan is driven by compassion in helping his neighbour (Luke 10:33),<sup>51</sup> and the narrative thus illustrates a perspective that I see as decisive. At the same time, it can channel ethical reflection in a more specific direction – for example, it shows that compassion accompanied by care for the suffering involves other values and therefore criteria, namely self-limitation for others and moral sensitivity, which is the antithesis of self-centredness, narcissism, and ‘moral blindness’.<sup>52</sup> As Spohn notes, moral blindness is not total in most cases but selective – the eye is often fixed on certain problems while others are morally ‘invisible’. These and similar questions and stimuli that emerge from reading this parable can then be applied to the realm of non-human creatures and used ethically through analogical imagination.

In this context, it is worth noting that there is an apocryphal story about Jesus that bears some similarities to the parable of the good

---

<sup>51</sup> Here, too, the term *πλαγχνίζομαι* is used. Given the theme of following Jesus, it should be mentioned that this parable has also been interpreted Christologically. François Bovon remarks on this: ‘Ought we simply to reject the patristic and medieval equation that made of the Samaritan an image of Jesus Christ? I do not think so, since the parable draws on a model in picturing what the love of one’s neighbour is like. For the Samaritan adopts the feelings of Christ himself and repeats Christ’s acts. Was not Jesus – he too, he before all others – “moved with pity” in the face of human beings’ suffering, solitude, and grief (cf. 7:13)? Did he not come as a physician to care for and save what was lost (cf. 5:31–32)? And behind Jesus’ active compassion, there is the symmetrical and programmatic “good pleasure” (the *εὐδοκία*), the plan of salvation, the active goodness of God (cf. 10:21). Thus, although I maintain the ethical orientation of the passage, I do not underestimate either the Christological element, containing an especially exemplary Christology, or the theological rooting in a theology of the plan of salvation.’ François Bovon, *Luke 2: A Commentary on the Gospel of Luke 9:51–19:27* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2013), 64.

<sup>52</sup> Cf. Johann Baptist Metz, ‘Compassion: zu einem Weltprogramm des Christentums im Zeitalter des Pluralismus der Religionen und Kulturen,’ in *Compassion: Weltprogramm des Christentums; soziale Verantwortung lernen*, ed. Johann Baptist Metz, Lothar Kuld and Adolf Weisbrod (Freiburg am Breisgau: Herder, 2000), 17.

Samaritan and explicitly involves an animal.<sup>55</sup> The animal, like the man who fell among the robbers, is beaten, and Jesus is not oblivious to the suffering creature but actively helps it:

It happened that the Lord left the city and walked with his disciples over the mountains. And they came to a mountain, and the road that led up it was steep. There they found a man with a pack-mule. But the animal had fallen, because the man had loaded it too heavily, and now he beat it, so that it was bleeding. And Jesus came to him and said, ‘Man, why do you beat your animal? Do you not see that it is too weak for its burden, and do you not know that it suffers pains?’ But the man answered and said, ‘What is that to you? I may beat it as much as I please, since it is my property, and I bought it for a good sum of money. Ask those who are with you, for they know me and know about this.’ And some of the disciples said, ‘Yes, Lord, it is as he says. We have seen how he bought it.’ But the Lord said, ‘Do you then not see how it bleeds, and do you not hear how it groans and cries out?’ But they answered and said, ‘No, Lord, that it groans and cries out, we do not hear.’ But Jesus was sad and exclaimed, ‘Woe to you, that you do not hear how it complains to the Creator in heaven and cries out for mercy. But threefold woes to him about whom it cries out and complains in its pain.’ And he came up and touched the animal. And it stood up and its wounds were healed. But Jesus said to the man, ‘Now carry on and from now on do not beat it any more, so that you too may find mercy.’<sup>54</sup>

The origin of this work is shrouded in mystery,<sup>55</sup> but the narrative demonstrates the author’s desire to extend to non-human creatures what he or she considers to be characteristic of Jesus’ attitude. If Jesus was compassionate and helped the suffering, it is likely that he would have acted similarly in the situation depicted in the apocryphal story – he would not have viewed the suffering creature as a mere object or possession, would not have been insensitive to its pain, and would have devoted his time to remedying the situation. However, this story need

---

<sup>55</sup> See Erich Grässer, ‘Kirche und Tierschutz – eine Anklage,’ in *Tierschutz: Testfall unserer Menschlichkeit*, ed. Ursula M. Händel (Frankfurt am Main, 1984), 61. Cf. Lintner, *Der Mensch und das liebe Vieh*, 30–31.

<sup>54</sup> I quote Richard Bauckham’s translation that is based on a German translation of a Coptic source. Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures*, 86.

<sup>55</sup> See Grässer, ‘Kirche und Tierschutz,’ 61; Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures*, 87; Andrew Linzey and Dan Cohn-Sherbok, *After Noah: Animals and the Liberation of Theology* (London: Mowbray, 1997), 86, n. 18.

not be regarded merely as a narrative grasp of how Jesus would probably have acted under such circumstances. It can also serve as a model for how Jesus' followers should properly treat non-human creatures. Understood in this way, it is an outstanding example of an analogical imagination based on a fundamental feature of Jesus' practice – the criterion of compassion accompanied by care for the suffering.

It is this criterion – or similar criteria that can be drawn from the body of gospel material – that establishes a plausible connection between following Jesus and ethical attitudes toward non-human creatures. Not only is this criterion a counterbalance to certain forms of sin, such as sloth (indifference, insensitivity) or cruelty, but at least in some cases, it can lead to quite specific ethical attitudes. While particular issues may be subject to dispute, if we accept compassion accompanied by care for the suffering as the guiding ethical perspective, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that wherever our actions or inactions cause or enable *unnecessary suffering*,<sup>56</sup> we find ourselves in conflict with this Christologically grounded criterion.

## Conclusion

The foundation of my argument is that the concept of following Jesus, coupled with the theologically grounded claim of his normativity, can provide a basic framework for ethical considerations about the appropriate treatment of non-human creatures. In taking this approach, we can avoid the danger of creating a 'green' Jesus or facing serious hermeneutical and other difficulties associated with trying to apply Jesus' words and actions in a direct way. The alternative I suggest is to

---

<sup>56</sup> Determining what is avoidable suffering would, of course, merit a more detailed discussion, which I cannot pursue here. Such a consideration would have to include the plight of non-human creatures as well as human beings, the fate of individual animals as well as biotic communities, and take into account their interconnectedness and interdependence. How complex this issue can be is suggested, for instance, by Rosemary Radford Ruether, who writes: 'Environmentalists see animal rights activists as operating out of a misplaced sentimentality for particular favorite animals, which often results in greater hurt to these animals. Thus, for example, in cases where monitored culling of herds of deer or horses in state parks has been stopped on grounds of sentimental feelings for these types of animals, the result has been ecological disaster. Not only have proliferating herds of horses or deer stripped the forests and grasses for food, but finally have died in large numbers from starvation, a form of death more painful than if their numbers had been kept within limits through periodic shooting.' Rosemary Radford Ruether, *Gaia & God: An Ecofeminist Theology of Earth Healing* (San Francisco: HarperOne, 1994), 221–222.



follow the path laid out by the key feature or features of Jesus’ teaching and actions. If we use these as a starting point for an analogical imagination, what comes into play is not a problematic attempt to copy the ways of Jesus, but a creative yet clearly demarcated ethical reflection.

I have proposed compassion accompanied by care for the suffering as such a feature, and I have based this suggestion on specific gospel passages and the views of some New Testament scholars. While it by no means needs to be the only ‘rule’, I believe that the approach I am highlighting in this paper is a valid one and provides a fundamental principle for considering a wide range of issues such as intensive factory farming, animal research, genetic engineering, zoos, etc. Applying this criterion is unlikely to lead to a consensus on how we should appropriately treat non-human creatures in each and every case, but certain types of behaviour will appear questionable or unacceptable in its light.

That is not to say that the value of compassion accompanied by care for the suffering needs to be expressed in the form of a prohibition of specific acts. In the first place, this ethical principle represents a positive perspective that leads to the development of considerations about what can be done to embody it. The use of this value is always linked to the responsibility of each moral agent, who cannot simply appeal to the fact that Jesus did this or that particular deed or uttered this or that particular word. But he or she can appeal to the basic attitude of Jesus, drawn from the Gospels, and thus meaningfully connect following Jesus with a kind relationship to non-human creatures.

*Protestant Theological Faculty, Charles University  
Černá 9  
115 55 Praha 1  
Czech Republic  
E-mail: zamecnik@etf.cuni.cz*



## THE ANIMAL WITHIN CREATION: THOUGHTS FROM CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY\*

LUCIE KOLÁŘOVÁ

---

### ABSTRACT

The article's topic is *animal* in Christian religion and concept of creation. It describes how Christian theology has reflected the status and significance of animals in the historical development, which positions it has created or preferred in this matter and how they have changed from biblical times until our post-modern present age. Methodically this cross-section through history means that each period is conveyed in its basic features and presented through selected authors, works or texts of the given time. Along with the historical line, the text also follows the principal question of the nature of the relation between human and animal from a theological viewpoint. The object of reflection is thus also the theoretical basis for a morally justifiable relation of post-modern people to other living creatures. The text mainly deals with the following key aspects: a) anthropocentrism and its difficulties in relation to the position of animals in the western, traditionally Christian culture, b) possible ethical perspectives and consequences of the theological concept of creation for the status of animal today.

### Keywords

Animal; Christianity; Theology of Creation; Historical development; Bible; Integral approach

DOI: 10.14712/23363398.2023.14

**C**hristianity is not a religion in which animals are part of the cult. On the contrary. Among other things, high Christian monotheism is characterised by a strict distinction between the immanent

---

\* The article is an extended version of a Czech text 'Bestia. Zvíře v historickém kontextu,' *Archivum trebonense* 15 (2020): 18–29.

and transcendent level. Here, animals are not part of the supernatural world; they are not connected to the heavenly spheres, they cannot be the bearer of magical powers, they are not attributed with otherworldly existence. The animal is neither a brother or a sister in the true sense of the word, yet nor is it a monstrosity that frightens and threatens and should be feared. Animals in the Christian concept are not pets treated with exclusive care, but neither are they ‘material on legs’ that could be used in a cruel way as raw material and then be disposed of. So, what status befits the animal within Christianity? A simple question with no simple answer. Theology itself responds differently and inconsistently for different eras. At the same time, however, there is an indisputable continuity of a certain type of thinking with its characteristic features which can be identified as Christian, regardless of the historical context. And it is precisely this continuity that enables a response that is differentiated and principled at the same time. The key to understanding is ‘creation’ as a theological category.

At first, I introduce the concept of creation against the historical background, which gives a meaningful framework when thinking about the status of animals in the Christian religion. Subsequently, I distinguish the Old Testament and New Testament contexts and their specificity of meaning in the approach to animals. The next procedure is chronological; the article outlines the development of Christian thought and theology regarding the issue of animals from the beginnings of Christianity to the present day. Parallel to the historical line, the text also follows the principled question of the nature of the relationship between human and animal from the theological point of view. In the end, the subject of reflection also includes the theoretical basis of the morally justifiable relationship of postmodern humans to other living creatures. All of this, of course, remains within the chosen selection, without claims to completeness, but with the wish that readers will not only gain an insight into past thinking in the given field but may also be inspired to reflect and act in the present.

## **1. The Animal in the Biblical-Christian Context**

### **1.1 On Theology of Creation**

If talk of animals is to be found at all in Christianity, it is in its concept of creation, which closely follows the Jewish concept. This introduces the world with all its elements – stars, mountains, seas, animals,

humans – as the work of God. Hence God is also called the Creator. The expression ‘creation’ – despite the root of the word and the meaning we associate with it – speaks of no (causal) mechanism that wants to clarify how the world came into being but points to the reason for the existence of everything that is. The reason here is the Creator himself. The concept of creation thus primarily means the relationship between the Creator and the world and not a ‘production process’. The nature of the world turns out to be relational. The revolution of Jewish monotheism and its concept of creation consisted in the rigorous distinction between God, human and nature. The human world has somehow ceased to be mutually permeable to the animal and the supernatural world. The consequences for all three areas are obvious: God, the one true, the absolutely transcendent, becomes an exclusive matter, not part of the world as such; humans are freed to their humanity – neither animal nor extraterrestrial; nature can no longer be the stage of unpredictable numinous forces and becomes ‘ordinary’ nature. Of course, we are talking about a process that took place for at least several centuries and for the Hebrews living in the second and first millennium BC, it only gradually transformed their worldview.<sup>1</sup> However, the effects of this process fundamentally exceeded the cultural framework of the Old Orient and became one of the turning points of the spiritual history of our own civilisation sphere. Christianity, unthinkable without its Jewish roots, draws on this historical progress of Judaism of that time also in its objective attitude towards nature, understood as creation.

The biblical textual corpus itself understandably brings no systematic ‘animal concept’.<sup>2</sup> Books of various genres, by authors known, but rather unknown, from a period spanning almost fifteen hundred years, are aimed at a wide audience. They are always period-specific, always situational, but each time they carry a theological meaning. However heterogeneous this diverse collection may seem, it does have a common characteristic: these are not factual, scientific texts, these are not professional treatises, nor even historiography; what we are dealing with is a collection of confessions. Biblical texts want to witness faith; they are testimonies. Therefore, if the authors mention the animal

---

<sup>1</sup> This is evidenced by the Hebrews’ ‘readiness’ over centuries to fall away from the true faith. For the whole problem cf. Karen Armstrong, *A History of God: From Abraham to the Present: the 4000-year Quest for God* (London: Mandarin, 1996), 18–36, 51–94.

<sup>2</sup> Cf. Simone & Claudia Paganini, *Die Biester der Bibel. Warum es in der Heiligen Schrift keine Katzen, aber eine Killer-Kuh gibt* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2022).

world in some places, it is necessary to read and understand it in the context of what was said and not to lose sight of the main intention of the texts.

## 1.2 Old Testament Context

In the Old Testament, animals are thematised indirectly, through narratives, poetic metaphors, verses or wise sayings, mostly in the context of the relationship between human and animal. Even if the actual encounter between humans and animals remains secondary in the background of the ‘main story’ between human and God, the relevant texts do reflect them as wonderful, mysterious and fascinating.<sup>3</sup> This may be largely a reflection of the fact that the bygone participant of the biblical scene is much closer to the animal kingdom than a member of modern Western societies. After all, even for the inhabitants of ancient cities, it was rather impossible to get through life without being directly confronted with animals. The world of everyday worries was so connected to the world of animals that people could not but reflect on how close the lives of humans and animals were. Although the specific relationship to animals in the Old Testament texts varies from a (more) theological position to a (rather) pragmatic one, in summary, all positions show a basic biblical sensitivity to the created nature of all living things.

Evidence of this variety of attitudes towards animals can be found in a number of texts. There are certainly sufficient passages showing that the ancient Israelites were much aware of the economic benefit to them from the animal world. The texts talk about numerous herds, about the products of animals (milk, wool, skin, to a lesser extent also meat), about cattle as currency for all kinds of trade, or about the respectability of the owner resulting from the size of the herd (e.g., Gen. 12:16; Gen. 26:14; Judg. 6:37). Despite the utility value of animals, however, the biblical mentality does not operate with the idea of the herd as a storehouse of meat, which is an idea of the modern West: ‘*consuming animals taken from the herd or stable for the mere pleasure of eating is rejected as intemperance*’ (Amos 6:4; cf. Zech. 11:4–7).<sup>4</sup> The owner chooses from the herd for his own consumption, usually on special,

---

<sup>3</sup> Cf. Albert de Pury, *Člověk a zvíře – stvoření Boží* (Praha: Kalich, 1999), 21–23. [*Homme et animal, Dieu les créa*. Genève, 1993.]

<sup>4</sup> Cf. De Pury, *Člověk a zvíře*, 34.

almost sacrificial occasions (cf. Gen. 15:9–10; Gen. 18:7; Judg. 6:19ff.). The Psalms, for example, offer another level of access to the world of animals. In these writings, which are poetic in nature, both the beautiful and the monstrous faces of creation are depicted by using examples from the animal world (Ps. 8:9; 74:13–14; 89:10–11). This reflects a theological point of view, as animals are involved in celebration- and salvation-creating processes (the prayer of lion cubs is their *roaring for prey*, Ps. 104:21),<sup>5</sup> and it is interesting from the perspective of depth psychology as well. It may reflect human's timeless desire to meet the world of animals and to have a deeper communion with them. And it probably shows how humans are fascinated by any encounter with (wild) animals in the most archaic layers of their perception, how we repeatedly experience certain existential anxiety that accompanies this encounter and how it might guide us to the potential communication with what is animal and monstrous within ourselves. It is as if the animal holds up a mirror to us in which we can reveal in ourselves a number of elementary features we would otherwise never have realised.<sup>6</sup>

Specifically, the animal is thematised in the so-called Yahwist account of creation (Gen. 2–3). Among other things, humans are entrusted to rule over other living creatures; here, the Hebrew verb refers to wise and just rule, not arbitrary and predatory treatment. It is not without interest that at the beginning only a vegetarian diet is mentioned for both humans and animals (Gen. 1:29–30), and only after the Flood did the peaceful regime give way to a reality where people and animals eat each other (Gen. 9:2–6).<sup>7</sup> In the aforementioned narrative, Albert de Pury considers three findings to be important: 1) there is no essential ('ontological') difference between humans and animals; 2) animals are created to live in relation to humans; and 3) animals are considered as 'help' for humans. The first characteristic does not aim to devalue humans, for it merely points out that both were created and that God breathed the 'breath of life' into both of them. Therefore, human as well as animal received life as a gift. This gift is not the same as participation in the divine being, nor does it mean the gift of immortality. Both humans and animals are inherently mortal in the perspective of this narrative. If there is a fellowship between them, then its meaning can

<sup>5</sup> Cf. Milan Balabán, *Hebrejské člověkosloví* (Praha: Herrmann & synové, 1996), 135.

<sup>6</sup> Cf. De Pury, *Člověk a zvíře*, 36, 38–39.

<sup>7</sup> Cf. Robert Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant: Bilical Themes of Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation* (London: Sheed & Ward, 1992), 99.

be found in their particular earthly lives to which they were called as created beings. The second characteristic relates the creation of animals to a precise intention: from an anthropological point of view, the animal is presented as a kind of remedy for human loneliness. Thus, from the very beginning, the Old Testament reflects the existence of animals with regard to humans, and therefore as a relational matter. Humankind receives the privilege of naming the animals. In doing so, it grants them a personal identity analogous to its own and enters into dialogue with them, so to speak. In comparison, consider that in the Yahwist story this privilege applies to no other created 'things' (such as trees or watercourses). Giving a name necessarily means establishing a relationship and establishing a certain principled equivalence, which, however, does not contradict the establishment of a functional hierarchy. It is humankind who addresses animals, not the other way round, just as – theologically – it is God who primarily addresses humankind, and not the other way round. Therefore, it is not possible to make the animal an object because, in the mutual relationship between human and animal, both parties remain subjects. The third characteristic must also be understood in a similar spirit: it is not a utilitarian relationship, for animals are there to help humans primarily in an existential sense. People need animals, they need each other, and in this sense, together they constitute help for life itself.<sup>8</sup>

Humans are the only creature to whom the symbolic category of the image of God (Gen. 1) belongs, so the distance between humans and all non-human creatures must be maintained under all circumstances; nevertheless, there are 'good relations' between humans and animals in the Old Testament. Their reciprocity even seems to be manifested 'inside out': while the spiritually dead eyes of people are unable to read and understand God's commands, animals are often characterised by surprising empathy, and their eyes seem to have the ability to say a lot. In the Old Testament concept, a considerable closeness, however not intimate, is established between human and animal. The community of animals, which God created for people according to the book of Genesis, is not enough for people, does not fully compare to them, and can therefore neither be seen as a brotherhood nor as a confidential partnership, but even so, we can observe people's loving approach to the animal kingdom, where animals are in a way guides to humans. For

---

<sup>8</sup> Cf. De Pury, *Člověk a zvíře*, 73–80.



that matter, orders and mandates given to people always apply proportionately to animals or non-human creation – cattle also have the right to rest on the seventh day (Deut. 5:14), the ‘animal worker’ also has a right to wages (Deut. 25:4), fledglings must not be deprived of their mother (Deut. 22:6), representatives of all animal species must survive the Flood (Gen. 7:3) and so on. God’s mercy should touch everyone, God’s salvation reaches both human and animal.<sup>9</sup>

### 1.5 New Testament Context

The basic Christian text corpus is represented by the New Testament. As for the practical relationship with nature, thanks to the Jewish heritage, Christians could quite naturally follow a practical and sober attitude towards nature and all creatures in it. However, young Christianity – quite understandably – did not solve theoretical questions of this type. The collection of twenty-seven books of different genres is focused on what is at the core of the Christian religion, namely the confession of Jesus as the Christ. Even so, in several places in the New Testament, the concept of creation shows through as the basic framework without which no other theological questions can be contemplated. It must be emphasised that in the liberating Christocentric message, presented as a message of fundamental significance for people, the quality of the rest of creation is in no way lost.

If we start from the historical figure of Jesus – although the preserved tradition is limited and brief – we can note his positive and favourable basic orientation towards the reality of creation. Jesus loves life and its natural pleasures (see the reproach that he is ‘*a glutton and a drunkard*’ in Matt. 11:19). His relationship to God – the primary concern – is articulated through a sapiential view of all created things: in the so-called Sermon on the Mount, there is talk of God’s permanent care for creation (Matt. 6:25–34) and the treatment of nature is a rich part of the allegories and parables told by Jesus. Animals often figure in them, even if not as a separate subject of consideration (a lost sheep is being sought, there is talk of abundant fishing, Jesus compares his existential need with birds and foxes, which have their nests and dens, etc.). Jesus also adopts the biblical metaphor of the shepherd and his animals (Luke 15:3–7). Typically, non-human living creatures are discussed in the context of the good work of creation. In Jesus’s narratives,

---

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Balabán, *Hebrejské člověkosloví*, 132–136.

animals are reflected relationally – in an atmosphere of omnipresent empathy and benevolence. Jesus’s attitude towards them – to put it aptly – appears to be normal in the best sense of the word. Free from folly, without utilitarianism, neither underestimating nor exaggerating, in a kind of balance of distance and favour. In no way is this an indifferent relationship; on the contrary, it is emotionally tinged. A relationship that can be understood on two levels. On the one hand, Jesus ‘borrows’ animals as actors who embody qualities and values of the human world. It is about the need for care and concern, about vulnerability, consideration, mutual dependence, or even about mutual benefit, which, however, is not usurping or arbitrary. A power-motivated approach to life is out of the question, and all this is transferred in a very simple analogy to all living creatures. Although the position of animals that appear in the message of Jesus – stories that are meant for human ears – might seem to be one of only functional servanthood, this is not the case. The texts also comprise another level. A sufficient number of parables attest to the autonomous status of the animal world, which is obviously respected. The elementary – natural – level of the parables remains authentic. For example, there is no reason to believe that the awareness of compassion for an animal is a feigned affectation but rather captures a real emotion that truly applies – it is indeed assumed that animals can suffer (Matt 10:29f.; 12:11). According to some, there is even an inclusive understanding of God’s generosity in Jesus that stands higher than an anthropocentric perspective would suggest. That is why even seemingly worthless sparrows are not forgotten in God’s eyes, and that is where their true value lies.<sup>10</sup>

Solidarity with a suffering creature is manifested in the letter to the Romans (chapter 8), where Paul of Tarsus speaks of the ‘*groaning of the whole of creation as in the pains of childbirth*’. He recalls an old, most likely Jewish tradition of great anticipation of the day when all will be one with all in all-reconciling harmony. The ‘childbirth sigh’, or the current state of nature and the world, suggests both a critical state and the nearness of (total) liberation. For according to this passage, all non-human creation – theologically as a result of the guilt and pastoral irresponsibility of humankind who ‘deserted’ from God’s original purpose – was given over to futility. It evidently means contentlessness,

---

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Andrew Linzey, *Animal Theology* (London: SCM Press, 1994), 35.

that is, the loss of God's intended 'content'. Adoration of nature as well as its abuse, exploitation and humiliation to the level of blind elements – they deprive the phenomena 'heaven and earth' of their finality, and thus also of the desired surge to final liberation. In this sense, it is possible to say that human and non-human creation have created and unfortunately always create again a tragic pair, where 'one cannot do without the other', but where at the same time only humans have the keys to liberation.<sup>11</sup>

People and other living creatures turn out to be connected for better or for worse; it is literally a solidarity 'for life and death'. Just as human sin causes the suffering of other creatures, so too can human conversion – in the sense of people's inner attitude changing to an attitude of trust and faith – lead to their liberation.<sup>12</sup>

## 2. Outline of Further Developments in Antiquity and the Middle Ages

Although it cannot be claimed that the above-mentioned inclusive understanding of moral generosity, which is elementarily indicated in the biblical texts, has been particularly widespread in the Christian tradition, at the same time, awareness of the entire creation's relatedness has never disappeared in the history of Christianity. Early Christian texts primarily testify that along with the spread of the new religion within the cultural space of the Roman Empire, Christians incorporated the ideas of Hellenic culture into their reflections and created a synthesis between this thinking and traditional biblical material. This was certainly also manifested in the field of theology of creation. *The first letter of Clement* (end of the 1st century), appealing for mutual concord, uses the argument of divine order, thanks to which even the smallest creatures live in peaceful harmony. The theme of cosmic harmony occurs in the *Letter to Diognetus* (middle of the 2nd century).<sup>13</sup> The scheme of harmony, and the praise of creation and calls for earthly imitation of cosmic harmony associated with it, can be found in an unchanged form throughout the first few centuries of Christianity – not least due to the strong influence of Stoic philosophy on Christianity. With the collapse

---

<sup>11</sup> Balabán, *Hebrejské člověkosloví*, 137.

<sup>12</sup> Cf. Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant*, 129–132.

<sup>13</sup> Cf. Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant*, 132–137.

of the Roman Empire, the theoretical model of cosmic harmony gradually weakens, which naturally means no resignation to the concept of creation as such. It is true that in the course of the entire historical development, influential supporters of the concept of God's moral generosity towards the entire creation are often found in certain currents of the Christian tradition, in which God's mercy towards the world of non-human creatures is repeatedly mentioned or reflected. For example, Basil of Caesarea from the 4th century, long before the well-known Francis of Assisi, speaks of animals as 'our brothers'.<sup>14</sup> From the same period, we can also refer to Gregory of Nyssa or John Chrysostom. The topic of the relationship with animals was understandably close to all hermits, eremites, and cenobites. The peaceful coexistence of wild animals with a human (hermit) is described in the *Life of St Anthony the Anchorite*.<sup>15</sup> R. Murray also quotes excerpts from a work devoted to ascetic life by the 7th-century East Syriac writer Saint Isaac the Syrian:

'The humble man approaches wild animals, and the moment they catch sight of him their ferocity is tamed. They come up and cling to him as their Master, wagging their tails and licking his hands and feet. They scent as coming from him the same fragrance that came from Adam before the transgression, the time when they were gathered before him and he gave them names in Paradise.' When asked what a compassionate heart is, the same author explicitly states: 'It is a heart on fire for the whole of creation, for humanity, for the birds, for the animals, [which] shrinks and cannot bear to hear or look on any injury or the slightest suffering of anything in creation. This is why he constantly offers up prayers full of tears, even for the irrational animals and for the enemies of truth, even for those who harm him, so that they may be protected and find mercy.'<sup>16</sup>

It would be fascinating to analyse the theme of animals in the field of art – in imaginative symbolic associations inspired by myths, in visual art, in iconographic monuments. Animals feature in late Roman mosaics and frescoes, and it is often difficult to determine whether these are pagan or Christian examples, even if they are housed in a Christian catacomb or church. Perhaps their mere placement can be understood

---

<sup>14</sup> Cf. Linzey, *Animal Theology*, 36.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant*, 146.

<sup>16</sup> Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant*, 146–147.

as evidence that a Christian interpretation was intended.<sup>17</sup> In many variations, the frequent theme of Christ as the ‘good shepherd’ was symbolically represented, often through a figure sitting in the middle of his sheep or surrounded by various animals and birds. We should also mention the interesting, unforgettable, influential work *Physiologus*, which was popular for centuries and originated in the folk tradition about animals, itself on the border between the mythical, artistic, and ‘scientific’ realms. The work was written in the early Christian period by an anonymous author, and its numerous expansions, known as bestiaries, contain curious comments on animals and are accompanied by diverse, allegorical reflections. They are meant to serve as a lesson for humans, but the bestiaries also express the feeling that animals also have something to teach us: ‘creatures of all kinds are described with wonder, delight and reverence for the wisdom of the Creator.’<sup>18</sup>

In the history of Christian thought, it would be possible to single out many of the great theologians who dealt with the issue of creation and, in one way or another, thematised the status of animals or the attitude of a believing Christian towards other living creatures. The individual contexts and intentions were very diverse, and the way of thinking about the created world differs because the method of theology itself changed considerably in the course of its development. For example, during the High Middle Ages, this method achieved an admirable formal perfection, which led to an exclusivist conception of theology, but given today’s question of the relationship between human and animal, we would also have to ask whether the overall ‘existential universality’ of the Christian message did not suffer from this kind of theological exclusivity. In general, many historical treatises might be inspiring, while others would provoke or seem aloof. But this article is not an encyclopaedic review. Regarding the intended purpose, it seems important to me to mention two great figures of the medieval period who perhaps represent the best of the Christian reception of nature and our fellow animals: Hildegard of Bingen (1098–1179) and Francis of Assisi (1181/2–1226).

Hildegard was a well-educated Benedictine nun of her time. Her lifestyle, by definition, involved her constant use of the Bible and regular prayer and singing of psalms and hymns that often featured the theme

---

<sup>17</sup> Cf. Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant*, 149–150.

<sup>18</sup> Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant*, 150–151.

of creation, while likewise being in daily contact with nature and specifically animals in the course of her physical work at the monastery. Her understanding of all being is – in accordance with the concept of the time – hierarchical but at the same time extremely dynamic. All nature is organically connected, alive, almost mystical. In her books that deal with, among other things, medicine and natural history, Hildegard not only collects traditional teachings but presents extensive knowledge, learned from her own experience and as observed from the reality around her. She managed to analyse and reflect on nature in its individual phenomena and processes, while at the same time perceiving it as a whole, without losing sight of the interconnectedness of the world's internal structure. Perhaps it can be said that Hildegard's work primarily demonstrates the 'aliveness' of the world. The world as a living organism in which life flows in all creatures at every level.<sup>19</sup>

Francis of Assisi, a well-known saint, often seen as a kind of 'mystic of nature', a dreamer and a fantasiser, actually makes a very substantive contribution to the theology of creation. His attitude, based on Christian spirituality's deep sources, can be understood as an example of a human attitude that responds in a unique way to the shared character of the entire creation.<sup>20</sup> Completely outside the framework of the legendary account of events from Francis's life, there are expert analyses that classify Francis as someone whose approach towards animals went beyond the established custom and qualitatively exceeded the tradition valid at that time. Francis

began a new kind of ministry, demonstrating a dynamically developing and original conception of how humanity should relate to creatures and the physical universe. Apparently it was a sudden and extraordinary inspiration which led him to preach to the birds as his sisters, with great reverence [...]. The effect of this experience was to convince him that his ministry must be to all creation and to humans about all creation, its harmony and the right use of creatures. From now on he let himself be seen preaching to animals and birds, field and forest, even the inanimate elements, call on them as his brothers and sisters to praise God. Francis showed a reverence

---

<sup>19</sup> Cf. Hildegard von Bingen, *Komplete Werkausgabe* (Beuron: Kunstverlag, 2017).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. Jacques le Goff, *Saint Francis of Assisi* (London: Routledge, 2003).

for all creatures which was like the chivalrous ideal of cortesia, but went even farther, in a humility which was even drawn to self-subjection [...].<sup>21</sup>

In a sense, his receptivity and sensitivity foreshadow a time much later, our own age. Still, the 750 years that remained until humanity's ecological awakening did not generally follow his fascinating and unconventional attitude. Universal respect for living creatures has certainly not become a dominant issue in Western culture.

### 3. The Animal in the 'Era of Humanity'<sup>22</sup>

#### 3.1 The New Self-Confidence of Humans in the Modern Age and Modernity

Self-subjection and humility are no attitudes which can be identified as central to the post-medieval era, which, in taking a brisk turn to humankind and secular things, begins to move away from the vertical perspective. The Modern Age pitches human consciousness against material nature as something that is extended outside humans. This represents a significant shift in perspective. Although the Middle Ages – in line with the 'desacralised' universe – was rather unmoved by nature, what was natural was simply normal and common, yet the concept of creation did contain the imperative of human responsibility for the entrusted world. The loss of the perception of the world and nature as a creation, the work of a good and wise Creator, entailed the loss of this imperative.<sup>25</sup> Theology, with a gradually fragmenting and weakening vision of creation and of salvation of the whole creation, evolved along with history. Other topics seem to be urgent, topics related to orthodoxy, for example, or to the new demands of science. Theology in its main currents exerts no influence on a society that resorts to a more or less predatory approach to the world. There is no offer of an alternative to counter this systematically, not even despite the fact that such potential was present in the concept of creation. In the new era, the relationship with nature and its living creatures is determined more and more by

---

<sup>21</sup> Murray, *The Cosmic Covenant*, 155–156.

<sup>22</sup> Term evoking both the era after the 'anthropological turn' (beginning with the European modern age) and the 'anthropocene' – see <http://quaternary.stratigraphy.org/working-groups/anthropocene>.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Jan Sokol, *Malá filosofie člověka a Slovník filosofických pojmů* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2010), 134–135.

a scientific perspective – modern experiments and rational theories emerge. It applies to the whole of society that between humankind as subject and nature as object we see the birth of the relationship of the worker and the work, the deed and the result.<sup>24</sup>

For the relationship with animals in the ‘era of humanity’ as of the end of the 15th century, it is determinative that humankind gradually becomes the criterion for the view on the world and on nature. No longer God, no longer the salvation and consummation of creation, but humans are ultimately at stake: humans as the starting point and goal, humans who act sovereignly. Awareness of individuality and awareness of personality is created, individuals find themselves interesting. A sense of human exceptionality awakens and becomes the standard for assessing human values, and thus corresponds to the new feeling of the infinity of the world and of history.<sup>25</sup>

During the Enlightenment and post-Enlightenment, a modern lifestyle eventually arises from the new ideological assumptions. The development of technology, the increase in capital supporting production and the increasing volume of the labour force bring about the explosive nature of the economy and in its wake an immense development, the increase in general wealth and the building of a cultural world which is understandably an ‘artificial’, non-natural world. At the same time, however, modern development means an ongoing environmental crisis because economic growth always brings along the consumption of the environment, which provides people with a resource material for production, a space for production and a waste dump.<sup>26</sup> It seems logical that also animals as part of the natural environment are instrumentalised together with this environment. Of course, this is the outlook of present-day people who question the obviousness of the viewpoints of that time, while through the self-centred perspective of modern humankind, the environmental crisis as such was not perceived and identified as a crisis at all for a long time.

### 3.2 Typology of the Relationship to Animals

In the modern world of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the human-animal relationship seems to be characterised by a high

---

<sup>24</sup> Cf. Romano Guardini, *Das Ende der Neuzeit. Die Macht* (Ostfildern/Paderborn: Grünewald/Schöningh, 2022), 40f.

<sup>25</sup> Cf. Guardini, *Das Ende der Neuzeit*, 54–55.

<sup>26</sup> Cf. Johan de Tavernier, *De broosheid van het zinvolle* (Leuven: Acco, 2011), 155.



degree of expediency. This attitude persists even in the postmodern era, although simultaneously the end of modernity (the 1960s) sees the emergence of systemic criticism, pointing out the limitations and flatness of the predominantly technical-economic approach to life.<sup>27</sup> The original biblical world of thought, which historically stood at the roots of Western culture and in its further development, significantly determined its character; however, it was familiar with a whole range of attitudes that people of that time ‘managed’ towards animals. In comparison, De Pury, an expert on ancient Near East literature and religion, points out that the relationship of most of our contemporaries to the animal kingdom unfolds mainly – or perhaps only – on three levels: objectification of animals, infantilisation of animals, possibly reduction of animals to something exotic, bizarre, or monstrous.<sup>28</sup>

The above-mentioned instrumentalisation approach corresponds to the first level. Animals are perceived as a good material available to us, not unlike the way plant products and minerals of inanimate nature serve us. When compared to the Christian concept of creation, such expediency appears problematic because it completely neglects the created character of non-human creation. From a theological point of view, not only people but also other living creatures are part of the good creation, ultimately destined to glorify God. Mere utilitarianism seems not only out of place but downright cynical. The second level represents a similarly problematic approach, turned inside out. Animals are perceived as pets, whose reason for existence actually consists in the fact that their owners embrace them, love them, spoil them, take care of them the way they care for small children, baby-talk to them, anthropomorphise them. In addition to the fact that such an approach shows the problematic features of infanthood from a psychological point of view, the core of the problem lies in the fact that here again the animal is instrumentalised, albeit as an object of tender favour, in a seemingly harmless, pleasantly positive way. Seeing this through the concept of creation, not even this appears to be a dignified position for the animal, which is to be neither undervalued nor overvalued in its proper

---

<sup>27</sup> Criticism of the ‘civilization order’ goes hand in hand with the beginnings of the environmental movement associated with the publication of certain ‘influential’ books or texts. See Rachel Carson, *Silent Spring* (Cambridge: Houghton Mifflin, 1962); Lynn White, ‘The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis,’ *Science* 155, no. 3767 (March 1967): 1203–1207.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. De Pury, *Člověk a zvíře*, 32–33.

determination. The third level means that the animal is perceived as something exotic in itself, to which people feel both attracted and repulsed at the same time, in a kind of combination of fascination and horror, as if this exoticism is what can still awake people, what can still arouse them, what is still worthy of their attention. Here too, by analogy, we are dealing with the objectification of animals placed in function of humans, albeit a 'harmless' function, perhaps only psychological or aesthetic, but probably always a function with a hedonistic tinge.

The threefold form of our common attitude towards animals characterises the transformation that Western civilisation has undergone in the perception of animals and, along with it, the dangers associated with this qualitative transformation. The concept of creation, which represented the basic framework for understanding the world until well into the modern age, ceased to be generally comprehensible. However, currently, we do not seem to have any other supporting concept in which we could – apart from mere utilitarian argumentation – universally anchor a corresponding relationship to the animal kingdom. The inability of contemporary humans to approach the animal within its own proper context seems to be more than just an oversight or a 'technically solvable error'. The essence of the matter may be deeper.

It is obvious that many of our contemporaries yearn for a species-different encounter with the world of animals and yearn for a deeper communion with them. It manifests itself in very different ways. [...] In this respect, I am surprised by numerous television programmes and documentaries of all kinds (often of a very high quality) that have made it their goal to explore the life of animals in its immense variety. Today, without getting up from our chairs, we can penetrate the remote valleys of Rwanda at any time and follow the fate of mountain gorillas, assist the difficult reacclimatisation of orangutans to life in the wild in Indonesia, watch how a lion's fangs sink into the flank of a frightened zebra on a wide screen in slow motion. All of this is certainly somewhat paradoxical: although no generation in human history has been more distant from the animal world than ours, we have a much more detailed and accurate idea of the fauna of all continents and of all its species than our ancestors did. [...] However, behind the escape to the imaginary Eden and the longing for the lost paradise, there is, at least implicitly, the eternal question that humans carry within themselves, the question about their own essence and their own destiny. From this point of view, the discoveries in animal ethology and their popularisation, the study

of animal behaviour and psychology inspire the greatest amazement. [...] The animal holds a mirror up to people, which enables them to discover a number of elementary features in themselves that they would otherwise never be aware of.<sup>29</sup>

This raises the question whether the existing basic inadequacy in the relationship between human and animal can be compensated legislatively. Laws, too, emerge from a particular breeding ground and draw from certain sources of ideas and values. The legal framework sets the parameters but cannot itself guarantee the correctness and adequacy of either the set parameters or the real approach in practice. This certainly does not mean that we should discard, for example, the concept of animal rights, as they have been increasingly advocated in recent decades.<sup>30</sup> The theological conception, however, considers the problem elsewhere. The attitude of humans towards animals is not a matter of a specific system of obligations that we administer ourselves but a recognition of the right of the Creator (not the right of humans) to have other living creatures treated with respect.<sup>31</sup> So it is not (only) about setting formal rules because they themselves do not change our internal attitudes and thinking, but whether we understand the reasons for those attitudes and whether we can accept them. Creation theology thus leads to the moral generosity discussed above rather than to the mere ‘egalitarianism’ of the law.

### 3.5 The Perspective of an Integral Approach

I believe that the preferred choice is not ‘people or animals’. The exclusive position of people in nature cannot be levelled out – due to their ability to create culture – but this does not mean that people are permitted to behave as if they ruled the world. On the contrary! True exclusivity manifests itself in an awareness of increased responsibility and even – in the spirit of Christianity – by prioritising the good for others. And therefore also for other living creatures. A generous and highly humane approach rejects the idea that we can impose human well-being and happiness at the expense of others. What else are our systems of animal exploitation but the institutionalisation of exactly

---

<sup>29</sup> De Pury, *Člověk a zvíře*, 35–39.

<sup>30</sup> Cf. e.g. Tom Regan, *The Case for Animal Rights* (Berkeley/Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2004).

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Linzey, *Animal Theology*, 42.

that idea? It is the relative defencelessness of animals towards us ‘that should make us draw back from the immediate exercise of power until we are quite sure that *their* claims have been given greater consideration’.<sup>32</sup> After all, claims, rights, and duties are always communicating vessels: there is an internal connection between nature and human social environment, and our actions have an impact on both without exception.

In a time of epochal changes, our society is looking for a new orientation. The narrowly anthropocentric perspective of the modern epoch has created many things at the expense of others, and in today’s post-modern era, perhaps we experience most of all fear. The inner coherence of the world seems to be threatened, for all without distinction. From a Christian point of view, inspiration for the future can be what Pope Francis calls ‘integral development’ in his encyclical *Laudato si’*. It is not about quantitative growth or about sustainability of growth but about qualitative development. The latter is not easily measured using economic quantities. It is integral because it includes all areas of life, including the animal kingdom, which, for a change, does not figure primarily as a resource (of whatever) for humans, but as a value in itself. Francis clearly thematises that all life is in danger not as a result of our ignorance or technological failure but because of the neglect of the obligation to cultivate and maintain the right relationships: the inner relationship to oneself, to others, to God, and to the Earth.<sup>33</sup> Any kind of tyrannical domination of humans over other creatures is rejected, as we are not their ultimate purpose.<sup>34</sup> Yet, also excessive, uncritical and out-of-context care for animals is also rejected if this care remains at the same time indifferent to the plight of others (for example, the fight against animal trafficking and the concurrent indifference to human trafficking).<sup>35</sup> Integrality means it is not possible to be loving on the one hand and hating on the other. You cannot care here and destroy elsewhere. Our attitude towards animals can be seen as a litmus test that ‘shows colours’, even if it does not suit us:

---

<sup>32</sup> Linzey, *Animal Theology*, 58.

<sup>33</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, *Laudato si’. On Care for Our Common Home*, 70, available at [https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco\\_20150524\\_enciclica-laudato-si.html](https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html).

<sup>34</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, *Laudato si’*, 85.

<sup>35</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, *Laudato si’*, 91.

It follows that our indifference or cruelty towards fellow creatures of this world sooner or later affects the treatment we mete out to other human beings. We have only one heart, and the same wretchedness which leads us to mistreat an animal will not be long in showing itself in our relationships with other people. Every act of cruelty towards any creature is ‘contrary to human dignity’. We can hardly consider ourselves to be fully loving if we disregard any aspect of reality.<sup>56</sup>

Regarding the above-presented typology of relations towards animals, the accents set by Pope Francis open up an alternative which, instead of objectifying the animal (instrumentalised as a material, as an object of infantile favour or as an exotic phenomenon), offers the possibility of acknowledging an intrinsic value of the animal itself. This value is, in principle, not dependent on humans and – as is evident from the creation theology of both the New and Old Testament – can legitimately be anchored in the basic biblical relationship between the Creator and the creation. Yet, it would seem that only the explicitness of this option can bring about a genuine paradigm shift in the church catechism,<sup>57</sup> which not only declines to instrumentalise animals on the part of human beings but also dismisses the anthropocentric reasons for that refusal. Thus, what is primarily involved is not that the instrumentalisation of animals is unworthy of humans (which is true in any case) but rather that it is unworthy of animals themselves.

Although, in relation to animals, humans fail to abandon the anthropomorphic perspective as the inherent and most adequate way to understand and to model living beings that are structurally close to them,<sup>58</sup> it is necessary to distinguish reasonable anthropomorphism from its more extreme variants. For example, a consistent anthropocentrism can hardly be persuasive in its arguments where the protection of animals for the sake of animals is concerned,<sup>59</sup> just as biocentrism, on the opposite end of the scale, in its radical biologism, even

---

<sup>56</sup> Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, 92.

<sup>57</sup> To this paradigm cf. Martin M. Lintner, ‘Respect for the Proper Value of Each Creature. An Animal-ethical Rethinking of the Encyclical *Laudato si'*,’ *Louvain Studies* 45, no. 1 (2020): 26–48, here 28–29; cf. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 2418.

<sup>58</sup> Cf. Stanislav Komárek, *Ochlupení bližní. Zvířata v kulturních kontextech* (Praha: Academia, 2011), 263–264.

<sup>59</sup> Cf. Michael Rosenberger, *Christian Ethics of Creation. On the Path of Ecological Conversion* (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2022), 133–134.

fails to account for the value of an individual phenotype, let alone of any subject whatsoever.<sup>40</sup>

Nevertheless, the ethical dilemma between humans as a norm and nature as a norm, which is constantly present in the long-running debate on animal ethics, need not be a dilemma in the field of creation theology, where norms as such are not concerned, yet where a base of orientation is prepared for them. Even though the encyclical *Laudato si'* develops no theoretical background for such a debate, its contribution reaches in reality far beyond the scope of a specialist or even a moral discourse. To demonstrate and define an integral approach of what is essentially biblical and Christian and at the same time deeply human constitutes a heuristic approach which indicates the direction of the next epistemological and hermeneutical conduct and also practice. And this is by no means negligible. If the encyclical asserts the exclusive position of humankind, then, objectively seen, this concerns none but a relative, because relational, positionality. This exclusivity is certainly not meant in a mode of elitism or isolation but rather of interconnection. According to Francis, humans cannot proclaim to be independent of reality without losing the very foundation of their existence.<sup>41</sup> In the given context, being connected to reality means much the same as acknowledging its complexity. As far as other living creatures are concerned, with which humans share a significant part of their genetic information, fragmented knowledge that excludes a broader reality definitely leads to ignorance.<sup>42</sup> In the encyclical, the Pope insists on the need for synthesis thinking which reflects the environmental problem in its entire context and therefore overcomes the 'false arguments of recent centuries'.<sup>43</sup> In relation to the inviolability of the animal's intrinsic value, the recognition of this value would then be at the same time an appeal to the acknowledgement of its contextuality, its interrelatedness. As regards content, this is – in the best sense of the word – compatible with the here continually considered biblical framework of creation theology.

What seems to me of key importance is the image of God with which the theology of creation works. If recognition of the animal's intrinsic

---

<sup>40</sup> Cf. Jean-Claude Wolf, *Tierethik. Neue Perspektiven für Menschen und Tiere* (Erlangen: Harald Fischer, 2005), 58.

<sup>41</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, 117f.

<sup>42</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, 138.

<sup>43</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, 121.

value is to be supported theologically, then it is not sufficient only to overturn the accusation that Christianity has provided ideological munition to an exploitative attitude toward animals. It will be necessary to show what kind of God Christians believe in. For, should it be the God of the classical version of theism, which can be found with Aristotle or in later medieval scholastic modifications and which presents God as the motionless mover who experiences nothing nor feels anything, it would then be hard to uphold that God is love. Were the starting point of theology to be metaphysical and to determine the essence of God metaphysically, then a static account of God's features would necessarily fail to include, for instance, mercy, as divine perfection does not allow for inconsistency and therefore endure the notion of God having compassion and suffering at the same time.<sup>44</sup> However, the biblical standpoint is quite different. Although the 'environmental encyclical' *Laudato si'* takes up certain viewpoints of the catechism without critical reflection,<sup>45</sup> it bears witness – on a basic heuristic level, together with other documents by Francis<sup>46</sup> – of a move away from objectivistic metaphysics, from which all magisterial statements were until recently formulated, towards the biblical, evangelical, and distinctly existential standpoint.

For the debate on the position of animals in the Anthropocene, this may prove to be a crucial impulse. It is true that biblical theology offers a variety of prototypical approaches towards animals which are, on the one hand, a product of their age and show, on the other hand, a certain universal feature. Still, in the here and the now, it remains our responsibility. While the exploitation of animals is unsustainable, the use of animals problematic, and stewardship to a certain extent corrupted, compassion seems to be the only attitude that grants the animal an intrinsic, non-instrumentalised value.<sup>47</sup> There is a chance that people will see the Anthropocene as a time of compassion, a time of mercy. This may even prove to lead to a better inclusive understanding of

<sup>44</sup> Cf. Walter Kasper, *Barmherzigkeit. Grundbegriff des Evangeliums – Schlüssel christlichen Lebens* (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 2012), 19–21.

<sup>45</sup> Cf. Lintner, *Respect for the Proper Value of Each Creature*, 30.

<sup>46</sup> Most importantly, *Evangelii gaudium* or *Amoris laetitia*.

<sup>47</sup> Birch and Vischer speak of three basic attitudes that were justified by Judeo-Christian Scriptures: exploitation, stewardship, and compassion. Cf. Charles Birch and Lukas Vischer, *Život se zvířaty. Společenství božích tvorů* (Praha: Kalich, 2007), 75–76. [*Living with the Animals – The Community of God's Creatures*. WCC Publikations, Switzerland, 1997.]

God's generosity, suggested in biblical texts at an elementary level, and to an improvement of the entire stream of awareness and sensitivity, carried with the humility – even to the extent of self-subjection – represented in Christian history by Francis of Assisi: the image of God as the one who shows compassion and suffers.

This line of thinking is fundamentally different from the type of search for objectivity fought for by philosopher and legal positivist Norbert Hoerster, among others, when he produces arguments not only against the animal's intrinsic value but – at a more elementary level – directly against value-bearing concepts like for example *dignity*, which he considers to be an empty phrase.<sup>48</sup> Quite surprisingly, he advocates differentiated intolerance under the shroud of neutral rationality. The integral approach, on the other hand, admits being – in a distinctively different way – biased, as it is always a matter of being on the side of life or of what integrally cultivates life.<sup>49</sup> Intolerance, which excludes, cannot be reconciled with this. *Laudato si'* uses a language in which human dignity, the fight against poverty, the state of nature are connected, in which everything is interconnected, and it is exactly this correlation that becomes the proper integral conception.<sup>50</sup> In the given moment, humankind may very well not yet have a clear idea of what or who animals are. Humankind may very well never have this clear idea or will never even be able to. What is clear, though, is that there are no good solutions that would like to benefit at the expense of others.

## Conclusion

In an attempt to grasp the last reason for the world's existence and meaning, theological thinking understandably has no manual for specific approaches of behaviour in relation to animals. Biblical texts, normative for Christianity, do not serve as an authority to derive precise norms. The very history of the Christian religion, then, appears as a parade of ambivalent attitudes and actions, many of which are exemplary, fascinating, worth following, and others repulsive, shameful, reprehensible. Still, Christianity seems to have a lot to offer with its concept of creation. It turns out that today, unlike in ancient societies,

---

<sup>48</sup> Cf. Norbert Hoerster, *Haben Tiere eine Würde? Grundfragen der Tierenethik* (München: C. H. Beck, 2004), 31, 33f, 40, 104.

<sup>49</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, 185.

<sup>50</sup> Cf. Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, 139.



there is no lack of expert knowledge, but of a sufficiently universal framework of values in which we could compile our great but fragmented knowledge or include the immense amount of ongoing technological procedures that are both sophisticated and at the same time isolated from the wider context of real lives.

Nonetheless, we cannot go back to the old days. The Old Testament ‘earthiness’ towards animals, a combination of basic respect, solidarity, and naturalness, arose from a certain concept of creation. We are not and we need not be capable of the same thing. However, Christianity continues to inspire with the ideal of harmony, justice, and peace, and in the face of today’s situation, it poses once again, with its appeal to mercy, a challenge to our humanity. How to overcome the extreme dualism in relation to nature and its degradation to a mere object? Where can we draw support so that we do not, in contrast, naively romanticise nature? How can we impede the cynicism which would result from pure evolutionism, which would eventually completely deny our freedom? Ingeborg Gabriel offers an update of the old ideal by restoring three important human qualities: (ecological) responsibility, humility, and gratitude.<sup>51</sup> She sees ecological responsibility as the basis of Christian and immanent humanism, which is in principle open to everyone. She characterises humility as a liberating recognition of reality. Humility does not ignore natural limitations and can endure them. Gratitude is presented as a virtue and the opposite of selfish indulgence. Thus, Gabriel elaborates on the discourse set by Francis in his encyclical *Laudato si’*.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that part of the Christian concept of creation is the process of creation itself. Creation as not yet finished, not yet fulfilled, is moving towards hope. There is nothing surprising about this, considering what has been stated earlier that this concept is no description of a ‘production procedure’ but a reflection concerning the order of relationship. In this concept, the future is open. Paradoxical as it may sound, perhaps animals, with which we share more than just a common earth and part of our genetic information, could be the ones that enable humans to systematically avoid cruelty and learn delicate sensitivity. Indeed, the above-mentioned integral

<sup>51</sup> Cf. Ingeborg Gabriel, ‘Ekologie jako otázka “nového člověka”. Antropologické a sociálně-etické úvahy,’ *Salve. Revue pro teologii a duchovní život* 27, no. 4 (2017): 65–85, here 74–81. Cf. Gabriel, *Ethik des Politischen. Grundlagen, Prinzipien, Konkretionen* (Würzburg: Echter, 2021), 180, 186–187.

approach can open the road towards establishing a balance between various demands, most of all, however, towards abandoning the mentality of demands in the first place. Theology of creation refers beyond mere expert knowledge or mere morality to the sources which shape the basic human attitude towards their living neighbours and which may even transform it.

*Faculty of Theology  
University of South Bohemia in České Budějovice  
Kněžská 8  
370 01 České Budějovice  
Czech Republic  
E-mail: kolaroval@tf.jcu.cz*

## REVIVAL OF ANCIENT QUESTIONS: CURRENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THEOLOGICAL ANIMAL ETHICS\*

MICHAEL ROSENBERGER

### ABSTRACT

Since the middle of the 19th century, animal husbandry has been industrialised and subdued to economic efficiency to an unsurpassable degree. Animals as living beings and fellow creatures have largely fallen by the wayside. Whereas philosophical ethics has reflected this situation critically since the 1970s, theological ethics entered the debate only with a notable delay in the 2010s and was enormously fostered by the encyclical *Laudato si'* in 2015. The article discusses different theological approaches to animal ethics and links it with the origins of Christian animal ethics in the patristic era. Finally, it focuses attention on the most debated controversy in animal ethics, namely meat consumption, and argues for the postponing of this question in favour of progress in animal welfare.

### Keywords

Animal husbandry; Animal ethics; Animal welfare; Creatures; Anthropocentrism; Stoic philosophy; Meat consumption; Vegetarianism/veganism; Monasticism

DOI: 10.14712/23363398.2023.15

In June 2021, the then Austrian Minister of Health, Dr Wolfgang Mückstein, whose portfolio also included animal welfare, spoke out in favour of abolishing full slatted floors in pig farming. Mückstein referred to the animal welfare referendum, which ended very successfully in January 2021 with more than 416,000 signatures and obliged

\* The article is an English translation of: Michael Rosenberger, 'Allianzen für das Tierwohl. Gegenwärtige Entwicklungen der theologischen Tierethik,' *Herder-Korrespondenz* 75, no. 10 (2021): 35–37.

the Austrian Parliament to discuss the central points for better animal welfare defined in the petition. Although Mückstein knew broad groups of society behind him, he reaped a storm of indignation from agricultural officials.

On the one hand, this contradiction of the stakeholders was understandable. Animal husbandry systems have been built for decades and represent long-term investments. A change in the laws would therefore have drastic economic consequences for animal farmers. On the other hand, it is perfectly clear that animal husbandry cannot continue as it has in recent decades. The ‘farm’ animals have been sacrificed too much to merciless economisation.

When in 1860, the already centralised great slaughterhouse of Chicago put the world’s first assembly line into operation, a consistent industrialisation of animal use and animal killing began – half a century before the assembly line production of automobiles which now prevails worldwide. From fertilisation to the dissection of dead animal bodies, a degree of economic efficiency has been achieved that can hardly be surpassed. The animals as living beings and fellow creatures have largely fallen by the wayside. Their exploitation clearly exceeds that of the poorest and most disadvantaged humans. A few clues can substantiate this:

- Procreation has globally become breeding. This is carried out specifically for the purpose of the desired useful properties. Diversity is not desired; economic efficiency takes precedence over animal welfare. Whether a dairy cow has a healthy, robust constitution is of no interest. The main purpose is that it brings maximum (milk) performance.
- Animal breeding with a single breeding goal requires the sorting out of the economically ‘wrong sex’. Male chicks in the laying hen breeding lines and male calves in dairy cattle are killed at the earliest possible time because they are unproductive.
- The trimming of the animal bodies also serves primarily to adapt to economically optimised housing conditions: the docking of the tails of piglets, the dehorning of the cattle, and the shortening of the chicken beaks. All this would be superfluous if the animals had enough space and were not crammed together in a so narrowly confined space.
- However, the keeping of the animals takes place in the greatest confinement and, apart from cattle, usually in completely isolated

stables, into which neither daylight nor fresh air penetrates. During the Covid pandemic, we humans have felt how hard two weeks of quarantine can be. The highly bred farm animals live in quarantine from birth to death. An infection in the stock would be the financial ruin of the operator.

- Finally, at the end of life, slaughter takes place on the assembly line: often insufficiently stunned, not to mention the psychological distress of the animals in advance. Many of them suspect already during transport that nothing good is waiting for them in the slaughterhouse.

Of course, there are also other, very animal-friendly forms of husbandry. Animals that graze in manageable groups all year round or at least in summer; which are allowed to keep their horns, beaks and tails to develop a natural social behaviour in a large space; which are allowed to eat what nature offers them, and not what promotes the highest performance; and which may even end their lives on the farm in the familiar environment. However, currently, this applies only to a negligible proportion of all farm animals.

Although there has been a lively and controversial animal ethical debate in industrialised countries since the 1970s, in which individual theologians have been involved from the beginning, theology has opened up broadly to this theme only in recent years. It has rediscovered the animal-sensitive positions of the Old Testament, from the Noah Covenant, in which animals are naturally included as allies (Gen 9), to individual norms of the Torah, which pay great attention to the protection and welfare of animals. It reinterpreted the incarnation of the Logos (John 1:14) and learned to understand it as God's becoming a creature. It appreciates the animal-friendly practices of popular Christian piety as a theological source of knowledge, e.g. the depiction of an ox and donkey at the manger, the blessings of animals, or the ritual of sharing Easter bread with the animals, which is still practised in some areas today. Finally, theology is increasingly opening up to the idea, strengthened in the encyclical *Laudato si'*, that animals have their place in God's eternity just as much as human beings.<sup>1</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> Cf. LS 243–244.

Nevertheless, theological ethics in questions of animals is as polyphonic and controversial as other scientific disciplines and society as a whole.<sup>2</sup> Greatly simplified, two groups can be distinguished:

- Pathocentrist approaches, for which the pain sensitivity of animals is the highest criterion, advocate for killing animals only in self-defence and exempting them largely or completely from human use (as a pioneer since the 1970s we can name Andrew Linzey, later Kurt Remele and Rainer Hagen cord, recently especially Simone Horstmann, Thomas Ruster, and Gregor Taxacher). Ultimately, this position amounts to a vegan or at least vegetarian lifestyle mandatory for everyone.
- Anthropocentrist approaches to animal ethics plead for an enlightened humanism that knows no fundamental limits to animal use but minimises human violence against animals and promotes their well-being as much as possible (e.g., Alberto Bondolfi, Martin Lintner, Christoph Amor, and Markus Vogt). Rather gradually distinguished from them are biocentrist approaches, which underline the fundamental unavailability of the animal by recourse to an inalienable animal dignity and reject a reduction of the animal to human utility considerations (e.g., already 100 years ago Albert Schweitzer, in the 1970s and 1980s Günter Altner, Gotthard M. Teutsch, and Friedo Ricken, and since 2000 the author of this essay). Single colleagues represent an intermediate position between these two (Hans Halter, Hans J. Münk). Anthropocentrist and biocentrist approaches meet in the conviction that they do not reject animal killing in principle but want to massively restrict it and fundamentally improve animal husbandry.

A look at the history of church and theology shows that the controversy about the moral status of animals has been present from the very beginning. In early Christianity, a type of anthropocentrism quickly developed as the mainstream that did not regard animals as ethically relevant and regarded them exclusively as a disposable mass for humans. This difficult course of the early church can be traced most impressively in the debate between the Neoplatonic philosopher and

---

<sup>2</sup> A good picture of this polyphony describes: Martin M. Lintner (ed.), *Mensch – Tier – Gott: Interdisziplinäre Annäherungen an eine christliche Tierethik* (Interdisziplinäre Tierethik Band 1) (Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2021).

ecocentrist Kelsos and the Christian theologian Origen. In his lost pamphlet 'True Doctrine', Kelsos accuses young Christianity of not being at the height of academic philosophy. Origen then places himself all the more decisively on the side of the mainstream philosophy of the time, the Stoa, which regards anthropocentrism as proof of the wise providence of the gods and thus justifies it theologically (!). The gods had so cleverly created all of nature for man that he could use all plants and animals wonderfully for his purposes. In addition, according to the Stoa, in the reception of an early setting of Greek mainstream philosophy from the 5th century BC, the animals are 'aloga', speechless and irrational beings who are far below humans in the hierarchy of being.

It is clear that such an argument was very suitable for Christianity since it also included the belief in a caring Creator and His kind providence; furthermore, the strict teleology of the Stoa was very convenient for Christianity as well. In addition, early Christians wanted to push back the doctrine of the transmigration of souls, which was closely linked to the creation- and animal-friendly position of Greek minority philosophy.<sup>5</sup>

Kelsos, on the other hand, presents Christianity as an uneducated and socially isolating current and sees no reason for the assumption, which he already perceives as typically Christian (and no longer stoic), that the world was created for the exclusive use of man. Rather, one could argue that it is there for the sake of the animals. For by nature, no single species is destined to dominate the world. Christian anthropocentrism is therefore mistaken because the cosmos forms a totality in which every component has equal significance.<sup>4</sup> In his defence of Christian anthropocentrism, Origen adopts the rationalist position of the Stoa and thus the philosophical mainstream of his time. In this way, he can incidentally refute Kelsos's core thesis that Christianity is uneducated and isolates itself.

The animal- and creation-friendly, bio- or cosmocentrist minority position of Greek philosophy, as it lives on in Neoplatonism and Neo-Pythagoreanism, is also reflected in the young church as a minority position.

<sup>5</sup> Günther Lorenz, *Tiere im Leben der alten Kulturen. Schriftlose Kulturen, Alter Orient, Ägypten, Griechenland und Rom* (Innsbruck: Innsbruck University Press, 2015), 245.

<sup>4</sup> Origen refers to the Kelsos position in *Contra Celsum* 4:74–99.

On the one hand, it is represented by early monasticism, which for ethical and biblical (!) reasons, consists in strictly vegetarian, partly even vegan lives. This minority position in 2000 years of church history never gets completely lost and is present impressively to this day, especially in Eastern monasticism, but always remains an elitist and increasingly less noticed minority position.

On the other hand, the animal-friendly minority position is represented by groups that subsequently qualify ecclesiastical orthodoxy as heretical or schismatic and exclude it from the large church: Manichaeans, Marcionites, and other groups. In contrast to the desert fathers and mothers, who see their vegetarian lifestyle as an anticipation of paradise and as a free option, the Manichaeans and Marcionites claim that the vegetarian or even vegan lifestyle is mandatory for all Christians. If I understand it correctly, it is still historically unclear whether this positioning contributed to the exclusion of the groups concerned as heretical. In any case, it is clear that the Church is also pushing its practice of eating meat in order to distance itself from such groups.

Meat consumption and meat renunciation always (!) had a religious dimension. Even the earliest religious-historical testimonies indicate that the killing of animals was regarded as religiously significant. This has remained the case up to this day. As soon as debates about meat consumption or animal use ignite, consciously or unconsciously, questions of one's own identity and worldview come into play. People say that they *are* (not) meat eaters and not only that they (do not) *eat* meat. The proportion of vegetarians and vegans who have no religious confession is strikingly high<sup>5</sup>. In the 2000 years of its history, mainstream Christianity has always cultivated meat abstinence for certain days and times, thus recognising that animal killing has religious relevance – even if the slaughter ritual has been abandoned for the sake of the mission to the Gentiles.

So opinions on meat consumption differ – in the early church as well as today. It does not take much prophetic talent to suspect that this will remain the case for decades to come, despite the current trend toward vegetarianism and veganism. As in the early Church, there are two ways to deal with it: one can seek the bitter confrontation that prevailed between Orthodoxy and Marcionites or Manichaeans, or one can

---

<sup>5</sup> Michael Rosenberger, *Wie viel Tier darf's sein? Die Frage ethisch korrekter Ernährung aus christlicher Sicht* (Würzburg: Echter, 2016), 34–35.



seek integrative cooperation, as happened between church and early monasticism. The Church developed times and practices of meat abstinence and thus gave space to the cause of monasticism in Christian everyday life. At the same time, the Church showed an appreciation of the monastic lifestyle and saw it as a special charism – including its radical renunciation of meat! Conversely, monasticism accepted that being a Christian is not necessarily associated with a complete renunciation of meat but can also mean a very moderate use of meat.

For the anthropocentrist and biocentrist positions of theological animal ethics, it is undisputed that in industrialised countries, a reduction of meat consumption by three-quarters is necessary – from around 60 to about 15 kilograms of meat consumption per person per year – for animal ethical, climate policy, health and social reasons (world nutrition). The dispute between these and the more radical pathocentrist positions thus concerns only the last quarter of meat consumption. In this respect, its processing should be postponed. There is still no practicable model of organic farming without animal use, and it is not certain whether such a model can be developed in the coming decades. Thus, a solid scientific basis is missing to rethink the entire cycle of agriculture, food production, and nutrition ‘animal-free’.

The remarkable experience of the Austrian animal welfare referendum was that it brought together the different currents of the animal welfare movement and united them in a common concern. The ‘crucial question’ of meat consumption was deliberately excluded, and all those involved agreed to it in order to stand up together for more animal welfare. It is precisely such strategic alliances that are needed if we really want to achieve something for the animals and not just be right.

*Institut für Moralthologie  
Katholische Privatuniversität Linz  
Bethlehemstr. 20  
A-4020 Linz  
Austria  
E-mail: m.rosenberger@ku-linz.at*



**VARIA**

---



# AUCH EINE GESCHICHTE DER OFFENBARUNG: DIE INSPIRATIONSLEHRE ALS HERAUSFORDERUNG GEGENWÄRTIGER THEOLOGIE

---

RENÉ DAUSNER

---

## ABSTRACT

### **This too a History of Revelation: The Doctrine of Inspiration as the Challenge of Contemporary Theology**

The article is an approach to a temporary understanding of inspiration as a theological key concept. Starting with the difficulties of a theology of inspiration, the contribution follows three main questions: 1. How can the Holy Scriptures be understood as an inspired document of revelation? 2. How can the conviction of faith in the inspired Word of God be plausibly expressed? And finally, 3. How can the doctrine of inspiration be understood in the horizon of revelation? The contribution traces back to the Second Vatican Council (1962–1965) and suggests, according to phenomenological thinking, inspiration as a challenging hyperphenomenon that inspires a new way of thinking the word of God.

## **Keywords**

Inspiration; Theology; Revelation; Word of God; Holy Scriptures; Judaism; Islam; Christianity; Phenomenology; Rationality; Second Vatican Council; Dei Verbum

DOI: 10.14712/23363598.2023.16

---

\* Der Titel des Beitrags lehnt sich an das monumentale Spätwerk von Jürgen Habermas: *Auch eine Geschichte der Philosophie*. 2 Bde. (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2019), das seinerseits auf die Schrift Johann Gottfried Herders „Auch eine Philosophie der Geschichte zur Bildung des Menschen“ verweist. Herder ging es bei seiner Titelwahl dezidiert nicht darum, was Corregio (1494–1534) beim Anblick eines Raffael-Gemäldes gesagt haben soll (anch'io sono pittore), sondern um Bescheidenheit.

In der gegenwärtigen Theologie gilt die Inspirationslehre als ihr vielleicht ungeliebtestes Kind. Es sei „geradezu stiefmütterlich“<sup>1</sup>, so bemerkte Karl Kardinal Lehmann (1936–2018) schon im Jahr 2014, wie die Inspirationslehre im Rahmen der Offenbarungsthematik behandelt werde. Gewiss: es gibt Gründe – sowohl historische als auch systematische Gründe –, warum die Inspiration aus dem Blickfeld systematisch-theologischer Forschung geraten ist. Extreme Ausprägungen einer Verbal- oder Diktattheorie, die als Nährboden für religiösen Extremismus oder Fundamentalismus dienen könnten, bieten Anlass für ein Unbehagen an der Inspirationslehre. Gleichzeitig verlangt eben dieses Unbehagen und insbesondere die drohende Gefahr eines erstarkenden Fundamentalismus nach einer wissenschaftlichen Reflexion.<sup>2</sup>

Seit einigen Jahren wird die Inspirationslehre daher neu als eine Herausforderung der Theologie wahrgenommen,<sup>3</sup> wobei die Komplexität der Fragestellung aus dem Umstand sich ergibt, dass – um mit Michael Seewald zu sprechen – die „christliche Theologie [...] kein kohärentes, erst recht kein konstantes Inspirationsverständnis“ kennt, „sondern nur Versuche, einige Unterscheidungen mit Blick auf das erkenntnistiftende Geistwirken wahrzunehmen“.<sup>4</sup> Im folgenden Beitrag will ich diese systematisch-theologische Herausforderung

---

<sup>1</sup> Karl Kardinal Lehmann, „Dei Verbum – Gottes Wort – eine Botschaft des Heils für die ganze Welt. Erste Einführung in die Dogmatische Konstitution über die göttliche Offenbarung des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils,“ in *Gottes Wort in Menschenwort. Die eine Bibel als Fundament der Theologie*, Hgg. Ralf Rothenbusch (Freiburg i. Br.: Verlag Herder, 2014), 25–50: „Es ist nicht möglich, in diesem begrenzten Beitrag ein wichtiges Thema ausführlicher zu behandeln, nämlich die Fragen der Inspiration und der ‚Irrtumslosigkeit‘ der Schrift (Art. 11–13). Unter den Themen von *Dei Verbum* werden sie im Unterschied zu früher geradezu stiefmütterlich behandelt.“ (38)

<sup>2</sup> Vgl. Karlheinz Ruhstorfer, „Inspiration – Geist – Vernunft. Die fundamentaltheologische Bedeutung der Inspirationslehre,“ in *Eingegeben von Gott. Zur Inspiration der Bibel und ihrer Geltung heute*, Hgg. Ralf Rothenbusch (Freiburg i. Br.: Verlag Herder, 2019), 205–230: 205–211.

<sup>3</sup> Vgl. Ralf Rothenbusch und Karlheinz Ruhstorfer, Hgg., *Eingegeben von Gott. Zur Inspiration der Bibel und ihrer Geltung heute* (Freiburg i. Br.: Verlag Herder, 2019). – Die zitierte Aussage Lehmanns fällt zeitlich zusammen mit der Veröffentlichung eines Schreibens der Päpstlichen Bibelkommission, vgl. Päpstliche Bibelkommission, *Inspiration und Wahrheit der Heiligen Schrift. Das Wort, das von Gott kommt und von Gott spricht, um die Welt zu retten*, (VAS 196) (Bonn: Libreria Editrice Vaticana, hg.v. Sekretariat der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz, 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Michael Seewald, „Über die Sprache Gottes als Thema christlicher Theologie,“ in *Welche Sprache spricht Gott? Versuche aus Judentum, Christentum und Islam*, Hgg. Michael Seewald, Thomas Bauer und Alfred Bodenheimer (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche

aufgreifen; die Inspirationslehre dient dabei als roter Faden, um die Entwicklung der Offenbarungsthematik als eines Kernbereichs von Theologie zu skizzieren. Die These, die ich dabei zu entfalten suche, besteht darin, dass die Rede von der Inspiration ins Zentrum der Theologie der Offenbarung, mehr noch: ins Zentrum einer jeden Theologie überhaupt gehört. Methodisch orientiere ich mich an drei Leitfragen, die jeweils zu Beginn jedes Abschnitts genannt werden.

## 1. Inspiration und Instruktion

Die erste Frage lautet: *Wie lässt sich die Heilige Schrift als inspiriertes Dokument der Offenbarung schützen und stützen?* In fundamentaltheologischer Hinsicht dient die Inspirationslehre dazu, „die göttliche Autorität der Heiligen Schrift [zu] begründen“.<sup>5</sup> Im Lauf der Geschichte ist diese grundlegende Aufgabe unterschiedlich bearbeitet worden.<sup>6</sup> Für das heutige Inspirationsverständnis, in dem sich eine spezifische Offenbarungskonzeption widerspiegelt, sind die einschlägigen Aussagen des Ersten Vatikanums hilfreich. Die dogmatische Konstitution „*Dei Filius*“ (1870) handelt im 2. Kapitel von der göttlichen Offenbarung und kommt in diesem Kontext auf die Inspirationslehre zu sprechen. Als Antwort auf den Rationalismus, der in der Folge der Aufklärung entstanden war, vertreten die Konzilsväter ein supranaturalistisches Offenbarungsverständnis, das inspirationstheoretisch abgesichert wird. Zunächst knüpft der Konzilstext an das Konzil von Trient an, das wörtlich folgendermaßen aufgenommen wird:

Die übernatürliche Offenbarung sei enthalten „in den geschriebenen Büchern und den ungeschriebenen Überlieferungen, die, von den Aposteln aus dem Munde Christi selbst angenommen oder von ebendiesen

---

Buchgesellschaft, 2022), 64–103, 88. Zum Folgenden vgl. ebd., 88–99: „Inspiration, Schrift und der Versuch, das Wort Gottes festzuhalten.“

<sup>5</sup> Christoph Böttigheimer, *Die eine Bibel und die vielen Kirchen. Die Heilige Schrift im ökumenischen Verständnis* (Freiburg i. Br.: Verlag Herder, 2016), 51.

<sup>6</sup> Vgl. Johannes Beumer, SJ, *Die Inspiration der Heiligen Schrift* (HDG I.5b) (Freiburg i. Br. u.a.: Verlag Herder, 1968); Helmut Gabel, *Inspirationsverständnis im Wandel. Theologische Neuorientierung im Umfeld des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils* (Mainz: Matthias-Grünwald-Verlag, 1991).

Aposteln durch Eingebung des Heiligen Geistes gleichsam von Hand zu Hand überliefert, bis zu uns gelangt sind“.<sup>7</sup>

Was in den grundlegenden Ausführungen des Konzilstextes zum Ausdruck kommt, ist ein offenbarungstheologisches Verständnis, das im Letzten auf die Aussagen und Zusagen Gottes zurückgeführt wird. Nicht zu Unrecht gilt dieses Offenbarungsverständnis als instruktionstheoretisch, weil die göttliche Offenbarung als Anweisung, eben als Instruktion gedeutet wird. Inspiration, so meine These, wird als eine theologische Schutzbehauptung für ein instruktionstheoretisches Offenbarungskonzept verstanden. Basis dieser Instruktionstheorie ist ausdrücklich nicht die Autorität der Kirche. Es ist höchst aufschlussreich, dass die Konzilsväter die Kanonizität und Heiligkeit der Bibel nicht aus menschlichem Fleiß, sondern aus der Inspiration ableiten; in dieser Gegenüberstellung von Inspiration und Imitation (griech. Mimesis) besteht „eine der Grundspannungen der europäischen Kultur“.<sup>8</sup>

„Die Kirche“, so *Dei Filius*, hält die Bücher des Alten und des Neuen Testaments „nicht deshalb für heilig und kanonisch, weil sie allein durch menschlichen Fleiß zusammengestellt und demnach durch ihre Autorität gutgeheißen worden wären; genaugenommen auch nicht deshalb, weil sie die Offenbarung ohne Irrtum enthielten; sondern deswegen, weil sie, auf Eingebung des Heiligen Geistes geschrieben, Gott zum Urheber haben und als solche der Kirche selbst übergeben worden sind.“<sup>9</sup>

Mit diesem Statement wird die Antwort des I. Vatikanums auf meine eingangs gestellte Frage deutlich; die Frage lautete, wie sich die Heilige Schrift als Dokument der Offenbarung Gottes schützen und stützen lasse. Die Antwort heißt schlicht: durch Autorität und zwar: durch die höchste denkbare Autorität, durch Gott selbst. Gott sei, so die Aussage der Konzilsväter, selbst der Urheber, genauer: der Autor der Bibel. Modern gesagt wird von kirchlich höchster Autorität ein Copyright verhängt und somit die Inspirationsvorstellungen in juristischen

---

<sup>7</sup> COD 3, 806, zit. COD 3, 663: COD = *Dekrete der ökumenischen Konzilien – Conciliorum Oecumenicorum Decreta*. Hg. v. Josef Wohlmuth. Bd. 3: Konzilien der Neuzeit. (Paderborn u.a.: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2001).

<sup>8</sup> Eberhard Ortland, „Genie,“ in *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe. Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden*, Bd. 2 (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2001), 661–709: 668.

<sup>9</sup> COD 3, 806.



Begriffskategorien gedacht. Unklar bleibt, wie die Inspiration rational nachvollzogen werden kann. Handelt es sich um eine Vorstellung, die nur zu glauben, nicht aber zu verstehen ist?

## 2. Inspiration und Interpretation

An diese letztgenannte Frage nach einem inneren Verständnis der Offenbarung Gottes und der damit verbundenen Inspiration knüpft die dogmatische Konstitution über die Offenbarung des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils an. Mit Blick auf die Inspirationslehre gilt es somit, eine zweite Frage zu formulieren; sie lautet: *Wie lässt sich die Glaubensüberzeugung vom inspirierten Wort Gottes plausibel zur Sprache bringen?* Mit anderen Worten: Es stellt sich die Frage nach den offenbarungstheologischen Verstehens- und Kommunikationsmöglichkeiten von Inspiration. Diese Frage musste im Ersten Vatikanischen Konzil offenbleiben, nicht nur weil das Konzil auf Grund äußerer Umstände abgebrochen wurde; es fehlten die theologischen Voraussetzungen eines Neuansatzes, den das Zweite Vatikanum in offenbarungstheologischer Hinsicht zu bieten imstande war.

Zu einem tieferen Verständnis von Inspiration sind dabei zwei theologische Denkbewegungen ausschlaggebend: zum einen ein offenbarungstheologischer, zum anderen ein ekklesiogenetischer Ansatz. Noch vor Beginn des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils hat Karl Rahner eine Studie über die Schriftinspiration verfasst, die die theologische Reihe der „*Quaestiones disputatae*“ eröffnet. Nicht zufällig, wie ich meine. Denn Inspiration ist ein Anfangsphänomen, Eröffnung und Erschließung zugleich, unableitbarer Beginn ohne Wissen und sichernde Berechnung, wie es weitergehen wird. In dieser Schrift hat Karl Rahner die These vertreten, Schriftinspiration sei nichts anderes als „die Kirchenurheberschaft Gottes, insofern diese sich gerade auf jenes konstitutive Element der Urkirche als solcher bezieht, das eben die Schrift ist“.<sup>10</sup> Heinrich Fries ist in seinem magistralen Lehrbuch über die „*Fundamentaltheologie*“ diesem Ansatz gefolgt, der Fries zufolge als „einleuchtendste *Interpretation der Inspiration*“<sup>11</sup> zu werten sei. Rahners These über die Inspiration als Kirchenurheberschaft

---

<sup>10</sup> Karl Rahner, „Über die Schriftinspiration,“ in *Sämtliche Werke*, Band 12: Menschsein und Menschwerdung Gottes (Freiburg i. Br.: Verlag Herder, 2005), 37.

<sup>11</sup> Heinrich Fries, *Fundamentaltheologie*, 2. Auflage (Graz: Verlag Styria, 1985), § 59: 505–507.

Gottes kann unmittelbar an das Erste Vatikanum anschließen und führt doch zugleich weiter. Anschluss bietet die Vorstellung von Gott als Autor, wobei eine Übergabe dieser Heiligen Schrift an die Kirche impliziert wird, die sich durch diese Übergabe konstituiert. Zugleich bereitet diese Zuordnung den Weg für die Vorstellung, dass das lebendige Lehramt der Kirche nicht über dem Wort Gottes stehe, sondern ihm diene (DV 10).

Trotz aller Plausibilität löst Rahners ekklesiogenetische These die Frage nach der Verstehbarkeit der Inspiration noch nicht hinreichend; denn offenbarungstheologisch bleibt unklar, wie Inspiration näherhin zu denken ist. Umso aufschlussreicher ist dafür die Offenbarungstheologie des Zweiten Vatikanums selbst. Im Unterschied zum Ersten Vatikanischen Konzil, das ein instruktionstheoretisches Offenbarungsverständnis vertreten hat, entwickelt das Zweite Vatikanum – nicht zuletzt auf Grund der Offenbarungstheologie Karl Rahners – den Gedanken der Selbstmitteilung Gottes konsequent weiter. Pointiert und prominent beginnt das erste Kapitel über die Offenbarung selbst mit dem Gedanken, Gott habe es in seiner Güte und Weisheit gefallen, „sich selbst zu offenbaren und das Geheimnis seines Willens bekannt zu machen“ (DV 2).

Ohne an dieser Stelle auf textliche und kontextliche Einzelheiten eingehen zu können, wird der Rekurs des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils auf das Erste Vatikanum ebenso deutlich wie dessen Fortführung. Hier ist nicht mehr von den Dekreten die Rede, sondern von dem Geheimnis (*lat.* sacramentum) des göttlichen Willens.<sup>12</sup>

Im Vordergrund steht die Selbstmitteilung Gottes, die theologisch als Inkarnation, das heißt als Fleischwerdung des Wortes Gottes, verstanden wird. Ziel der Offenbarungskonstitution ist somit, christologisch einsichtig zu machen, was im Ersten Vatikanum vorausgesetzt werden musste: das Eingehen des göttlichen Wortes in die Lebenswirklichkeit von uns Menschen. Für die Inspiration ist dieser Gedanke prägend. Denn im Unterschied zum instruktionstheoretischen bietet das als kommunikationstheoretisch oder auch als personal oder auch als dialogisch gekennzeichnete Offenbarungsverständnis des Zweiten Vatikanums die Möglichkeit, nicht nur auf Grund äußerlicher

---

<sup>12</sup> Vgl. das Diktum von Josef Ratzinger, das er in seinem Kommentar zur Offenbarungskonstitution zitiert (in: LThK<sup>2</sup> (1967) 517): „Die Nachfolge ist die Gestalt der Überlieferung, die Überlieferung ist der Gehalt der Nachfolge.“ (Karl Rahner und Joseph Ratzinger, *Episkopat und Primat* (Freiburg: Verlag Herder, 1961), 49).

Autoritätsargumente, sondern auf Grund innerer Einsicht die Selbstmitteilung Gottes verständlich zu machen. Das Zweite Vatikanum bestätigt die Rede von Gott als dem Autor der Schrift, ergänzt aber zugleich, dass auch die Menschen „wahre Verfasser“ (*veri auctores*) (DV 11,1) seien. Die Bezugnahme auf die Inspiration geschieht nun in heilsgeschichtlicher Absicht, um zu verdeutlichen, dass die biblischen Bücher der inspirierten Verfasser „als vom Heiligen Geist ausgesagt gelten“ müssten und dass die inspirierten Verfasser „sicher, getreu und ohne Irrtum die Wahrheit lehren, die Gott um unseres Heiles willen in heiligen Schriften aufgezeichnet haben wollte“ (DV 11,2). Die Inspiration gewinnt somit – ebenso wie die Offenbarung im Sinn der Selbstmitteilung Gottes – eine soteriologische Spezifizierung.

Die zweite Frage lautete, wie sich die Rede vom inspirierten Wort Gottes plausibel zur Sprache bringen lasse. Im Unterschied zum Ersten Vatikanum, in dem die Inspiriertheit der Hl. Schrift abstrakt durch die Autorität Gottes behauptet wurde, ist die Antwort, die auf Grund der Offenbarungstheologie des Zweiten Vatikanums gegeben werden kann, nun begründeter und präziser: „Die Begründung für die göttliche Autorität der Schrift kann logischerweise keine äußere, irdische Autorität liefern, vielmehr muss sie der Schrift selbst inhärent sein.“<sup>15</sup> Ein theologisches Verständnis von Offenbarung als Selbstmitteilung Gottes sowie von Inspiration beruht auf soteriologischer Einsicht. Methodologisch hat Max Seckler diesen Wechsel im Inspirations- und Offenbarungsverständnis als Verschiebung von einer extrinsezistisch zu einer intrinsezistisch argumentierenden Fundamentaltheologie bezeichnet.<sup>14</sup> Wie ist aber dieser der Heiligen Schrift selbst eingeschriebene Sinnüberschuss sowohl erfahr- als auch denkbar?

### 3. Inspiration und Inkarnation

Beim Wandel von einer instruktionstheoretischen zu einer kommunikationstheoretischen Inspirations- und Offenbarungstheologie, der sich vom Ersten zum Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil beschreiben lässt, blieb unklar, wie eine intrinsezistische Begründung der Inspiration inhaltlich näher zu denken ist. Die dritte Frage lautet demnach: *Wie*

<sup>15</sup> Christoph Böttigheimer, *Die eine Bibel und die vielen Kirchen. Die Heilige Schrift im ökumenischen Verständnis* (Freiburg i. Br.: Verlag Herder, 2016), 51.

<sup>14</sup> Max Seckler, „Fundamentaltheologie: Aufgaben und Aufbau, Begriff und Namen,“ in *HFTTh* 4 (Freiburg i. Br.: Verlag Herder, 1988), 450–514, v.a. 511–513.

lässt sich die Lehre von der Inspiration im Horizont der Offenbarung verstehen? Als charakteristisch für das erneuerte Offenbarungskonzept des Zweiten Vatikanums gilt das in der nachkonziliaren Theologie geprägte Theologoumenon: *Gotteswort im Menschenwort*. Diese pointierte Begriffsprägung, die auch als eine Einladung zum Dialog mit dem Judentum und dem Islam<sup>15</sup> verstanden werden kann, leitet sich ab aus der Offenbarungskonstitution, näherhin aus dem letzten Satz des Kapitels über die Inspirationslehre. Dort heißt es: „[...] Gottes Worte, durch Menschenzunge formuliert, sind menschlicher Rede ähnlich geworden, wie einst des ewigen Vaters Wort durch die Annahme menschlich-schwachen Fleisches den Menschen ähnlich geworden ist“<sup>16</sup> (DV 13).

Trotz dieser Passage, die mit einer kleinen Differenz der Enzyklika „*Divino afflante spiritu*“ von Papst Pius XII. entnommen ist<sup>17</sup>, bleibt in offenbarungstheologischer Hinsicht unklar, wie Inspiration näherhin zu verstehen ist.<sup>18</sup> Mit Blick auf die Inspiration bleibt das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil eine Erklärung schuldig, „wie gedacht werden soll, dass sich im Menschenwort Gotteswort artikuliert“.<sup>19</sup> Armin Kreiner geht noch einen Schritt weiter, wenn er die Inspirationslehre hinsichtlich offenbarungstheologischer „Geltungsansprüche“ befragt.<sup>20</sup> Konsequenterweise deutet er die Rede vom Gotteswort im Menschenwort

---

<sup>15</sup> Vgl. Thomas Bauer, „Die undeutlich-deutliche Sprache Gottes im Islam,“ in *Welche Sprache spricht Gott? Versuche aus Judentum, Christentum und Islam*, Hgg. Thomas Bauer, Alfred Bodenheimer, Michael Seewald (Darmstadt: wbg Theiss, 2022), 104–157: „Das Wort Gottes, das im Himmel ist, muss auf die Erde kommen. Wichtiger noch: Aus dem göttlichen Wort muss Menschenwort werden.“ (110). Vgl. auch: Mouhanad Khorchide, *Gottes Offenbarung in Menschenwort. Der Koran im Licht der Barmherzigkeit* (Freiburg i. Br. u.a.: Verlag Herder, 2018).

<sup>16</sup> Vgl. DV 13: „Dei enim verba, humanis linguis expressa, humano sermoni assimilia facta sunt, sicut olim aeterni Patris Verbum, humanae infirmitatis assumpta carne, hominibus simile factum est.“ (Zit. nach: COD 3 (wie Anm. 7), 977).

<sup>17</sup> Vgl. AAS 34 (1943) 297–325: 316.

<sup>18</sup> Alois Grillmeier, SJ. „Drittes Kapitel, Kommentar.“ In *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 2. Auflage (1967), 528–570, 544: „Wie die Verbindung der Kirche mit dem Heiligen Geist nicht als eine solche Parallele zum Gottmenschentum Christi betrachtet werden kann, so kann auch die Schrift als Gotteswort im Menschenwort nicht als solcher Parallelismus zur Inkarnation verstanden werden.“

<sup>19</sup> Knut Wenzel, *Offenbarung – Text – Subjekt. Grundlegungen der Fundamentaltheologie* (Freiburg i. Br. u.a.: Verlag Herder, 2016), 68.

<sup>20</sup> Vgl. Armin Kreiner, *Das wahre Antlitz Gottes – oder was wir meinen, wenn wir Gott sagen* (Freiburg i. Br.: Verlag Herder, 2006), 175.: „Behauptungen, wonach Gott bestimmte Ereignisse wirkt, in bestimmten Personen nahe kommt, in bestimmten Situationen erfahren wird oder bestimmte Texte bzw. Autoren inspiriert, sind integrale Bestandteile dessen, was Menschen von Gott behaupten.“

in erkenntniskritischer Hinsicht. Die sprachliche Mehrdeutigkeit menschlicher Sprache bedeutet zugleich, dass Kritik jederzeit möglich sein und bleiben muss. Gerade eine konsistente Beziehung zwischen dem Offenbarungs- und dem Gottesbegriff schlössen aus,

ein bestimmtes Gottesverständnis für sakrosankt und kritikimmun zu erklären, indem man es unvermittelt auf Gott selbst zurückführt. In dieser Einsicht besteht die epistemologische Pointe der offenbarungstheologischen These, wonach Gottes Wort nicht anders als im Menschenwort greifbar wird.<sup>21</sup>

Gegenüber einem supranaturalistischen Offenbarungsverständnis des Ersten Vatikanums bietet das Theologoumenon vom Gotteswort im Menschenwort somit eine negative Grenzmarkierung, um die Rationalität zu wahren. Unweigerlich stellt sich dann aber die Frage, der ich mich im Folgenden widmen möchte, wie die göttliche Inspiration eines Menschenwortes möglich sein soll. Die Frage ist umso bedeutender, als ohne Verständnis von Inspiration eine offenbarungstheologische Rede von dem Wort *Gottes* oder von der *Heiligen* Schrift sinnlos ist.

Das Theologoumenon von *Gotteswort im Menschenwort* erlaubt es uns, die Vorstellung von der Inspiration erfahrungsbasiert zu denken, ohne den Ursprung der Erfahrung im menschlichen Bewusstsein des autonomen Subjekts zu verorten und gleichzeitig ohne die Verstehbarkeit der Erfahrung in Abrede zu stellen. Hatte das Erste Vatikanum nur negativ festhalten können, dass die Inspiration nicht auf den „menschlichen Fleiß“ zurückführbar sei und somit Inspiration von Imitation abgegrenzt, ohne positiv darlegen zu können, wie Inspiration positiv zu verstehen ist. Als besonders fruchtbar zum Verständnis der Rede von *Gotteswort im Menschenwort* erweist sich der Begriff des Hyperphänomens, den Bernhard Waldenfels in die Diskussion eingebracht hat. Der Begriff „Hyperphänomen“ trägt dem Umstand Rechnung, dass Erfahrungen als Erfahrungen einen Charakter des Neuen und Unbekannten in sich tragen und dass darum Modi „einer starken Form der Erfahrung“ zur Debatte stehen – Waldenfels spricht auch von einer *radikalisierten* oder *hyperbolischen Erfahrung*. Mit dem Begriff des Hyperphänomens macht Waldenfels darauf aufmerksam, dass sich nicht nur etwas als etwas zeigt, sondern dass sich angesichts

---

<sup>21</sup> Kreiner, *Das wahre Antlitz*, 175.

des Neuen auch immer etwas „*als mehr* und *als anders*“ zeigt, als es ist, und jemand „zugleich *mehr* und *anderes*“ ist, „als er oder sie ist“.<sup>22</sup>

Für eine Theologie der Inspiration bedeutet dieser Begriff des Hyperphänomens einen Mehrwert, der dem Menschenwort innewohnt; die Heilige Schrift ist Gotteswort im Menschenwort, d.h. mehr im Weniger. Hintergrund dieses intuitiven Denkens, das „den Rahmen diskursiver Rationalität“ überschreitet<sup>23</sup>, ist der Rekurs auf Phänomene, die der sprachlichen Reflexion vorausliegen, sowie die philosophiehistorische Erkenntnis, dass das menschliche Denken sich nicht bloß auf Rationalität begrenzen lässt. Vergleichbar etwa mit der griechischen Unterscheidung zwischen *nus* und *dianoia* oder dem lateinischen Begriffspaar *intellectus* und *ratio* so spricht man im Deutschen „von *Einsicht* oder auch von einer Vernunft, die vernimmt, statt zu rechnen“.<sup>24</sup> Bernhard Waldenfels, von dem das letztgenannte Zitat stammt, schreibt an anderer Stelle treffend: „Was uns demgegenüber vorschwebt, sind Formen der Intuition, die an den Rändern, in den Lücken und an den Bruchstellen der Erfahrung auftauchen. [...] Ich wähle dafür das Wort *Gespür*, das weniger einseitig das Sehen betont und stattdessen eine synästhetische Aura ausstrahlt.“<sup>25</sup> Für eine theologische Rede von der Inspiration sind diese phänomenologischen Überlegungen programmatisch, sofern theologisches Denken sich nicht auf eine „Arithmetik des Göttlichen“ einschränken lässt.<sup>26</sup>

Die Gedankenfigur *Gotteswort im Menschenwort* trifft sowohl auf die Inspiration als auch auf die Inkarnation zu. In dieser Hinsicht vertrete ich in meinem Vortrag die These, dass die Inspiration als Offenbarung des Geistes Gottes zu verstehen ist – analog zur Inkarnation als Selbstoffenbarung des göttlichen Wortes im Menschen Jesus von Nazareth. Irenäus von Lyon hat das Wort und den Geist Gottes als die beiden Hände umschrieben, mit denen Gott in den Lauf der Welt und der Geschichte eingreift.<sup>27</sup> Die Inspiration, die die Voraussetzung einer

---

<sup>22</sup> Bernhard Waldenfels, *Hyperphänomene. Modi hyperbolischer Erfahrung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2012), 9.

<sup>23</sup> Bernhard Waldenfels, *Sinne und Künste im Wechselspiel. Modi ästhetischer Erfahrung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2010), 19.

<sup>24</sup> Waldenfels, *Sinne und Künste*, 19.

<sup>25</sup> Waldenfels, *Sinne und Künste*, 20.

<sup>26</sup> Vgl. Emmanuel Levinas, „Monotheismus und Sprache,“ in *Schwierige Freiheit. Versuch über das Judentum*, 2. Auflage (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1996), 126–128; 126: „Der Monotheismus ist keine Arithmetik des Göttlichen.“

<sup>27</sup> Irenäus, *Adv. haer.* IV, 20,1. FC 8/4, 155.

Rede von der Heiligen Schrift als dem Wort Gottes im Menschenwort ist, gehört nicht nur „in den Bereich der *Aneignung* der Offenbarung und der Heilswirklichkeit Gottes“,<sup>28</sup> wie Aloys Grillmeier in seinem Kommentar zu *Dei Verbum* konstatierte. Vielmehr muss die Rede vom inspirierten Menschenwort, das unendlich viel mehr sagt, als es sagt, als zeitliche Konstitution von Offenbarung und Heil gedacht werden, weil das fleischgewordene Wort in der Geschichte überliefert, tradiert, verkündet und somit re-präsentiert wird. Der Heilige Geist lässt sich – mit dem Regensburger Dogmatiker Erwin Dirscherl – auch als „Atem des sprechenden Gottes“<sup>29</sup> deuten; diese pneumatologische Deutung ist inspirationstheologisch folgenreich, erlaubt sie uns, den Gedanken, dass Gotteswort im Menschenwort erscheint, zu denken. Wenn die Inspiration als Erfahrung des Geistes Gottes im Sinn eines Hyperphänomens verstanden werden kann, dann ist die Lehre der Inspiration *auch eine Geschichte der Offenbarung*. Inspiration bezeichnet somit weniger einen Gegenstand objektivierten Wissens, als vielmehr die Dynamisierung des offenbarten Gotteswortes. Die Lektüre der inspirierten Bücher kann zu einem Ort der Erfahrung inspirierenden Lesens und Lebens werden. In dieser Hinsicht ist die Inspirationslehre eine Geschichte der Offenbarung, deren eschatologische Wahrheit in der Inkarnation besteht und die gerade darum von jedem Menschen pneumatologisch<sup>30</sup> vermittelt erfahren werden kann.

<sup>28</sup> Alois Grillmeier, SJ. „Drittes Kapitel, Kommentar,“ in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 2. Auflage (1967), 528–570: 545: „Inspiration und ihr Ergebnis, die inspirierten Bücher, gehören in den Bereich der *Aneignung* der Offenbarung und der Heilswirklichkeit Gottes, nicht zur *geschichtlichen Konstituierung* von Offenbarung und Heil.“

<sup>29</sup> Im Rekurs auf Gregor von Nyssa und Johannes von Damaskus hat E. Dirscherl den „Hervorgang des Hl. Geistes in Gott als *spiratio*, als Hauchung“ gedeutet. „In Analogie zum menschlichen Sprechen spricht Johannes von Damaskus von dem Odem bzw. Atem Gottes als dem Hl. Geist, der das Wort begleitet und seine Wirklichkeit offenbart.“ (205) „Der Hl. Geist ist, so meine These, zu verstehen als der Atem, dessen der Vater beim Sprechen des Wortes bedarf. [...] Der Geist Gottes inspiriert uns zur Nachfolge des Herrn. Und diese Nachfolge führt uns zum Vater. [...] Wo Inspiration geschieht, geschieht ein Zeugnis. Das verweist auf die Bedeutung der Hl. Schrift, die vom Gottesgeist inspiriert, durchatmet ist und von denen gedeutet wird, die vom selben Geist inspiriert sind. Der Hl. Geist öffnet uns für die Bedeutung des Wortes Gottes, das uns als Gotteswort im Menschenwort von der Bibel her beansprucht und uns in Jesus Christus mit dem Vater und dem Nächsten konfrontiert.“ (Erwin Dirscherl, *Das menschliche Wort Gottes und seine Präsenz in der Zeit. Reflexionen zur Grundorientierung der Kirche* (Paderborn u.a.: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2013), 206.)

<sup>30</sup> Josef Wohlmuth hat mit Karl Rahner auf den dogmatisch grundlegenden Gedanken hingewiesen, die „Pneumatologie als die anthropologische Ausweitung der hypostatischen Union“ zu verstehen und diese wiederum engstens mit der Christologie zu verknüpfen, vgl. Josef Wohlmuth, *Im Geheimnis einander nahe. Theologische Aufsätze*

## Schluss

Die Inspirationslehre ist völlig zu Unrecht ein ungeliebtes Sorgenkind der Theologie. Im Kontext der Offenbarung bildet die Inspiration eine theologische Basis- und Fundamentalkategorie, die geeignet erscheint, – wie ich in enger Anlehnung an DV 24 formulieren möchte – das Studium der Heiligen Schrift als *Seele der ganzen Theologie* bewusst zu machen. Die Inspirationslehre stellt dabei für die Theologie eine Herausforderung dar, weil die Öffnung auf die Vorgängigkeit des Wortes Gottes, das im Menschenwort erscheint, wissenschaftlich redlich zur Sprache gebracht und verantwortet werden muss. Für die Fundamentaltheologie plädiere ich daher dafür, die Hyperphänomenalität menschlicher Sprache gründlich und grundlegend zu erforschen. Voraussetzung ist die Wahrnehmung einer *Unverfügbarkeit*<sup>51</sup> (Hartmut Rosa), die es gegenüber jedweder Form von Irrationalismus abzugrenzen und mit allen Mitteln des Denkens zu verantworten gilt.

Darüber hinaus ist die Inspirationslehre auch eine Herausforderung der Theologie in dem Sinn, dass sie die Theologie als Wissenschaft sui generis zur Sprache bringt. Im Unterschied zu den übrigen Wissenschaften ist die christliche Theologie als eine *kirchliche Glaubens-Wissenschaft* zu verstehen.<sup>52</sup> Gott ist kein Untersuchungsgegenstand wie andere. Inspiration steht in Spannung zur Vorstellung von Imitation. Inspiration lässt sich als Phänomen der Unverfügbarkeit schlechthin mit Konzepten wie Enthusiasmus,<sup>53</sup> Einfall, Intuition<sup>54</sup> oder dem Gespür<sup>55</sup> in Verbindung bringen. Wissenschaftstheoretisch bedeutet die Inspirationslehre eine Grundorientierung der Theologie, die neben dem Wissen die Produktivität, Kreativität und Positivität des

---

zum Verhältnis von Judentum und Christentum (Paderborn u.a.: Schöningh, 1996), 155.

<sup>51</sup> Vgl. Hartmut Rosa, *Unverfügbarkeit* (Salzburg: Residenz Verlag, 2019).

<sup>52</sup> Christoph Böttigheimer, *Lehrbuch der Fundamentaltheologie. Die Rationalität der Gottes-, Offenbarungs- und Kirchenfrage*, 4. Auflage (Freiburg i. Br.: Verlag Herder, 2021), 54–67.

<sup>53</sup> Vgl. *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe. Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden*, Bd. 2 (Stuttgart: J.B. Metzler, 2001).

<sup>54</sup> Vgl. Theo Kobusch, „Art. Intuition,“ in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, Bd. 4 (Basel: Schwabe Verlag, 1976), 524–540.

<sup>55</sup> Vgl. Waldenfels, *Sinne und Künste*.



Glaubens zur Sprache zu bringen vermag.<sup>56</sup> Inspiration lässt den Glauben neben dem Wissen nicht verstummen, sondern steht gegenüber einem deterministischen oder naturalistischen Denken für Offenheit und Innovation. Inspiration bewirkt, dass kein Ende ein Ende, sondern stets ein neuer Anfang ist, das Gedachte und Geglaubte je neu und je besser zu verstehen und zu bezeugen. Mit dieser Perspektive eröffnen sich der Theologie neue Zukunftshorizonte.

*Universität Hildesheim  
Institut für Katholische Theologie  
Systematische Theologie  
Universitätsplatz 1  
31141 Hildesheim  
E-mail: dausner@uni-hildesheim.de*

---

<sup>56</sup> Jacques Derrida, „Glaube und Wissen. Die beiden Quellen der ‚Religion‘ an den Grenzen der bloßen Vernunft,“ in *Die Religion*, Hg. Jacques Derrida und Gianni Vattimo (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 2001), 9ff.



---

## IL VOLTO MARIANO DELLA CHIESA E IL VOLTO ECCLESIALE DI MARIA NEL PENSIERO DI JOSEPH RATZINGER-BENEDETTO XVI

---

P E T R H A V L Í K

---

### ABSTRACT

#### **The Marian Face of the Church and the Ecclesial Face of Mary in the Thought of Joseph Ratzinger-Benedict XVI**

Our article seeks to highlight the connection between the Mother of the Lord and the theme of the Church in Ratzinger's thought. It also reflects the Bavarian theologian's approach to Mariology in the context of the development of theology in the second half of the 20th century, especially with regard to the importance of the Second Vatican Council and its ecclesiology. The main topics of interest include the biblical basis of our author's ecclesiological Mariology, the relationship between the doctrine of the Church, Marian theology, and Christology, the mystery of the Covenant and the nuptial analogy as a correction of so-called christomonism and the feminine dimension of the Church, of which Mary is the image and personal concretisation.

### **Keywords**

Mary; Church; ecclesiology; Mariology; woman; christomonism; female dimension of the Church

DOI: 10.14712/25365398.2025.17

**N**el ricco pensiero di Joseph Ratzinger, Maria e la Chiesa sono sempre molto unite: “Lo stesso mistero eucaristico-cristologico della chiesa [...] resta nelle sue giuste proporzioni soltanto se racchiude in sé il mistero mariano”<sup>1</sup>. La scelta metodologica della mariologia ecclesiotipica, che si rispecchia nel capitolo ottavo della Costituzione

---

<sup>1</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente* (Roma: Edizioni San Paolo, 2005), 18.

*Lumen Gentium* del Concilio Vaticano II, è stata seguita dal teologo bavarese ancora prima del Concilio, come risulta dallo studio dei cosiddetti *Hörermitschriften*, cioè delle dispense del periodo della sua docenza a Frisinga (1954–1957)<sup>2</sup>. È un metodo che lo accompagnerà per tutta la vita. La mariologia ed ecclesiologia ratzingeriana sono temi molto estesi. Nel presente articolo ci limitiamo soltanto ad illustrare alcune immagini bibliche della Vergine di Nazaret con richiamo ecclesiologico (soprattutto la figlia di Sion, il resto santo d'Israele, la cosiddetta “linea femminile” nella Scrittura e l’analogia nuziale). La figura di Maria è per lui strategica perché la contempla come il *nexus mysteriorum* – come il nesso tra diversi misteri della fede<sup>3</sup>. Dunque, la mariologia svolge la funzione di chiave ermeneutica per l’ecclesiologia cristologica di Ratzinger, perché vede Maria come immagine e archetipo della Chiesa<sup>4</sup>.

Sostanzialmente le opere sulla Madre di Dio più note del nostro autore sono due: “La figlia di Sion”<sup>5</sup> e “Maria Chiesa nascente”<sup>6</sup> (questa ultima scritta con il suo maestro, Hans Urs von Balthasar). La sua mariologia non può essere racchiusa soltanto in questi due testi, ma la si trova anche in diversi suoi discorsi, omelie, saggi e articoli. Comunque, è noto il fatto che il pensiero di Ratzinger sulla Madonna ha subito una sua evoluzione. Per capirla bene, bisogna contestualizzare le fonti di pensiero ratzingeriano. Se consideriamo il clima teologico, nel quale il giovane seminarista bavarese si formava e studiava, vediamo un forte entusiasmo dopo la Seconda Guerra Mondiale che si riflette anche nella teologia di quell’epoca. Questo entusiasmo veniva logicamente in contrasto con il metodo neoscolastico (ancora fondante per alcuni dei suoi docenti) che era abbastanza freddo e poco esistenziale<sup>7</sup>. Altra tendenza negativa che osservava in quei tempi era un certo

---

<sup>2</sup> Cfr. Rainer Hangler, *Juble, Tochter Zion. Zur Mariologie von Joseph Ratzinger/Benedikt XVI.* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2016), 64–69.

<sup>3</sup> Cfr. Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 20.

<sup>4</sup> Cfr. Maximilian Heinrich Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger – Kirchliche Existenz und existentielle Theologie. Ekklesiologische Grundlinien unter dem Anspruch von Lumen Gentium* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2005), 377.

<sup>5</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Die Tochter Zion. Betrachtungen über den Marienglauben der Kirche* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1977).

<sup>6</sup> Joseph Ratzinger e Hans Urs von Balthasar, *Maria: Kirche im Ursprung* (Freiburg im Breisgau/Basel/Wien: Herder, 1980).

<sup>7</sup> Cfr. Joseph Ratzinger – Benedetto XVI, *Il sale della terra. Cristianesimo e la Chiesa cattolica nel XXI secolo. Un colloquio con Peter Seewald* (Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni San Paolo, 2005), 73.

storicismo, razionalismo e positivismo<sup>8</sup>. Comunque, anche tra alcuni dei suoi professori si vedeva già il rinnovamento della teologia cattolica più attenta alle fonti (*ressourcement*): alla Scrittura, ai Padri della Chiesa, alla dimensione spirituale ed antropologica<sup>9</sup>. Già in questi anni di formazione teologica possiamo notare il suo forte attaccamento alla Sacra Scrittura, ai Padri, alla liturgia, al mistero della Chiesa e al cristocentrismo<sup>10</sup>. Per quanto riguarda il rapporto alla Madre di Dio, il nostro autore ne parla nella famosa intervista con Vittorio Messori: “Rapporto sulla fede”. Se come ragazzo viveva la pietà mariana consistente soprattutto nella preghiera del rosario e nei pellegrinaggi svolti nei luoghi di culto mariani<sup>11</sup>, poi da giovane teologo prova certe riserve rispetto ad alcune formulazioni della tradizione popolare, come – per esempio – “*De Maria numquam satis*”<sup>12</sup>. Lo spiega non soltanto rifacendosi alla mentalità tedesca, secondo la quale le devozioni alla Vergine Maria non sono vissute in modo così emotivo come in altri paesi tradizionalmente cattolici, ma anche sottolineando il forte cristocentrismo della sua spiritualità personale<sup>15</sup> e del movimento liturgico, accentuato ancora dal dialogo ecumenico con i protestanti<sup>14</sup>. Alla fine però, dopo aver visto e vissuto la crisi della Chiesa, della sua fede e della morale, negli anni del post-concilio<sup>15</sup>, trova il rimedio ritornando a Maria<sup>16</sup>. Propone perciò sei punti per un corretto risveglio della pietà mariana e per un approccio mariologico alla fede:

- a) “Riconoscere a Maria il posto che il dogma e la tradizione le assegnano significa stare saldamente radicati nella cristologia autentica”<sup>17</sup>.
- b) “La mariologia della Chiesa suppone il giusto rapporto, la necessaria integrazione tra Bibbia e Tradizione”<sup>18</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Cfr. Joseph Ratzinger, *La mia vita. Autobiografia* (Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni San Paolo, 1997), 57.

<sup>9</sup> Cfr. Ratzinger, *La mia vita*, 58.

<sup>10</sup> Cfr. Ratzinger, *Il sale della terra*, 74–75.

<sup>11</sup> Cfr. Joseph Ratzinger, *Dio e il mondo. Essere cristiani nel nuovo millennio. In colloquio con Peter Seewald* (Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni San Paolo, 2001), 269.

<sup>12</sup> Joseph Ratzinger e Vittorio Messori, *Rapporto sulla fede* (Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni San Paolo, 1985), 106.

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. Benedetto XVI e Peter Seewald, *Ultime conversazioni* (Trebaseleghe: Garzanti, 2016), 88.

<sup>14</sup> Cfr. Ratzinger, *Dio e il mondo*, 269.

<sup>15</sup> Cfr. Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 11.

<sup>16</sup> Cfr. Ratzinger-Messori, *Rapporto*, 104.

<sup>17</sup> Ratzinger-Messori, *Rapporto*, 107.

<sup>18</sup> Ratzinger-Messori, *Rapporto*, 108.

- c) “Nella sua persona [...] Maria lega insieme in modo vitale e inestricabile antico e nuovo popolo di Dio, Israele e cristianesimo, Sinagoga e Chiesa”<sup>19</sup>.
- d) “La corretta devozione mariana garantisce alla fede la convivenza dell’indispensabile ‘ragione’ con altrettanto indispensabili ‘ragioni del cuore’”<sup>20</sup>.
- e) “Maria è ‘figura’, ‘immagine’, ‘modello’ della Chiesa. Allora, guardando a lei, la Chiesa è messa al riparo da quel modello maschilista [...] che la vede come strumento di un programma d’azione socio-politico”<sup>21</sup>.
- f) “Con il suo destino, che è insieme di Vergine e di Madre, Maria continua a proiettare luce su ciò che il Creatore ha inteso per la donna di ogni tempo”<sup>22</sup>.

## Il “femminismo” ratzingeriano

La sottolineatura dell’importanza del ruolo della donna nella storia della salvezza porta il nostro autore alle implicazioni mariologiche: “nell’Antico Testamento, accanto e con la linea che va da Adamo, ai patriarchi e al Servo del Signore, corre la linea che va da Eva, alle donne dei patriarchi, a figure come Debora, Ester e Rut e infine alla Sophia”<sup>23</sup>. Il papa emerito poi prosegue nella sua suggestiva esegesi (ispirata nella mariologia patristica), affermando che se la linea adamitica riceve il suo senso da Cristo, allora la linea femminile trova il suo significato nella figura di Maria e della Chiesa<sup>24</sup>. Ratzinger distingue nella linea femminile della Sacra Scrittura tre direzioni: le immagini delle grandi madri dell’Antico Testamento, la teologia della figlia di Sion e la visione del vangelo di Giovanni dove Maria è vista come figura di Eva e “donna” in genere<sup>25</sup>. Sempre però considera la persona della Madre di Gesù come una personificazione della vera fecondità spirituale prefigurata dalle grandi donne inizialmente sterili ma poi

---

<sup>19</sup> Ratzinger-Messori, *Rapporto*, 108.

<sup>20</sup> Ratzinger-Messori, *Rapporto*, 108.

<sup>21</sup> Ratzinger-Messori, *Rapporto*, 109.

<sup>22</sup> Ratzinger-Messori, *Rapporto*, 109.

<sup>23</sup> Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 55.

<sup>24</sup> Cfr. Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 35.

<sup>25</sup> Cfr. Joseph Ratzinger, *La figlia di Sion. La devozione a Maria nella Chiesa* (Milano: Jaca Book, 2016), 14.

benedette dal Signore nell'Antico Testamento<sup>26</sup>. In questo modo la sua mariologia diventa persino una *Gnadentheologie*, partendo da una definizione relazionale della grazia con un forte impatto esistenziale<sup>27</sup>. Essa “non esprime qualcosa su una proprietà di un soggetto, ma qualcosa su una relazione di io e tu, di Dio e uomo”<sup>28</sup>. Questa prospettiva ci fa vedere come Maria è piena di Dio perché vive in una relazione intima con il Signore; diventa davvero feconda come Lui stesso è fecondo; diventa la benedetta e sorgente di benedizione anche per gli altri.

Grazie alla figura della donna avviene una spiritualizzazione del concetto dell'alleanza: la relazione tra Dio e Israele è relazione dell'amore matrimoniale<sup>29</sup>. Ratzinger, dunque, vede in Maria il compimento e la concretizzazione della Chiesa nel rapporto sponsale con il Signore: “Se quindi ‘Christus et ecclesia’ costituiscono il fulcro ermeneutico della scrittura [...] allora viene definito il luogo in cui la maternità di Maria diventa teologicamente significativa come ultima concretizzazione personale della chiesa”<sup>30</sup>. In altre parole, Maria rappresenta la risposta del resto fedele d'Israele al Signore dell'Alleanza<sup>31</sup>.

## 1. Il rapporto tra la mariologia e l'ecclesiologia

Considerando il rapporto tra la teologia mariana e l'ecclesiologia del teologo bavarese bisogna partire dall'esemplarità di Maria rispetto alla comunità dei discepoli di Gesù. Ci sono due categorie portanti: la maternità di Maria rispetto alla Chiesa e il suo essere *typos Ecclesiae*. Infatti, questa coppia si intravede anche lungo il capitolo mariologico della Costituzione conciliare *Lumen Gentium*. Per Ratzinger la Chiesa ha un doppio carattere di vergine e madre, il quale si può contemplare nella Vergine Maria come nell'immagine e archetipo<sup>32</sup>.

<sup>26</sup> Cfr. Ratzinger, *La figlia di Sion*, 19–20.

<sup>27</sup> “In quanto vera ‘Figlia di Sion’, Maria è immagine della chiesa, immagine dell'uomo credente, il quale non può giungere alla salvezza e a se stesso in nessun altro modo, fuorché grazie al dono dell'amore, ossia mediante la grazia. [...] Essa è rappresentazione dell'umanità, la quale è tutta aspettativa” [Ratzinger, *Introduzione al cristianesimo* (Brescia: Queriniana, 2008), 271].

<sup>28</sup> Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 57.

<sup>29</sup> Cfr. Ratzinger, *La figlia di Sion*, 22.

<sup>30</sup> Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 21.

<sup>31</sup> Cfr. Karl-Heinz Menke, *Incarcato nel seno della Vergine Maria. Maria nella storia di Israele e nella Chiesa* (Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni San Paolo, 2002), 13.

<sup>32</sup> Cfr. Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger – Kirchliche Existenz und existentielle Theologie*, 377.

Per quanto riguarda il rapporto tra Maria e la Chiesa, è utile vedere, almeno brevemente, la posizione di Ratzinger rispetto alla mariologia del Concilio Vaticano II. Lì è avvenuto uno scontro tra i seguaci di una mariologia cristotipica e quelli della mariologia ecclesiotipica<sup>35</sup>. Qualche volta le due correnti vengono chiamate, in modo non molto preciso, “massimalisti” e “minimalisti” mariologici<sup>34</sup>. La mariologia cristotipica si trova spesso tra i teologi appartenenti al movimento mariano del XX secolo e in autori della manualistica della neoscolastica. Ha quasi eliminato la differenza tra Cristo e Maria, o, detto meglio, “Maria è stata posta, come mai prima nella storia della Chiesa, al fianco di Cristo”<sup>35</sup>. La suddetta mariologia si concentra sui cosiddetti “privilegi” della Vergine Maria che sono derivati dai dogmi cristologici e non dalla storia della salvezza (l’approccio è quindi piuttosto speculativo)<sup>36</sup>, cosa che produce “una scissione tra la mariologia biblica e quella dogmatica”<sup>37</sup>. Invece il secondo gruppo di teologi, tra i quali possiamo contare pure il teologo bavarese<sup>38</sup>, optava per la mariologia ecclesiotipica, più storico-salvifica e incentrata sul rapporto tra Maria e la Chiesa. Per non causare fraintendimenti, ponendo la Madre di Gesù sullo stesso piano di Cristo, cercava di vederla invece come personificazione della Chiesa<sup>39</sup>, come tipo della Chiesa (l’etimologia della nozione “ecclesiotipismo” punta proprio a questa realtà).

Il nostro autore tratta il mistero della Chiesa come un mistero della fede<sup>40</sup>, cioè con molta riverenza e rispetto. La sua ecclesiologia è sem-

<sup>35</sup> Cfr. Juan Luis Bastero de Eleizalde, *Maria, Madre del Redentor* (Pamplona: EUNSA, 2004), 67–69. Ci sono però autori i quali vedono la distinzione dei due movimenti come priva di fondamento – come pura questione terminologica [cfr. Gérard Philips, *La Chiesa e il suo mistero nel Concilio Vaticano II. Storia, testo e commento della Costituzione Lumen Gentium* (Milano: Jaca Book, 1982), 559]. Altri invece, con un tono conciliante, vogliono dimostrare che le due tendenze non si escludono, ma sono complementari [cf. Salvator M. Meo, *Maria nel capitolo VIII della “Lumen Gentium”. Elementi per un’analisi dottrinale* (Roma: Pontificia Facoltà Teologica Marianum, 1974–1975), 14].

<sup>34</sup> Cfr. Francisco Gil-Hellín, *Concilii Vaticani II Synopsis. Constitutio dogmatica de Ecclesia Lumen Gentium* (Città del Vaticano: LEV, 1995), 539.

<sup>35</sup> Menke, *Incarcato nel seno della Vergine Maria*, 14.

<sup>36</sup> Cfr. Philips, *La Chiesa e il suo mistero*, 513.

<sup>37</sup> Antonio Ducay, *La prediletta di Dio. Sintesi di mariologia* (Roma: Aracne editrice, 2015), 14.

<sup>38</sup> Cfr. Hangler, *Juble*, 73.

<sup>39</sup> Cfr. Menke, *Incarcato nel seno della Vergine Maria*, 15.

<sup>40</sup> Cfr. Pablo Blanco Sarto, “Mysterium, communio et sacramentum. La ecclesiologia eucaristica di Joseph Ratzinger,” *Anales Theologici* 25 (2011): 242.



pre molto teocentrica<sup>41</sup> e persino apofatica: sempre sa riconoscere umilmente che la realtà misteriosa e invisibile della Chiesa ci supera e ci trascende<sup>42</sup>. Perciò vede come necessario “subordinare il tema della Chiesa al tema di Dio, in modo da offrire un’ecclesiologia più propriamente teologica”<sup>43</sup>, affinché lo studio della Chiesa non la porti a un autocompiacimento e alla troppa concentrazione di essa a sé stessa<sup>44</sup>. Anche rispetto ai diversi paradigmi ecclesiologici prende una posizione prudente. Trattando la Chiesa, usa diverse immagini: quella del Corpo mistico<sup>45</sup>, del sacramento<sup>46</sup> o della *communio*<sup>47</sup>. Da buon teologo sa che la totalità del mistero non può essere espressa in maniera soddisfacente con un solo paradigma, sempre limitato<sup>48</sup>. Anche se la sua ecclesiologia è prima di tutto cristologica ed eucaristica<sup>49</sup>, la Vergine di Nazaret ne ha il suo ruolo indispensabile, benché non venga trattata nei suoi scritti con tanta frequenza come i temi cristologici ed eucaristici. «Lo stesso mistero eucaristico-cristologico della chiesa [...] resta nelle sue giuste proporzioni soltanto se racchiude in sé il mistero mariano»<sup>50</sup>. Maria è sempre inscindibilmente unita con Cristo e il suo posto teologico è sempre dentro il mistero del Verbo incarnato, sia nel suo ruolo materno, sia nell’essere tipo della Chiesa<sup>51</sup>. Ratzinger perciò sottolinea l’indissolubile unione tra mariologia ed ecclesiologia (al modo di tipo e antitipo), cosa che hanno ricordato in abbondanza i Padri già dagli inizi della cristianità. Non ci può essere dunque nessuna contrapposizione tra Maria e la Chiesa. Maria infatti “sta al posto della chiesa stessa”<sup>52</sup>. Perciò nella teologia patristica “l’intera mariologia era già delineata nell’ecclesiologia, senza comunque che venisse nominata la madre del Signore”<sup>53</sup>.

<sup>41</sup> Cfr. Ratzinger, *Il sale della terra*, 74.

<sup>42</sup> Cfr. Joseph Ratzinger, *Il nuovo popolo di Dio. Questioni ecclesiologiche* (Brescia: Queriniana, 1992), 84.

<sup>43</sup> Blanco Sarto, “Mysterium, communio et sacramentum,” 242.

<sup>44</sup> Cfr. Joseph Ratzinger, *Obras completas. Iglesia. Signo entre los pueblos Vol. VIII/1* (Madrid: BAC, 2015), 546.

<sup>45</sup> Cfr. Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger – Kirchliche Existenz und existentielle Theologie*, 251–242.

<sup>46</sup> Cfr. Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger – Kirchliche Existenz und existentielle Theologie*, 65–70.

<sup>47</sup> Cfr. Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger – Kirchliche Existenz und existentielle Theologie*, 268–281.

<sup>48</sup> Cfr. Miguel de Salis, *Una Chiesa incarnata nella storia. Elementi per una rilettura della Costituzione Lumen gentium* (Roma: EDUSC, 2017), 124.

<sup>49</sup> Cfr. Heim, *Joseph Ratzinger – Kirchliche Existenz und existentielle Theologie*, 7–8.

<sup>50</sup> Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 18.

<sup>51</sup> Cfr. Hangler, *Juble*, 68.

<sup>52</sup> Ratzinger, *La figlia di Sion*, 73–74.

<sup>53</sup> Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 19.

Al posto delle trasposizioni dei titoli cristologici a Maria (operazioni spesso non prive di ambiguità e imprecisioni terminologiche), usate dai teologi appartenenti al cosiddetto “movimento mariano”<sup>54</sup>, il nostro autore proponeva il ritorno a una mariologia più radicata nella Scrittura e negli scritti dei Padri della Chiesa. Considerava necessaria una mariologia basata sulla ecclesiologia, altrimenti essa stessa correrebbe il rischio di dissolversi nella cristologia (nel cristomonismo) e perdere la sua *raison d’être*. È proprio la dimensione ecclesiale che integra la mariologia e impedisce che essa sia distaccata dal resto della teologia oppure degeneri in un mariomonismo<sup>55</sup>. Perciò il teologo bavarese vede sempre profondamente intrecciati cristologia, mariologia ed ecclesiologia<sup>56</sup>. Nonostante tutto ciò, negli anni che seguono il Concilio il nostro autore cercherà di proporre una mariologia più equilibrata rispetto alla tendenza abbastanza unilaterale dei Padri ecclesiotipici, la quale – se non si riscontra nell’ultimo capitolo della Costituzione *Lumen gentium* – comunque ha causato la crisi della mariologia nel dopoconcilio<sup>57</sup>. Forse possiamo chiamare la suddetta tendenza pernicioso l’ecclesiomonismo<sup>58</sup>, ossia un eccessivo ecclesio-centrismo, nel quale la mariologia si dissolve<sup>59</sup>. Questa sarebbe una soluzione perdente pure per la stessa ecclesiologia, come avverte Ratzinger: “Il senso del ‘typos’ resta invece garantito se la chiesa, tramite la figura singolare e non permutabile di Maria, diviene riconoscibile nella sua fisionomia personale. In teologia non si deve ricondurre la

<sup>54</sup> Cfr. Ratzinger, *La mia vita*, 57.

<sup>55</sup> In modo molto simile si è espresso il Card. König durante le discussioni conciliari circa l’inserimento dello schema mariano nel capitolo ottavo della Costituzione *Lumen Gentium* (cfr. Meo, *Maria nel capitolo VIII della “Lumen Gentium”*, 103).

<sup>56</sup> Cfr. Hangler, *Juble*, 299.

<sup>57</sup> Cfr. Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 15–16. Ci sono però autori che – diversamente da Ratzinger – danno colpa della crisi postconciliare della mariologia piuttosto al cambiamento culturale avvenuto dopo l’anno rivoluzionario 1968, senza ammettere l’esistenza dei motivi teologici o intraecclesiali della crisi menzionata. Cfr. Stefano De Fiores, *Maria. Nuovissimo Dizionario* (Bologna: Edizioni Dehoniane Bologna, 2006), 343.

<sup>58</sup> Cfr. Antonio Stagliano, *Madre di Dio. La mariologia personalistica di Joseph Ratzinger* (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 2010), 91.

<sup>59</sup> Lohfink offre un’analisi storica dei motivi, per i quali all’Occidente si è persa l’unione vitale tra mariologia ed ecclesiologia. Adduce pure gli esempi concreti delle degenerazioni, alle quali portò quello che chiamiamo mariomonismo (con il logico distacco di Maria da Cristo e dalla Chiesa). Cfr. Gerhard Lohfink e Ludwig Weimer, *Maria non senza Israele. Una nuova visione del dogma sull’Immacolata Concezione. Vol. III* (Bari: Ecumenica Editrice, 2010), 396–399.

persona alla cosa, ma questa a quella. Una ecclesiologia puramente strutturale fa necessariamente degenerare la chiesa a programma di azione”<sup>60</sup>. Perciò il nostro autore vede nel titolo *Mater Ecclesiae*, così discusso durante il Concilio Vaticano II, una garanzia del giusto rapporto tra mariologia ed ecclesiologia nella loro mutua correlazione<sup>61</sup>, perché nella persona di Maria, totalmente aperta al Signore, diventa concreto ciò che la Chiesa è<sup>62</sup>. La divina maternità di Maria appare dunque come causa esemplare della maternità della Chiesa<sup>63</sup>. Maria è la garanzia del carattere personale della Chiesa. Se questa può e deve essere madre a modo della Vergine di Nazaret, lo è soltanto imitando le sue virtù e generando in modo personale con la fede e nella fede, non in maniera fredda, sociologica e istituzionale<sup>64</sup>. L’allora Arcivescovo di Monaco in Baviera-Frisinga non si stanca di sottolineare l’aspetto personale della Chiesa prefigurato nella Vergine di Nazaret perché “il confronto tipologico della Vergine con la Chiesa ricorda che si può e si deve parlare di questa in termini personali e non semplicemente istituzionali”<sup>65</sup>. Qui si trova nella stessa onda di pensiero con il suo amico e maestro Hans Urs von Balthasar, il quale descrive questo aspetto personale come “atteggiamento profondamente personale di una fede perfettamente servizievole”<sup>66</sup>.

## 2. Il mistero dell’Alleanza e dell’analogia nuziale: correzione mariologica del cristomonismo

Ambedue i temi sono collegati nel pensiero di Ratzinger perché “la teologia dell’Alleanza, fin dall’inizio, si è sviluppata in stretta connessione con l’immagine nuziale”<sup>67</sup>. Maria è la vera figlia di Sion in

<sup>60</sup> Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 18.

<sup>61</sup> Cfr. Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 20.

<sup>62</sup> Cfr. Hangler, *Juble*, 76.

<sup>63</sup> Cfr. Leo Scheffczyk, “Mary as a Model of Catholic Faith,” in *The Church and Women. A Compendium*, ed. Helmut Moll (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1988), 88.

<sup>64</sup> Cfr. Michele Giulio Masciarelli, *Il segno della donna. Maria nella teologia di Joseph Ratzinger* (Cinisello Balsamo: Edizioni San Paolo, 2017), 112–113.

<sup>65</sup> Masciarelli, *Il segno della donna*, 37.

<sup>66</sup> Guido M. Miglietta, “Il volto mariano e femminile della Chiesa secondo H. U. von Balthasar,” *Theotokos* 5 (1997): 272.

<sup>67</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Per una teologia del matrimonio* (Venezia: Marcianum Press, 2018), 18.

quanto la Sion o Gerusalemme fu considerata Madre di tutto Israele<sup>68</sup>. Così pure la Vergine di Nazaret è Madre del nuovo Israele, della Chiesa. Allo stesso tempo è vergine e sposa escatologica del Signore, Sposo del Suo popolo. Ella è il vero Israele che compie l'Alleanza<sup>69</sup>; “incarna anzitutto la risposta del popolo di Israele all'alleanza”<sup>70</sup> e lo fa in nome del nuovo popolo di Dio e di tutta la umanità quando dice al Signore il suo “sì”.

Il teologo bavarese intende l'Alleanza in modo più vasto e più teologico nel senso dell'Alleanza iscritta nel cuore così come la profetizzava Geremia (31,31–34) e altri profeti. Così vediamo di nuovo un collegamento del tema dell'Alleanza con la dimensione nuziale, perché l'Alleanza in questa dimensione interiore del cuore “viene vista sempre più e sempre meglio come un patto d'amore tra Dio e il popolo, tra lo sposo-Jahvè e la sposa-Israele”<sup>71</sup>. L'allora Arcivescovo di Monaco in Baviera-Frisinga spiega che al Signore non appartiene come partner sponsale una dea; Lui stesso ha scelto come Suo interlocutore e partner dell'Alleanza “Israele, la figlia di Sion, la donna”<sup>72</sup>. Ricorda giustamente che il mistero nuziale dell'unione di tutta l'umanità, ossia della Chiesa, con Cristo nell'amore sponsale, si può riscontrare nella Vergine Maria, però c'è bisogno di precisare. Maria “sta certamente in rapporto a Cristo anzitutto non come sposa ma come madre”<sup>73</sup>. Lì sta il fondamento per il titolo “Madre della Chiesa” attribuito a lei. Ma se consideriamo il fatto che il centro della storia della salvezza sia “Cristo e la Sua Chiesa” e la Chiesa va intesa come “unione della creatura con il suo Signore nell'amore sponsale nel quale, attraverso la fede,

<sup>68</sup> Della figura della figlia di Sion in mariologia cfr.: Elena Lea Bartolini, “Figlia di Sion,” in *Mariologia*, ed. Stefano De Fiore, Valeria Ferrari Schiefer, Salvatore M. Perrella (Cinisello Balsamo: San Paolo, 2009), 551–556; Duca, *La prediletta di Dio*, 26–31; Lohfink-Weimer, *Maria non senza Israele*, 326–334; Menke, *Incarnato nel seno della Vergine Maria*, 28–32; Elios Giuseppe Mori, *Figlia di Sion e serva di Jahvè. Nella Bibbia e nel Vaticano II* (Bologna: EDB, 1970); Gianfranco Ravasi, *L'albero di Maria. Trentuno “icone” bibliche mariane* (Cinisello Balsamo: Paoline, 1993), 74–83; Aristide Serra, *La Donna dell'Alleanza. Prefigurazioni di Maria nell'Antico Testamento* (Padova: Messaggero, 2006), 12–13; Odone da Spinetti, “Eccelsa Figlia di Sion,” *Theotokos* 8 (2000): 499–512.

<sup>69</sup> Cfr. Ratzinger, *La figlia di Sion*, 42.

<sup>70</sup> Stefano De Fiore, *Maria Madre di Gesù. Sintesi storico-salvifica* (Bologna: EDB, 2008), 46.

<sup>71</sup> Staglianò, *Madre di Dio*, 80–81.

<sup>72</sup> Ratzinger, *La figlia di Sion*, 25.

<sup>73</sup> Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 20.

viene esaudita la sua speranza di divinizzazione<sup>74</sup>, allora si capisce che la maternità di Maria non è un fatto meramente biologico, ma una accoglienza della Parola di Dio nell'obbedienza della fede. Così "la maternità di Maria diventa teologicamente significativa come ultima concretizzazione personale della chiesa: Maria, nel momento del suo sì, è Israele in persona"<sup>75</sup>. Il fatto biologico riceve un senso teologico della realizzazione del contenuto spirituale dell'Alleanza, realizzazione di ciò che è la Chiesa<sup>76</sup>. e così si può affermare pure che Maria, la vera figlia di Sion, esprime il mistero grande, la dimensione sponsale e femminile della Chiesa<sup>77</sup> in quanto risposta accogliente, non chiusa in sé stessa, ma abitabile per lo Sposo divino. Il piano originario di Dio di unirsi con la Sua creatura, il quale fu iscritto in tutta l'opera della creazione, ha la sua prima e vera realizzazione nella Vergine Maria e quella ultima nella Chiesa (nella sua pienezza della sponsalità)<sup>78</sup>. Comunque, la pienezza escatologica di questo piano sponsale di Dio risplende già nella figura di Maria grazie alla sua glorificazione nell'Assunzione<sup>79</sup>.

Secondo Ratzinger è proprio la dimensione nuziale dell'Alleanza, contemplata nella persona di Maria, eccelsa figlia di Sion e Chiesa nascente, il rimedio opportuno che salvaguarda il posto della mariologia e devozione alla Madre di Gesù nella Chiesa contro la tendenza del cosiddetto cristomonismo. Allo stesso tempo aiuta a stabilire giusti rapporti con la cristologia e con gli aspetti cristologici all'interno della ecclesiologia. Commentando la scelta dei Padri del Concilio Vaticano II di includere lo schema mariologico dentro la Costituzione sulla Chiesa invece di dedicare alla Madre di Gesù un documento a sé stante, il nostro autore afferma: "La mariologia non può mai essere puramente mariologica, perché essa si colloca nell'insieme unitario della struttura fondamentale di Cristo e chiesa, come espressione, la più concreta, della loro connessione"<sup>80</sup>. Già la storia del dogma ci offre una verifica perché "le affermazioni su Maria sono divenute necessarie

<sup>74</sup> Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 21.

<sup>75</sup> Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 21.

<sup>76</sup> Cfr. Hangler, *Juble*, 76.

<sup>77</sup> Cfr. Alberto Valentini, "Personalità corporativa e principio di totalità," *Theotokos* 8 (2000): 495.

<sup>78</sup> Cfr. Louis Bouyer, *Mystère et ministères de la femme* (Paris: Aubier Montaigne, 1976), 35.

<sup>79</sup> Cfr. Ratzinger, *La figlia di Sion*, 71-74.

<sup>80</sup> Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 22.

innanzitutto a partire dalla cristologia, all'interno della cui struttura si sono sviluppate<sup>81</sup>. La mariologia dunque deve partire dalla cristologia e spiegarla<sup>82</sup>. Similmente nelle considerazioni patristiche la mariologia era già in qualche modo contenuta e delineata nell'ecclesiologia, anche se a volte pure implicitamente<sup>83</sup>. Per questi motivi però la mariologia non può essere semplicemente subordinata alla cristologia ed ecclesiologia; funge piuttosto come un nesso tra di loro: "Il discorso su Maria rimarca piuttosto il 'nexus mysteriorum', l'intimo intrecciarsi dei misteri nel loro reciproco essere-di-fronte come nella loro unità"<sup>84</sup>.

Il cristomonismo sarebbe dunque, secondo il pensiero ratzingeriano, una visione della storia della salvezza, la quale vede in Cristo il centro di tutta questa storia e di tutto il creato, però – a differenza del cristocentrismo – in modo esclusivo (sembra che tutto debba dissolversi in Lui). Ciò significherebbe che Cristo esclude ogni altra mediazione o partecipazione alla Sua missione, cosa che Ratzinger rifiuta precisando, secondo il tenore della LG 62, che l'unicità della mediazione di Cristo non è esclusiva, bensì inclusiva e non esclude la partecipazione: "L'unicità di Cristo non dissolve la mutua responsabilità e la comunione degli uomini davanti a Dio, che, in unione con Cristo, possono essere in molteplici modi l'un l'altro mediatori verso Dio"<sup>85</sup>. In altre parole il cristomonismo "orienta tutti i vettori del mistero cristologico all'interno di sé col risultato d'impedire l'irraggiamento del mistero di Cristo, che è strutturalmente mediativo"<sup>86</sup>. Come se Cristo dovesse fare tutto nella Sua qualità di rappresentante della creazione, dell'uomo esemplare che sta ristabilendo l'errore del primo uomo, Adamo. In questa prospettiva si potrebbe vedere come superflua la figura di Maria in quanto risposta personificata della creatura al Creatore, la quale – nella sua pura ricettività e obbedienza della fede – accoglie la grazia e corrisponde all'iniziativa divina d'amore. Il cristomonismo vede tale risposta effettuata soltanto nell'umanità di Cristo. Ma così assorbe e dissolve "la relativa autonomia delle realtà che entrano in contatto con la realtà assoluta e totale di Cristo: *solus Christus* sì, ma

---

<sup>81</sup> Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 19.

<sup>82</sup> Cfr. Hangler, *Juble*, 74.

<sup>83</sup> Cfr. Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 19.

<sup>84</sup> Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 20.

<sup>85</sup> Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 44. Bisogna però aggiungere che le altre mediazioni, come quella di Maria, sono sempre derivate da quella di Cristo e subordinate ad essa (cfr. Masciarelli, *Il segno della donna*, 101).

<sup>86</sup> Masciarelli, *Il segno della donna*, 41-42.

nella dialettica biblica dell'alleanza, per la quale Cristo è 'capo e corpo' e perciò vi è un corpo che non esiste senza il capo, ma ha consistenza, ha autonomia (cioè è vera libertà)<sup>87</sup>. Come vedremo più avanti, Ratzinger sa molto bene che ci sono aspetti che Cristo non può esprimere nella totalità dei dettagli. Questo è il caso della nostra analogia nuziale e della dimensione sponsale dell'Alleanza, nella quale allo Sposo divino deve corrispondere la Sposa, rappresentatrice di tutta l'umanità redenta e della Chiesa<sup>88</sup>.

La risposta ratzingeriana al cristomonismo ha dunque come il suo asse la sottolineatura della linea storico-salvifica femminile Eva-Maria, corrispondente a quella maschile Adamo-Cristo. Allora "come la linea adamitica riceve il suo senso da Cristo, così alla luce della figura di Maria e nella posizione dell' 'ecclesia' diventa chiaro il significato della linea femminile, nella sua unione inseparabile con il mistero cristologico"<sup>89</sup>. Se dunque esiste una correlazione tra Adamo ed Eva, uomo e donna, senza la quale non si compirebbe la totalità dell'essere umano, creato a immagine e somiglianza di Dio<sup>90</sup>, possiamo dire in modo analogico che la linea cristologico-adamitica ha come suo contrappunto necessario la linea femminile, il cui apice troviamo nella Vergine Maria. Non bisogna dunque temere che la mariologia diminuirà la cristologia; che l'interesse per la figura della Madre di Gesù toglierebbe qualcosa alla persona del Figlio di Dio fatto uomo. Come nella sua vita Maria sempre rimandava a Gesù e si metteva in disparte, così avviene anche nel campo della mariologia: tutto mariano costantemente rinvia al cristologico<sup>91</sup>. Perciò Ratzinger non esita ad esaltare la mariologia come difesa della cristologia: "il manifestarsi di un senso veramente mariologico è la regola per stabilire se sia completamente presente il contenuto cristologico"<sup>92</sup>. In altre parole: la cristologia non è completa senza la dimensione mariologica, come si può vedere nel caso del nestorianesimo, il quale rifiuta le conseguenze mariologiche del dogma cristologico fino ad impoverirlo e mutilarlo<sup>93</sup>. Dall'altro canto neanche la mariologia può stare da sola, "perché essa si colloca

<sup>87</sup> Staglianò, *Madre di Dio*, 98.

<sup>88</sup> Cfr. Hangler, *Juble*, 292-293.

<sup>89</sup> Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 35.

<sup>90</sup> Cfr. Ratzinger, *La figlia di Sion*, 17-18.

<sup>91</sup> Cfr. Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 27.

<sup>92</sup> Ratzinger, *La figlia di Sion*, 35.

<sup>93</sup> Cfr. Ratzinger, *La figlia di Sion*, 35.

nell'insieme unitario della struttura fondamentale di Cristo e chiesa, come espressione, la più concreta, della loro connessione"<sup>94</sup>. Così pure la trattazione teologica su Maria ha bisogno di non essere sradicata dal mistero dell'Alleanza tra Cristo e la Chiesa, Sua Sposa. Per il nostro autore la mariologia non deve mai dimenticare la dimensione storico-salvifica contenuta nei libri della Sacra Scrittura, altrimenti perderà la sua natura originaria e si deformerà.

### 3. Importanza della dimensione femminile della Chiesa

Nel famoso libro "Maria Chiesa nascente" Ratzinger e von Balthasar volevano presentare un'alternativa alla visione secolarizzata, orizzontale e meramente sociologica della Chiesa degli anni 70' vista soltanto come popolo di Dio<sup>95</sup>, che è molto popolo e poco di Dio<sup>96</sup> e si impegna soprattutto nella lotta contro l'ingiustizia sociale, nei diritti umani e attivismo sociale. Questo modello alternativo della Chiesa è quello contemplato nella figura della Vergine Maria perché "dove la tradizionale pietà mariana del popolo declina, il vuoto è riempito da ideologie politiche"<sup>97</sup>. La Madre di Dio e Madre della Chiesa, nella sua apparente passività, ricettività, apertura alla grazia di Dio, contemplazione amorosa di Gesù, disponibilità alla volontà del Padre, docilità allo Spirito Santo, materna donazione di sé, resistenza al dolore e tenerezza affettiva rappresenta l'antipolo femminile così necessario in quei tempi della prepotenza del modello maschilista dell'attivismo, razionalismo, dell'efficacia, del fare e non lasciarsi sorprendere con il dono gratuito. Commentando l'Enciclica *Redemptoris Mater*, l'allora Prefetto della Congregazione per la Dottrina della Fede osserva acutamente: "Naturalmente, ove la Chiesa viene concepita solo in maniera istituzionale, solo in forma di decisioni e di azioni a maggioranza, non rimane più spazio per una cosa del genere. Di fronte a tale sociologizzazione superficiale del concetto di Chiesa il papa ricorda

---

<sup>94</sup> Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 22.

<sup>95</sup> Cfr. De Salis, *Una Chiesa incarnata*, 105.

<sup>96</sup> Ratzinger fu abbastanza critico rispetto alle interpretazioni sociologizzanti e meramente orizzontali del concetto ecclesiologico del popolo di Dio, riscoperto dal Concilio Vaticano II, che lo staccavano dal paradigma sacramentale, comunionale e quello del corpo mistico di Cristo, sapendo che nessuno di questi sia capace di esprimere da solo il mistero della Chiesa in pienezza (cfr. Ratzinger, *Rapporto*, 45-54; Ratzinger, *Obras completas. Iglesia*, 220-246).

<sup>97</sup> Ratzinger, *Rapporto*, 106.



un'affermazione troppo poco meditata di Paolo: 'Io di nuovo parto nel dolore, finché non sia formato Cristo in voi' (Gal 4,19)<sup>98</sup>. Allora "Maria esprime la fisionomia personale della Chiesa, impendendone una sua visione puramente organizzativa"<sup>99</sup>. Non siamo noi che "facciamo" o "costruiamo" la Chiesa. Dobbiamo invece "essere" Chiesa a modo di Maria, la quale nella fede accoglie la parola di Dio e la fa fruttificare<sup>100</sup>. Affinché la Chiesa possa essere davvero Madre che genera alla vita, che dà la vita, non basta il fare e produrre superficiale. La vita si genera soltanto nel dolore del parto, come possiamo vedere sull'esempio della Vergine Maria, la quale genera la Chiesa nel giorno della Pentecoste soltanto in forza dell'esperienza dell'Addolorata sotto la croce<sup>101</sup>.

L'esempio della Madre di Gesù preserva la Chiesa da un'altro pericolo, dall'attivismo maschilista:

Nel nostro modo di pensare vale ancora solo il principio del maschio: fare, produrre, pianificare il mondo e semmai rifabbricarselo da sé, senza dover niente a nessuno, ma facendo affidamento solo sulle proprie risorse. Non a caso, credo, con la nostra mentalità maschilista abbiamo sempre di più separato Cristo dalla madre, senza renderci conto che Maria, come sua madre, potrebbe significare qualcosa per la teologia e per la fede. [...] Se il fare prende il sopravvento, divenendo autonomo, quelle cose che non sono da farsi, ma che sono vive e vogliono maturare, non potranno più esistere<sup>102</sup>.

In altre parole, se non usciamo di questa mentalità, rischiamo di ridurre la Chiesa ad una "opera delle nostre mani" e dei nostri progetti meramente umani. Perciò abbiamo bisogno di Maria come colei che ha dato la vita al Figlio di Dio incarnato, come pure alla Chiesa. La Chiesa non è un prodotto del nostro fare, bensì un organismo vivente che matura e cresce in modo misterioso in forza della grazia. Potrà partecipare alla fecondità spirituale della Madonna soltanto se seguirà il suo esempio di esistenza contemplativa, raccolta nella preghiera e tutta a disposizione del Signore: "La Chiesa non è un manufatto finito, ma

<sup>98</sup> Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 46.

<sup>99</sup> Staglianò, *Madre di Dio*, 87.

<sup>100</sup> Cfr. Ratzinger, *Obras completas. Iglesia*, 239.

<sup>101</sup> Cfr. Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 46-47.

<sup>102</sup> Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 7-8.

seme vivente di Dio che vuole svilupparsi e arrivare a maturazione. Per questo essa ha bisogno del mistero mariano [...]. Può esserci nella Chiesa fecondità solo se si sottomette a questo segno [...]. Dobbiamo nuovamente diventare uomini e donne che aspettano, raccolti all'interno"<sup>105</sup>. Dall'altro canto, Maria ci insegna a non proiettare nella Chiesa noi stessi e i nostri interessi parziali. Aiuta pure la Chiesa stessa a non cadere in una autoreferenzialità. E non si tratta soltanto di una chiusura della Chiesa in sé stessa al livello delle teorie e paradigmi ecclesiologicali. Anche a livello della prassi e del vissuto, avverte il teologo bavarese, corriamo il rischio di occuparci soltanto di noi stessi, dei problemi e dibattiti intraecclesiali e dimenticare il compito dell'evangelizzazione ricevuto dal Signore: "Sembra proprio che la Chiesa continui a occuparsi di se stessa [...] e altrettanto poco si considera che non dovremmo tormentarci continuamente con le nostre domande, bensì riflettere su come noi, in quanto cristiani, possiamo esprimere oggi nel mondo attuale ciò in cui crediamo"<sup>104</sup>.

La mariologia ratzingeriana offre delle risposte significative alla domanda "perché la Chiesa ha bisogno di Maria?". Soltanto una immagine femminile è capace di esprimere il mistero della Chiesa nella sua pienezza. La Chiesa non è soltanto la gerarchia ed istituzione (rappresentata con l'Apostolo Pietro). Proprio per questo i primi cristiani hanno usato l'immagine femminile (della vergine, sposa e madre) e non maschile per raffigurare la Chiesa che sta davanti a Cristo appunto come Sposa<sup>105</sup>. Perciò il documento dei vescovi tedeschi "*Maria, die Mutter des Herrn*" dell'anno 1979, alla cui stesura collaborò in modo sostanziale l'allora Cardinale Joseph Ratzinger, propone ai fedeli la Vergine Maria come modello e immagine della Chiesa nella sua apertura alla volontà di Dio: "Essa pone il vero atto costitutivo della Chiesa; tutto ciò che è venuto successivamente, il ministero apostolico, i sacramenti, l'invio in missione nel mondo, presuppone questo fondamento mariano. Senza di esso la Chiesa sarebbe ciò che purtroppo a molti sembra essere: nient'altro che un'organizzazione"<sup>106</sup>.

---

<sup>105</sup> Ratzinger, *Maria Chiesa nascente*, 8.

<sup>104</sup> Ratzinger, *Il sale della terra*, 185–184.

<sup>105</sup> Cfr. Lohfink-Weimer, *Maria non senza Israele*, 410–411.

<sup>106</sup> Lohfink-Weimer, *Maria non senza Israele*, 413.

## Conclusione

Nel nostro articolo abbiamo cercato di far vedere il nesso tra la Madre del Signore e il tema della Chiesa nel pensiero di Ratzinger. L'evoluzione del suo approccio alla mariologia rispecchia le tappe della storia della teologia nel secolo scorso. Mentre negli anni precedenti al Concilio Vaticano II la sua posizione fu critica rispetto al "masimalismo" mariano, dopo la crisi del Postconcilio vide come necessario il ritorno alla persona della Madonna in quanto tipo e immagine della Chiesa.

Altro campo di ricerca rappresenta la mariologia biblica ossia l'elemento femminile della Scrittura. Il nostro autore propone come complemento alla ben nota linea maschile della Scrittura (cui protagonisti sono Adamo, i patriarchi, profeti e altri eroi fino a Cristo) la linea femminile che parte da Eva, attraversa le grandi salvatrici del popolo di Israele, le profetesse o le grandi madri e confluisce nella figura della figlia di Sion, la quale trova il suo compimento nella Madre di Gesù, archetipo della Chiesa.

Per quanto riguarda il rapporto tra l'ecclesiologia e mariologia, Ratzinger considera il titolo *Mater Ecclesiae* la chiave ermeneutica per la comprensione della dottrina mariana del Concilio Vaticano II, perché esprime l'intreccio tra mariologia, cristologia ed ecclesiologia. Secondo lui la dimensione mariana aiuta alla Chiesa di non cadere nell'auto-compiacimento e nell'autosufficienza, puntando allo stesso tempo al primato di Cristo. Allora il parallelismo tipologico porta ad affermare che la Chiesa, imitando le virtù e la disponibilità alla volontà di Dio da parte della Vergine Maria, diventa essa stessa pure vergine e madre feconda che genera i figli.

Proseguendo nella linea scritturistica, il teologo bavarese vede nel mistero dell'Alleanza una sana correzione del cosiddetto cristomonismo, il quale considera la risposta sponsale del creato al Creatore compiuta nell'umanità di Cristo. Procedere in questo modo significherebbe snaturare la grande analogia nuziale, la quale richiede una risposta sponsale e femminile a Dio-Sposo da parte dell'umanità creata e redenta; da parte della Chiesa in persona.

Come ultimo tema del nostro articolo abbiamo abbozzata brevemente l'importanza della dimensione femminile della Chiesa, il cui modello il nostro autore vede nella Madre di Dio. Quando la Chiesa viene concepita in maniera meramente sociologica e istituzionale,

secondo la mentalità “dello stereotipo maschilista” dell’attivismo e dell’efficacia, perde il suo mistero e cessa di essere madre. Rimane soltanto opera delle nostre mani. Perciò Ratzinger propone il ritorno alla contemplazione delle virtù ecclesiali della figura di Maria; il ritorno cioè alla sua apparente passività, ricettività, apertura alla grazia di Dio, che sono le caratteristiche solitamente attribuite all’archetipo femminile. Soltanto così viene salvato il carattere personale, soprannaturale e gratuito della Chiesa.

*U Proseckého kostela 5/3  
190 00 Praha 9  
Czech Republic  
E-mail: havlik.pj@gmail.com*

---

## TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF HOLINESS IN THE LAITY: NEWMAN, ESCRIVÁ AND WOJTYŁA

---

JUAN R. VÉLEZ

---

---

### ABSTRACT

John Henry Newman, Josemaría Escrivá, and Karol Wojtyła are three modern saints who insisted on the general or universal call to holiness in everyday life, which until recent centuries focused on religious vows, degrees of prayer or mystical experiences. All three taught that this call is rooted in the sacrament of baptism with its subsequent growth by means of prayer, sacramental life, and the exercise of the virtues. They conceived of Christian holiness in terms of the imitation of Christ through the action of the Holy Spirit. For them, each Christian participates in the threefold office of Christ, Priest, Prophet, and King. Their teaching on divine filiation, sanctification of work and secular realities is a notable contribution towards a theology of holiness which calls for further elaboration.

### Keywords

Newman; Escrivá; John Paul II; Holiness; Laity; Threefold office of Christ; Holy Spirit; Divine filiation; Identification with Christ; Sanctification of work

DOI: 10.14712/23363398.2023.18

Since the early sixteenth century, there has been a gradual re-discovery and deepening of the concept of holiness or sanctity understood as a theological category of Christian life for all the faithful, including the laity. Holiness has been conceptualized as the union of man with God by means of sanctifying grace through which the Christian lives the virtue of charity and the other theological and moral virtues to a high degree. Over the centuries, emphasis has been placed on different aspects of this process: divinization and adopted

filiation (St. Athanasius, Pseudo-Dionysius, St. Maximus the Confessor,<sup>1</sup> St. Gregory of Nyssa), ascetical life and prayer in monasticism (St. Augustine, St. Benedict), profession and practice of the evangelical counsels (St. Thomas Aquinas, St. Francis of Assisi), identification with Christ (St. Theresa of Avila, St. Ignatius of Loyola, *Devotio moderna*), practice of charity and acceptance of God's will (St. Francis de Sales) and the way of spiritual childhood (St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus).<sup>2</sup>

The modern and contemporary awareness of the universal call to holiness has led to a renewal and development of an earlier emphasis: identification with Christ and divine filiation, and a new perspective: sanctification of work. This article identifies the contributions made by St. John Henry Newman, St. Josemaría Escrivá, and St. John Paul II (Karol J. Wojtyła) to a theology of holiness, which is not centered on religious vows or the mystical state. For these three priests, sanctity consists in Christian perfection, which is lived out in ordinary life by all men and women, the majority of whom are laity. They emphasize the gradual deification or divinization through a configuration with Christ. Here we discuss some specific notions which they have in common in their teaching about sanctification.

## 1. Historical Overview

For many centuries, the call to sanctity, directed by Christ Himself, to all Christians was relegated primarily to priests and members of religious communities. Since the fourth or fifth centuries onwards, a clear distinction was made between two types of Christians: those who were called to follow the commandments and those who were called to live the beatitudes by leaving society to seek holiness in religious communities.<sup>3</sup> In subsequent centuries a theology of 'Christian perfection'<sup>4</sup>

---

<sup>1</sup> See Paul O'Callaghan, *Children of God in the World* (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2016), 142–156.

<sup>2</sup> See Jordan Aumann, *Christian Spirituality in the Catholic Tradition* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1985), 54–56, 57–72, 80–108, 162–168, 178–217.

<sup>3</sup> See José Luis Illanes, *Tratado de Teología Espiritual* (Pamplona: Eunsa, 2007), 138–150.

<sup>4</sup> Adolphe Tanquerey (1854–1932) has a chapter titled 'The Duty of Tending to Perfection' which begins with the faithful but focuses on those in religious orders and the priesthood (*The Spiritual Life*, Tournai: Desclée & Co., 1930, 176–205). Tanquerey explains that a Christian cannot remain in the state of grace for long unless he strives to make progress in the spiritual life, and adds: 'It is only in this restricted sense that we maintain the obligation of perfection for ordinary Christians.' (177).

developed around the pursuit of holiness through the practice of the three evangelical counsels (poverty, chastity, and obedience) with the profession of vows to live these counsels. According to St. Thomas Aquinas (1274–1323), the evangelical counsels dispose man more perfectly for charity for the attainment of his end. The vows, which are acts of the virtue of religion, have the function of healing man's nature, freeing him to dedicate himself wholly to the highest pursuit.<sup>5</sup>

Through the exercise of these acts of the virtue of religion, some persons enter into the religious state, which was held to be perfect because of the means it provides to obtain holiness. Aquinas explained the vows in therapeutic, ascetic, and oblativistic terms.<sup>6</sup> Although the pursuit of holiness was not limited to the religious vocation, this state was considered the 'state of perfection'.<sup>7</sup> The profession of vows, practice of a rule in convents or monasteries, and contemplative life thus became the paradigm of Christian life and many religious institutions were founded for the spiritual growth of religious and priests.<sup>8</sup> The laity practiced popular devotions, celebrated feasts of their patron saints, and some joined third orders. The earlier theological tradition looks to perfection through the exercise of religious vows considered as the perfect means associated with infused contemplation and mystical gifts.<sup>9</sup> A more recent tradition, instead, conceives of the pursuit of charity through the exercise of all the theological and moral virtues in the sanctification of work, family, and other secular realities. For the latter, the means are the acts of all these virtues rather than those specific to the virtue of religion and the three vows.

In the middle of the sixteenth century, the Catholic doctrine of sanctifying grace and justification through sacramental grace was defined at the Council of Trent. However, the earlier theological understanding of Christian holiness remained the same. The Protestant reformers,

<sup>5</sup> St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* II-II, q. 186, a. 2. For a detailed explanation, see Gregory Pine, O.P. 'Religious Life as a State of Perfection,' *Nova et Vetera* 19, no. 4 (2021): 1181–1214: 1209.

<sup>6</sup> *ST*, II-II, q. 186, a. 7.

<sup>7</sup> Tanquerey, *The Spiritual Life*, 185–187.

<sup>8</sup> Gregory Pine, O.P. presents the Thomistic teaching on the relationship between the virtue of religion and charity, and maintains the importance of the theological category of state of perfection. Gregory Pine, O.P. 'Religious Life as a State of Perfection,' 1181–1214.

<sup>9</sup> For the Patristic notion of *theosis* or deification see Kharlamov, V. (2008). 'Theosis in Patristic Thought,' *Theology Today* 65, no. 2 (2008): 158–168, doi: 10.1177/004057360806500203.

who maintained the teaching of justification through faith alone, taught instead the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers.<sup>10</sup> The Reformers rediscovered the value of ordinary life and work as a Christian vocation, but they excluded the mediation of the Church. The Church was no longer considered an instrument of salvation; it was only a symbol of salvation. Furthermore, ‘neither the Lutheran idea of work as “profession” nor the Calvinist-Puritan idea of sanctification of work was really aimed at the redemption of the world and thereby at its inner healing and sanctification’.<sup>11</sup> Whereas John Wesley (1703–1791) taught a ‘holiness tradition’ which emphasized the sanctity of God contrasted with man’s sinfulness, the Swiss protestant theologian Karl Barth (1886–1968) wrote about the total otherness of God (God as the wholly other, *totaliter aliter*). In his second edition of the Epistle to the Romans (1922), Barth insisted on God’s transcendence; for Barth, man cannot speak about God; he can only wait for God’s revelation of himself. In his later work, *Church Dogmatics* (1950), Barth explained how God speaks to man in Christ, giving a new ‘Christological concentration’ to his entire theological work.<sup>12</sup>

During the first half of the twentieth century, Catholic theologians debated on the need for infused prayer to reach this perfection. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, O.P. (1877–1964), in line with the work of John Arintero, O.P. (1860–1928), offered a very detailed description of three stages on the way of perfection available to all: purgative, illuminative, and unitive.<sup>13</sup> Another line of thinking represented by Joseph de Guibert, SJ (1877–1942) held the view that Christian perfection does not require infused contemplation or necessarily consist in mystical experiences or the mystical state.<sup>14</sup>

In general, however, there has been a consensus among theologians and spiritual writers that Christian perfection is the fullness of Christian life effected by the transformative work of the Holy Spirit and

---

<sup>10</sup> See Martin Rhonheimer, ‘Affirming the World and Christian Holiness,’ in *Changing the World, The Timeliness of Opus Dei* (New York: Scepter Publishers, 2009), 33–44.

<sup>11</sup> Rhonheimer, ‘Affirming the World and Christian Holiness,’ 39.

<sup>12</sup> Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics, Christian Life*, vol. IV (Bloomsbury, 2017). See ‘Preface’ by Hans Anton-Drewes, ix.

<sup>13</sup> Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange holds that although everyone is called to infused contemplation, only some are called in a proximate and immediate way. *The Three Ages of the Interior Life*, vol. 2 (St. Louis: B. Herder Book Co., 1948), 319–324.

<sup>14</sup> Jordan Aumann, ‘Mystical Experience, the Infused Virtues and the Gifts,’ *Angelicum* 58, no. 1 (1981): 33–55, 33.



his gifts. This sanctity begins with the sanctifying grace received in Baptism and involves a life of prayer, frequent reception of the Sacraments, and the practice of the theological and moral virtues, which leads to a growth and perfection in charity.<sup>15</sup> In the words of Gustave Thils (1909–2000), ‘... the definitive criterion of true and total Christian perfection is the perfection of charity, the heroic practice of the virtue of one’s state in life’.<sup>16</sup>

We can find these themes in the writers discussed in this article, who stand out for anticipating or underlining the Christocentric and Trinitarian doctrine on sanctity beginning with Baptism and teach on the universal call to holiness put forth in the Second Vatican Council.

## 2. Newman, Escrivá and Wojtyła

John Henry Newman (1801–1890), Josemaría Escrivá (1902–1975), and Karol J. Wojtyła (1920–2005) are three modern-day saints who were born and raised in very different social and religious environments. The first was alive during Vatican Council I; the other two during Vatican Council II. They each exerted significant influence through their preaching, spiritual direction and writing.

Instead of treatises on Christian perfection, they wrote mostly reflections and homilies on this topic, employing a less abstract language which is more accessible to audiences. Their approach to this subject differs from the traditional approach, with its focus on the vows and its frequent classification of prayer and the ascetical life. Although Escrivá and John Paul II were familiar with this doctrine of the evangelical counsels, vows, and mystical theology and encouraged those called to this consecrated life,<sup>17</sup> they considered sanctity from the perspective of a filial relationship and a friendship with God. Josemaría Escrivá often spoke of a divine friendship with Jesus Christ, who called His disciples

<sup>15</sup> *ST II-II*, q. 184, a. 3.

<sup>16</sup> Gustave Thils, *Christian Holiness*, 43. Writing in 1961, Thils explains the universality of the call to holiness which is not limited to 1) consecrated persons, 2) monks and religious, or 3) the laity, 27–44. For him, the foundation for Christian sanctity is supernatural life and participation in the holiness of God which demands constant growth and development, 45–6.

<sup>17</sup> For instance, John Paul II wrote that: ‘By professing the evangelical counsels, consecrated persons not only make Christ the whole meaning of their lives but strive to reproduce in themselves, as far as possible, ‘that form of life which he, as the Son of God, accepted in entering this world.’ Post-Synodal Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* (Vatican, March 25, 1966), 16.

friends. Escrivá also urged people to befriend the Holy Spirit by which he meant attention and docility to the inspirations and motions of the Holy Spirit.<sup>18</sup> Similarly, John Paul II asked: ‘Is not Christ the supreme friend and the teacher of all genuine friendship?’<sup>19</sup> This divine friendship is based on God’s charity, about which in the *Summa Theologiae* Aquinas comments: ‘Now the friendship of charity is based on the fellowship of happiness, which consists essentially in God, as the First Principle, whence it flows to all who are capable of happiness.’<sup>20</sup>

Escrivá appreciated the fourth-century Doctor of the Church, St. John Chrysostom (c. 347–407), who said: ‘The truth is that all men must rise to the same heights; and what has made the world go upside down is that thought that only the monk is obliged to a higher perfection and that all others can live as they please. But it is not so!’<sup>21</sup> Escrivá quoted this passage, explaining that:

There is a parenthesis of centuries – very long and inexplicable one – in which to seek Christian perfection by means of sanctification of everyday work, each one through his professional work and in his own state of life, was a doctrine that sounded and sounds as if something new.<sup>22</sup>

Although Newman, Escrivá, and Wojtyła are well-known writers, their teaching on sanctification is less well-known. Newman, for example, is widely recognized in various subjects of theology, yet relatively few theological studies exist on his teaching of Christian sanctity.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>18</sup> See Josemaría Escrivá, *Friends of God* (New York: Scepter Publishers, 1981), 93, 120; Josemaría Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By* (New York: Scepter Publishers, 1974), 134–136.

<sup>19</sup> Apostolica Exhortation *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (January 6, 2001), 9. See also *Dominum et Vivificantem* (May 18, 1986), 34 and 52.

<sup>20</sup> *ST II-II*, q. 26, a. 2.

<sup>21</sup> St. John Chrysostom, *Adversus oppugnatores eorum qui ad monasticam vitam inducant*, 1, III, 14 [PG 47, col. 374].

<sup>22</sup> Josemaría Escrivá, *Letters I*, 3, 3 a, January 9, 1932, ed. Luis Cano (Madrid: Ediciones Rialp, 2020), 163.

<sup>23</sup> For instance, it is surprising that Gustave Thils’ important work *Christian Holiness* alludes once only to Newman and makes a few bibliographical references to his works. *Christian Holiness, A Precis of Ascetical Theology* (Tiel: Lanoo Publishers, 1961), 117, 613, 727. For a good presentation of the spiritual and ascetical teaching of Newman see: Ryan J. Marr, *Seeking God with St. John Henry Newman* (Huntington, Indiana: Our Sunday Visitor), 2020.

### 3. John Henry Newman

Newman was raised in a family which subscribed to the Low Anglican Church. As a child his faith and religious practice were grounded on the reading of the Bible. Also at a young age he was influenced by the Calvinist doctrines and religious zeal of Walter Mayers, one of the school masters.

Despite Newman's deep biblical piety inspired by Evangelical teachers, he gradually developed a growing awareness of the value of religious tradition as found in the Anglican Church.<sup>24</sup> He understood that holiness is rooted in a new birth through Baptism,<sup>25</sup> in a life of prayer, and in the exercise of the virtues. A sort of moral strictness in his early Evangelical period later gave way to an emphasis on the action of the Holy Spirit and the life of grace.<sup>26</sup> In the Church Fathers, especially St. Athanasius (c. 296–373), he discovered the idea of *theosis*, or divinization<sup>27</sup> and the action of the Indwelling Spirit in the Church and in each Christian's soul. In a Christmas sermon (1842), Newman echoes the Greek Fathers:

Men we remain, but not mere men, but gifted with a measure of all those perfections which Christ has in fullness, partaking each in his own degree of the His Divine Nature so fully, that the only reason (so to speak) why His saints are not really like Him, is that it is impossible – that He is the Creator, and they his creatures; yet still so, that they are all but Divine, all that they can be made without violating the incommunicable majesty of the Most High.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>24</sup> Cyril O'Regan discusses Newman's opposition to the complex liberal prejudice against the pursuit of holiness, 'John Henry Newman and the Argument of Holiness,' *Newman Studies Journal* 9, no. 1 (Spring 2012): 52–74.

<sup>25</sup> Newman, 'The Indwelling Spirit,' *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (London: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1900–1910) 2: 223.

<sup>26</sup> *Oxford University Sermons* (1843/1871), 3, 'Evangelical Sanctity the Completion of Natural Virtue.' For a study of moral perfection in Newman's sermons see, Keith Beaumont, 'The Spiritual and Doctrinal Significance of Newman's Sermons,' in *A Guide to John Henry Newman: His Life and Thought*, ed. Juan R. Vélez (Washington: The Catholic University of America Press, 2022).

<sup>27</sup> Brian E. Daley, 'Newman and the Alexandrian Tradition: "The Veil of the Letter" and the Person of Christ,' in *Newman and Truth*, ed. Ker I. and Merrigan T. (Louvain: Peeters, 2008), 147–188.

<sup>28</sup> Newman, *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, 8: 253

His later Anglican sermons indicate that he reached a balanced understanding of the interplay between God's grace and human action, and his focus was 'the person of Christ, and his significance for the person in grace'.<sup>29</sup> Brian E. Daley explains how this was key for Newman's understanding of sanctity as participation in God's holiness:

Similarly, it seems mainly from his study of Athanasius that Newman drew his own strong sense of salvation as actual transformation in Christ, as 'divinization', a participation in the holiness and in the very being of God. Although this idea appears as early as Irenaeus, it was Athanasius who first emphasized it clearly as the purpose and result of the Incarnation of the Word.<sup>30</sup>

The future English saint commented on the biblical teaching of God's holiness and man's call to holiness 'without which no one will see the Lord' (Heb 12:14). Newman, in fact, chose this line from the *Letter to the Hebrews* as the opening text for the sermon 'Holiness, Necessary for Future Blessedness' (1826). A few years later, when he published volume one of *Parochial and Plain Sermons* (1834), he placed this as the first sermon in the volume, indicative of the centrality he gave to Christian perfection. In addition to this key notion of Christian life, throughout Newman's sermons, there is a Christological dimension.<sup>31</sup> Drawing from the creeds, revelation and the Church Fathers, his sermons insist on the doctrine of Christ's Incarnation and work of redemption and his fulfillment of the Old Testament.

When writing about the Church in *Prophetical Office of the Church* (1837), he asserted that Christ has made it participate in his threefold office of priest, teacher, and king. In the sermon 'The Christian Ministry' (1834), he affirmed that consecrated ministers also share in Christ's threefold office, not just the prophetic and kingly.<sup>32</sup> In another sermon, 'The Three Offices of Christ' (1840), he noted that the Apostles

<sup>29</sup> Daley, 'Newman and the Alexandrian Tradition,' 168.

<sup>30</sup> Daley, 'Newman and the Alexandrian Tradition,' 166–167.

<sup>31</sup> Jaak Seynaeve indicates three facets of Newman's teaching on sanctity: 1) holiness comes first; 2) his 'teaching on holiness is fully Christological, Christocentric'; and 3) Christian holiness calls for fostering relationships (*cor ad cor loquitur*). 'Holy Scripture as "First Principle" in Newman's Teaching on Christian Holiness,' *Internationale Cardinal-Newman-Studien* 12, Sigmaringendorf (1988): 40–41.

<sup>32</sup> Newman, 'The Christian Ministry,' *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, 2: 25.

shared in Christ's triple office.<sup>35</sup> Newman acknowledged, in the 1877 Preface to the *Prophetical Office*, that the Roman pontiff also takes part in some way in the three *munera*. We are left, however, with the question of the manner of the layperson's assimilation to Christ since, in these texts, participation in the threefold office is specified only for the hierarchy and ordained ministers.

Newman thought of sanctity in terms of the holiness of God, Who is holiness Himself, and Who in the person of Christ asks his disciples to be holy. Newman quoted Christ's words: 'Be ye perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect' (1 Pt 1:16; Mt 5:48) and explained:

His Law is the declaration of His infinite and glorious attributes, and thereby becomes the rule by which all beings imitate, approach, and resemble Him. And when He created them, He provided that it should be to them what it ought to be. God loves holiness, and therefore, as became a good and kind Father, He created all His children holy ... He formed them upon the pattern of the Law; He moulded them into symmetry by means of it. He created man 'in His own image, and after His likeness'; that is, upon the type of the Law. He put His Spirit within him, and set up the Law in his heart; so that, what He is in His infinite nature, such was man, such was Adam in a finite nature, – perfect after his kind.<sup>34</sup>

Thus, holiness refers to a participation or likeness to God in whose image and likeness man was created and a restoration of the image marred by sin. The effect is that the Christian, under the personal influence of Christ, becomes a living witness to others.<sup>35</sup>

Newman considered the beauty of God's being and attributes and was captivated by the expression the 'beauty of holiness' found in the King James version of the Bible (Ps 96:9),<sup>36</sup> and he sometimes used it to express a quality of worship.<sup>37</sup> He used this expression as early as 1825 in an Address to the Church Missionary Meeting.<sup>38</sup> He found

<sup>35</sup> Newman, 'The Three Offices of Christ,' *Sermons on Subjects of the Day* (1843/1869), 62.

<sup>34</sup> Newman, 'The Law of the Spirit,' *Parochial and Plain Sermons*, 5: 145–146. Beaumont, 'The Doctrinal and Spiritual Significance of Newman's Sermons.'

<sup>35</sup> Newman, 'Personal Influence, the Means of Propagating the Gospel,' *Oxford University Sermons*, 5: 96.

<sup>36</sup> 'O worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness: fear before him, all the earth.' Ps 96:9 [KJV].

<sup>37</sup> *LD* ix, 616.

<sup>38</sup> Guy Nicholls, *Unearthly Beauty*, 18.

examples of sanctity of life in the Anglican Church<sup>39</sup> and later in the lives of Roman Catholic saints, especially the Jesuits.<sup>40</sup>

In his novels<sup>41</sup> and personal meditations, Newman employed the adjective ‘beautiful’ to refer to the person of Christ.<sup>42</sup>

Newman slowly realized the necessary role of the other sacraments in addition to Baptism. As an Anglican clergyman, he began to read daily prayers in the parish church and to hold a weekly communion service – which was very uncommon for Anglicans of the time. When he became a Roman Catholic, daily Mass and frequent confession became central to his religious life. In a Catholic sermon of 1849, ‘Saintliness the Standard of Christian Principle’, Newman comments on the great variety found in the lives of saints, yet in all ‘grace overcomes nature’<sup>43</sup> and their lives ‘show to the multitude what God can do, and what man can be’.<sup>44</sup>

Perfection for Newman, however, does not imply sinlessness and absence of human idiosyncrasies. In a letter to a religious sister, Augusta Theodosia Drane, who had written a biography of her foundress, Mary Margaret Hallahan (1803–1868), Newman praises the boldness of the biographer who:

has had faith enough in the substantial sanctity and perfection of the dear Mother whom she has lost, to be sure that that Mother would lose nothing by having every one of her characteristics brought into light, and that Almighty God does not need our managements and artifices, our observance of mawkish proprieties and tenderness towards weak sandalizabilities (sic), in order to set off duly the creations of His grace.<sup>45</sup>

He continues by explaining that she has placed before the reader ‘something *real*’ avoiding the common practice of ‘cutting up a Saint into virtues and of distributing him into pigeon holes, which serves to

---

<sup>39</sup> For example, after the death of his Anglican friend, Samuel Wood, Newman remarked to another friend that the deceased was one of the most excellent men that he knew, a man of interior life, and that Christians should ‘try to cultivate personal holiness.’ *LD* ix, 335. Letter to Maria Giberne, May 11, 1843.

<sup>40</sup> *LD* ix, 305. Diary entry, April 12, 1842.

<sup>41</sup> Newman, *Loss and Gain* (1848) and *Callista, A Tale of the Third Century* (1855).

<sup>42</sup> Newman, *Meditations and Devotions* (1893), 342.

<sup>43</sup> Newman, *Discourses to Mixed Congregations* (1849), n. 5, 98.

<sup>44</sup> Newman, *Mixed Congregations*, n. 5, 99–100.

<sup>45</sup> *LD* xxiv, 262. Letter to Augusta Theodosia Drane, May 29, 1862. Mary Margaret Hallahan was the foundress of an Order of Dominican nuns.

destroy the special value of biography over didactic composition, and without intending it, goes far to deny to Holy Church her prerogative of being “circumcudate varietate”.<sup>46</sup>

Newman points beyond the hierarchy and sacraments for signs of the Church’s sanctity. For him, the internal signs of holiness in the Church were more convincing than the external notes. And he found those in individuals. Frequently, he addresses the subject of faith, obedience of faith, and earnestness, which form the substance of personal sanctity. Still, in his sermons, he deals more with holiness in the Church and the action of the Holy Spirit within the Church as the source of that holiness.<sup>47</sup> Addressing the theological nature of the Church and its holiness, Newman developed, like Johann Möhler (1796–1838), a pneumatological ecclesiology established on Christological grounds.

The study of history led Newman to admire the accomplishments of the Benedictines and their school of sanctification.<sup>48</sup> He thought that St. Benedict (480–547), St. Dominic (1170–1221), and St. Ignatius (1491–1556), respectively, represented the great teachers of the Ancient, Medieval, and Modern times; where Benedict was a type of Poetry, Dominic of Reason, and Ignatius of Practical Government or Prudence.<sup>49</sup> While praising these models, he chose a fourth type of school, so to speak, that of St. Philip Neri (1515–1595), which was holiness in the world, and he took the Apostle of Rome as his patron. Following Neri, Newman held that ‘the Congregation of the Oratory ... is a community of secular priests, living together without vows, for the fulfillment of their ministry, under a rule and with privileges given them by the Holy See’.<sup>50</sup> Neither Neri or Newman intended to found a new religious body with its members under religious vows or the counsels which correspond to these.<sup>51</sup>

<sup>46</sup> *LD* xxiv, 262. The words ‘circumcudate varietate’ taken from Ps 45, are translated: ‘In many-colored robes she is led to the king’ Ps 45:11 (KJV).

<sup>47</sup> Miguel de Salis Amaral and John Nepil, ‘John Henry Newman’s Personal View of the Holiness of the Church: Some Useful Insights for our Times,’ *Newman Studies Journal* 17, no. 2 (Winter 2020): 81–94.

<sup>48</sup> Newman praised the monastic life as a special calling, but not obligatory for all Christians. See Greg Peters, ‘John Henry Newman’s Theology of the Monastic/Religious Life as a Means to Holiness,’ *Newman Studies Journal* 10, no. 2 (Fall 2013): 7–17, 17.

<sup>49</sup> *HS*, ii, 369–370.

<sup>50</sup> Newman’s Oratory Papers, 25 (August 18, 1856), in *Newman the Oratorian*, ed. Placid Murray (Leominster, England: Gracewing, 2004), 314.

<sup>51</sup> Newman thought that all Christians need to observe the evangelical counsels but ‘there are many Counsels, and not *all* are necessary for perfection, but the observance of

In 1856, the founder of the English Oratory told his brothers that they were secular priests and clerks (sic). They were not regular priests (regulars) and aimed at a different type of perfection: 'We are neither religious, nor have the perfection proper to religious.'<sup>52</sup> Monks, he explained, unlike Oratorians, renounce pursuits and studies, which they had done before entering a monastery.<sup>53</sup> Newman sought a perfection in ordinary life instead of within the religious life, and he explained that perfection in terms of the fulfillment of ordinary duties accomplished with love.<sup>54</sup> 'It is a life of faith, hope and charity, elicited in successive acts according to the calls of the moment and to the vocation of the individual. It does not consist in any specially (sic) heroic deeds.'<sup>55</sup> He thus qualified that perfection does not mean doing any extraordinary service or special heroic deeds but in completing tasks and doing them without flaws. He offered a simple yet telling description of these ordinary duties, which included going to bed and waking up on time.<sup>56</sup>

#### 4. Josemaría Escrivá

Escrivá, a native of the northern province of Aragon in Spain, was born into a Catholic family and grew up under the reforms of Pius X, and the influence of the Council of Trent and its catechism. Soon after a deep religious experience at the age of fifteen he entered the seminary. There he studied the doctrine of St. Thomas Aquinas and throughout his life he returned to texts of Aquinas along with the writings of the Church Fathers. As previously noted, he especially liked the writings of St. John Chrysostom; this saint's practical application of truths to Christian life resonated strongly with Escrivá's appreciation for holiness in ordinary life, as exemplified in the lives of many early Christians. He

---

*one or other*; and as counsels are very different from each other in themselves, and still more in the mode of fulfilling them there will be very different modes of pursuing and practicing perfection, and men may be all going on to perfection, though they look very different from each other', Oratory Paper, n. 25, 317.

<sup>52</sup> Oratory Paper, n. 25, 315.

<sup>53</sup> Oratory Paper, n. 25, 323. He gave the example of Cesar Baronius (1538–1607), who upon the insistence of St. Philip, wrote a history of the Church, *Annales Ecclesiastici*. Many others wrote on history, antiquities and topography. Newman also spoke of the pursuit of fine arts and music by members of the Oratory.

<sup>54</sup> Oratory Papers, n. 28, 360.

<sup>55</sup> Oratory Paper, n. 25, 316.

<sup>56</sup> *Newman the Oratorian*, 360.



knew well the writings of St. Theresa of Avila and the Spanish classics in spirituality and literature and had devotion to St. Thérèse of the Child Jesus (1873–1897), whose *Story of a Soul* he read with great interest.

In 1928, while on a spiritual retreat in Madrid as a young priest, he received from God an intellectual vision of Opus Dei with the mission to spread the universal call to holiness and to apostolate. From that moment on, the goal of his entire life became that of striving for holiness, and teaching others to do likewise. The call to holiness was specified further by another divine locution which took place in October 1931 when Fr. Josemaría had a transforming spiritual experience of his divine filiation.<sup>57</sup>

In comparison with Newman, we could say that whereas Newman emphasized God as Creator without neglecting God as Savior and Sanctifier, Escrivá privileged the awareness of God's Fatherhood. He frequently taught Christians to meditate on Jesus' revelation of the Father, and to apply to themselves the words of Psalm 2: 'Tu es filius meus ...' Both Newman and Escrivá speak of God's providence as a manifestation of His Fatherhood, but Escrivá lays the accent precisely on God's Fatherhood. He insists, as St. Thérèse of Lisieux had done in the generation before him, that we are children – little children – before our Heavenly Father.

Through these authors, we see a sort of progression or development in the Christian understanding of holiness. We are small children, brothers and sisters, before God in Christ. Furthermore, the Holy Spirit makes the Christian another *Christ*, and thus he becomes a son in the Son,<sup>58</sup> and is therefore introduced into the life of the Trinity. Escrivá often used the terms '*alter Christus*' (another Christ) and '*ipse Christus*' (Christ himself) to refer to the spiritual and sacramental configuration and identification with Christ.<sup>59</sup>

Escrivá, like Newman, underlines the Christological and pneumatological underpinning of Christian life. The foundation for his teaching

<sup>57</sup> Andres Vasquez de Prada, *The Founder of Opus Dei*, vol. 1 (New York: Scepter Publishers, 2001), 332–338, 'The Early Years'.

<sup>58</sup> E. Mersch wrote about our filiation through the Son of God. (Filii in Filio, *Rev. Theol.*, 1938, 700. See G. Thiils, *Christian Holiness*, 85–87.)

<sup>59</sup> St. Augustine had spoken of *Christianus alter Christus*, but the source of St. Josemaría's use of the term is not clear. See Ernest Burkhardt and Javier López, *Ordinary Life and Holiness in the Teaching of St. Josemaría, A Study in Spiritual Theology*, vol. 2 (New York: Scepter Publishers, 2017), 62. Burkhardt and Lopez study this identification with Christ under the theological concept of participation, 2, 78–84.

on holiness is the indwelling of the Trinity in the soul, along with the action of the Holy Spirit. There are three characteristic elements in his doctrine: 1) divine filiation,<sup>60</sup> and identification with Christ, 2) a spirit of freedom and practice of the virtues, and 3) sanctification of everyday work.

Divine filiation, frequently mentioned in his writings, is a loving awareness of being a son of God which is distinct from the knowledge of this truth. It becomes the foundation for the Christian life. It is the way that a Christian experiences his or her faith and responds to Christ's invitation to be perfect (Mt 5:18). Escrivá frequently mentions other biblical texts in his preaching to teach about holiness and God's will for man's sanctification, especially Ephesians 1:4–5 and 1 Thessalonians 4:3.<sup>61</sup> Man's vocation to holiness is precisely as adopted children, as St. Paul taught when he wrote that God 'destined us in love to be his sons through Jesus Christ' (Eph 1:5).

For this Spanish saint, every Christian is grafted unto Christ in Baptism and thereby made to share in his priesthood. Through this and the other sacraments and by means of his prayer and work, he grows in identification with Christ, becoming in some way *ipse Christus*.<sup>62</sup> Every Christian, not just the ministerial priest, must be configured to Christ, even though a ministerial priest is consecrated through the sacrament of Orders. He taught lay persons that they should exercise the 'priestly soul' which they have by virtue of their union with Christ in Baptism. This doctrine is found in his preaching:

A Christian knows that he is grafted onto Christ through baptism. He is empowered to fight for Christ through confirmation, called to act in the world sharing the royal, prophetic and priestly role of Christ. He has become one and the same thing with Christ through the Eucharist, the sacrament of unity and love. And so, like Christ, he has to live for other men, loving each and everyone around him and indeed all humanity.<sup>63</sup>

---

<sup>60</sup> José Luis Illanes notes the novelty of Escrivá's spirituality in contrast to the preceding ones of mystical union. Instead of following the paradigm of the spousal relation it follows that of the father-son relation. *Tratado de Teología Espiritual* (Pamplona: Eunsa, 2007), 574–575.

<sup>61</sup> *Diccionario de San Josemaría Escrivá de Balaguer*, ed. José Luis Illanes (Burgos: Monte Carmelo, 2013), See Enrique Molina, 'Santidad,' 1113–1123, and Vicente Bosch, 'Santidad, Llamada Universal a la,' 1123–1126.

<sup>62</sup> Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 120.

<sup>63</sup> Escrivá, *Christ is Passing By*, 106.

Escrivá thus points out the role of the laity as mediators, subordinate to Christ's mediation as king, prophet and priest. He teaches that the laity too are destined to be ambassadors for Christ, salt and light of the earth and missionaries – without necessarily calling themselves missionaries.

Escrivá's spiritual theology is deeply Trinitarian. The mysteries of divine filiation and incorporation in Christ are realized by the Holy Spirit through the sacraments and prayer. Already as a young priest, Escrivá practiced a strong devotion to the Holy Spirit which he passed on to his spiritual sons and daughters. In a homily for the feast of Pentecost (1969), titled 'the Great Unknown' he writes:

The action of the Holy Spirit can pass unnoticed, because God does not reveal to us his plans, and because man's sin clouds over the divine gifts. But faith reminds us that God is always acting. He has created us and maintains us in existence and he leads all creation by his grace toward the glorious freedom of the children of God.<sup>64</sup>

In this homily, he explained that 'docility' sums up the necessary attitude of the Christian to the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. Here and throughout his priestly life, he encouraged persons to pray to the Sanctifier and to be docile to his inspirations.

In addition to his teaching on divine filiation, another distinctive though not unique element of his spiritual theology is an emphasis on meditation of Christ's life as it is found in the Gospel. He invites the reader to see and to listen to Christ in the Gospel scenes. Escrivá's writings are scriptural meditations leading to discipleship and friendship with Christ. In comparison, Newman's analysis of the Scriptures is no less deep and encompassing, but his analysis moves more along theological lines rather than an experiential encounter with Jesus.

An underlying theme stressed by Escrivá was the spirit of freedom by which men and women serve God. Freedom is primarily the capacity to love God and to choose the means to accomplish this. He emphasized this meaning of freedom rooted in divine filiation, a correct understanding of natural law and the moral conscience, as well as the Magisterium, which are frequent points of reference for his teaching. Unlike the earlier spiritualities that emphasized the evangelical

---

<sup>64</sup> Escrivá, 'The Great Unknown' in *Christ is Passing By*, 130.

counsels – especially poverty, obedience and chastity – he drew more attention to the three theological virtues and insisted on practicing all the virtues well.

Another very significant development in the spiritual theology of St. Josemaría Escrivá is his theology of the ‘sanctification of work’. For him, work and ordinary life become an integral part of holiness, and the Christian should try to carry out the ordinary in an extraordinary way, that is, with love for God and neighbor.<sup>65</sup> The founder of Opus Dei repeats the terms ‘sanctification of work’ countless times in his writing and preaching and explained:

Those who want to live their Faith perfectly and to do apostolate according to the spirit of Opus Dei, must sanctify themselves with their work, must sanctify their work and sanctify others through their work. It is while they work alongside their equals, their fellow working men from whom they are in no way different, that they strive to identify themselves with Christ, imitating His thirty years in the workshop in Nazareth.<sup>66</sup>

As would be expected, Newman too, in line with other great saints beginning with St. Benedict, St. Philip Neri, St. Francis de Sales and St. Ignatius, had acknowledged the reality of work for God’s glory and the service of men. This was specified in an Anglican sermon: ‘Doing Glory to God in Pursuits of the World.’ Escrivá, however, goes further than Newman, teaching that the sanctification of work is the ordinary path of holiness for men and women. Most people usually live in the midst of the occupations of the world; that is there where they are called to live holy lives, and that is the reality which they must make holy. Escrivá spoke of work as the raw material of their holiness, the materializing of the spiritual life, a notion which finds its correlation in

---

<sup>65</sup> Then Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger commented in 2002, that Escrivá corrected the erroneous understanding of heroic virtue as reserved for exceptional people. ‘This is an erroneous concept of holiness, a wrong perception which has been corrected – and this seems to me to be the main point – by Josemaría Escrivá,’ *L’Osservatore Romano* (English Edition), 41–49, October 2002.

<sup>66</sup> Escrivá, ‘Opus Dei: An Association which fosters the search for holiness in the World,’ in *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá* (New York: Scepter Publishers, 1993), 70.

the Incarnation.<sup>67</sup> He was inspired by the thought of the early Christians and fittingly quotes the *Letter to Diognetus* in his writings.<sup>68</sup>

Escrivá's doctrine on the sanctification of ordinary life is found in many different texts and summarized in the homily 'Passionately Loving the World'.<sup>69</sup> This evangelical teaching would be proclaimed later in *Lumen Gentium* and in other Vatican II documents.

Like Newman before him, Escrivá did a great deal to foster the study of the faith and formation of character in university students. He established student residences – more precisely *colegios mayores* ('college halls') along the same lines. Escrivá was concerned with the religious practices and the spiritual and moral difficulties faced by students and made it a point to offer them the necessary sacramental and spiritual care. He told students that they could be 'modern day saints' and that '... an hour of study, for a modern apostle, is an hour of prayer'.<sup>70</sup>

## 5. Karol J. Wojtyła

This intellectually gifted young Pole received the early spiritual and religious formation from his parents and from a layman, Jan Tyranowski (1901–1947), who, steeped in a Carmelite spirituality, promoted the practice of the living rosary. After the early death of his mother, Wojtyła, at the age of nine, embraced a deep spiritual trust in Mary's maternity, which would mark his entire life. In his formative years, the teaching of the Spanish mystic St. John of the Cross – the abandonment of the dark night – also had a noticeable impact on Wojtyła's spiritual life.<sup>71</sup> The mystery of suffering and the Cross, Carmelite spirituality, and later devotion to Divine Mercy shaped his spirituality.

Wojtyła pursued a serious philosophical formation at the Catholic University of Lublin, where he developed, within a personalist perspective, a Christian anthropology and sexual ethics that resulted in his works *Love and Responsibility* and *The Acting Person* (composed

<sup>67</sup> Escrivá, 'Passionately Loving the World' in *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá*, 113–123.

<sup>68</sup> Escrivá, 'Singuli Die' (1933–1966) in *Letters*, I, 4, 16.

<sup>69</sup> *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá*, 113–123. For mention of the redemptive dimension of work, see Escrivá, *Forge* (New York: Scepter Publishers), 1987, n. 702.

<sup>70</sup> Escrivá, *The Way* (New York: Scepter Publishers) 1954, n. 335.

<sup>71</sup> George Weigel, *Witness to Hope* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999), 61.

during Vatican II)<sup>72</sup> and afterwards his catechesis on human love (*Theology of the Body*). These texts outline man's initial vocation, original fall, and subsequent redemption and the gift of grace, as well as the need for each person to make the gift of self to others and live in a communion of persons.

As a young parish priest in Poland, he worked extensively with young people, opening up for them horizons of Christian sanctity and cultural engagement with Marxist atheism and secularism. He did this by means of study groups and on vacations in the mountains and lakes of Poland.<sup>73</sup> Throughout his life, he continued to challenge young men and women to respond to the demands of the Gospel and to strive to live holy lives, and as pope, he did this by means of World Youth Days. In his *Letter to the Youth*, he invited them to find meaning in their lives by following Christ: 'Your youth opens different prospects before you; it offers you as a task the plan for the whole of your lives. Hence the question about values; hence the question about the meaning of life, about truth, about good and evil.'<sup>74</sup>

The experience of communism gave John Paul II a direct and profound understanding of the evil of practical and theoretical atheism. He dedicated various encyclicals to teach a correct vision of material realities, work and justice.<sup>75</sup> For him, work is God's plan for man and through work man develops as a person and manifests his dignity.<sup>76</sup>

In *Novum Millenio Ineunte*, the pope urged Catholics to see holiness, both personal and ecclesial, as the goal to be sought, highlighting the universal call to holiness taught by Vatican II. As the Council itself explained, this ideal of perfection must not be misunderstood as if it involved some kind of extraordinary existence, possible only for a few 'uncommon heroes' of holiness. 'The ways of holiness are many,

---

<sup>72</sup> In part 2 of the *Acting Person*, Wojtyła develops the notion of transcendence. He describes the person's self-possession closely linked to self-governance and self-determination.

<sup>73</sup> Weigel, *Witness to Hope*. See in particular, 'Srodowisko,' 98–102, and 'The Gospel in Kayaks,' 102–105.

<sup>74</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Dilecti Amici* (March 31, 1985), 4.

<sup>75</sup> John Paul II, Encyclical Letters *Laborem et Exercens* (September 14, 1981), *Solicitudo Rei Socialis* (December 30, 1987), and *Centesimus Annus* (September 1, 1991).

<sup>76</sup> Wojtyła held that man exercises his free will in such a way as to constitute himself through his acts and work according to what his intellect values as good. See John J. Coughlin, 'Pope John Paul II and the Dignity of the Human Being,' 27 *Harv. J. L. & Pub. Pol'y* 65 (2003–2004), 66–67. Available at: [https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/law\\_faculty\\_scholarship/494](https://scholarship.law.nd.edu/law_faculty_scholarship/494).

according to the vocation of each individual. I thank the Lord that in these years he has enabled me to beatify and canonize a large number of Christians, and among them many lay people who attained holiness in the most ordinary circumstances of life.<sup>77</sup>

In the same text, he proposed ‘this high standard of ordinary Christian living’ as the program for the new millennium of the Church and made it clear that this would require a genuine ‘training in holiness’, through daily prayer, a eucharistic spirituality and the practice of charity. This programmatic text was developed further by two documents, *Ecclesia de Eucharistia* and *Rosarium Virginiae Mariae*, which offer a picture of John Paul II’s doctrine of sanctity in the key of a eucharistic and Marian spirituality.<sup>78</sup>

The pope’s appreciation for Christian perfection in the ordinary lives of men and women prompted him to recognize many as models of holiness for the Church.<sup>79</sup> It is no surprise that he praised the contributions of Newman and Escrivá. He named the English saint venerable and mentioned him in the encyclical *Fides et ratio* as an example of one who had formulated well the relation between reason and faith. He beatified and later also canonized the Spanish founder whom he called the ‘saint of the ordinary’ and whose teaching on sanctification of work he shared.

John Paul II did not write in a systematic way on a theology of holiness, and there are few studies on this subject in his works.<sup>80</sup> However, his writing and teaching on Christian life, at various periods of his own life, present a theological anthropology which is the foundation for his understanding of holiness: 1) man created in the image and likeness of God, and Christ, Redeemer of Man, and 2) a Trinitarian and Christological theology of the ‘gift of self’. The pope’s Christocentric anthropology is summarized in articles 22 and 24 of *Gaudium et Spes* and in his first encyclical letter *Redemptoris Hominis*.<sup>81</sup> Commenting on what was

<sup>77</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Novo Millennio Ineunte* (January 6, 2001), 31.

<sup>78</sup> John Thavis, ‘John Paul II’s spiritual journey,’ *The Arlington Catholic Herald*, last modified May 19, 2011, [https://www.catholicaherald.com/news/local\\_news/john\\_paul\\_ii\\_s\\_spiritual\\_journey](https://www.catholicaherald.com/news/local_news/john_paul_ii_s_spiritual_journey).

<sup>79</sup> Between 1978–2004, among the 450 men and women canonized, 250 of these were laypersons. Philip Zaleski, ‘The Saints of John Paul II,’ *First Things* 16 (March 2006): 28–32.

<sup>80</sup> Danielle M. Peters concurs with this view in her book, *Ecce Educatrix Tua, The Role of the Virgin Mary for the Pedagogy of Holiness in the Thought of John Paul II and Joseph Kentenich* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2009), 2, 102.

<sup>81</sup> Peters, *Ecce Educatrix Tua*, 67–68.

for him a paradigmatic council text (*GS*, 24), he offers a description of holiness in another memorable passage, *Mulieris Dignitatem*:

Being a person means striving towards self-realization (the Council text speaks of self-discovery), which can only be achieved ‘*through a sincere gift of self*’. The model for this interpretation of the person is God himself as Trinity, as a communion of Persons. To say that man is created in the image and likeness of God means that man is called to exist ‘for’ others, to become a gift.<sup>82</sup>

In the same text, the pope explains how God’s self-revelation as a communion of persons serves as the model for man’s gift of self. His Trinitarian theology, in the three-year catechesis preceding the start of the new millennium, expounds on the Church’s teaching on the three Divine Persons and the communion of persons.<sup>83</sup> This rich catechesis offers a foundation for Christian holiness, which revolves on filiation and identification with Christ and the Spirit as Person-Gift.

Other important elements in his theology of holiness<sup>84</sup> include: 1) spiritual abandonment in God through a life of faith, 2) sacramental life, 3) contemplative prayer, rooted in meditation of the mystery of Christ in the Scriptures, 4) a Marian spirituality, 5) sanctification of suffering and the Cross, and 6) the spirituality of Divine Mercy.

Like the two other saints, Pope John Paul II stressed the importance of faith and the practice of daily meditation of the Scriptures. Like Escrivá, he lived a filial abandonment to God and a deep Marian spirituality and advanced a theology of work, contributing his own personalistic and ethical insights and highlighting the demands of justice for workers.

---

<sup>82</sup> John Paul II, Apostolic Letter *Mulieris Dignitatem* (August 15, 1988), 7.

<sup>83</sup> Peters, ‘John Paul II’s Theology of Holiness,’ in *Ecce Educatrix Tua*, 101–125.

<sup>84</sup> For an insightful article, see Magda Bušková, ‘Conversion As The Path To The Recovery Of Humanity In The Context of St John Paul II’s Theology of Holiness,’ *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Theologica* 11, no. 1 (2021): 109–128. Bušková studies John Paul II’s thought on holiness, presenting it as a ‘theology of holiness’ (110–11, 116, 126) and a development of the Christocentric teaching found in Vatican II (115). She highlights the notion of sanctity as union with Christ, which John Paul II developed in his encyclical *Redemptoris Hominis* (116), and his other Trinitarian encyclicals. This process of constant inner conversion begins at Baptism (116), and is strengthened in the Sacraments of Penance and the Holy Eucharist (118).



Thus, for the three saints here studied, holiness is based on the indwelling of the Trinity with an emphasis on divine filiation (Escrivá) and identification with Christ (Escrivá and Wojtyła) lived out through prayer, sacramental life, and practice of all the virtues, especially the theological virtues. It is realized in the everyday ordinary lives of Christians. A high degree of contemplative prayer and mystical union with Christ is not a requirement or characteristic element of holiness. For instance, Newman, who consigned to writing all of his personal experiences and thoughts, offers very little, if anything, to suggest that he had contemplative prayer as described by St. Theresa of Avila.<sup>85</sup> Escrivá referred to the prayer of ordinary men and women such as a milkman or a poor handicapped woman who knew nothing of spiritual theology but were clearly closely united to God. For his part, Wojtyła was inspired by the life of Jan Tyranowski, a simple tailor in Krakow who had a deep life of prayer. God communicates his grace and gifts, ultimately holiness, to his children in countless ways, and even though prayer is a fundamental one, the daily life and prayer of most Christians is very different from that of monks and members of religious orders.

This model and approach to holiness speaks to everyone, not just consecrated religious or priests. It contrasts with the older model, which does not correspond well to the lives of married Christians, youth, martyrs, or secular priests, few of whom practiced contemplation in the traditional sense or, with the exception of some, took vows. These three writers, therefore, do not focus on the vows as the means of Christian perfection. They understand and show appreciation for the vocation of consecrated religious men and women. Yet, for them, the will of God can be lived out by the majority of Christians at work and through relationships in the world without the mediation of vows. By means of the acts of all the virtues, the faithful, laypersons, and secular priests can be conformed to Christ by the grace and gifts of the Holy Spirit and live charity to a high degree. Furthermore, these three saints have in common that they highlighted the laity's contributions to the Church, the subject briefly considered below.

---

<sup>85</sup> A reading of Newman's *Letters and Diaries* leads to same conclusion as Fr. Zeno in his biography: *John Henry Newman, His Inner Life* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 1987), 274–276.

## 6. Laity in the Church

Newman was a pioneer in defending the indispensable contribution of the laity in society and the Church. His emphasis was on their contributions in civil professions and university life. He taught the laity that they have a mission as Christians. By means of their religious formation – including some study of theology – he encouraged men and women to contribute to political and cultural life, government and education.<sup>86</sup> In his *On Consulting the Faithful in Matters of Doctrine* (1859–1860) Newman articulated the concept of the *sensum fidelium* by which the faithful, made up primarily by laity, act *per modum unius* in the Church, bearing witness in the liturgy and customs to the Apostolical Tradition.<sup>87</sup>

The founder of Opus Dei understood the vast contribution the laity make to the Church, considered as the Mystical Body of Christ. He focused on their contribution to the life of the Church as professionals and tradesmen in the secular world rather than to the Church's institutional and teaching dimension as directors of diocesan offices, theology professors, or ecclesiastical judges, without disregarding that for some this constitutes their specific way of serving the Church.

Lay people have their own way of contributing to the holiness and apostolate of the Church. They do so by their free and responsible action within the temporal sphere, to which they bring the leaven of Christianity. Giving Christian witness in their everyday lives, spreading the word which enlightens in the name of God, acting responsibly in the service of others and thus contributing to the solution of common problems: these are some ways in which ordinary Christians fulfil their divine mission.<sup>88</sup>

Karol Wojtyła, as a priest, archbishop, and later pope, worked untiringly to promote the laity's full participation in the evangelizing mission of the Church. As pope, he explained the laity's participation in

---

<sup>86</sup> This subject is examined in more detail in 'Newman's Farsighted Understanding of the Laity's Role in the Church' in *A Guide to John Henry Newman: his Life and Thought*.

<sup>87</sup> Juan R. Vélez, Synods in Newman's ecclesiology and in the twenty first century. *The Downside Review* 141, n. 2 (2023).

<sup>88</sup> Escrivá, 'Opus Dei: An Association which fosters the search for holiness in the World,' in *Conversations with Monsignor Escrivá*, 59.

Christ's threefold mission: priestly, prophetic, and kingly, especially in the encyclical letter *Redemptor hominis*.<sup>89</sup> He pointed out that, among these three, the kingly dimension, by which they order creation through their work and cooperation in its redemption, makes their secular character stand out: 'The lay faithful's position in the Church ... comes to be fundamentally defined by their newness in Christian life and distinguished by their secular character.'<sup>90</sup>

Although the lay faithful take part in the priesthood and prophetic office of Christ, it is the secular, or kingly office that is specific to them.<sup>91</sup> With reference to the Council's description of the Christian vocation as a share in Christ's kingly mission, the pope wrote: 'This dignity is expressed in readiness to serve, in keeping with the example of Christ, who "came not to be served but to serve". If, in the light of this attitude of Christ's, "being a king" is truly possible only by "being a servant" then "being a servant" also demands so much spiritual maturity that it must really be described as "being a king".'<sup>92</sup>

Two decades earlier, the Constitution *Lumen Gentium* had expounded on this teaching when defining the laity as:

all the faithful except those in holy orders and those in the state of religious life specially approved by the Church. These faithful are by baptism made one body with Christ and are constituted among the People of God; they are in their own way made sharers in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly functions of Christ; and they carry out for their own part the mission of the whole Christian people in the Church and in the world.<sup>93</sup>

The Fathers of Vatican II further specified that '[w]hat specifically characterizes the laity is their secular nature.'<sup>94</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Encyclical *Redemptor Hominis*, (March 4, 1979), 13–14, 16, 18 and 21. In the same encyclical, art. 20 refers to the Christian's sharing in Christ office of priest.

<sup>90</sup> *Christifidelis Laici*, 15. See also the encyclical *Veritatis Splendor*, (August 6, 1993), 107.

<sup>91</sup> Josef Clemens, 'The Vocation and Mission of the lay faithful in the light of the Post Synodal Apostolic Exhortation *Christifideles Laici*,' accessed September 18, 2022, <http://laici.va>.

<sup>92</sup> *Redemptoris Hominis*, 21.

<sup>93</sup> Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, (November 21, 1964), 31.

<sup>94</sup> *Lumen Gentium*, 31.

## Conclusion

For Newman, Escrivá, and Wojtyła, ‘Christian holiness’ is a key category for theology and in the moral and spiritual life which is not exclusively or primarily centered on the exercise of religious vows in the state of perfection or tied to a high degree of contemplative prayer. These authors offer insights for dogmatic and spiritual theology and widen our understanding of holiness.<sup>95</sup> Their work can contribute to the elaboration of a theology of holiness, which for centuries has revolved around spiritual counsels and religious vows. Drawing from their own meditation of the Scriptures and the writings of the Church Fathers, they understood sanctification as the work of the Holy Spirit acting on the faculties of the believer through the sacramental and ascetical life. Divine filiation and christian holiness grows through identification with Christ by means of the virtues, especially the theological virtues and gifts of the Holy Spirit, which perfect the person conforming him to Christ.

As pastors, these three saints taught lay persons to aspire to Christian holiness. Through their example and preaching, they also emphasized in a new way the role of the theological and moral virtues in living Christian perfection in everyday life.

Newman reaffirmed the concept of *sensus fidelium* exercised by the faithful, noting its importance for the life of the Church. For his part, Escrivá shed new light on the universal call to holiness<sup>96</sup> through sanctification of professional work and stressed the royal priesthood of the faithful, exercised through prayer and sacrifice united to the eucharistic sacrifice. Wojtyła, whose teaching was in agreement with those of the former, highlighted and developed the Christocentric teaching of Vatican II in relation to Christian life and holiness.

Both Escrivá and Wojtyła (as Pope John Paul II) applied the theological notion of the *tria munera Christi* to the laity’s participation in Christ’s kingly office and sanctification of the world. They emphasized the imitation of Christ for whom ‘to reign is to serve’ (*LG*, 36).<sup>97</sup> For

---

<sup>95</sup> For mention of Yves M. Congar, Romano Guardini, Alvaro del Portillo, José Luis Illanes, Pedro Rodriguez, see ‘Farsighted Vision of the Laity’s Role in the Church,’ in *A Guide to John Henry Newman: His Life and Thought*.

<sup>96</sup> Benedict XVI, Exhortation *Verbum Domini*, (September 30, 2010), 48.

<sup>97</sup> John Paul II also applies this to the Virgin Mary. See John Paul II, *Mulieris Dignitatem*, (June 29, 1995), 10.

both, this function is exercised primarily, although not exclusively, through their action in the world rather than in the governance of the Church or its prophetic mission.

The intuitions and contributions of these authors require a systematic theological treatment that includes further study on the sanctification of ordinary work and that addresses different questions, such as how the ontological configuration to Christ takes place and how the ontological distinction between the Creator and creatures is preserved.

*Independent scholar  
4415 SW 88th Ave  
Miami, FL 33165  
United States of America  
E-mail: jrv98@gmail.com*



---

## LE SOPHISME DE LA BEAUTE CHEZ GREGOIRE DE NYSSE

---

LENKA FÍLOVÁ

---

### ABSTRACT

#### The Deceptiveness of Beauty in Gregory of Nyssa

In my article, I will discuss Gregory's view of beauty from a theological-anthropological perspective, focusing on why beauty is deceptive and where the limits and boundaries lie between beauty as a theological category and beauty that becomes an idol and does not lead to God. The key question will be how beauty, whose source is God – the essential beauty – can be deceptive. I want to emphasise that although Gregory sometimes speaks about the deceptiveness of beauty, the ambiguity lies not in the beauty itself but in the ability or inability of the human being to discern the beautiful. Here I draw on the foundation of Gregory's anthropology, namely the creation of human beings in the image and likeness of God. I will further analyse Gregory's concept of the knowledge of beauty and its relationship to desire and passion in Gregory. I will conclude by reflecting on the moment when beauty becomes an idol that leads people away from the path of knowledge of the truly beautiful.

#### Keywords

Beauty; Image of God; Beauty of person; Deceptiveness of beauty; Idol

DOI: 10.14712/23363398.2023.19

**L**Le concept de la beauté chez Grégoire dérive de la perception de Dieu comme beauté essentielle : « Mais tout le monde est d'accord pour dire que la divinité est la Beauté essentielle<sup>1</sup>. » La beauté

---

<sup>1</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *La Vie de Moïse* (Paris : Les Éditions du Cerf, 2000), II. 1 (SCh 1, 237).

de Dieu est la cause de la beauté de l'être humain et se reflète dans la beauté de la création. Elle éveille le désir de l'être humain, et dans le même temps amène ce dernier à la connaissance de la beauté et à la participation à celle-ci. Cette participation à la beauté de Dieu transforme l'être humain, tout en approfondissant sa connaissance de la beauté de Dieu et en le rendant lui-même beau.

Le concept de la beauté tel qu'il est théorisé par Grégoire relie profondément l'être humain à Dieu et inspire de nombreux auteurs à travers l'histoire. Ainsi, dans la Byzance tardive, Denys l'Aréopagite, Maxime le Confesseur ou bien Syméon le Nouveau Théologien développent une dimension mystico-spirituelle à partir du concept de Grégoire. Directement ou à travers cette tradition spirituelle, ses idées trouvent donc un écho dans la pensée religieuse russe de la fin du XIXe et du début du XXe siècle<sup>2</sup>. Je perçois notamment cette influence dans la vision de la beauté de l'être humain et du monde partagée dans les romans de Fiodor Dostoïevski<sup>3</sup> ou dans l'œuvre du philosophe Vladimir Soloviev. Dans l'esthétique de ce dernier, les influences patristiques sont évidentes même si elles ne sont pas explicitement mentionnées<sup>4</sup>. Le père Paul Florensky, polymathe et néo-martyr, travaille sur le concept de beauté de Grégoire dans son œuvre *La Colonne et le*

<sup>2</sup> En Russie, à partir de la seconde moitié du XVIIIe siècle, la disponibilité des textes patristiques s'est accrue grâce aux efforts de Pasi Velichkovsky pour renouveler la vie monastique selon la doctrine spirituelle des Pères. En 1793, une traduction de la Philokalia grecque de Nikodimos Hagiorita et Macarius de Corinthe est parue en slavon ecclésiastique, mais la Philokalia ne comprend pas les textes de Grégoire de Nysse. Patrologia Graeca était disponible en Russie après 1857, et des traductions russes des Pères ont été publiées par l'Académie spirituelle de Moscou à partir de 1843 dans l'édition Творения святыхъ отцовъ, les œuvres de Grégoire ont été publiées en 1861–1865, 1871.

<sup>3</sup> Les influences patristiques sur l'œuvre de Dostoïevski n'ont pas été suffisamment explorées, un bref aperçu de cette question est donné par Guisepppe Ghini dans son article « *Imago Dei* anthropology in Dostoevsky's *The brothers Karamazov* ». Giuseppe Ghini, « *Imago Dei* anthropology in Dostoevsky's *The brothers Karamazov* », *Church, Communication and culture* no. 2 (Nov 2017) : 206–219, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23753234.2017.1395287>. Les sources bibliques et l'inspiration des Saints Pères dans l'œuvre de Dostoïevski sont analysées dans Simonetta Salvestroni, *Dostoïevski et la Bible* (Paris : Lethielleux, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> L'intérêt de Soloviev pour la patristique est mentionné, par exemple, par Karel Sládek dans son article « Kosmické aspekty svátosti v pojetí Vladimíra Solovjova », *Teologické texty* 16, no. 4 (2005) : 144–146, <https://www.teologicketexty.cz/casopis/2005-4/Kosmicke-aspekty-svatosti-v-pojeti-Vladimira-Solovjova.html>. L'esthétique de Soloviev est présentée avec ses trois textes dans le livre de Michelina Tenace, *La beauté unité spirituelle : Dans les écrits esthétiques de Vladimir Soloviev* (Troyes : Édition Fates, 1993). Cependant, l'influence directe de Grégoire devrait être étudiée.



*Fondement de la vérité*<sup>5</sup>. Par la suite, il influence également les théologiens du XXe siècle, en particulier ceux de la tradition spirituelle orthodoxe comme Paul Evdokimov, qui se concentre sur le thème de la beauté dans son livre *L'Art de l'icône, théologie de la beauté*<sup>6</sup>. Issu du milieu catholique, Tomáš Špidlík s'inspire notamment de la vision de la beauté de Grégoire dans ses ouvrages consacrés à la spiritualité<sup>7</sup>. Les auteurs appuient leur réflexion sur l'anthropologie de Grégoire fondée sur la création de l'être humain à l'image de Dieu – à l'archétype de la beauté conservée malgré la chute, et permet ainsi aux gens, sous certaines conditions, de participer à la beauté au sens large du terme, c'est-à-dire à la fois par rapport à Dieu – la Beauté –, et par rapport à la beauté de la création, au niveau de la relation, de la connaissance et de l'activité humaine – la création.

Dans mon article, je me concentrerai sur la vision qu'entretient Grégoire de la beauté d'un point de vue théologique et anthropologique, plus précisément sur ce qui caractérise la tromperie de la beauté, les limites et la frontière entre la beauté en tant que catégorie théologique et la beauté qui devient une idole et ne mène pas à Dieu. La question clé sera de savoir comment la beauté essentielle, dont la source est Dieu, peut être trompeuse. Je tiens à souligner le fait que bien que Grégoire parle parfois de ce qui est trompeusement ou apparemment beau, le caractère trompeur de la beauté ne réside pas dans la beauté en elle-même mais dans la capacité ou l'incapacité de l'être humain à discerner le beau. Je m'appuie ici sur le fondement de l'anthropologie de Grégoire, à savoir la création de l'être humain à l'image et à la ressemblance de Dieu, car c'est la création à son image qui fonde la capacité humaine à reconnaître la beauté et à y participer. Dans le deuxième chapitre de l'article, je discute de la beauté de l'image de Dieu après la chute de l'être humain. J'étudierai si l'être humain est encore capable de reconnaître la beauté après ce changement fondamental. Grégoire affirme que cela est possible et donne Moïse comme exemple. Dans le chapitre trois, je suivrai donc l'interprétation allégorique de Grégoire

<sup>5</sup> Paul Florensky, *La colonne et le fondement de la vérité* (Lausanne : L'Éditions l'Age d'Homme, 1994). En tchèque : Pavel Florenský, *Sloup a opora pravdy* (Velehrad : Refugium, 2000).

<sup>6</sup> P. Evdokimov, *L'Art de l'icône, théologie de la beauté* (Paris : Desclée De Brouwer, 1972).

<sup>7</sup> Tomáš Špidlík, « Symbolická teologie jako ospravedlnění umění », in *Integrální poznání*, Tomáš Špidlík, Ivan Marko Rupnik (Olomouc : Refugium Velehrad-Roma, 2015). Tomáš Špidlík, « Teologia simbolica come giustificazione dell'arte », in *Una conoscenza integrale*, Tomáš Špidlík, Ivan Marko Rupnik (Roma : Lipa, 2010).

de l'histoire de Moïse, perçu comme une personne s'efforçant d'atteindre la beauté par une vie vertueuse. Dans le chapitre suivant, j'analyserai plus en profondeur la connaissance de la beauté dans l'œuvre de Grégoire pour découvrir où se trouve, dans le processus de reconnaissance de la beauté, l'erreur dans le discernement du beau par rapport à l'apparement beau. Dans cette partie, je présenterai la tendance croissante de la connaissance, ce qu'on appelle *l'epectasis* et les degrés de connaissance. Dans le chapitre cinq, j'expliquerai la signification des termes *désir* et *passion*. Le désir peut être assimilé à une source du mouvement humain vers la connaissance du beau, être soutenu par la passion dans cette connaissance ou, à l'inverse, tirer vers le bas et entraîner vers ce qui n'est pas beau. Sur la base de ces chapitres, je conclurai en réfléchissant sur comment la beauté peut devenir une idole qui éloigne les gens du chemin de la connaissance du beau.

## **1. La beauté de l'être humain en tant que beauté de l'image de Dieu**

Le but de la création du genre humain est, selon Grégoire, la participation aux biens divins. L'être humain doit donc être constitué pour cette participation, de sorte qu'une cohérence en rapport avec le divin soit intégré dans sa nature. Cette affinité fonde alors l'élan vers ce qui lui est apparenté. Cette relation entre l'être humain et Dieu est exprimée dans l'Ancien Testament, dans le livre de la Genèse, par l'expression *création à l'image*<sup>8</sup>. Grégoire interprète le texte de la Genèse, « Dieu créa l'homme à son image, il le créa à l'image de Dieu, homme et femme il les créa<sup>9</sup> » comme une double création de l'être humain. La première étape est la création de l'être humain à l'image de Dieu. Cette « image porte en tout l'impression de la beauté prototype<sup>10</sup> ».

Pour décrire le transfert de la beauté de l'original vers l'image, Grégoire utilise l'analogie du peintre : « imaginez de même celui qui nous façonne : les couleurs en rapport avec sa beauté sont ici les vertus qu'il dépose et fait fleurir en son image pour manifester en nous le pouvoir

---

<sup>8</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Discours catéchétique* (Paris : Les Éditions du Cerf, 2000), V. 39–63 (SCh 453, 269).

<sup>9</sup> Gn 1,27

<sup>10</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* (Lyon : Les Éditions du Cerf, 1943), XVI. 184c (SCh 6, 157).

qui est le sien<sup>11</sup>. » La ressemblance de l'être humain à Dieu est créée par les vertus, dont Grégoire énumère quelques exemples : la pureté, la liberté spirituelle<sup>12</sup>, la béatitude ou l'éloignement de tout mal. La raison et la pensée en tant qu'imitation de l'Esprit et du Verbe<sup>15</sup> sont également des caractéristiques de la ressemblance avec Dieu. La nature de notre esprit, parce qu'elle « possède en lui exacte ressemblance », est insaisissable<sup>14</sup>. Pour assurer la plénitude de l'image et que celle-ci ne soit pas déformée, l'amour<sup>15</sup> et la liberté<sup>16</sup> sont également indispensables. La création de l'être humain à l'image de Dieu, outre ce qui vient d'être mentionné, octroie à l'être humain sa capacité de perception et de connaissance. « Enfin la Divinité voit tout, entend tout, scrute tout. Vous aussi, par la vue et l'ouïe, vous percevez les choses et par la pensée vous pouvez examiner et scruter l'univers<sup>17</sup>. » La perfection de l'image est contenue dans la première création. L'image de Dieu donne à l'être humain sa grandeur, sa beauté, sa possibilité de participer au divin et l'appelle à dominer la Terre : « L'homme avait un bel aspect, puisqu'il avait été fait à l'image même de l'archétype de la beauté ; il était exempt de *pathè*, puisqu'il était à l'image de Celui qui est impassible ; il avait une pleine liberté de langage, puisqu'il se délectait de voir Dieu qui se manifestait à lui face à face<sup>18</sup>. »

Si « l'image porte en tout l'impression de la beauté prototype<sup>19</sup> », qu'est-ce qui distingue un être humain de son modèle ? L'être humain, bien que créé « à l'image de la nature divine<sup>20</sup> », est un être créé. Le fait d'être créé le distingue du modèle ; l'être humain vient à l'existence en vertu du passage du non-être à l'être. Cette transformation permanente

<sup>11</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* V. 137a (SCH 6, 96).

<sup>12</sup> Il s'agit d'une traduction du mot *apatheia*. Le terme *a-patheia*, impassibilité, est en relation filologique directe avec le terme *pathos*, passion. *Apatheia* signifie son contraire, l'absence de passions. Ce terme a une longue histoire d'utilisation dans la philosophie avant Grégoire, qui l'utilise en conformité avec la chrétienté. Pour savoir plus, consultez par exemple : L. F. Mateo-Seco, « *Apatheia* », in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, L. F. Mateo-Seco, Giulio Maspero (Leiden – Boston : Brill, 2010), 51–54. Je parlerai de la signification de ce mot dans la partie sur l'image obscurcie de Dieu dans l'être humain.

<sup>15</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* V. 137b (SCH 6, 97).

<sup>14</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* XI. 156b (SCH 6, 122).

<sup>15</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* V. 137c (SCH 6, 97).

<sup>16</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* XVI. 184b (SCH 6, 157).

<sup>17</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* V. 137c (SCH 6, 98).

<sup>18</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Discours catéchétique* VI. 103 (SCH 453, 181).

<sup>19</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* XVI. 184c (SCH 6, 157).

<sup>20</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Discours catéchétique* XXI. 3 (SCH 453, 241).

se manifeste par le mouvement constant qui caractérise l'être humain et le distingue de l'être incréé, qui reste sans changement<sup>21</sup>. Pour Grégoire, cette première étape achève la création de l'être humain à l'image de Dieu<sup>22</sup>.

La deuxième étape de la création de l'être humain est sa création ultérieure en tant qu'homme et femme, que Grégoire ne considère pas comme une création à l'image de Dieu puisqu'elle exclut la perfection du modèle. Il soutient cette idée par les propos de Paul selon lesquels en Jésus-Christ n'est ni homme ni femme<sup>23</sup>. La nature humaine est ainsi double. D'une part, elle a une ressemblance avec Dieu, d'autre part, par la division en mâle et femelle, étrangère aux attributs divins, elle échappe à cette perfection<sup>24</sup>. Grégoire y voit la position exceptionnelle de l'être humain qui se tient, en fonction de la base de sa nature humaine, au milieu de la nature divine (désincarnée) et de la vie irrationnelle (animale). Il ressemble à Dieu dans sa pensée ; « par son esprit déiforme, il porte les traits de la beauté de Dieu<sup>25</sup> ». Avec ses instincts, l'être humain s'approche toutefois du monde irrationnel des animaux. S'il se soumet à ses dispositions instinctives, sa nature peut s'écarter de son image et se transformer ainsi en vie animale. Si les instincts ne sont pas dirigés par l'esprit, ils donnent naissance à la méchanceté et transforment la nature humaine créée à l'image de Dieu. Ainsi, la colère non traitée et non apaisée par l'esprit peut avoir pour conséquences « le ressentiment, l'envie, le mensonge, les embûches, l'hypocrisie<sup>26</sup> ». Cela se manifeste après la chute de l'être humain.

Par sa dualité, l'être humain participe à deux ordres, et la nature humaine est doublement équipée pour participer à ces deux ordres. La grandeur de la personne réside alors dans cette position unique, où la nature humaine constitue le point de convergence entre la nature divine et la nature animale irrationnelle. Bien que l'être humain embrasse les deux ordres dans son intégrité, il reste constamment à l'image de Dieu, car sa nature irrationnelle n'a été acquise que plus tard. La grandeur de l'être humain réside dans le fait qu'il est « à l'image de la nature de

---

<sup>21</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Discours catéchétique* XXI. 1–20 (SCh 453, 241–245).

<sup>22</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* XVI. 181a (SCh 6, 154).

<sup>23</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* XVI. 181d (SCh 6, 156).

<sup>24</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* XVI. 181b (SCh 6, 154–155).

<sup>25</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* XVIII. 192d (SCh 6, 168).

<sup>26</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* XVIII. 193c (SCh 6, 169).

celui qui l'a fait » et non dans sa ressemblance avec le monde créé<sup>27</sup>. L'humain est un mélange de l'intelligible et du sensible ; sa raison d'être, comme on l'a dit, tient à la participation aux biens de Dieu, et sa vocation est l'élévation de tout ce qui est terrestre vers le divin, « afin que ce qui est terrestre fût élevé par son union avec ce qui est divin et que par le mélange de la nature d'en bas avec celle au-dessus du monde, une seule et même grâce pût s'étendre également à travers toute la création<sup>28</sup> ». Il paraît déjà, dans cette deuxième création, qu'une nouvelle dynamique entre dans la nature humaine, tout en permettant à l'être humain de s'écarter de sa propre image, bien que la plénitude de la beauté de l'image de Dieu demeure. Cette dynamique conditionne le discernement du beau et se manifeste par le mauvais choix d'Adam, qui modifie fondamentalement les conditions et la capacité humaine à connaître le beau.

## 2. La beauté de l'image obscurcie de Dieu dans l'être humain

L'histoire de la chute de l'être humain dans l'Ancien Testament est décrite par Grégoire comme l'origine d'un changement des conditions humaines qui ne correspondent plus à la bénédiction initiale donnée par Dieu au genre humain. De fait, la manifestation de l'image de Dieu dans l'être humain et, par conséquent, sa capacité à reconnaître la beauté de Dieu change.

Pour Grégoire, l'arbre de « la connaissance du bien et du mal » apporte des fruits aux qualités contradictoires qui produisent une connaissance mitigée, ce qui explique l'existence du fruit défendu. Il est tentant de le regarder mais il apporte la mort<sup>29</sup>. Les conditions préalables qui permettent à l'adversaire de tromper l'être humain et de le détourner des bénédictions de Dieu sont sa liberté, sa mutabilité due à sa nature de créature et sa composition en tant que corps et âme<sup>30</sup>.

La chute, selon Grégoire, a été causée par un choix imprudent, préférant le pire au meilleur. Cette erreur a été rendue possible par la liberté de l'être humain<sup>31</sup>.

---

<sup>27</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* XVI. 180b (Sch 6, 152).

<sup>28</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Discours catéchétique* VI. 35 (Sch 453, 175).

<sup>29</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* XX. 200a (Sch 6, 177).

<sup>30</sup> Markéta Bendová, « Úvod », in *Katechetická řeč*, Řehoř z Nyssy (Praha : Oikomenh, 2015), 42.

<sup>31</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Discours catéchétique* V. 96 (Sch 453, 169).

L'être humain, par son propre choix, a ainsi participé au péché. Il est tombé de l'état de béatitude à cause de sa propre erreur et a été revêtu d'une tunique de peau. La tunique est un état mortel appliqué temporairement aux êtres humains. Il s'agit du vêtement de ce monde échangé avec Adam contre le vrai vêtement divin. La tunique de peau – la tunique de mortalité qui enveloppe la nature humaine – est déposée par le baptême<sup>32</sup>. Étant donné que le vêtement sert l'être humain temporairement, il ne fait pas partie intégrante de lui. Il touche la personne de l'extérieur, mais pas de l'intérieur : « Elle intercepte la partie sensible de l'homme, mais ne touche pas à l'image divine elle-même<sup>33</sup>. » L'expression « revêtement de peaux mortes », comme le souligne Aubineau, est utilisée pour la première fois par l'évêque de Nysse dans l'œuvre *Traité de la virginité*. Par la tunique de la peau, Grégoire ne fait pas référence à l'aspect physique en tant que tel, mais plutôt à la « pensée du corps » qui est régie par les passions et conduit à la mort. Elle symbolise l'état de l'être humain après sa chute, sa nature déchue<sup>34</sup>. Cette condition humaine conduit la personne à vivre de manière à ce que l'âme se laisse « clouer en bas à la volupté de la chair, si elle applique son désir aux passions humaines, toutes les fois qu'elle incline vers les biens matériels, par suite d'une prénotion fallacieuse qui a manqué d'éducation » au lieu de lever les yeux vers les beautés supérieures et tourner sa « puissance d'aimer pour la reporter sur la contemplation intellectuelle et immatérielle du Beau<sup>35</sup> ». La tunique de peau rend difficile l'accès de l'âme à la beauté de Dieu ; la connaissance initiale – c'est-à-dire la connaissance sensorielle<sup>36</sup> – doit être cultivée pour discerner la beauté. Dans le même temps, le désir humain pour la beauté de Dieu est impacté : « la beauté déiforme de l'âme [...] eut été obscurcie<sup>37</sup> » et l'être humain succombe au désir sur la base des passions de la chair. L'image reste intacte, mais la compétence à connaître le beau est affaiblie au niveau du désir et de la passion. L'état sans passion – *apatheia* – est perturbé. L'expert de l'œuvre de Grégoire, Jean

<sup>32</sup> A. G. Hamman, « Un glossaire des termes caractéristiques de Grégoire de Nysse », in *Le cantique des cantiques*, Grégoire de Nysse (Paris : Migne, 2014), 325.

<sup>33</sup> Grégoire de Nysse in J. Daniélou, *Platonisme et Théologie mystique, doctrine spirituelle de saint Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris : Aubier, 1944), 71.

<sup>34</sup> Abineau, « Introduction », in *Traité de la virginité*, Grégoire de Nysse (Paris : Les Éditions du Cerf, 1966), 159.

<sup>35</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Traité de la virginité* V. 5–21 (Sch 119).

<sup>36</sup> Voir plus : la note 5 in Grégoire de Nysse, *Traité de la virginité* (Sch 119, 335).

<sup>37</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Traité de la virginité* XII. 2,48 (Sch 119, 407).

Daniélou, donne un sens plus profond à l'expression « état sans passion ». Il la comprend comme une participation à la vie de Dieu et la traduit par la formule « liberté spirituelle ». L'*apatheia* est un privilège qu'Adam a perdu en commettant le péché originel<sup>58</sup>.

La chute de l'être humain modifie profondément la réalité originelle ; toutes les conditions changent. Bien que l'énumération des diverses modifications de la personne inclue les vertus qui constituent l'image de Dieu, Grégoire affirme que cette dernière reste intacte mais obscurcie. Ainsi, la capacité de l'être humain à accéder directement à la beauté de Dieu est changée, et sa capacité à connaître la beauté en est affectée. L'équilibre initial de la dualité humaine est altéré. L'accent de la connaissance humaine se tourne vers le monde sensoriel et celle-ci est principalement influencée par la pensée du corps. La connaissance doit être cultivée de manière à ramener la nature humaine à l'*apatheia*, l'état de l'être humain avant la chute, un état de capacité à reconnaître et à participer à la beauté de Dieu. L'être humain est-il capable de cette cultivation dans des conditions modifiées, lorsque l'image de la beauté de Dieu, qui est cruciale pour la connaissance de la beauté, est obscurcie ? Grégoire l'affirme et illustre son propos avec l'exemple de la vie d'un personnage de l'Ancien Testament, Moïse.

### 3. Moïse comme modèle d'une vie belle et vertueuse

« Mais si vous regardez Moïse ou ceux qui lui ont ressemblé, ils ont gardé dans sa pureté la forme de l'image. Et la vue de ceux en qui l'image n'a pas été obscurcie confirme notre foi en la création de l'homme comme image de Dieu<sup>59</sup>. »

Grégoire décrit comment atteindre cette forme pure de l'image dans son œuvre *La Vie de Moïse*. En racontant l'existence de Moïse, il répond à la demande de son interlocuteur de progresser dans la perfection, d'être encouragé dans sa démarche<sup>40</sup>.

Dans la deuxième partie du livre, présentée sous le nom de *theoria*, Grégoire interprète le chemin de Moïse de manière allégorique, comme une démarche de perfection dans la vertu, un chemin de purification. L'attitude que Grégoire adopte par rapport à sa progression en matière

<sup>58</sup> Note 1 in Grégoire de Nysse, *La Création de l'homme* (SCH 6, 97).

<sup>59</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* XVIII. 196a (SCH 6, 171).

<sup>40</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *La Vie de Moïse*, praef. 1–8 (SCH 1, 2).

de vertu est inspirée par les Philippiens 3,12–14. Elle est caractérisée par un mouvement constant et éternel de l'âme vers la perfection et vers la connaissance de Dieu, qui ne peut jamais prendre fin car Dieu est infini dans sa bonté. Dans *La Vie de Moïse*, Grégoire décrit ce mouvement vers la perfection comme une progression sans fin vers la ressemblance de Dieu, permise à l'aide la relation réciproque de l'éclairage de l'intellect et de la purification du désir<sup>41</sup>. Karfíková décrit les motifs de Dieu illimité et du chemin infini de l'être humain chez Grégoire comme une application de la question de la vertu et de la perfection dans la vie humaine. Grégoire tente de définir cette application, par l'intermédiaire de l'histoire de Moïse, comme un effort constant pour atteindre la perfection et aussi comme un progrès incessant dans celle-ci. Il souligne le rôle crucial du désir dans ce processus de perfection et de participation à la beauté de Dieu. Daniélou appelle cet avancement perpétuel l'épectase<sup>42</sup>.

Dans la conclusion du traité *La Vie de Moïse*, Grégoire appelle à l'imitation de l'œuvre de Moïse, c'est-à-dire à l'imitation de sa vie et de ses actes qu'il considère comme des modèles de beauté d'une vie parfaite et vertueuse<sup>43</sup>. Il fait état de la beauté d'une personne spirituellement purifiée qui a entrevu une nature transcendante et qui est devenue une amie de Dieu<sup>44</sup>.

Mais il n'est pas seulement question de la beauté de la vie ; Grégoire décrit aussi la beauté de l'apparence physique de Moïse. Dans les premières pages de son texte, il affirme que Moïse était beau et que sa beauté laissait prévoir tout ce que le temps apporterait. À la fin de cette partie du récit, il ajoute : « Le temps n'avait pas altéré sa beauté, ni émoussé l'éclat de ces yeux, ni terni l'éclatante majesté de son visage. Mais il restait toujours semblable et conservait inchangée dans la mobilité de la nature immutabilité de sa beauté<sup>45</sup>. » La beauté de l'apparence de Moïse révèle la beauté constante et immuable de sa vie, même s'il change. C'est la beauté d'un être humain purifié de tout ce qui n'appartient pas à sa nature et qui se rapproche ainsi de Dieu ; il s'agit alors de beauté essentielle. L'être humain devient beau, saint et révèle de fait sa propre image.

---

<sup>41</sup> J. Warren Smith, « Desire », in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, 221.

<sup>42</sup> Daniélou, « Introduction », in *La Vie de Moïse*, Grégoire de Nysse (SCh 1, 26).

<sup>43</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *La Vie de Moïse* II. 1–17 (SCh 1, 325).

<sup>44</sup> Ex 33,11.

<sup>45</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *La Vie de Moïse* I. 1–4 (SCh 1, 76, 103–105).



Selon Grégoire, la beauté de l'apparence de Moïse s'explique par la structure de l'être humain, par ses éléments constitutifs et leurs interactions. En ce qui concerne la beauté, il fait la distinction entre l'esprit, la nature et la partie matérielle de l'être. La nature humaine est régie par l'esprit. La nature contrôle et maintient la partie matérielle de l'être. « L'esprit tire sa perfection de sa ressemblance avec la beauté prototype<sup>46</sup>. » L'esprit se maintient dans la beauté tandis qu'il conserve la ressemblance avec son modèle, autant qu'il le peut. « Mais s'en écarte-t-il, il est dépouillé de sa beauté première<sup>47</sup>. »

La beauté de l'esprit se reflète analogiquement dans la nature, et la beauté de la nature dans la partie matérielle de l'être : « Tant que cette dépendance est gardée entre les éléments, tous sont unis, chacun à son degré, à la beauté en soi, car l'élément supérieur transmet sa beauté à celui qui est placé sous lui<sup>48</sup>. » Ce lien et la beauté de l'être humain sont soutenus lorsque le désir de celui-ci est dirigé vers Dieu : « Le plus beau et le plus haut bien de tous est la divinité elle-même, vers laquelle se dirige tout ce qui désire la beauté<sup>49</sup>. » Si, en revanche, la nature humaine est dirigé non vers la beauté, mais vers ce qui doit être embelli, cette beauté disparaît. « Cette chute n'a d'autre cause que le retournement de la tendance spontanée de la nature à la suite du désir qui ne tend pas vers le Bien/Beau<sup>50</sup>, mais vers ce qui a besoin d'un autre pour l'embellir<sup>51</sup>. » La laideur de la matière elle-même, informe et désordonnée, émerge, et ainsi défie la nature et détruit sa beauté. La laideur de la matière est transférée à la nature, jusqu'à l'esprit lui-même ; l'image de Dieu ne peut alors plus être vue<sup>52</sup>.

Dans l'exemple de Moïse, Grégoire montre la voie de la connaissance de la beauté comme un chemin spirituel. Cette ascension spirituelle est un travail de connaissance et de discernement du beau, qui est finalement le chemin de la connaissance de Dieu. En même temps, il s'agit d'un processus pour devenir beau, révélant ainsi sa propre

<sup>46</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* XII. 161c (SCH 6, 131).

<sup>47</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* XII. 161c (SCH 6, 131).

<sup>48</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* XII. 161d (SCH 6, 131).

<sup>49</sup> Ici je préfère le second sens du mot kaloz qui est beauté. Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* XII. 161c (SCH 6, 131). « La Divinité est le Bien Suprême, vers qui tendent tous les être possédés du désir du Bien. »

<sup>50</sup> <sup>50</sup> Afin de préserver la fluidité et la clarté du texte, j'ajoute le second sens du mot kaloz à la citation.

<sup>51</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* XII. 164b (SCH 6, 132-133).

<sup>52</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* XII. 164a, 164b (SCH 6, 132).

image, qui se trouve dans les vertus. Cette révélation, ou plutôt ce processus de révélation de la beauté originelle de l'image, est un parcours de purification, de connaissance et de contemplation de la beauté de Dieu.

Le chemin de la connaissance est décrit par l'évêque de Nysse dans *La Vie de Moïse* en trois étapes, résumées par Karfíková, liées à trois révélations de Dieu à Moïse : la révélation dans le buisson ardent que Dieu est l'être véritable, la révélation au Sinaï, dans l'obscurité, que Dieu ne peut être vu et la révélation dans la vase rocheuse que Dieu ne peut toujours être vu que partiellement et que le désir de Dieu ne peut être que partiellement satisfait. Bien que l'on n'atteigne jamais pleinement la plénitude, l'âme peut continuellement ressembler à la beauté<sup>53</sup>.

Avec l'exemple de Moïse, Grégoire montre que même après la chute, l'être humain peut participer à la beauté de Dieu ; il est capable de cultiver sa connaissance sensorielle. La connaissance de la beauté est le chemin de l'âme désirant connaître Dieu et fixant son esprit sur la beauté de Dieu. Il s'agit d'un processus complexe et infini de transformation de l'être humain progressant en perfection dans la vertu, redécouvrant en soi son image de Dieu et restituant son état initial. Une condition nécessaire à cette transformation est le désir de Dieu et la purification de l'âme. Cette participation n'est toutefois pas un mouvement automatique issu du désir humain. La nature humaine peut s'écarter de cette direction. La cause de cette déviation est, comme nous l'avons dit plus haut, due au manque de cultivation de la connaissance sensorielle, qui succombe alors à la tromperie, et au fait que l'être humain choisit ce qui n'est pas beau au lieu de ce qui est beau. Ainsi, comment arrive-t-on à connaître le beau ?

#### 4. Le processus de connaissance humaine de la beauté

La connaissance du beau est le privilège de l'être humain, car elle requiert l'intellect et le raisonnement<sup>54</sup>. La connaissance est une disposition humaine à ce qui est souhaitable<sup>55</sup>. Déjà, dans son interprétation de la chute de l'être humain, Grégoire fait la distinction entre la connaissance et le discernement. Le discernement est une qualité de

---

<sup>53</sup> L. Karfíková, *Řehoř z Nýssy* (Praha : Oikoymenh, 1999), 215.

<sup>54</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Discours catéchétique* VIII. 135–140 (SCh 453, 199).

<sup>55</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* XX. 197d (SCh 6, 176).

la personne spirituelle ; il s'agit de la capacité à discerner le bien et le mal, qui s'acquiert par l'exercice des sens<sup>56</sup>. Bien que l'être humain, en tant qu'être créé et limité avec une nature créée, ne puisse pas reconnaître une nature illimitée, il peut connaître le Dieu illimité à partir de son œuvre et de son action en tant que créateur du monde<sup>57</sup>.

La connaissance chez Grégoire a le caractère d'un mouvement ascendant, elle ne signifie pas seulement la science et la connaissance pure, mais aussi la connaissance sensuelle du monde, du mal, du bien et de Dieu. En ce qui concerne la beauté, j'utiliserai la conception de Malouf sur la connaissance chez Grégoire. Il distingue classiquement trois étapes de la connaissance en les divisant en connaissance sensible, conceptuelle et mystique. Bien que ces étapes ascendantes aient chacune leurs propres caractéristiques et distinctions, la connaissance se caractérise dans le même temps par son unité ; il est impossible de séparer une étape de l'autre. Cette interconnexion est due à la tendance constante, dynamique et croissante de la connaissance humaine<sup>58</sup>.

La connaissance sensorielle est l'étape initiale. Grégoire est convaincu de la capacité humaine à percevoir, à comprendre la beauté sensuelle du monde et à transmettre cette expérience de la beauté : « En effet la beauté sensible qui entoure ici-bas notre vie et qui se manifeste avec un certain coloris soit dans une matière inanimée, soit même dans les corps vivants, notre sensibilité a suffisamment de ressources pour l'admirer, l'appréhender et la faire connaître à autrui par la peinture des paroles, puisqu'une telle beauté est peinte par la parole comme sur un tableau<sup>59</sup>. »

Les sens sont les premiers stimuli de l'esprit et rendent possibles la perception et la connaissance de la beauté du monde. Ils constituent une ressource essentielle pour que l'être humain créé puisse établir une relation avec l'être du monde. Pour Grégoire, le monde comme création de Dieu est une empreinte du Créateur. Il s'agit d'une œuvre visible qui témoigne de son Créateur invisible ; le visible est le manifeste de l'invisible. La valeur de la beauté du monde réside dans l'importance qu'elle accorde à l'être humain ; elle peut le conduire à la connaissance du vrai beau. La connaissance sensuelle de la beauté

<sup>56</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* XX. 197c (Sch 6, 176).

<sup>57</sup> L. Karfiková, *Řehor z Nýssy*, 185.

<sup>58</sup> Charbel Maalouf, *Une mystique érotique chez Grégoire de Nysse* (Paris : Les Édition du Cerf, 2017), 49–155.

<sup>59</sup> Grégoire Nysse, *Traité de la virginité* X. 15–21 (Sch 119, 2, 377).

du monde est l'étape initiale de la connaissance de Dieu et est accessible à tous, chrétiens et païens. Mais il ne s'agit pas du seul chemin vers Dieu<sup>60</sup>. Bien que la beauté du monde soit une première étape sur le chemin de la connaissance de la beauté de Dieu, elle ne doit pas être sous-estimée, car elle amène la raison humaine à comprendre la merveille de la création qui se manifeste en elle. Si la raison humaine est incapable de comprendre cela, elle peut difficilement comprendre la nature qui la transcende<sup>61</sup>. Même si Grégoire a une attitude positive à l'égard de la beauté de la création, il en mentionne également le caractère trompeur.

La deuxième étape de la connaissance est une connaissance conceptuelle liée à la connaissance sensible. Cette connaissance n'est pas seulement intellectuelle, mais aussi un processus comprenant un chemin de purification, qui elle-même comprend un travail intellectuel et moral. La connaissance conceptuelle permet à la personne de se rapprocher de la connaissance du mystère de Dieu. Dans le même temps, elle est limitée ; elle ne permet de connaître le mystère de Dieu que partiellement, car celui-ci transcende infiniment l'être humain. À ce niveau de connaissance, l'être humain est capable de comprendre la beauté du monde comme la beauté de la création de Dieu, mais celle-ci n'est qu'un reflet de la vraie beauté. Grégoire écrit que celui dont l'intelligence est imparfaite pense qu'un objet qui paraît beau est beau par sa nature. L'erreur dans la connaissance du beau est de distinguer la matière de la beauté contemplée et de penser que la beauté consiste dans la chose elle-même. Grégoire donne comme raison de cette erreur le manque d'entraînement des sens humains. Les sens éloignent par conséquent du vrai beau, vers la pensée du corps. Sous l'influence du désir, l'être humain glisse vers l'apparence du beau, comme la richesse, la gloire, le pouvoir, la technologie, la science, la nourriture ou la boisson. Mais pour celui « qui a purifié l'œil de son âme<sup>62</sup> », cette beauté est une étape vers la beauté de l'intelligible. C'est la participation à la beauté intelligible qui rend les choses belles, comme nous les appelons<sup>63</sup>.

---

<sup>60</sup> Charbel Maalouf, « La connaissance sensible chez Grégoire de Nysse », in *Une mystique érotique chez Grégoire de Nysse*, 52–74.

<sup>61</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Le Cantique des cantiques*, 235.

<sup>62</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Traité de la virginité* XI. 22 (Sch 119, 1, 385).

<sup>63</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Traité de la virginité* XI. 1–26 (Sch 119, 1, 383–385).

Le degré suivant de la connaissance est une connaissance mystique – cette étape suit et complète la connaissance sensorielle et la connaissance intelligible, qui sont toutes deux interdépendantes. Grégoire caractérise la connaissance sensorielle et intelligible comme un chemin de connaissance externe. La connaissance mystique est le chemin intérieur de l'âme. Elle est une connaissance des ténèbres, une vision dans l'invisible. En effet, comme le montre Grégoire avec l'exemple de Moïse, « ayant laissé toutes les apparences, non seulement ce que perçoivent les sens, mais ce que l'intelligence croit voir, il tend toujours plus vers l'intérieur jusqu'à ce qu'il pénètre, par l'effort de l'esprit, jusqu'à l'invisible et l'inconnaissable et que là il voie Dieu<sup>64</sup> ». Grégoire pense de manière analogique, par rapport à la connaissance de la vraie beauté, la beauté de Dieu, qui ne peut toujours être connue que partiellement. Il souligne la différence incommensurable entre les choses que les personnes considèrent comme belles et « cette Beauté qui est contemplée autour du Bien premier et de ce qui est au-delà de tout bien<sup>65</sup> ». La vraie beauté est inexprimable par les mots, inconcevable par la pensée, mais d'une manière ou d'une autre, l'être humain peut la contempler comme un don divin avec des yeux adaptés, avec le regard purifié de son cœur<sup>66</sup>. La connaissance de la beauté est en fin de compte le chemin mystique de l'âme vers Dieu. Ce processus de la rencontre constante de l'âme avec la beauté de Dieu – avec le Christ – est décrit par Grégoire dans ses *Homélies sur le Cantique des Cantiques* comme la relation d'amour de Dieu à l'être humain et de l'être humain à Dieu. Le Christ – l'archétype de la beauté – est symbolisé par le fiancé et l'âme humaine par la fiancée, aspirant au Christ. L'âme qui découvre la véritable réalité de la beauté renonce à toute beauté apparente et aspire au Beau unique. La beauté de Dieu se révèle dans la beauté du fiancé et la beauté de l'âme dans la beauté de la fiancée. Il s'agit d'une relation suscitée par l'éros divin auquel répond l'âme humaine : « Ensuite la fiancée, qui a pris part au beau autant qu'elle a pu, est de nouveau attirée vers la participation au beau transcendant comme si

<sup>64</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *La Vie de Moïse* II. 1–5 (SCH 1, 163, 211).

<sup>65</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Traité de la virginité*, 373. Le texte montre un certain chevauchement entre les concepts de bonté et de beauté. Certains chercheurs pensent que Grégoire superpose ces concepts, d'autres qu'il les distingue. Pour en savoir plus sur la relation entre la bonté et la beauté, voir M. Abineau dans une note de bas de page à la page 373 du *Traité de la virginité* (SCH 119) ou Karfiková, *Rehoř z Nysse*, 64–65.

<sup>66</sup> Grégoire Nysse, *Traité de la virginité* X. 5–21 (SCH 119, 1, 371).

elle n'avait jamais encore pris part à lui<sup>67</sup>. » Ici encore, nous abordons l'attraction de la beauté transcendantale, en même temps que la capacité de participation au beau de la fiancée, dans la mesure du possible. En participant au beau, elle devient elle-même belle : « Tu es devenue belle parce que tu as refusé de participer à tout mal et que tu t'es approchée de moi et que tu es devenue proche de la beauté exemplaire, et toi-même tu es devenue belle, transformée comme un miroir à mon image<sup>68</sup>. » C'est leur relation qui transforme l'âme – la fiancée – à la beauté du fiancé. Dans le *Traité de la Virginité*, il décrit cette relation réciproque et cette transformation en termes lumineux : « nous deviendrons lumineux en approchant de la lumière véritable du Christ ; mais si la véritable lumière, celle qui brille même dans les ténèbres descend jusqu'à nous, nous aussi serons lumière<sup>69</sup>. »

Comme dans le chapitre précédent, la connaissance de la beauté se présente comme un processus, un mouvement sans fin de l'âme humaine vers Dieu et vers la beauté essentielle. Mais il ne s'agit pas d'un mouvement unilatéral ; il s'agit également d'un don de celui qui se laisse connaître. La connaissance de la beauté est donc une relation que Grégoire décrit, dans les *Homélie sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, comme une relation érotique qui s'approfondit sur la base du désir éveillé de l'âme pour le beau unique, l'archétype de la beauté – le Christ. Ici aussi, le rôle du désir apparaît comme crucial. Cependant, après la chute de l'être humain qui suit la perte de l'*apatheia*, comme nous l'avons vu plus haut, le désir peut à son tour devenir la cause d'une fausse connaissance lorsqu'il reste attaché aux passions humaines. Quel rôle jouent donc le désir et la passion dans la connaissance du beau ?

## 5. Le rôle du désir et de la passion dans la découverte du beau

Le rôle du désir a déjà été mentionné ici dans le contexte de la création de l'être humain et de sa chute, ainsi que l'importance du désir dans le cadre de l'ascension de l'être humain vers la connaissance de la beauté éventuellement dans le cadre de son écart de cette ascension. En quoi Grégoire voit-il l'aspect crucial de ce rôle ?

---

<sup>67</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Le Cantique des cantiques*, 130.

<sup>68</sup> *La Colombe et la Ténèbre*, extraits des « *Homélie sur le Cantique des Cantiques* » de Grégoire de Nysse, choisis par J. Daniélou (Paris : Édition de l'Orante, 1967), 52.

<sup>69</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Traité de la virginité* XI. 41–44 (Sch 119, 4, 393).

Les humains sont caractérisés par un changement constant ; la nature humaine ne peut rester immobile, la volonté la dirige toujours quelque part et le moteur de ce mouvement est le désir du beau. Dans son *Discours catéchétique*, Grégoire explore la cause de ce désir, en la voyant précisément dans la création de l'être humain à l'image de Dieu. Le désir du beau naît de l'affinité de la nature humaine avec le divin, l'être humain étant doté de tous les biens qui suscitent le désir humain de ce qui leur est apparenté<sup>70</sup>. « En effet, celui qui a créé l'homme en vue de lui donner part à ses propres biens et qui a déposé dans sa nature des germes de tout ce qui est beau pour que chacun d'entre eux fait tendre le désir vers l'attribut correspondant<sup>71</sup>. » Le désir est une capacité innée de l'être humain qui permet à une personne de grandir dans sa participation à la beauté de Dieu. Comme nous l'avons déjà mentionné ci-dessus et comme Grégoire le décrit dans son *Discours catéchétique*, le désir du beau est la source du mouvement de la volonté, sa direction. Cependant, il ne distingue pas lui-même ce qui est beau par nature de ce qui n'est beau qu'en apparence<sup>72</sup>. Smith caractérise le désir chez Grégoire comme la puissance neutre de l'être humain. Si le désir est contrôlé par les passions, il conduit au péché, mais s'il est contrôlé par la raison, il est indispensable pour l'ascension de l'âme vers Dieu. Cependant, les désirs sensuels font souvent obstacle à cette ascension, car par la force de l'habitude, ils inclinent l'âme vers les biens temporels sensuels<sup>73</sup>. De même, Charbel Maalouf montre, en analysant les textes dans lesquels Grégoire utilise le mot désir, qu'il s'agit pour lui essentiellement d'une puissance neutre de l'être humain inscrite dans sa nature. Le désir se produit dans un contexte à la fois physique et spirituel. Il peut être conduit par la personne intérieure, libre de ces passions, ou par la personne extérieure, dépendante de ces passions. Lorsque le désir est contrôlé par la personne intérieure, il devient une force motrice, une dynamique, un instrument indispensable à l'ascension infinie de l'âme<sup>74</sup>. Le désir purifié est la disposition de l'être humain qui le dirige vers Dieu et lui donne de l'élan. Il s'agit d'une inclination amoureuse qui cherche sans cesse à approfondir ses connaissances, attirée par les profondeurs de la

<sup>70</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Discours catéchétique* V. 39–69 (Sch 119).

<sup>71</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Discours catéchétique* V. 91 (Sch 119).

<sup>72</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Discours catéchétique* XXI. 26–29 (Sch 119).

<sup>73</sup> J. Warren Smith, « Desire », 220.

<sup>74</sup> Voir plus Charbel Maalouf, *Une mystique érotique chez Grégoire de Nysse*, 239–250.

beauté essentielle. Le désir est le moteur qui rend possible ce mouvement sans fin. Selon les mots de Grégoire : « Ressentir cela me semble d'une âme animée d'une disposition amoureuse à l'égard de la beauté essentielle, que l'espérance ne cesse d'entraîner de la beauté qu'elle a vue à celle qui est au-delà et qui enflamme continuellement son désir de ce qui est encore caché par ce qu'elle découvre sans cesse. L'ardent amant de la Beauté désire, aspire à rassasier de la figure même de l'Archétype ; et la demande audacieuse et qui dépasse les limites du désir, c'est de ne pas jouir de la Beauté par des miroirs et des reflets, mais face à face<sup>75</sup>. »

En d'autres termes, nous ne faisons que répéter ici les observations qui ont déjà été mentionnées dans la partie de notre texte consacrée à la connaissance, mais en soulignant davantage le rôle du désir dans le processus de connaissance de la beauté. Grégoire décrit le mouvement constant de l'âme, de la connaissance sensuelle de la beauté vers la beauté essentielle. Il appelle ici désir la disposition amoureuse. Dans la connaissance de l'invisible, l'être humain est stimulé par l'inclination amoureuse à la beauté au-delà de la beauté du visible. Cette beauté est également la source de la beauté visible. Le penchant amoureux – le désir – est suscité par la même beauté que l'âme désire. La beauté attire l'être humain et suscite son désir. Celui-ci crée un lien à cette beauté par l'intermédiaire de son désir. Il s'agit d'un mouvement à double sens. Ce n'est pas seulement le mouvement de l'âme, mais aussi l'évocation de ce mouvement par la Beauté elle-même. Karfíková attire l'attention sur la compréhension de ce mouvement de l'âme, lequel représente un effort constant pour atteindre une beauté infinie en tant que désir érotique de beauté, mais qui n'est jamais satisfait<sup>76</sup>.

Une autre caractéristique du désir de beauté est le mouvement constant qui fait que le désir est insatisfait et inassouvi. Le désir ne trouve jamais de satisfaction complète, car en s'accomplissant, un nouveau désir surgit. Cette insatisfaction est à l'origine d'un mouvement sans cesse renouvelé, né d'une part du désir humain de beauté essentielle, et d'autre part de la transcendance infinie de la beauté de Dieu et de l'inaccessibilité de la pleine connaissance de Dieu. Pour Grégoire, le désir n'est plus seulement l'expression d'un manque ou d'une

---

<sup>75</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *La vie de Moïse*, II. 1–8 ; 1–4 (SCh 1, 231, 232, 265–267).

<sup>76</sup> L. Karfíková, *Řehoř z Nýssy*; 215.



privation, mais un signe d'abondance, car il ne fait pas seulement partie du mouvement de l'être humain vers Dieu, mais il est aussi suscité par la beauté infinie de Dieu. Ainsi, cette beauté devient partie intégrante de la relation réciproque entre l'être humain et la beauté de Dieu, et la beauté de Dieu qui évoque ce désir. Le désir devient le moteur. À la différence de la conception du désir de Platon, qui le voit comme un défaut, le désir est infini dans un sens positif. Il y a toujours quelque chose de plus beau à laquelle l'âme aspire après l'accomplissement du désir du beau. Cette infinité de désir vient du mystère infini de Dieu. L'accomplissement ultime du désir chez Platon est la connaissance du beau – il adopte une perspective purement noétique. Pour Grégoire, le désir, comme on l'a dit, est un mouvement infini et comporte à la fois un plan gnoséologique et un plan érotique, puisqu'il comprend à la fois l'expérience de l'amour et la connaissance qui se transforme en amour<sup>77</sup>. Daniélou comprend également cette insatisfaction du désir comme un débordement, et non comme un manque<sup>78</sup>.

La manière de découvrir le beau, telle que Grégoire la décrit dans son *Traité de la virginité*, est la manière de purifier le désir des choses considérées comme belles. D'après eux, le désir ne doit pas s'arrêter et s'épuiser, et donc devenir stérile, mais s'élever du sensible, guidé par la beauté contemplée dans ce sensible, vers le désir de beauté « dont les cieux racontent la gloire<sup>79</sup> ». L'âme humaine peut alors s'approcher de cette beauté inaccessible par la puissance de l'Esprit Saint. L'intelligence humaine, ayant renoncé à ce monde turbulent et purifiée par la puissance et le souffle de l'Esprit Saint, devient elle-même transparente et brille de la lumière de la vraie et noble pureté, tout comme la surface claire de l'eau reflète les rayons du soleil<sup>80</sup>. Mais comment se fait-il que l'on choisit ce qui n'est pas beau ? Grégoire considère l'esprit comme une norme de discernement. Comme exemple de l'esprit trompé, il cite la fable païenne du chien qui voyait dans le reflet de l'eau la nourriture qu'il portait dans sa gueule. Dans cette fable, le chien laisse tomber ce qu'il avait en gueule et attrape son reflet dans l'eau ; il reste alors sur sa faim. C'est le désir d'une bonne chose qui trompe le chien. De la même manière, l'être humain est

<sup>77</sup> Charbel Maalouf, *Une mystique érotique chez Gregoir de Nysse*, 366–370.

<sup>78</sup> J. Daniélou, « Introduction », in *La vie de Moïse*, Grégoire Nysse (Sch 1, 30).

<sup>79</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Traité de la virginité* XI. 1–18 (Sch 119, 3, 385–387).

<sup>80</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Traité de la virginité* XI. 28–35 (Sch 119, 4, 391–392).

trompé par l'« attrait » du beau et choisit le contraire. L'esprit humain est trompé dans son désir<sup>81</sup>. Pour bien discerner le beau, le désir doit être purgé des passions qui caractérisent l'état de l'être humain après la chute. Depuis leur chute, les humains ont perdu l'état sans passion de l'*apatheia*, l'état de liberté spirituelle<sup>82</sup>. L'esprit de l'être humain est beau et capable de connaître le beau uniquement dans la mesure de sa participation au beau. Cette participation au beau est influencée par la direction du désir, qui est influencée par les passions – le *pathos*<sup>85</sup>. La façon dont Grégoire réfléchit à la question des passions dans les *Homélie sur le Cantique des Cantiques* est résumée par M. Canévet et F. Vinel. Les passions sont liées à la vie terrestre. L'être humain est lié à la matière et ne peut pas vivre une vie sans passions. Il peut diriger ses affections vers le bien ou le mal. Grégoire parle de la purification des passions charnelles et de leur conversion à Dieu. L'état d'être libre des passions ne signifie pas leur suppression, mais leur orientation vers Dieu. L'*apatheia* n'est donc pas l'absence des passions, mais le détournement de leur relation au sensuel<sup>84</sup>. Cela permet à Grégoire de Nysse de parler de la relation de la fiancée avec son bien-aimé dans les *Homélie sur le Cantique des Cantiques* en évoquant la passion contenant des choses comme le désir et l'éros. Dans le contexte de ce texte, les passions sont conçues dans la perspective de l'abandon au sens négatif, ce qui explique le discours sur la purification des passions. En effet, la purification du désir consiste à ne pas succomber à une première impulsion pour le beau sans discerner le contenu réel de ce désir.

<sup>81</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Discours catéchétique* XXI. 35–45 (Sch 453, 245).

<sup>82</sup> Voir ci-dessus *La Beauté de l'image obscurcie de Dieu dans l'être humain*.

<sup>85</sup> Dans son étude introductive à la traduction tchèque du *Discours catéchétique*, Markéta Bendová explore la signification du mot *pathos* dans cette œuvre. Le *pathos* fait généralement référence à quelque chose qui arrive à une personne, une action extérieure, une soumission à cette action. Le lien avec le péché et la culpabilité humaine d'une part est important, car les passions signifient être sujet au vice. D'autre part, le *pathos* est lié à la naissance et à la mort de la personne et signifie être sujet au changement. Par conséquent, la traduction pose des difficultés et ne permet pas une traduction uniforme ; il faut choisir un équivalent de sens en fonction du contexte. Le français utilise les équivalents « accident », « impression », « émotion », « passion ». Markéta Bendová, « Základy křesťanské zvěsti podle Řehoře z Nyssy », in Gregory of Nyssa, *Katechetická řeč*, 52–55.

<sup>84</sup> M. Canévet, F. Vinel, « Introduction », in *Homélie sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, Grégoire de Nysse (Paris : Les Éditions du Cerf, 2021), (Sch 613, 54–55).

Le désir fait partie de l'équipement humain servant à connaître le beau. C'est le moteur qui met en mouvement la connaissance humaine du beau. Mais dans les conditions du monde d'après la chute, il doit lui-même être purifié des passions humaines qui peuvent le tirer vers des biens inférieurs. Le désir purifie l'esprit dans la mesure où il participe lui-même au beau. Le désir non purifié peut devenir l'impulsion du mouvement inverse, où il se rapporte sous la force des passions à des réalités qui ne sont pas belles. Sur la base de la description de la structure humaine, se met en marche un processus qui détourne la nature humaine de la beauté et, par conséquent, l'esprit humain lui-même de son image. La relation humaine à la vraie beauté est affaiblie au lieu d'être approfondie.

## 6. L'idole comme réalité dénuée de beauté

Je conclurai par un bref résumé et par une réflexion sur la façon dont une idole peut être comprise dans le contexte de la conception de la beauté chez Grégoire.

Dieu est la beauté essentielle. La raison d'être de l'existence humaine est de participer à cette beauté. L'être humain est parfaitement équipé pour cette participation par sa structure. Il est ainsi capable de connaître la beauté et d'y participer. La reconnaissance de la beauté est un processus infini, un chemin spirituel, une ascension, un mouvement vers l'avant. Chaque étape de ce chemin transforme l'être humain, qui approfondit sa capacité à connaître la beauté et à y participer. Par sa participation à la beauté, l'être humain devient semblable (et est assimilé) à cette beauté, il devient donc beau. À chaque pas, il comble son désir du beau, afin de ressentir un nouveau désir. *Dans les Homélie sur le Cantique des Cantiques*, Grégoire dépeint ce processus de découverte de la beauté par de nombreuses images, qui expriment la relation mutuelle, amoureuse et érotique qui s'approfondit infiniment entre l'âme humaine et l'archétype de la beauté – le Christ. La pleine connaissance de la beauté reste toujours inachevée, car la beauté de Dieu est illimitée, tout comme l'est la croissance illimitée de l'être humain dans la beauté de Dieu.

Quant à la beauté du monde, sa valeur, qui consiste à témoigner de la beauté du transcendant à l'être humain, a été déjà mentionnée plus haut dans la section portant sur la connaissance. Ramelli, dans le *Dictionnaire Brill*, explique que Grégoire relie la laideur non pas à la

matière du monde, mais au péché ; c'est pourquoi, dans la restauration finale, toute laideur disparaîtra avec la disparition du mal<sup>85</sup>. La nature de Dieu, bien qu'inconnaissable, est révélée dans la beauté de la création. La valeur de la beauté de la création réside dans le témoignage de la beauté de Dieu envers l'être humain. Ainsi, la reconnaissance de la beauté du monde devient le marchepied vers la connaissance de la beauté de Dieu. Tout ce qui est beau appartient à Dieu. Selon les mots de Grégoire, « toute beauté, quelle qu'elle soit, est de la même famille que le premier bien, mais ce qui n'a avec le bien ni attenance ni similitude n'a absolument aucune beauté<sup>86</sup> ». Ce résumé montre le pouvoir de la beauté d'attirer l'être humain vers Dieu – la beauté essentielle. C'est seulement l'être humain qui introduit la tromperie dans ce concept.

Le genre humain perd sa capacité à connaître directement la beauté dans le contexte des conséquences de la chute, par la perte de l'*apatheia*. À partir de là, le savoir humain est mélangé et doit être cultivé. La capacité d'aimer n'est pas tournée vers la contemplation du bel intellectuel et immatériel. Bien que l'être humain n'ait pas le pouvoir de priver la création de la beauté qui reflète la sagesse de Dieu, il a la liberté de la nier et de se rapporter à la réalité créée d'une manière qui néglige cette beauté. Par conséquent, il a la liberté de faussement comprendre et interpréter la réalité. La tromperie survient lorsque l'être humain ne reconnaît pas le beau comme beau. Il choisit au lieu du vrai beau, comme l'illustre la fable du chien, seulement ce qu'il croit être beau ; il choisit le beau en apparence. La beauté apparente ne réside pas dans la réalité elle-même – le reflet de la réalité dans l'eau peut certainement être beau – mais dans la mauvaise identification du beau. Dans la fable, la beauté du reflet dans l'eau résidait dans autre chose, pas dans le fait d'offrir quelque chose à manger. Le chien a perdu ce qu'il a eu et a poursuivi l'illusion de la nourriture. De la même façon, pour l'être humain, toute beauté est destinée à être un témoignage de la beauté essentielle et à susciter le désir humain de cette beauté. Si l'être humain se rapporte à une chose sur la base d'une distinction erronée, il sépare la réalité de la source

---

<sup>85</sup> Ilaria Ramelli, « Good/Beauty », in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, 359–360.

<sup>86</sup> Grégoire de Nysse, *Création de l'homme* XII. 164a (SCH 6, 132). J'ai préféré ici traduire le mot *kaloz* par son second sens beauté à la différence de la traduction française qui utilise le mot bonté : « Toute bonté, quelle qu'elle soit, est de la même famille que le premier bien, mais ce qui n'a avec le bien ni attenance ni similitude n'a absolument aucune bonté. »

de sa beauté et la considère comme belle en soi. Comme un chien à la poursuite de l'illusion de la bonne nourriture, l'être humain est trompé dans son désir et court après l'illusion de la beauté en pensant qu'il va satisfaire son désir. Il fait ainsi de la réalité une idole ; et selon cette distinction, il se met en relation avec la réalité, c'est-à-dire qu'il agit d'une manière décisive. C'est pourquoi Grégoire dit aussi que le mal naît en rejetant ce qui est beau. Confiant dans le consensus général, Grégoire affirme que la seule chose abominable par sa propre nature est la soumission au vice. Ce qui est beau par nature est ce à quoi rien d'abominable n'est mêlé, sans mélange avec son contraire. Paradoxalement, l'être humain se fait une idole de la réalité en cessant de voir la valeur de la beauté dont la réalité regorge et en cessant de discerner en quoi consiste la beauté. Dans son désir, il préfère la valeur d'une réalité dépourvue de référence à la beauté essentielle. Par sa relation idolâtre à cette réalité, il court-circuite sa participation à la vraie beauté. Il détourne son désir de beauté vers une réalité qui est elle-même dépourvue de beauté. Le détournement du désir de l'être humain de la vraie beauté obscurcit l'image de Dieu en lui et entraîne la dissolution de son humanité.

La connaissance de la beauté est la relation qui se développe entre l'âme humaine et l'archétype de la beauté. Toute autre relation qui entrave le développement de la relation de l'être humain avec la beauté elle-même est idolâtre et éloigne celui-ci de la connaissance de la beauté. Il est intéressant de comparer cela avec une déclaration du psychothérapeute et fondateur de la logothérapie Viktor Frankl ; il ose affirmer qu'une personne qui sombre dans le désespoir fait de ce désespoir une idole. Il le fait en défiant et en absolutisant une valeur qui n'est que relative, c'est-à-dire de manière analogue à ce qui a été dit plus haut. Si je situe ce point de vue dans la conception de Grégoire de la beauté, l'être humain qui succombe au désespoir cesse de voir la beauté et absolutise la valeur de ce qui le désespère. Il cesse de percevoir la beauté de la création et de se rendre compte de sa valeur. En conséquence, il perd son orientation vers le bien et s'enfonce dans les ténèbres du désespoir.

Dans la conception de Grégoire, la beauté ne peut devenir une idole. Une idole est créée par l'être humain à partir de la réalité à laquelle il se rattache dans son désir et dont il est incapable de discerner la valeur de la beauté. Le discernement du beau est une connaissance spirituelle. Si l'être humain veut vraiment connaître le beau, il doit

nécessairement cultiver sa connaissance à la manière de Moïse, en se perfectionnant dans la vertu, en purifiant son désir et en recherchant la liberté spirituelle, pour qu'ensuite, sur les ailes de la colombe, dans l'Esprit Saint, il puisse discerner le vrai beau<sup>87</sup>.

*Protestant Theological Faculty, Charles University  
Černá 9  
115 55 Praha 1  
Czech Republic  
E-mail: filae@seznam.cz*

---

<sup>87</sup> Gregoire de Nysse, *Traité de la virginité* XI. 9–19 (Sch 199, 4, 389).

## **REVIEWS & NEWS**

---





---

## Conference Report: ‘The Pattern and the Image: Insights from the Alexandrian Exegetical Tradition’

---

PAVEL DUDZIK, DAVID VOPŘADA

The international patristic conference entitled *The Pattern and the Image: Insights from the Alexandrian Exegetical Tradition* took place in Prague on 17–18 November 2022. The conference was held under the auspices of the Catholic Theological Faculty of Charles University and the Czech Patristic Society, and the venue was the Vratislav Hall of the Royal Collegiate Chapter of Sts Peter and Paul in Vyšehrad.

The organisers intended to introduce the topic of the relationship between pattern and image somewhat more widely than just on patristic ground and to explore its roots in both the Greek philosophical and Jewish Hellenistic traditions. On the first day of the conference, the programme opened with two papers on the theme of ‘pattern and image’ in Plato and Plotinus (Ondřej Krása, ‘World as an Image in Plato’, and Ota Gál, ‘The Pattern and the Image in Plotinus: Plato’s Heritage’), addressing possible reasons for referring to the sense-perceptible world as an image in Plato and exploring the continuity of Plato’s and Plotinus’ thought in relation to art. Thematically, this section culminated in Prof. Lenka Karfíková’s lecture, ‘The Iconic Structure of Reality in the Platonic Tradition and Its Christian Reinterpretation’, in which the motifs associated with the concepts of image and simile were brought from Plato and Plotinus to the 3rd and 4th century Christian authors Origen, Athanasius of Alexandria, and Gregory of Nazianzus.

In the afternoon session, three papers first presented partial aspects of the same theme in the Jewish tradition, especially in Philo of Alexandria (Marcela Andoková, ‘Moses as the Model of a Hellenistic King in Ezekiel the Tragedian’, Adrián Flores Lopez, ‘The “Human Body” in Philo’s Interpretation of Gen 1–3: A Testimony to the Polysemy of Images in his Allegorical Exegesis’, and Markéta Dudziková, ‘The Image Ascending to Its Archetype according to Philo of Alexandria’); the papers were devoted to the Jewish dramatisation of Moses after the model of Hellenistic kings, the multiple meanings of the term ‘image’ in Philo, and, in the same author, the relation of the human mind to the intelligible and uncreated, which makes possible the ascent of the mind through the world to God. Then Gregory E. Sterling, in his lecture ‘Day One and the Intelligible World: An Alexandrian Exegetical Tradition?’ explored the identification of the intelligible world with the ‘one day’ of Gen. 1:5 in the Alexandrian tradition, especially in Clement, Origen, and Eusebius of Caesarea. In the evening session of the first day of the conference, four papers addressed

issues of the concept of image in Clement and Origen, authors belonging to the Alexandrian exegetical tradition of the 3rd century, as well as in the work of Gregory of Nyssa (Pierluigi Banna, 'The Copy and the Revelation. Protagonists and Contents of partial truths in Clement of Alexandria', Sincero Mantelli, "'Servant mysterium Trinitatis". The Role of Seraphim (Is 6, 2–5) in Concealing and Revealing the Nature of God in the Origenian Work and its Sources', Matteo Monfrinotti, 'Εἰκὼν and ὁμοίωσις in the Anthropology of Clement of Alexandria and Gregory of Nyssa. Theological Convergence?'. and Pavel Dudzik, 'Origen of Alexandria and His Use of Prov 8: 22–25 LXX'); they concerned the relationship between Christian truth and the partial truth of non-Christians in Clement of Alexandria, Origen's interpretation of the prophet's vision of the two Seraphs interpreted according to the Trinitarian key, the concept of image and likeness in the anthropology of Clement and Gregory, and the name Divine Wisdom from Prov 8:22 as a summary of the patterns of future creation in Origen's Commentary on the Gospel of John.

The second conference day began with a return to the Philonic theme, namely Philo's concept of image and pattern and its reception in early Christian thought, in a keynote by Justin M. Rogers, 'The Reception of Philo's *De Opificio Mundi* 15–25 in Alexandrian Christianity'; Rogers examined Philo's view of the Logos as the mediating power that creates the sensible world according to patterns understood as divine and the reception of this view in Clement, Origen, and Didymus the Blind. Then there were papers on the 4th century authors Pseudo-Athanasius, Ambrose of Milan and Gregory of Nyssa (Viacheslav V. Lytvynenko, 'From Created Realities to Prototypes: Ambrose's Concept of Creation', David Vopřada: 'World as an Idea and Reality: Ambrose's Concept of Creation', Magdalena Marunová, 'The Pattern and the Image in Gregory of Nyssa's Searching for the Perfect Virtue'), the first paper of which compared the use of the exegetical method proceeding from created realities to prototypes in the Pseudo-Athanasian *Disputatio contra Arium* and in authentic Athanasius' *Orationes contra Arianos*, the second focused on Ambrose's concept of creation, according to which the visible world is an image of the invisible and heavenly world as reality, and reflected on the value that Ambrose attributes to the created world and to the existence and history of humanity; the third paper focused on the theme of the Names of Christ and the role of participation in them in the pursuit of human perfection. In the last, afternoon session, the participants spoke (in contrast to the program in English) on the Latin terminology in Augustine (interpretive and translational possibilities of the term *Word/verbum*) and on the Trinitarian aspects evident in the figure of the Virgin Mary in Gregory of Nyssa (Róbert Horka, 'Latin Equivalents of the Term *Logos/Verbum* and their Interpretative Meaning in the Sermons of Trinitarian Features of God's Image in Man in Gregory of Nyssa', Petr Havlík, 'Mary and the Trinity: Trinitarian Features of God's Image in Man in Gregory of Nyssa').

The conference brought partial, detailed contributions on the theme of 'pattern and image' in cosmological, Christological and anthropological contexts,

as well as summarising lectures on this important concept, consistently present in the thought of many pre-Christian, Jewish, and early Christian authors. It was an opportunity to trace the transformations of this concept and its concrete forms in different authors on a rather long timeline. Equally importantly, over this broad unifying theme, it facilitated personal encounters among scholars working in the fields of patristics, philosophy, and Biblical studies from four countries.

doi: [10.14712/23363398.2023.20](https://doi.org/10.14712/23363398.2023.20)

ACTA UNIVERSITATIS CAROLINAE  
**THEOLOGICA** 2023, Vol. 13, No. 1

Charles University  
Karolinum Press  
Ovocný trh 560/5, 116 56 Praha 1  
Czech Republic  
[www.karolinum.cz](http://www.karolinum.cz)  
Typeset and printed by Karolinum Press

Published twice a year  
ISSN 1804-5588 (Print)  
ISSN 2536-3398 (Online)  
MK ČR E 19775