

VIATORUM

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Editorial

Anthropology of Hope¹

The articles in this issue of *Communio Viatorum* are all expanded versions of papers presented at a conference held in Prague in May 2023, with the theme “Anthropology of Hope”. This was the final conference of a six-year Charles University Centre of Excellence Research Project, directed by Professor Ivana Noble of our Protestant Theological Faculty, involving people from that faculty and also from the Catholic Theological Faculty.² The project dealt with Theological Anthropology in Ecumenical Perspective, and each year a conference was held dealing with some sub-themes of the topic, with speakers from different Christian traditions sharing their expertise. The final conference was no different in this respect.

This issue is the first of our journal to come out since the death of Professor Jürgen Moltmann in June 2024, a very good and already much-missed friend of our faculty and one of the great theologians of the post-war period. This year indeed marks the sixtieth anniversary of the first publication of his highly influential book *Theologie der Hoffnung (Theology of Hope)*, in which he sought to give a Kingdom-centric view of what it means to hope in today’s world. Moltmann’s insistence on openness to the eschaton remains a key contribution, but the question of where and how to find hope persists, and thus it is important to respond to this question theologically.

Around Europe and across the world elections or election campaigns seem to indicate a world in which people are losing hope, in their societies and in their politicians. A number of politicians have tried to use as a backdrop to their campaigns a song from the 1990s by D-Ream, “Things Can Only Get Better”, but many voters are appearing to be saying to them that as far as they

- 1 This editorial and this issue of *Communio Viatorum* are outcomes of the work of the Charles University Research Centre programme No. UNCE/24/SSH/019, “Theological Anthropology in Intercultural Perspective”.
- 2 Articles developed from other papers presented at the conference can be found in the Catholic Theological Faculty’s journal, *AUC Theologica* 13:2 (2023), available at <https://karolinum.cz/en/journal/auc-theologica/current>.

are concerned at best things might not get a whole lot worse. This is not the place to go in to an analysis of why we are seeing the death of hope, but it does suggest that putting hope in penultimate things (whatever slogans one chooses to believe in) will always fail to provide the ultimate eschatological hope of which Moltmann wrote so profoundly.

And yet, despite all the societal indications of hopelessness, most people most of the time do cling on to some form of hope, because most people have in their own actions and in the actions of others caught a glimpse of the good, of transcendence, of another possible world. Like the sun in our part of the world over the past few months, glimpses of this may be very fleeting, but it is enough to serve as a reminder that behind the clouds and the greyness and the suffering, there is light. In this sense, human beings are hopeful and hope-filled. And because human beings are imbued with hope, any theological anthropology must engage with the topic.

The theme of hope is not easy to deal with from an academic perspective, since it roots itself in the present with an eye to a future which is necessarily indeterminate. Hope is not the same as naivety, a specious belief that, in the classic words of Voltaire's Pangloss, echoing Leibniz, all is for the best in the best of all possible worlds.³ Hope can be as easily in spite of, rather than because of experience. Again as Moltmann insisted, it is a refusal to be reduced to the immediate, and a recognition of the presence of transcendence, thus of God. It was with this struggle between often very difficult situations and a belief in the transformative power of God that many of the papers delivered in our conference dealt. They were not trying to escape from reality, with the blinkers of an unfounded hope, but asking what it means to hope in situations of despair, of violence and abuse and oppression.

We begin with an article by Lenka Fílová, who works with the parents of adult disabled children, drawing on the psychotherapeutic approach of the Austrian founder of logotherapy, Victor Frankl. Although Frankl does not explicitly deal with hope very much, the article argues that in his search for meaning, there are implicit signs of hope. When meaning is found or assigned, then there is the possibility of hope.

The second article by Professor Peter De Mey of KU Leuven presents us immediately with a challenge to any too easy move to hope. Through an

3 Pangloss is a character in Voltaire's satirical picaresque novella *Candide*, with a Leibnizian optimism.

analysis of some recent literature on the subject, he considers the child sex abuse crisis that has rocked the Roman Catholic Church, in Professor De Mey's native Belgium and in so many other countries around the world. To speak too quickly of hope in such circumstances can appear yet another form of the Church ignoring the survivors. The article looks at what theological possibilities there are for speaking of hope in a way that takes seriously and includes the survivors.

One of the questions implicit in Peter De Mey's article is about what would be necessary to offer hope for these survivors. The next article does not seek directly to answer this question, but perhaps suggests one way forward. The article is by the Swedish ecumenical theologian Sara Gehlin, and it takes up the Constitution of UNESCO, produced only a few months after the final end of the Second World War. In that constitution, there is the declaration that just as war begins in human minds, so must the defence of peace. Over against the construction of "imagined enemies" (something we sadly see only too clearly in the Russian invasion of Ukraine), the article suggests that hope can be formed in and through the development of an empathetic imagination.

Our fourth article is by a Serbian Orthodox theologian based in Sweden, Fr Milutin Janjić, who examines the sermons broadcast through Radio Liberty by the noted Orthodox theologian Fr Aleksander Schmemmann, focusing in particular on Fr Schmemmann's analysis of a poem by Joseph Brodsky. The article suggests that the sermons offer a unique form of hope (not least because it was impossible to know if anyone ever heard them). It also looks at the power of language to convey the experience of God that lies at the heart of any Christian hope.

The final article in this issue of *Communio Viatorum* is by a Romanian Orthodox theologian, Viorel Coman. In his text he deals with the most pressing issue facing the world today, the need to restore the world in which we live so we and other species will be able to continue to dwell in it. He does this through an investigation of the contribution of the well-known Romanian scholar Fr Dumitru Stăniloae, especially his theology of the sacramentality of creation. The article argues that this theology can help in developing a Christian ecology whose central idea is of non-possession or non-domestication of the world by human beings.

These articles, which challenge us to think about what we understand by hope and how we can practice it, form this first issue of a new year of

our journal. This new year sees some changes for us too. Most notably, the journal will now be published by Carolinum, the press of Charles University, and it will become open access, thus expanding the possibility to read the articles in our journal to a still wider public. But of course as often change comes with a tinge of sadness. For the editorial team it marks the end of a long and uniformly excellent cooperation with Petr Kadlec, who expertly dealt with all the different fonts and scripts and tight deadlines in setting out the journal for publication. This work, because it was always so well-done, perhaps passed most of our readers by, but we would like to take this opportunity to express our deep gratitude to him for all that he has done for us. It also marks a change in our relationship with ATLA, who have hitherto been the main source offering online access to our journal. This too has been a beneficial collaboration, and we are glad that they will continue to host the back numbers of our journal, allowing access to articles for scholars and other interested readers around the world. And we look forward with hope to the next phase in the long history of our journal, and to you, our readers, accompanying us on that journey.

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DOI: 10.14712/30296374.2024.2

Meaning and Hope in the Work of Viktor Frankl

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Abstract: Reflecting on my work, supporting parents of adult children with disabilities, I asked myself about the meaning of my work. If the answer is “to give hope,” is it possible to live up to such a challenge? Viktor Frankl’s most famous book, *Yes to Life: In Spite of Everything*, bears witness to hope in its very title – witness to the hope that life has meaning despite all the suffering. The aim of this paper is to show the relationship between meaning and hope through analysing some of Frankl’s books. First, I provide a brief background to the people with whom I work. In understanding hope, I draw on Jan Sokol’s definition. I then briefly introduce Frankl’s logotherapy and the basic concepts with which he works, before analysing his texts and defining the relationship between meaning and hope. Finally, I consider whether I can live up to the claim of bringing hope through my work.

Keywords: logotherapy; meaning; hope; anthropology; disability

DOI: 10.14712/30296374.2024.3

Introduction

I work in a non-profit organization with parents of adults with disabilities. My work straddles the line between psychotherapeutic and social counselling and peer programmes. I myself have a 30-year-old son with a disability. The people who I have been given to accompany for two years on the journey of their lives have experienced dehumanised treatment of people with disabilities under communism in Czechoslovakia. The profound devaluation of human dignity is expressed in a nutshell by a doctor’s advice to the parents of a beloved baby: “Put it in an institution.” Now, the parents are in the second half of their lives, and they no longer have as much energy as before. What they fought for during the communist regime and won after the Velvet Revolution, that is, the life of their child in a family outside of institutional care, is again uncertain. The government is systemically unable to create good conditions for their children, now about 40 to 50 years old, to be able to continue to live in their homes, in the environment they know, in an environment that gives them safety and which they can understand, after their parents’ deaths. After two years of guiding them, I am confronted in some cases with the situation of leaving these “aging” parents alone, tired,

battered and humiliated in their struggle for a proper quality of life for their children, in uncertainty, with no prospect of a change in their conditions. As part of my self-reflection and reflection on my work, I asked myself the question, *What is the meaning of my work?* And the answer came to me: to bring hope. But is it possible to live up to such a claim in my work? Since in my practice I use a logotherapeutic approach, I adapted the question to this realm: *Can logotherapeutic practice bring hope?*

The aim of this paper is to show that logotherapy is a means of bringing hope, although Viktor Frankl, the founder of logotherapy, does not explicitly address this issue. He builds his logotherapy–existential analysis on a view of the human being which extends the contemporary conception of the human being in psychology as a psychophysical being, with a specifically human dimension, a spiritual dimension. At the start, therefore, I focus on the anthropology of Frankl’s analysis, to see if it creates space for grasping hope at all.

Logotherapy works primarily with the question of meaning and its fulfilment in human life. The next step in my inquiry, therefore, is the significance of the notion of meaning in Frankl’s work as a “tool” of logotherapy, if one accepts the Czech psychologist Karel Balcar’s paraphrasing of logotherapy as a treatment with meaning.¹ Last but not least, I examine Frankl’s statements relating hope, or rather hopelessness, to meaning. I conclude the paper with my answer regarding the possibility of logotherapeutic guidance bringing hope. Before proceeding to Frankl’s notion of hope, let me refer to the Czech philosopher Jan Sokol’s definition of hope as a reference point for my argument:

Hope, an attitude that clings to the expectation of the future. Hope can be objectified and fixed on a particular goal or something, or it can remain open as an expression of trust in the world or in God’s direction. In this sense, Christianity regards it as one of the divine virtues.²

1 Karel Balcar, “O knize” in Viktor E. Frankl, *Léčba smyslem, základy a aplikace logoterapie* (Prague: Portál, 2021), 160.

2 Jan Sokol, *Slovník filosofických pojmů* (Prague: Vyšehrad, 2004), 330.

1. Viktor Frankl and logotherapy³

Viktor Frankl, born in Vienna in 1905, founded logotherapy / existential analysis, sometimes called the third Viennese school of psychotherapy alongside Freud's psychoanalysis and Adler's individual psychotherapy. He worked as a neurologist and psychiatrist and published his first works on questions of meaning in human life in the 1930s. He is not only widely known in the professional milieu, but thanks to his book *Yes to Life in Spite of Everything: A Psychologist Experiences a Concentration Camp*, translated into many languages, he is also in the consciousness of the general public. Frankl died in 1997.

“Logotherapy is applied therapy on the basis of the psychological-anthropological model developed by Viktor Frankl.”⁴ Existential analysis is also characterized here as the philosophical basis of logotherapy and, at the same time, as its form. An understanding of existential analysis is provided through its comparison with psychoanalysis. In contrast to psychoanalysis, which enables a person to become aware of what is instinctual in them, existential analysis helps a person become aware of what is spiritual or existential in them.⁵ In the words of Frankl, “Existential analysis presupposes the image of the human as a spiritual, free and responsible being, responsible for the realization of values and the fulfilment of meaning.”⁶ Existential analysis seeks to reveal an intact and unbreakable humanity while appealing to the freedom and responsibility of the person. Logotherapy / existential analysis is now an internationally recognized and empirically validated psychotherapeutic approach with the key concept of meaning.

3 A distinction must be made between Viktor Frankl's Logotherapy/Existential Analysis (the direction more commonly referred to as logotherapy) and the direction based on this background of thought developed in a separate psychotherapeutic approach by Alfied Längle, Logotherapy and Existential Analysis (more commonly referred to as Existential Analysis). Frankl himself later prefers logotherapy in the name of his approach and retreats from the term existential analysis because of its extension in different contexts and the resulting ambiguity.

4 Alexander Batthyány, “What is Logotherapy / Existential Analysis?,” *Viktor Frankl Institut*, <https://viktorfrankl.org/logotherapy.html> (accessed 31. 7. 2023).

5 Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* (London: Rider, 2011), 30. Epub.

6 Viktor E. Frankl, *Theorie und Therapie der Neurosen: Einführung in Logotherapie und Existenzanalyse* (München – Basel: E. Reinhardt, 1993), 142.

2. Logotherapy – Existential Analysis and its view of a human being

The term logotherapy expresses the key position of meaning in Frankl's therapy.⁷ As noted in the introduction, Balcar paraphrases logotherapy as a treatment with meaning. To understand the significance of meaning and its role in human life as Frankl conceives it, it is necessary to understand his view of human being. Frankl was well aware that psychotherapy always relies, consciously or unconsciously, on a certain anthropology.⁸ Since the 1930s, in relation to Freud's psychotherapist's and Adler's individual psychology, Frankl discussed the rehumanization of psychotherapy. He did not underestimate the importance of either psychotherapist direction, but argued that psychotherapy, in order to help the suffering person, must work on the basis of the true image of the person, that is, in their wholeness, their psychophysical-spiritual unity:⁹ "Human beings are more than an animal; they extend into the human dimension."¹⁰ Frankl considers this specifically human dimension to be the spiritual dimension and thus distinguishes three human dimensions overall: physical, psychological and spiritual or noetic.

The spiritual dimension is to be understood in the broadest sense, not primarily in a religious sense. The inclusion of the spiritual dimension allows one to see and understand human beings in their wholeness. Frankl uses the metaphor of a cylinder to approach this idea. The cylinder is represented as a circle on the plane projection and as a rectangle on the lateral projection. Neither of these projections independently shows the relationship between these representations, nor the object in its entirety. Only the three-dimensional view allows the cylinder to be seen as a cylinder; and even as open – as hollow. Similarly, the three-dimensional view of a human being makes it possible to see them as a human being in their fullness and uniqueness.¹¹

7 The term *logos*, used in philosophy in multiple senses, can be understood in Frankl's work as meaning.

8 Viktor E. Frankl, *Das Leiden am sinnlosen Leben, Psychotherapie für heute* (Freiburg: Herder, 1987), 98.

9 Viktor E. Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul* (New York: Random House, Inc., 1986), 16–17, eBooks.

10 Viktor E. Frankl and Pinchas Lapide, *Gottsuche und Sinnfrage* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2005), 73.

11 Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, 417–20.

The relationships among the different human dimensions are not identical. Frankl termed the relationship between the physical and psychic dimensions *parallelism*, expressing the close connection between these dimensions and their inner unity, which, however, does not imply identity. The spiritual dimension is independent of both the physical and psychic dimensions.¹² This independence of the spiritual dimension establishes the possibility of human beings fulfilling their existence freely and responsibly.

In the introduction to *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*, Frankl defines the human dimensions and their interrelationships with respect to ultimate meaning.¹³ The spiritual dimension is a higher and specifically human dimension and includes both the psychological and physical dimensions of a person. The higher dimension always overarches the lower dimensions. Thus, biology is transcended by psychology, psychology by noology, and noology by theology.¹⁴ Frankl reflects that if the noological dimension as a specifically human phenomenon is described as a person seeking meaning, then religion can be defined as a person seeking ultimate meaning. He refers to Albert Einstein, who said that the religious person is one who seeks an answer to the question about the meaning of life.¹⁵

Logotherapy, by including this spiritual, specifically human dimension, can grasp specifically human phenomena “in order to incorporate them in its therapeutical arsenal”.¹⁶ Specifically, human phenomena have the capacity for self-transcendence, in the sense of self-overcoming and self-distancing – the capacity for self-detachment.¹⁷ Logotherapy involves precisely these human phenomena. Self-transcendence is the ability of a person to transcend themselves, to forget themselves when they focus on a particular thing or a fellow being; it is the ability to transcend oneself in a direction towards something that is not oneself.¹⁸ This capacity makes one a being who decides what, or,

12 Martin Wagenknecht, “Současné rozpracování a metody existenciální analýzy (vybrané části ze závěrečné práce pro psychologický výcvik v logoterapii a existenciální analýze)”, *Společnost pro logoterapii a existenciální analýzu*, 10, <https://www.slea.cz/wp/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/ealt-rozpracovani-GLE.pdf> (accessed 31. 7. 2023).

13 The higher meaning, or ultimate meaning, is the meaning of all the world's events and is described below in the section on meaning and values.

14 Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*, 22.

15 Ibid., 22.

16 Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, 420.

17 Frankl, *Theorie und Therapie der Neurosen*, 10.

18 Viktor E. Frankl, *The Will to Meaning* (New York: Penguin Group, 2014), 5, Kindle.

perhaps more accurately, who they will be in the next moment. Concerning this, Frankl quotes Jaspers' words: "What man is, he has become through that cause which he has made his own."¹⁹ It is precisely as a consequence of the capacity for self-transcendence that a human being is always searching for meaning.²⁰ Frankl considers love and conscience to be the most striking phenomena of self-transcendence. Love is the transcendence of self in relation to another being and conscience in relation to meaning.²¹ In this case, self-transcendence must be understood as an anthropological and not a theological concept.

The capacity for self-detachment allows a human being to withdraw from themselves, from their problems and illnesses, to detach from the situation. This distance allows them to take a free attitude towards the situation. Humour and heroism refer to the ability of self-detachment.²² What equips one with these faculties is conscience and will to meaning. Conscience, which Frankl calls the organ of meaning, empowers a person to seize the meaning in a particular, given, unique situation.²³ Conscience tells a human being what to do or what not to do²⁴ – what the situation requires of a person. But if one does not know how to decide until the last moment, if one does not know whether one's conscience is mistaken, one must take the risk of making a decision knowing that one may be incorrect.²⁵ To search for meaning, a human being is endowed not only with a conscience, but also with a will for meaning: "Man is essentially penetrated by the will to meaning,"²⁶ that is, the desire for one's existence to have meaning.²⁷ The will to meaning is rooted in human beings, and Frankl uses this term to describe the striving "for the best possible fulfilment life."²⁸ The will to meaning leads a human being to find and fulfil meaning and, at the same time, to encounter the

19 Ibid., 22–23.

20 Frankl, *Theorie und Therapie der Neurosen*, 19.

21 Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 5.

22 Ibid., *The Will to Meaning*, 4.

23 Ibid., 6.

24 Ibid., 6.

25 Frankl and Lapide, *Gottsuche und Sinnfrage*, 57–58.

26 Frankl, *Theorie und Therapie der Neurosen*, 14.

27 Ibid., 146.

28 Frankl, *Das Leiden am sinnlosen Leben*, 70.

other – the “you” – to love them. The will to meaning is thus understood by logotherapy as a basic motivational theory.²⁹

3. Person

Frankl summarizes what is specifically human in a human being under the term *person*, characterized in his lecture “Ten Theses About the Person.”³⁰ In the way Frankl, as a psychiatrist and neurologist, describes the person, regardless of their philosophical and theological backgrounds, he maintains a dialogue primarily with the psychology of his time.

1. The person as an individuum is indivisible; they are whole; they are unity. Frankl refers to this unity in relation to psychiatric illness, describing human illness as splitting the personality, as in the case of schizophrenia. A person remains whole despite any illness.
2. “The person is not only in-dividuum but also in-summabile; that is to say, it is not only indivisible, but also not fusible, because it is not only unity but also wholeness. As such, it is also impossible that the person completely dissolves in higher entities: in the crowd, in the class, in the race: All these ‘units’ or ‘wholes’ that can be posited above the person are not personal entities, but at most pseudo-personal.”³¹
3. They are an absolute novelty – they are a personal spirit, a spiritual existence; they are non-transferable. They cannot be reproduced.
4. They are spiritual and, as such, cannot become ill at all. In relation to the psychophysical organism, the person is both carried by it and carrying it. The person is endowed with dignity regardless of social or vital utility. Existence establishes human beings as responsible and free, open to the future. The person is meaning-oriented, striving for values.
5. A person is existential; this characterizes them as an optional being. A person is always deciding what they will be in the next moment. Existence establishes human beings as responsible and free.
6. The person belongs to the sphere of the self, as opposed to the sphere of the id. “I” cannot be derived from “id.” A person is unconscious of the

²⁹ For more on this, see Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 20–27, and 17–31.

³⁰ Viktor E. Frankl, “Ten Theses about the Person,” *Victor Frankl Institut*, <https://viktorfrankl.org/texts.html> (accessed 31. 7. 2023).

³¹ *Ibid.*

source of their spirituality. It is therefore important to distinguish between the instinctively unconscious, as considered in psychoanalysis, and the spiritually unconscious. In the realm of the spiritually unconscious, Frankl includes unconscious faith.

7. The person is not only unity and wholeness, but also constitutes this unity and wholeness in three layers of being (the physical, the psychological and the spiritual).
8. The person is dynamic. As a spiritual being, they can distance themselves from themselves as a psychophysical organism. This distancing from oneself defines and manifests the spiritual person as such.
9. This capacity for detachment distinguishes human beings from animals. For the animal, human reasoning and its relation to the environment as a world of meaning and values is inaccessible. By analogy, a human being can reason about the super-world, but intellectual knowledge of its meaning remains inaccessible to them.³²
10. The person can attain self-understanding through transcendence by hearing its call in their conscience.

Sokol, we saw, defined hope as an attitude related to expectations of the future. Frankl's conception of human beings as not only psychophysical but also spiritual, and thus open and relating to the future, sets the conditions for considering such a human attitude as hope. The inclusion of specifically human phenomena in the logotherapeutic practice is then a fundamental prerequisite for the possibility of therapeutic work in relation to hope. In logotherapeutic practice, the therapist seeks to appeal to the person and to help the client discover and draw on their spiritual strengths. Frankl says that the purpose of logotherapy is "to appeal to the person and to stir up the spite of the spirit."³³ As is clarified later, hope for Frankl is an attitude of *in spite of*, and logotherapy works with the person's attitudes, but explicitly in relation to meaning. What, then, does Frankl mean by meaning, and what relation does meaning have to hope?

³² See more in the section below on Meaning and Values.

³³ Frankl, *Theorie und Therapie der Neurosen*, 59.

4. Meaning and values

Frankl characterizes meaning as always objective. In defining meaning in relation to being in the world, he starts with a comparison between *subject* and *object*. The maintenance of the otherness of the object, according to Frankl, always necessarily requires a tension between subject and object. The same tension then distinguishes between “I am” and “I ought,” between reality and ideal, between being and meaning: “I should say that it is the meaning of meaning to set the pace of being.”³⁴ It is meaning that draws a human to self-transcendence through values.

In order to understand *meaning* in Frankl’s view, it is important to distinguish who asks the question for meaning. It is not a person who asks, but life that asks a person about the meaning of their existence, and a person answers this question. By their active response, they become responsible for their existence.³⁵ In their answer, a person is free, but at the same time responsible for ensuring that their answer is right, by finding the true meaning of a situation:³⁶ “It is the task of conscience to disclose to man the *unum necesse*, the one thing that is required.”³⁷

Some of Frankl’s formulations, such as this statement about the responsibility of finding the right meaning, the unveiling of the *unum necesse* of the situation and the objectivity of meaning, may raise questions about Frankl’s understanding of human determination. Here a brief digression is in order, even if it is not clear that there is a direct link to Frankl’s understanding of hope. At best, there is only an indirect relation, which could be expressed thus: “What would be the need for hope if a person’s fate is predetermined?” Although Frankl speaks of the objectivity of meaning and the responsibility to find the right meaning – the *unum necesse* of a situation – he also emphasizes the freedom of human decision-making, a spiritual freedom that is independent of any psychological-physical or social determinism. Frankl is very sharply opposed to determinism, which for him implies a narrowing of freedom.³⁸ Freedom manifests itself in free will and means not freedom

34 Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 33.

35 Peter Tavel, “Základní myšlenky Viktora Frankla,” in Viktor E. Frankl, *Utrpení z nesmyslnosti života, psychoterapie pro dnešní dobu* (Prague: Portál, 2016), 120.

36 Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 42.

37 Frankl, *Man’s Search for Ultimate Meaning*, 41.

38 See more Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2006), 128–31. Epub.

from conditions – these are given – but freedom to take a stand on all conditions.³⁹ It is this freedom to take a stand that enables one to realize attitudinal values⁴⁰ in relation to suffering. Frankl's response to the existentialist philosophical position, which sees the world as a work written in secret, speaks against the deterministic understanding of meaning. Rather, Frankl compares the world to a protocol to be dictated by a human being. With reference to Martin Buber and the human experience, he further emphasizes the dialogical nature of the life of spirit, that it is life that asks us questions to which we respond: "Truly, life is serious questions and answers."⁴¹

Through their life, a person creates being out of the nothingness of the future and makes it the past. They create it in the particular present moment as an event – as their experience and their decision. Making it the past, they bring it into eternity: "The strait of the present, this narrow place that transports from the nothingness of the future into the (eternal) being of the past, is then the liminal plane between nothingness and being, the liminal plane of eternity."⁴² Here again, Frankl establishes human responsibility for what a person brings by their free decision into this eternity of the past. Preserving of the realized events in the past can also be a source of hope. "All that is good and beautiful in the past is safely preserved in the past. On the other hand, so long as life remains, all guilt and all evil is still 'redeemable' (Scheler, *Wiedergeburt und Reue*)."⁴³

Meaning is the cause of human transcendence. Being does not remain static; it is dynamic and existential. Rather than accepting the determination given by the objectivity of meaning and the responsibility for the proper fulfilment of meaning, I understand the relationship between meaning and the human being motivated by the will to meaning as a dialogical becoming of oneself through the choice and realization of values, open to the future until the last moment of human life.

In Frankl's work, one can distinguish three types of meaning, which Batthyány of the Viktor Frankl Institute in Vienna categorizes as follows:

39 Frankl, *Das Leiden am sinnlosen Leben*, 103.

40 On attitudinal values, see the section below "Meaning and Values."

41 Viktor E. Frankl, *Vůle ke smyslu, vybrané přednášky o logoterapii* (Brno: Cesta, 1994), 39.

42 *Ibid.*, 39.

43 Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, 186.

the meaning of the whole world; the meaning of life; and meaning in life.⁴⁴ Knowledge of the meaning of the world or the “purpose” of world events, and therefore the ultimate meaning, lies outside the intellectual realm of human knowledge. This super-meaning is transcendent; it is more than comprehensible. To illustrate this point, Frankl uses the analogy of Pascal’s statement that a branch can never understand the meaning of the whole tree.⁴⁵ According to Frankl, this super-meaning can be grasped existentially with one’s whole being, that is, through faith.⁴⁶ That is why in the final lecture of the book *The Will to Meaning*, entitled “Dimensions of Meaning,” he discusses the relationship between logotherapy and religion, which reflects the dimensions of meaning, rather than the relationships among the different types of meaning.

Frankl relates the ultimate meaning to God, arguing that belief in the ultimate meaning must be preceded by trust in a supreme being – God. He thus expresses the relationship between the human and the divine world. The divine world is in a different dimension from the human world, which is why a person cannot grasp it intellectually. However, by grasping this dimensional difference, a person can understand why this dimension lies beyond their capacity for knowledge.⁴⁷

For a believer, this knowledge is not problematic because of their faith. For others, the question of the ultimate meaning – the purpose of world events – is problematic because the purpose lies outside of what has that purpose.⁴⁸ Although this meaning is intellectually inaccessible to humans, Frankl is convinced that a person is penetrated by a basic trust in ultimate meaning, without which they could not exist: “Even a person who commits suicide must be convinced that suicide makes sense.”⁴⁹ If they were not convinced of that meaning, they would not do anything. For Frankl, this confidence in meaning is transcendent, and therefore nothing can destroy it.⁵⁰

Logotherapy leaves the door to religion open precisely in the area of responsibility, in which one decides not only what one is responsible for,

44 Alexander Batthyany, “Logotherapie und Religion,” in Frankl and Lapide, *Gottsuche und Sinnfrage*, 40.

45 Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, 71.

46 Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 111.

47 *Ibid.*, 113.

48 Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, 69.

49 Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 116.

50 *Ibid.*, 116.

but also to whom one is responsible for one's actions.⁵¹ This meaning is inaccessible through logotherapy and is not its subject. A key observation, however, is made by Karel Balcar in his afterword to the Czech translation of Frankl's *The Will to Meaning*: The importance of the super-meaning for logotherapy / existential analysis is that "everything depends on it".⁵² For Frankl, super-meaning is a necessary premise that gives meaning to human life and human suffering. In this sense, he also asks the rhetorical question, "[...] but must we not assume that the human world itself is overarched by a world that is similarly inaccessible to man, and that only the meaning of this world, its 'meta-meaning', could give meaning to his suffering?"⁵³

This dimensional difference between the human and divine worlds cannot be overcome by a person, but the ultimate meaning can be grasped through faith. This faith is mediated by trust in a supreme being. Logotherapy, being a form of therapy, does not work with this higher dimension of meaning, but presupposes it and builds its anthropology on it. For Frankl, as I discuss later, hope is an attitude of trust relating to the ultimate meaning, or the meaning of the world. This interconnectedness of dimensions, though not intellectually graspable from a lower-dimensional perspective, is crucial to understanding how logotherapeutic work can bring hope.

The next type of meaning is the meaning of life itself. Frankl claims that human life always has meaning: "Logotherapists venture to talk about life as something that always has meaning."⁵⁴ Drawing on his conception of the person, he defends the meaningfulness of human existence, human dignity and uniqueness of each human life and its meaning, even under conditions of suffering. The meaning of a particular life as such, however, in its totality, is invisible to humans. Frankl communicates this idea using a parable about film: "A film has a meaning as a whole, but we only learn that meaning when we see the individual pictures in their context. We only see the meaning of our lives when we are lying on our deathbeds. At best."⁵⁵ In contrast, elsewhere he says, "And he will not know it even on his deathbed."⁵⁶ Here he shows the connection of the meaning of life to a higher meaning. One

51 Ibid., 110.

52 Balcar, "O knize," 161.

53 Frankl, "Ten Theses about the Person," point 9.

54 Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 127.

55 Frankl and Lapide, *Gottsuche und Sinnfrage*, 118.

56 Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 45.

could only glimpse the meaning of one's life in its totality in the context of a higher meaning. At the same time, the fulfilment of the meaning of life is tied to the fulfilment of a particular meaning here and now: "And doesn't the final meaning, too, depend on whether or not the potential meaning of each single situation has been actualized to the best of the respective individual's knowledge and belief?"⁵⁷ Like the question of super-meaning, the question of the meaning of life is not the subject of logotherapy, although it is possible to address these issues in existential analysis if the client brings them up.

Logotherapy deals with the third type of meaning, meaning in life. This type of meaning is characterized by particularity. The uniqueness of each existence and the uniqueness of each moment gives a person the possibility of fulfilling that moment and thus realizing the meaning of their own existence. It is precisely this uniqueness of human life and the uniqueness of the moment that gives deep meaning to our existence and calls it to responsibility. It is at this point of the encounter of human existence with the moment of reality that humans grasp the possibility of meaning. To perceive meaning is to recognize it as a possibility against the background of reality, when this possibility "is always unique, unrepeatable and passing."⁵⁸ This transience refers to this possibility only at this given moment. The possibility of meaning, if grasped and realized, is fulfilled once and for all. What has been realized has become past and is saved; it is conserved, stored in the past, and can no longer be damaged or changed by transience. According to Frankl, "The past is the safest mode of being,"⁵⁹ and "only unrealized possibilities pass away."⁶⁰ Just like meaning in relation to being in general, this unique, particular meaning is not a purely subjective meaning, but a meaning that humans themselves give to a situation. Subjectivism for Frankl implies a rejection of the existence of meaning "in itself," which in effect entails a denial of meaning itself:

This is what we have to struggle with. The moment there is no objectivity, the moment we forget that the world contains possibilities of meaning and values waiting to be realized in the time period we call our life, all the

57 Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning*, 141.

58 Frankl, *Das Leiden am sinnlosen Leben*, 28.

59 Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 91.

60 Frankl, *The Doctor and the Soul*, 134.

binding force of the possibilities of meaning and values disappears. Why should I realize them? After all, it is nothing but my own projection.⁶¹

Altogether, meaning in life can be characterized by three of Frankl's statements:

1. "Meaning cannot be given; meaning must be found."⁶² This means that everyone must responsibly find the meaning of a particular situation for themselves. No one can tell them what that meaning is.
2. "Meaning must be found, but it cannot be created."⁶³ With this statement, Frankl distinguishes between subjective and objective meaning. True meaning, that is, objective meaning, lies in the tasks of the world and is not identical with the subjective experience of meaning.
3. "But not only do we have to find meaning, we can find it."⁶⁴ This statement refers to the human endowment for finding meaning, which is conscience and the will to meaning.

Logotherapy works with meaning precisely in this sense of the unique, concrete meaning of a particular person in a particular situation. It helps the person discern and fulfil meaning in situations of loss of orientation to meaning. A person fulfils meaning by actualizing values, that is, through action, activity, experiencing and choosing an attitude.

In distinguishing three directions of fulfilling meaning, Frankl identifies three chief groups of values: creative, experiential, attitudinal. Creative values include the sphere of human creation, which, in the broadest sense of the word, is the realization of a work: "what [a human being] gives to the world." Experiential values include the realms of nature, art, love, beauty and goodness: "what [a human being] takes from the world." Meaning can be fulfilled even in the unchangeable conditions of human life, when humans cannot realize values in the first two directions, in a situation of suffering. Then, in spite of suffering, they fulfil meaning by taking a stance towards the suffering and therefore realizing their attitudinal values. For Frankl, the

61 Frankl and Lapide, *Gottsuche und Sinnfrage*, 53.

62 Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 91.

63 Frankl, *Das Leiden am sinnlosen Leben*, 28.

64 *Ibid.*, 29.

fact that even in these circumstances life has meaning is an argument for the meaningfulness of human life itself.⁶⁵

Earlier I presented a division of meaning into three types. Based on the descriptions of these different types of meaning, it can be seen that they are not three mutually independent categories. What are the relationships among the different types of meaning? For Frankl, meaning is one, although in his lectures he distinguishes the three types of meaning in order to clearly specify the field of the logotherapeutic approach. In "Dimensions of Meaning," Frankl does not explicitly address the dimensions of meaning, but he does address the question of religion in relation to logotherapy.⁶⁶ He makes a clear distinction between the two fields. As with a human person, he uses a dimensional analogy and points to the dimensional difference between the human and the divine world, that is, the dimensional difference between the meaning of the here and now and the higher meaning. However, this dimensional difference does not imply separateness or difference. If one views reality only from a two-dimensional perspective, one cannot understand the three-dimensional perspective. At the end of this lecture, reflecting on human suffering and in the context of his own experience, he asks, "What kind of meaning might depend on whether they print my manuscript?" And he answers: "I wouldn't care about that kind of meaning. If there is a meaning, it is unconditional, and neither suffering nor death can disturb it in any way."⁶⁷

In relation to patients, he then argues that what they need is "unconditional belief in unconditional meaning."⁶⁸ Meaning in the here and now is relative and subjective only insofar as it is tied to a particular individual and a particular situation. The connection to a higher dimension of meaning is shown not only by this "unconditional meaning," but also by Frankl's claim that a person is responsible for finding the right meaning. Further, the belief that life is always meaningful despite the suffering is based on a link to ultimate meaning. The possibility of finding proper meaning in situations of suffering and then taking a stance towards that suffering, even though the meaning of the suffering is only glimpsable from the perspective of a higher meaning, confirms this link. It turns out that there is only one meaning,

65 Cf. Frank, *The Will to Meaning*, 48–49.

66 See above.

67 Frank, *The Will to Meaning*, 119.

68 *Ibid.*, 120.

even though logotherapy involves working with meaning in certain clearly defined conditions.

Logotherapy deals with a particular person's meaning in the here and now – with the meaning that appears in a unique way to a particular person against the background of reality in the possibility of realization of values, in the unique way of their own life. This meaning remains, at the same time, an objective one. It is this objectivity of meaning which remains outside of human beings that I find hopeful. The human being grasps the particular meaning of a situation in their own unique way, thus moving out of themselves and relating to the future in the confidence of the fulfilment of the meaning of the situation and, consequently, of their life. The objective meaning draws a person out of their shell and towards the world and others – and into the common work of fulfilling the meaning of the world. It thus presupposes the hope that this meaning of the world, or ultimate meaning, exists.

In relation to Sokol's definition, I understand this concrete realization of meaning as an objectified hope in the sense of achieving a specific thing or accomplishing a task. However, at the same time, for Frankl, meaning is neither a goal nor a task.⁶⁹ It does not consist in a thing, task or goal, but is determined by the value that one realizes through reaching this goal, a value that does not lie in human beings, but in the world that offers it in the possibility of fulfilling its meaning. Thus, in the realization of values, the subjective meaning, that is, the responsibly grasped meaning, and the objective meaning, offered by the world in values, encounter each other.

5. Hope

Most of Frankl's texts are lectures aimed at introducing logotherapy; the significance of meaning is discussed and placed in a practical context. However, Frankl says very little explicitly about hope, though his books are often described as hopeful or hope-bearing. Christoph Schönborn, the Archbishop of Vienna, praises Frankl's book *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* thus: "With this book, Viktor Frankl will give millions of people a message of hope and spiritual and psychological guidance."⁷⁰ In a letter to Frankl, prisoners in a maximum-security prison wrote after reading his books, "People who

⁶⁹ Frankl and Lapide, *Gottsuche und Sinnfrage*, 74.

⁷⁰ Viktor E. Frankl, *Man's Search for Ultimate Meaning* (New York: Basic Book, 2000), 71. I quote from this edition of the book only here.

were helpless and without hope suddenly see a new meaning in their lives. [...] It's before Christmas, but logotherapy means Easter for us. [...] May we have a beautiful new day."⁷¹

How does Frankl understand hope? In Frankl's dialogue with the Jewish theologian Pinchas Lapid, he characterizes what he says about hope as unprepared and improvised, commenting:

Hope cannot be commanded, but hope must be present from some higher dimension. [...] Hope is only true hope when the dying know that they are going to die, and therefore, know it while still alive. And yet they don't give up their faith that everything will somehow be all right or will be put right or will be put right by so and so, by this or that. In that sense, they still hope. Every true hope is in spite of and never by some privileged hope.⁷²

Frankl's notion of hope appears as an open attitude of trust in the future, even at the ultimate point of human life, at the moment of death. Hope is given from a higher dimension, that is, it presupposes it. In relation to Sokol's definition, Frankl's understanding corresponds to an attitude of trust in the meaning of life and the meaning of the whole world.

A comparison of Frankl's statements on meaning and hope offers many similarities. How they overlap can be seen in the following table 1.

Tab. 1: Similarities of meaning and hope according to Viktor Frankl

Meaning	Hope
Meaning cannot be given, meaning must be found.	Hope cannot be commanded.
Meaning must be found, but it cannot be created.	Hope must have a reason. ⁷³
We can find it – humans are equipped with the will to meaning and the conscience.	A person is penetrated by a basic trust in ultimate meaning.
Meaning is in spite of suffering	True hope is in spite of everything.
There is a higher dimension of the meaning – super-meaning	Hope must be present from some higher dimension

⁷¹ Frankl, *Das Leiden am sinnlosen Leben*, 84.
⁷² Frankl and Lapid, *Gottsuche und Sinnfrage*, 89.
⁷³ Frankl, *Das Leiden am sinnlosen Leben*, 96.

As can be seen, neither meaning nor hope can be provided from the outside; each person must relate to meaning and hope by themselves and find the reason for them. To discern and find both meaning and hope, a person is equipped, in relation to meaning, with a conscience and a will to meaning and, in relation to hope, with a basic trust in the ultimate meaning. One finds meaning and hope “in spite of” the conditions in which one lives. Both meaning and hope are tied to a higher dimension.

The similarity between hope and meaning was also noted by Pinchas Lapide who, in his dialogue with Frankl, called meaning “the twin of hope.” He saw this twin similarity primarily in relation to the future. Hope enables one to see reality not only in the here and now, but also in its fulfilment in the future. Similarly, meaning, through requiring the act of fulfilment, transcends the present and points towards the future, to what ought to be.⁷⁴ Lapide’s view expands understanding of the relationship between hope and meaning.

Although Frankl does not explicitly address hope in his lectures, he often deals with the loss of hope – despair – which I understand as the experience of hopelessness. Therefore, I now turn to the relationship between meaning and hope in this negative characterization. Frankl characterizes despair as a manifestation of hopelessness as a kind of deification, as the absolutization of a single value. One gives absolute value to something that has only a conditional, relative value. Frankl shows this in the case of a woman, a nurse, who fell ill with a terminal illness and could no longer perform her job. She fell into despair not because of her illness, but because of her inability to work; her life thus lost its meaning for her. Frankl points out that such an approach understands human life as meaningful only if one is able to work for so many hours, but it neglects the possibility of another grasp of the meaning of a particular life situation. For this woman, the value of being able to work was a built-in value, and this attitude did not allow her to see other values in her life.⁷⁵

It is precisely logotherapy that enables a person to turn from despair to meaning through guiding the responsibility for the realization of existence even in the unchangeable conditions of suffering. It does so through its phenomenological accompaniment to the discovery of values in life and the support of choosing an attitude. This grasp of meaning then somehow

⁷⁴ Frankl and Lapide, *Gottsuche und Sinnfrage*, 120.

⁷⁵ Frankl, *Theorie und Therapie der Neurosen*, 178–79.

includes hope. It includes hope in the sense of a change of attitude from *what will no longer be* to *what may yet be*, that is, to the future. Logotherapy, as has already been said, brings not religious hope, but spiritual hope – that whatever the conditions be, one can freely and responsibly adopt an attitude towards a situation. In his lectures, Frankl liked to quote Nietzsche: “He who has a *why* to live for can bear with almost any *how*.”⁷⁶

The relation between the finding of meaning and despair is also suggested by a diagram,⁷⁷ whose purpose is to illustrate the dimensional difference between the success – failure axis and the despair – fulfilment of meaning axis, as well as to demonstrate this dimensional difference through research. The graph shows persons in the fields defined by the axes described above, with the horizontal denoting failure – success and the vertical capturing despair – meaning. It shows that some people who can be considered successful regarding their status in life, having money, a job, a family and apparently no reason for dissatisfaction, yet fall on the despair side of the vertical axis. On the other side, this graph shows people who, despite “failure in life,” show a feeling of fulfilment of meaning. Although this research cannot, as Lukas⁷⁸ argues, demonstrate a negative correlation of the tendency to despair with an orientation towards meaning, it nevertheless shows that it is not possible to reduce the experience of meaning to the experience of success. It also confirms Frankl’s claim that one can find and fulfil meaning even in desperate conditions, precisely by choosing the attitude one adopts.⁷⁹

The opposing relationship between fulfilment of meaning and hopelessness is expressed in the point of the following story, where Frankl illustrates how meaning can be found in suffering: “At the same moment, he could see a meaning in his suffering, the meaning of a sacrifice. There was still suffering, but no longer despair. Because despair is suffering without meaning.”⁸⁰ This quotation illustrates that while the act of finding meaning may not bring an end to suffering, it averts despair. Thus, it is hopeful. Evidence of the consequences of finding meaning as hopeful also exists in some of the stories from Frankl’s lectures, such as the following excerpt from a prisoner’s letter to Frankl:

76 Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, 104.

77 Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 53.

78 Elisabeth S. Lukasová, “K validizaci logoterapie,” in Frankl, *Vůle ke smyslu*, 195.

79 Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 52–53.

80 Frankl, *Man’s Search for Ultimate Meaning*, 130.

I shall show them an exact circumstance from our prison where, from the depths of despair and futility a man was able to mold for himself a meaningful and significant life-experience. They, also, would not believe that a man under these circumstances could possibly undergo a transmutation which would turn despair into a triumph. I shall attempt to show them not only is it a possibility, it is a necessity.⁸¹

One may ask why Frankl hardly talks about hope. I suggest that it is because of the practical focus of his lectures, which can be described in two points. First, hope, in the sense of “true hope,” was for Frankl a concept that belonged more to the realm of the meaning of life and the meaning of the world, a realm that logotherapy does not address, although Frankl considered trust in the last sense to be a basic human attribute and spoke of it in the context of his anthropology. It can be asked if this trust is, ultimately, identical with hope. Second, despite consciously building on a philosophical view of human beings as doctors and as persons, Frankl was confronted with human suffering, often associated with the loss of hope. In such moments, people do not ask where their hope is, but rather ask what the meaning of their suffering is. Convinced that all suffering must have a meaning, Frankl, being a psychiatrist, seeks and finds a practical answer to this question. He answers with logotherapy, with the key concept of meaning in which, as I have shown, hope is unarticulated, but present.

6. Conclusion

The connection of meaning and hope stems, in my view, from the binding of the particular meaning of the individual person in a particular situation here and now to the meaning of their life, and hence to a higher meaning. This guarantees the objectivity of the “partial concrete meanings” of each person in their situation. Through this objectivity of meaning, the human being is drawn into a common work that is in process and, hence, open to the future. Humans, in their own unique way, participate in the “creation of the world.” The realization of these particular and, at the same time, objective values strengthens and empowers them and brings hope, that is, an attitude of trust in the future – in the possibility of the fulfilment of meaning. This attitude can be adopted even if one rejects or does not see the existence of the ultimate meaning. According to Frankl, although one does not per-

⁸¹ Frankl, *The Will to Meaning*, 54–55.

ceive the ultimate meaning, as a spiritual person who cannot fall ill, one is equipped not only with the will to meaning, as the basic human motivation, and conscience, as the organ of meaning, but also with the basic trust in the ultimate meaning, that is, the a priori hope that everything has a meaning in the end, even if one cannot always recognize it. This relationship is nicely expressed by Václav Havel: "Hope is not simply optimism. It is not the conviction that something will turn out well, but the certainty that something has a meaning – no matter how it turns out."⁸²

How then does one express the relationship between meaning and hope? I agree with Lapide that meaning is the twin of hope, or, to put it another way, that meaning and hope go hand in hand. The search for and fulfilment of meaning, turning one towards the future, appears to be hopeful, as evidenced by the stories from Frankl's lectures. Logotherapeutic practice can bring hope because of its focus on activating the spiritual. It supports the search for and realization of meaning in the here and now, precisely because this meaning, though unique and specific to one's situation, is ultimately tied to the higher meaning from which hope springs. I find this interconnectedness of meaning realized through the realization of values in Frankl: "There is certainly the possibility of imagining everything of value in such a way that it converges to one supreme value, to one 'person of value' (Scheler); so that perhaps all truth, conceived to the end, misses God; all beauty, conceived to the end, glimpses God; and every salutation, rightly understood, salutes God."⁸³

The search and fulfilment of meaning here and now is also the search and fulfilment of human hope. This hope given to a human being cannot be destroyed, as the spiritual is bound to the objectivity of meaning, that is, to the ultimate meaning. Thus, to return to my original question as to whether hope can be brought through my counselling logotherapy work, this investigation in to the role of meaning and hope in Frankl would indicate that the answer is: "Yes, it can."

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82 Václav Havel, *Dálkový výslech (rozhovor s Karlem Hviždou)* (Prague: Melantrich, 1989), 156–57.

83 Viktor Frankl, *Zeit und Verantwortung* (Vienna: Franz Deuticke, 1947), 43.

The Restoration of Hope and Dignity in the Context of the Sexual Abuse Crisis in the Church

Peter De Mey

Abstract: This article looks at the sexual abuse crises that have hit churches around the world, especially the Roman Catholic Church, and asks if it is possible to talk of hope in such circumstances. It asks whether theology has a role to play or a responsibility for the crisis, and what sort of church is called for in the light of it. The article ends by suggesting possible places of hope that do not seek to impose on the survivors.

Keywords: Theology; sexual abuse; ecclesiology; hope; synodality

DOI: 10.14712/30296374.2024.4

This article is based on a presentation at a conference entitled ‘Anthropology of Hope’. In light of the terrible reality of sexual abuse in the Catholic Church it can be wondered whether “anthropology” and “hope” are not better discussed separately. The abuse crisis immediately turns our attention to the *anthropos*, the human person, and in the first instance the survivor who has been treated in an inhuman way. As Massimo Faggioli wrote in an opinion paper for the *National Catholic Reporter*: “Abuse of any type – sexual, spiritual, abuse of power and/or authority – blatantly contradicts the fundamental dignity of every human being.”¹ Paying attention to the survivors of sexual abuse should be the first priority of the Catholic Church and of all Christian churches today. In Faggioli’s opinion the abuse crisis should be “the center of the pope’s ongoing synodal process” and not “one among other equally important issues.”²

1 Massimo Faggioli and Hans Zollner, “The abuse crisis should be the center of the pope’s ongoing synodal process,” *National Catholic Reporter*, 15 November 2022, <https://www.ncronline.org/opinion/guest-voices/abuse-crisis-should-be-center-popes-ongoing-synodal-process> (accessed 5. 2. 2024).

2 Ibid.

1. Can it still be legitimate to speak about hope in the context of the abuse crisis? Comments on three recent reactions to the abuse crisis in the Catholic Church

The synodal path in Germany was launched in response to the 2018 MHG report on clerical sexual abuse³ and therefore the opening line of its preamble makes it absolutely clear: “As a Synodal Assembly, we are walking a path of repentance and renewal. We face the criticism and the justified accusation of those affected by sexualised violence, abuse of power and its cover-up in the Church.”⁴ Inspired by the opening line of Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes* and by the Würzburg synod and its famous statement *Unsere Hoffnung*, the opening line of the preamble does not forget to speak of hope either: “As Synod members, we stand with our guilt and need, with our hope and our faith in the midst of a world that is itself shaken by serious crises.” This is even true for the sexual abuse crisis: “We also see encouraging signs of hope in this grave crisis: the decisive commitment of those affected and of survivors to clarification, reappraisal and change testifies to a trust in the liberating God whom no power in the world can silence for good and who is also able to make His word effective anew in crisis situations of the Church through prophetic voices.”⁵

Following a recommendation of the 2017 final report of the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference ordered a national review of its governance and management structures that led to the 2020 report: *The Light from the Southern Cross: Promoting Co-responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia*. The introduction is a quotation from the opening line of Vatican II’s *Gaudium et Spes*: “The joys and hopes and the sorrows and anxieties of people today, especially of those who are poor and afflicted, are also the joys

3 Cf. *Sexueller Missbrauch an Minderjährigen durch katholische Priester, Diakone und männliche Ordensangehörige im Bereich der Deutschen Bischofskonferenz*, https://www.dbk.de/fileadmin/redaktion/diverse_downloads/dossiers_2018/MHG-Studie-gesamt.pdf (accessed 5. 2. 2024).

4 Der synodale Weg, “Preamble Text: Listen, learn, taking new ways: The Synodal Path of the Catholic Church in Germany,” § 1. The documents of this process can be consulted in English here: <https://www.synodalerweg.de/english/documents> (accessed 5. 2. 2024).

5 Ibid., §§ 5–6.

and hopes, sorrows and anxieties of the disciples of Christ.”⁶ One wonders though whether the Australian Catholic Bishops’ Conference in its response to this document should not rather first have accepted the ‘Call to reform’ of the Review instead of starting with three rather self-centred ‘Causes for hope’: “Despite shame at the past behaviour of some fellow clergy and religious, the vast majority of priests, nuns and brothers have been faithful to their vocations and continue to pour themselves out in servant leadership today.” The bishops also see reasons of hope in the fruits which “a right understanding of ‘co-responsibility’ in leadership” may bring forth and in “the willingness of the wider community to give the Church ‘a second chance.’”⁷

For Pope Francis, in his May 2023 address to the plenary assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Protection of Minors, hope is not immediately given but the ultimate result of God’s healing work and of the development of a “spirituality of reparation”: “Where harm was done to people’s lives, we are called to keep in mind God’s creative power to make hope emerge from despair and life from death.” [...] “Where life is broken, then, I ask you to help put pieces back together, in the hope that what is broken can be repaired.”⁸

2. Renewing theological anthropology in light of the sexual abuse crisis

The respected and much-missed Catholic theologian Rick Gaillardetz⁹ was surely right when he claimed “an integrated social analysis” of the sexual abuse crisis is needed. Instead of looking for a monocausal explanation, several causes – which relate to “personal agency, social structure, and culture” – need

6 Implementation Advisory Group and the Governance Review Project Team, *The Light from the Southern Cross: Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia. A Report and Recommendations on the Governance and Management of Dioceses and Parishes in the Catholic Church in Australia*, 1 May 2020, 2.

7 *Response of the Australian Catholic Bishops Conference to ‘The Light from the Southern Cross: Co-Responsible Governance in the Catholic Church in Australia’*, 24–27 November 2020, 3.

8 See <https://cruxnow.com/vatican/2023/05/pope-tells-safeguarding-body-not-to-be-discouraged-amid-setbacks> (accessed 5. 2. 2024).

9 Gaillardetz, a professor at Boston College, died of cancer in November 2023, aged only 65.

to be investigated: “the moral failings of individual clerics,” “priestly celibacy,” “a defective understanding of human sexuality” and “a problematic theology of the priesthood.”¹⁰ For Massimo Faggioli the sexual abuse crisis is “also a theological failure”¹¹ in which different theological disciplines are involved. Among those mentioned in his article are ecclesiology, the theology of priestly ordination, the relationship between the clergy and the laity, the role of women in the church, soteriology, moral theology and the teaching on sexuality. Church history, theology of childhood and liturgy are treated in greater detail in his article.¹² For feminist theologian Susan A. Ross it is especially necessary to revise “the dominant image of the powerful male God,” clericalism and “magisterial teaching that sees all sexual relationships according to the norm of procreation.”¹³

In what follows, I will pay particular attention to a chapter which the Spanish theologian Lluís Oviedo published in the 2020 collective volume *The Abuse of Minors in the Catholic Church: Dismantling the Culture of Cover Ups*. The chapter is entitled: “Does faulty theology play a role in the abuse crisis?”¹⁴ In this chapter Oviedo identifies beliefs and views that may have triggered and even justified sexual abuse by clergy, even if he is aware that it is not always easy “to isolate external cultural ideas and the internal organizational culture.”¹⁵ He is also aware that for some the pre-Vatican II culture of clericalism and for others Vatican II and its turn to the world will have triggered

10 Richard Gaillardetz, “Loving and Reforming a Holy yet Broken Church. My ‘Last Lecture,’” *Theological Studies* 97 (2023), 62–81, 69. Cf. Gaillardetz, “A Church in Crisis: How Did We Get Here? How Do We Move Forward?,” *Worship* 93 (2019), 202–24 and “Ecclesial Belonging in This Time of Scandal,” *Worship* 94 (2020), 196–204.

11 Massimo Faggioli, “The Catholic Sexual Abuse Crisis as a Theological Crisis: Emerging Issues,” *Theological Studies* 80 (2019), 572–89, 589.

12 *Ibid.*, 580.

13 Susan A. Ross, “Feminist Theology and the Clergy Sexual Abuse Crisis,” *Theological Studies* 80 (2019), 632–52, esp. 650–52.

14 Lluís Oviedo, “Does Faulty Theology Play a Role in the Abuse Crisis?,” in ed. Anthony J. Blasi and Lluís Oviedo (eds.), *The Abuse of Minors in the Catholic Church: Dismantling the Culture of Cover Ups* (London – New York: Routledge, 2020), 69–98. Oviedo teaches theological anthropology at the Antonianum in Rome and fundamental theology at the Theological Institute of Murcia.

15 *Ibid.*, 69. His theoretical framework, which he explains in the first section, is influenced by literature on “social imaginaries” (Cornelius Castoriadis), by the mature Niklas Luhmann, who discovered that it was not sufficient to study social systems but also dominant ideas, and by the field of cultural evolution. *Ibid.*, 70–73.

the abuse crisis. Since both positions need a lot of nuance, Oviedo prefers to only look at the responsibility of theology and in his opinion “theology has sinned more by omission and less by actively exerting any influence.”¹⁶ In his analysis he pays attention to both theological method and to “suspicious contents.”¹⁷

As to the former, for decades theology “has been predominantly a speculative and aprioristic discourse” based on Scripture and Tradition. The study of empirical data was not considered a *locus theologicus* and when the Council asked to pay attention to the “signs of the times” theologians did not identify the abuse crisis to be one of these signs.¹⁸ Oviedo discusses “inculturation and its challenges” as a second formal issue. However, while some blame the Catholic Church for having too easily embraced “a sexually relaxed dominant culture,” others like Charles Taylor criticise it for not developing enough sensitivity to culture. Hence there is not enough ground for Oviedo to maintain this issue as a potential root cause of the abuse crisis.¹⁹

Oviedo knows that the great Christian traditions in their theological anthropology offer variations of a “relational program between the human person and God” which consists of three components: “created in the image of God, sinners, and redeemed by grace.”²⁰ Compared to Lutheran theology the Catholic Church has developed a more optimistic anthropology in its conviction that sin never destroys God’s good creation and that in the sacrament of reconciliation the sinner encounters God’s healing offer of grace. In the light of the sexual abuse crisis it can according to Oviedo not be deduced that Catholic anthropology was wrong, but “its fault was rather overgeneralization, or the inability to spot exceptions and cases in which pathologies and other defects can even create a big question regarding the central claim about human likeness to God.”²¹

Assisted by recent developments in the behavioural sciences, theology should develop a more realistic theological anthropology. “It needs to come

16 Ibid., 77.

17 Ibid., 81.

18 Ibid., 77–79.

19 Ibid., 79–80.

20 Ibid., 81.

21 Ibid., 82. Also for Hans Zollner S.J., “The Child at the Center: What Can Theology Say in the Face of the Scandals of Abuse?,” *Theological Studies* 80 (2019), 692–710, the warnings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer against “a *cheap grace* or a *cheap forgiveness*” remain valid today. Ibid., 700.

to terms with the wide plurality of forms that human behaviour assumes, and needs to make place for its worst cases and manifestations.”²² Oviedo concretely shows how perpetrators, Church authorities but even the survivors, influenced by “a too idealistic anthropology,”²³ were guilty of “self-deception” of different kinds, analogous to what Catholic tradition terms “original sin.”

Self-deception was surely involved in human sinfulness or negativity already at the level of perpetrators, who could convince themselves that such an abusive behavior was not a sin, or was not a serious sin, or was a sin that could be easily remedied or forgiven in sacramental praxis. I am convinced by many testimonies that in many cases this kind of self-deception was present and was even being projected onto the victims, who were convinced about the good and beneficial nature of such abuses. The self-deception was surely present at the level of Church authorities who dealt with the problem, too. Again many testimonies point to an attitude that reveals how far these authorities were wrongly self-convinced that abusive clergy could not be that bad or so perverse; that they could overcome the problem in quite an easy way, through simple measures and the help of sacramental grace; or that they would not relapse when being allowed to. To some extent, many in the Catholic hierarchy were convinced in those years about the impossibility that such bad behaviours could even happen.²⁴

In some contexts self-deception goes hand in hand with a culture of shame.²⁵ Oviedo offers three suggestions for theological anthropology. First, in light of “the psychopathologies associated with abuse,” “theology should make more place for a hard-to-tame negativity and recognize its limits when trying to relate human nature to a divine plan.” Second, theology should become more modest in its reflections about human nature. To quote Oviedo again: “The only theological certainty is the divine will to save humans; but when human nature is under examination, things become too fuzzy and a theory trying to fix every aspect or to determine how good or how bad it is, is destined to fail.”²⁶ Theology should thirdly “assume a decidedly systemic, integral, or holistic approach” and accept the help of disciplines such as psychology, social sciences, therapeutic studies and law.

22 Oviedo, “Faulty Theology,” 82.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid., 83.

25 Cf. Jaisy A. Joseph, “Responding to Shame with Solidarity: Sex Abuse Crisis in the Indian Catholic Church,” *Asian Horizons* 14 (2020), 381–92 and Shaji George Kochuthara, “The Sexual Abuse Scandal and a New Ethical Horizon: A Perspective from India,” *Theological Studies* 80 (2019), 931–49.

26 Oviedo, “Faulty Theology,” 85.

3. Rethinking ecclesiology in light of the sexual abuse crisis

As an ecclesologist I also want to touch briefly on ecclesiological views which the literature on sexual abuse believes to have been conducive to potential misbehaviour by clerics. When reviewing the ecclesiological theories and models of the past Oviedo actually appreciates recent evolutions in the Church's magisterial teaching on holiness and sin in the Church.²⁷ For him the essential holiness of the Church can be defended even today, as long as one recognizes that sin happens in the Church.²⁸ Pope Benedict and Pope Francis have even gone one step further and have insisted that the Church must do penance for the abuse committed by its members. The contours of a healthy doctrine of the holiness of the Church, therefore, are clear: "Holiness, after these scandals, depends on the capacity to recognize limits and mistakes, to acknowledge the damage caused, and on the will to compensate the victims."²⁹

Oviedo knows that the dominant image of the Church as a *societas perfecta* has, after the Council, been replaced by the so-called "communion ecclesiology." This ecclesiology gives ample attention to the sacramental dimension of the Church and insists on the communion of the believers with the Holy Trinity. This important theological contribution should not

27 Oviedo situates the start of this debate "at the end of the 1990s" (ibid., 87) but the debate is already much older with important articles by Congar and Rahner written in the 1940s. Cf. Peter De Mey, "Church Renewal and Reform in the Documents of Vatican II: History, Theology, Terminology," *The Jurist* 71 (2011), 369–400.

28 See for another opinion Faggioli, "Catholic Sexual Abuse Crisis," 583: "No less in need of reexamination is the ecclesiological notion that the church as such does not sin, only the individual members do." Richard Gaillardetz, "Loving and Reforming a Holy yet Broken Church," 64, notes that, "for many of us today, in the face of endless scandal, it is the church's sinfulness, not its holiness, that requires little defense. [...] If the church is holy, it is only because Christ has not abandoned it and his promised Spirit remains, in spite of the impediments we have placed before it." For Cristina Lledo Gomez, "The 'Conducive Situation' in the Context of Abuse and the Catholic Church: Exploring Integral Theories of Sexual Violence and Ecclesiologies Supporting Sexual Abuse," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 41 (2021), 127–47, the idea that the Church is "only holy, never unholy, and therefore above reproach by moral or civil laws" is one of four problematic ecclesiological views which she discusses. The others are "the priest alone as Christ himself, ontologically changed through ordination which makes him morally and spiritually above lay persons; the Church as God's kingdom which makes its laws divine and superior to civil laws; the Church's main concern is the spiritual development of persons." Ibid., 135–42.

29 Oviedo, "Faulty Theology," 89.

completely be dismissed but be brought in balance with the somewhat neglected institutional dimension of the Church, as long as the Church as an institution promotes “a culture of accountability and transparency.”³⁰

In light of the abuse crisis it is for Oviedo also important that the Church accepts the “worldly assistance” of, for example, “the civil power’s police and judiciary.”³¹ It has become difficult to defend privileges such as the appeal to the seal of confession to a secular court or government commission.³² Faggioli also briefly discusses another point, namely “the Trent-to-Vatican II assumption of a certain territoriality of the Catholic Church based on the diocesan and parish structure.”³³ The link with the sexual abuse crisis is clear: “The territoriality of the diocesan presbyterium was one of the roots of a misplaced sense of solidarity between priests and their bishops in the cover-up of crimes; territoriality was also a misused ‘asset’ in the pattern of transfer of abusive priests to another parish or another diocese instead of their removal from ministry.”³⁴

The French Catholic moral theologian Marie-Jo Thiel is aware that the literature on synodality calls for a circular relationship between one, some and everyone, but it often occurs that “one takes the decisions and has the final

30 Ibid., 90. Oviedo does not seem to be aware of or does not take into account the fact that the ecclesiology of communion has especially been defended in the Catholic Church since the special assembly of the Synod of Bishops in 1985, which twenty years after the end of the Council had become more critical of the ecclesiology of the people of God. The rediscovery of the notion of the people of God in the current pontificate is an important act of reception of the Second Vatican Council. See also the special issue on ‘Accountability in a Synodal Church’ which the Peter and Paul Seminar, a group of Roman Catholic ecclesialogists and canonists has published in *Studia Canonica* 56:2 (2022), 369–708. One of the first pleas for an accountable Church is found in Stephen Pope, “Accountability and Sexual Abuse in the United States: Lessons for the Universal Church,” *Irish Theological Quarterly* 69 (2004), 73–88. According to Pope, “insufficient accountability has undermined the health of the Church” and “more adequate structures of accountability would help to strengthen the genuine authority of the Church.” Ibid., 88.

31 Oviedo, “Faulty Theology,” 94.

32 Neil Ormerod, “Sexual Abuse, a Royal Commission, and the Australian Church,” *Theological Studies* 80 (2019), 950–66, 956–58.

33 Faggioli, “Catholic Sexual Abuse Crisis,” 584.

34 Ibid. Richard Lennan, “Beyond Scandal and Shame? Ecclesiology and the Longing for a Transformed Church,” *Theological Studies* 80 (2019), 590–610 distinguishes three tasks “for an ecclesiology able to be both realistic and hopeful in the current circumstances”: “facing the church’s brokenness; understanding the church in terms of grace and human freedom; and facilitating the participation of all the church’s members.” Ibid., 590.

word.”³⁵ The sexual abuse crisis in the Church requires in her opinion that the pleas for a synodal Church also promote a culture of mutual accountability. She even asks that this be inscribed in the Code of Canon Law.³⁶ The French ecclesialogist Hervé Legrand is also convinced that there is a connection between the dissociation of laity and ordained in Catholic ecclesiology – which even persisted long after the Second Vatican Council – and the abuse crisis.³⁷ The current pleas for a synodal Church can be seen as a response to the sexual abuse crisis.³⁸ In the meantime the Synodal Path in Germany has approved a number of concrete implementation texts to prevent sexual abuse in the future. They deal among others with ‘Prevention of sexualized violence, intervention and dealing with perpetrators in the Catholic Church’ and ‘Measures against abuse of women in the Church’.³⁹

4. To conclude: narratives of hope

In the conclusion of the chapter which has played a central role in this paper, Lluís Oviedo answers his own question: “Does faulty theology play a role in the abuse crisis?” In his opinion “theology could probably play some role, but her fault is rather associated with passivity or absence.”⁴⁰ His final word is, therefore one of hope:

35 Marie-Jo Thiel, *L'Église catholique face aux abus sexuels sur mineurs* (Paris: Bayard, 2019), 616.

36 *Ibid.*, 612: “Pour prévenir les abus sexuels, il importe d’encadrer le pouvoir des clercs, prêtres, religieux, mais aussi des évêques et des cardinaux, de les obliger à se situer dans la transparence et à rendre des comptes sur la manière dont ils font usage de leur autorité.”

37 Hervé Legrand, “Les dimensions systémiques de la crise des abus dans l’Église catholique et la réforme de l’ecclésiologie courante,” *Revue des sciences philosophiques et théologiques* 104 (2020), 551–87, esp. 559–67 (l. ‘La scission actuelle entre clercs et laïcs a favorisé les abus’).

38 One of the first examples was the organization of a Lay National Self-Convended Synod in Chile in January 2019. Cf. Sandra Arenas, “The Awakening of Chile: Demands for Participation and the Synodal Church,” *Louvain Studies* 45 (2022), 97–111. At the end of her article she writes: “The church has to be a teacher of inclusion and of generating spaces of freedom for its members. The rest is something else, but not the church of Christ.” *Ibid.*, 111.

39 See <https://www.synodalerweg.de/english/documents> (accessed 5. 2. 2024).

40 Oviedo, “Faulty Theology,” 96. Cf. also Faggioli, “Catholic Sexual Abuse Crisis,” 586: “There is no imaginable exit from the Catholic abuse crisis without the intervention of the civil or secular authorities, at least of the judicial power.”

As already stated, theology cannot remain the same and work the same way after the abuse crisis, and I just hope we can learn the lesson to avoid repeating the same mistakes, the same delusions. The lesson to be learned clearly includes changes in method and approach, and surely a new style and awareness regarding its responsibility in ecclesial dynamics. The invited engagement entails a message of hope and reparation.⁴¹

One of the goals of the conference at which the paper on which this article was based was given was “to investigate how narratives of hope were framed and successfully shared in past crises.” Béatrice Guillon, who teaches theology at the Collège des Bernardins in Paris, wrote an article, in which she showed how traditional understandings of the evangelical counsels could easily lead to abuse, with a message of hope that focuses on the paschal mystery.⁴² Experiencing sexual abuse, she testifies, “is an experience of authentic death.”⁴³ When after a long and difficult process an abused person is able to throw away all unnecessary feelings of guilt and freely accepts their status of survivor, it may happen that this person, “who has freely entered into death, can now let herself be led by Christ, receive from Him the white garment washed in his blood (Ap 7:14) and live the life of the Risen One.”⁴⁴ In the case of the sexual abuse crisis narratives of hope probably are only possible on the condition which immediately follows the words of Guillon: “Only someone who has lived through this tragedy and travelled this road can say such things.”⁴⁵

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41 Oviedo, “Faulty Theology,” 97.

42 Béatrice Guillon, “Victimes d’abus dans l’Eglise : Pour une théologie de la vulnérabilité, de la responsabilité et de la guérison,” *Nouvelle Revue Théologique* 144 (2022), 24–37. She criticizes the fact that in some religious communities it is impossible for its members to live their vows in a spirit of “interior freedom.” For a few examples cf. *ibid.*, 29: “La radicalité du message évangélique peut devenir le lieu des plus odieuses perversions lorsqu’elle devient l’instrument d’un abus de pouvoir, lorsque le supérieur exhorte une communauté à vivre l’obéissance pour asseoir son pouvoir et en abuser sur les personnes. [...] Le conseil évangélique de la pauvreté place la personne consacrée dans une situation de dépendance qui devient facteur de vulnérabilité dans les situations de déviance. Le fait de ne disposer d’aucun bien personnel ne donne pas la liberté de partir facilement. [...] La résignation devient la seule réponse possible aux situations d’abus de pouvoir.”

43 *Ibid.*, 36.

44 *Ibid.*, 37.

45 *Ibid.*

Hope and Imagination: Ecumenical Aspirations for Overcoming Violence

Sara Gehlin

Abstract: This article highlights the imperative of building defences of peace in the human mind, articulated in the Constitution of UNESCO. Pursuing the question of how such defences can be built in contexts of religious antagonism, the article explores the work of ecumenical theologians who seek to find ways of building defences of peace in the minds of believers. The exploration involves intersecting ecumenical theology with the fields of religious education, cognitive science, and peace studies. In this way, the article brings introductory perspectives to interdisciplinary research that considers pressing questions of how to overcome violence and build peaceful communities. Throughout the investigation, hope and imagination serve as guiding concepts. Hope is discussed with regard to memory, change of perceptions, and the building of trust and peace. However, the article also considers the tendency towards constructing imagined enemies. Elucidating how empathetic imagination can provide resistance to this tendency, it discusses the way dialogue might break destructive habits of imagining the religious other as an enemy. With a view to this capacity of dialogue, the article considers the role of longstanding endeavours of ecumenical exchange in processes towards overcoming violence and constructing defences of peace in human minds.

Keywords: Hope; Constitution of UNESCO; ecumenism; peace; empathetic imagination; imagined enemy; memory; dialogue

DOI: 10.14712/30296374.2024.5

1. Defences of Peace in the Human Mind

In November 1945, half a year after the end of the Second World War in Europe, a group of representatives from forty-four countries gathered in London around a common aspiration. Their aim was to create an organization that would strengthen human solidarity on a moral basis and by intellectual means, and in this way contribute to the prevention of another world war. Their meeting eventually led to the adoption of the Constitution of UNESCO, the United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organization.¹ Today,

1 UNESCO, *Constitution of UNESCO*, adopted in London on 16 November 1945, available in the UNESCO Digital Library, <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000017503?posInSet=1&queryId=ee56505c-5ad8-4953-816f-df15dd5bcbc0>; UNESCO, “History of UNESCO.” Accessed May 3rd 2023, <https://www.unesco.org/en/brief>.

when the prevention of another world war once again appears an urgent issue, there is reason to return to what the representatives in London articulated months after the end of the devastating World War II. There are good grounds for considering what hopes they expressed for the future, and what they recommended with regard to their recent experiences of war.

In the Constitution from November 1945, the UNESCO representatives affirmed their resistance to contemporary tendencies towards prejudice and ignorance. The Constitution articulates that the ignorance of each other's ways and lives is a cause of the suspicion and mistrust that all too often lead the peoples of the world into war. Therefore, the Constitution recommends full and equal education for all, and a free exchange of knowledge and ideas. It declares that education for justice, peace, and liberty constitutes a sacred duty, which all nations must fulfil in a spirit of mutual assistance and concern. Accordingly, it advocates increasing means of communication between peoples of different nations, for the purpose of mutual understanding and a truer knowledge of each other's lives. It concludes that if peace is to last and not fail, it must be founded not only on political and economic arrangements, but also on intellectual and moral solidarity.² In the Constitution, it is assumed that the development of such a solidarity finds a primary source in the human mind. The Constitution opens by declaring, "That since wars begin in the minds of men, it is in the minds of men that the defences of peace must be constructed."³

The voices of the UNESCO representatives resound clearly through the decades. Their message has endured. Today, it serves once again as a reminder that the human mind is a seedbed for war. In times of increasing international unease and the need for renewed efforts to prevent war, it begs the question: What does it mean to construct the defences of peace in the minds of human beings?

In what follows, this question will be pursued with a focus on *hope* and *imagination* in contemporary ecumenical aspirations for overcoming violence. Thus, throughout this exploration, hope and imagination will serve as guiding concepts. Their meaning and implications will be explored in dialogue with scholars in the fields of theology, religious education, peace, and cognitive sciences. The article introduces perspectives on hope and

² UNESCO, *Constitution*, Introduction.

³ UNESCO, *Constitution*, Opening words.

imagination that are elaborated in the framework of a range of disciplines, and discusses them at the intersection with ecumenical discourses on the overcoming of violence.⁴ Hence, while the article involves interdisciplinary dialogue concerning hope and imagination, it furthermore aims at clarifying the way in which ecumenical aspirations for overcoming violence connect to endeavours of building defences of peace in human minds.

The history of the modern ecumenical movement spans both times of peace and times of war. This means that ecumenical theology is frequently constructed in regard to how peace as well as war can begin in the human mind. As a religious movement evolving through the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, the modern ecumenical movement provides numerous examples of religious resistance to violence and war. As such, it has created a breeding ground for theological discourses inspired by the hope of overcoming violence. However, ecumenism engages with matters that from time to time are far from peaceful, namely the encounters between churches and their respective traditions and groups of believers. Church history testifies to how religion can form part of the background to wars. It provides evidence of how violent attitudes and sentiments can grow in religious contexts.⁵ In other words, it is relevant to repeat the question of what it means to construct the defences of peace in human minds and, more specifically, in the minds of believers in contexts of religious antagonism. Subsequently, this question will be approached with a special view as to how ecumenical theologians in recent years have struggled with issues concerning the formation of mindsets in contexts of inter-Christian hostility.

2. Approaching the Perceived Antagonist

To begin with, focus will turn towards the ecumenical theologian and Catholic Bishop Michael Putney. In his book *My Ecumenical Journey*, he invites his readers to accompany him on a walk between historical places in the city of Rome. Contrary to what might be expected from a Catholic Bishop

4 This article is based on a conference lecture and has the limits of a short, exploratory, text. In this capacity, it aims at bringing introductory interdisciplinary perspectives on the themes of hope, imagination, and aspirations for overcoming violence. The lecture was held at the conference *Anthropology of Hope*, Prague, May 30th, 2023.

5 Sara Gehlin, *Pathways for Theology in Peacebuilding: Ecumenical Approaches to Just Peace* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 1–24.

in Rome, Putney takes his readers in the footsteps of the reformer Martin Luther. This gesture not only signals interest in another tradition; it also challenges settled perspectives and points at the possibility of changing rooted perceptions. While Putney moves beyond the familiar paths of his own tradition to seek new knowledge about an historical antagonist, he indicates that such new knowledge might be transformative of mindsets. According to Putney, initiatives to search for a renewal of understanding can open up new ways for overcoming inter-Christian suspicion and mistrust. Increasing knowledge and exchange, he maintains, can transform perceptions in liberating ways. Simultaneously, he makes clear that the lack of such knowledge and exchange can lead to isolation and even “imprisoning.” When religious groups do not meet and actively try to achieve a deeper understanding of one another, historical misconceptions can settle and remain influential. In this way, prejudices grow and may, in the worst case, lead religious groups into the trap of demonising each other.⁶ Reflecting on the widespread animosity among churches in Western Christian history, he concludes that,

[...] this exploration in isolation has also been an exploration over against the other, for example Protestants versus Catholics, Evangelicals versus Liberals, Reformed versus Lutheran, Lutherans versus Catholics. This has meant that each of us has emphasised in our tradition whatever distinguishes us from the other, and has interpreted the other as a damaged or limited form of ourselves, which has really been to imprison each other. The boundaries of isolation have been the walls of our mutual imprisoning.⁷

Bishop Putney’s conclusions find resonance in the document *From Conflict to Communion*, a document created by the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity in preparation for the common commemoration of the Reformation in 2017. With this upcoming commemoration in mind, they called attention to how accounts of the past can be oppositional, as in previous centennial commemorations of the Reformation. To commemorate can mean to justify and accuse as well as to stabilize and revitalize identities through polemics. Referring to the relationships between Lutherans and Catholics, the Commission recalls that historical remembrance has time and again intensified the conflict between the two church traditions and sometimes turned into open hostility. Accordingly, the way believers account for the past may have destructive consequences for the relationships between

6 Michael Putney, *My Ecumenical Journey* (Hindmarsh: ATF Theology, 2014), 63–78.

7 Putney, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 75–76.

believers of different traditions. Accounts for the past can dig new trenches between Christians of different church traditions.⁸ In Putney's words, such an exploration over against the other can raise walls of "mutual imprisonment."⁹ These assumptions are echoed in the field of religious education, which is where I now turn my focus.

3. Conversations at the Wells

According to Rune Larsson, a researcher in the field of religious education, new knowledge often emerges in the encounter with people and environments that are unfamiliar to oneself. This means that socially isolated groups and persons miss significant opportunities to acquire new knowledge and experience. The way to knowledge, Larsson maintains, can be described as an encounter with the unknown. This, however, requires courage enough to step into an unexplored terrain. He points out that the current situation of internationalization and a growing multi-cultural community give rise to different reactions. By many, it is perceived in terms of richness, abundance, and opportunity for renewal and new insight. By some, however, it is perceived as a cause of insecurity and a reason to fear. Therefore, Larsson elucidates the need of finding ways of living together *with* one's different backgrounds and traditions. Dialogue, he contends, is such a way. It makes possible a sincere, open, and critical reflection on what challenges and what nurtures the formation of reconciled diversity. With such a dialogue in mind, Larsson likens the creation of new knowledge with conversations at the wells. By listening to each other, human beings create new knowledge together. They draw from each other's wells.¹⁰

Larsson's image of the conversations and exchange of wisdom at the wells stands in contrast to Putney's metaphor of mutual imprisonment. In times of increasing antagonism and threat of war, it raises the question of how to find the way from the prison to the well. Research in religious education has generated essential insights on the nature of this way, which may be long,

8 Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, *From Conflict to Communion: Lutheran-Catholic Common Commemoration of the Reformation in 2017* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt/Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2013), 11–15.

9 Cf. Putney, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 75–76.

10 Rune Larsson, *Samtal vid brunnar: Introduktion till religionspedagogikens teori och didaktik* (Lund: Arcus, 2009), 15–18, 24, 28–31.

winding, and difficult to find. Pointing to the widespread phenomenon of dualistic thinking in terms of friend and foe, the religious education scholar Karl Ernst Nipkow emphasizes that both history and theology are being used in the service of producing simplifying images of strangers. This may contribute to the preparation for violence. According to Nipkow, religious education can provide means for resisting such tendencies towards violence. At the same time, he observes that religious contexts frequently serve as seedbeds for the growth of simplifications and dualistic thinking.¹¹ This recalls the words of Putney, who points to the tendency of religious communities to end up in the trap of condemning and even demonizing each other.¹² Whereas Nipkow calls for efforts of religious education to close this trap, there is need for further inquiry into the possible consequences of being caught in its logic.

4. Imagined Enemies

The researcher of religion and sociology Mark Juergensmeyer discusses this issue with special reference to the concept of “imagined enemy.” On the basis of his research on the jihadi war, he points out that the tendency to imagine the religious other in terms of foe rather than friend may lead to an understanding of the other as a threat to one’s very existence. An imagined enemy, Juergensmeyer explains, is an attempt to make sense of a difficult experience. In some cases, the enemy can be imagined with little justification. However, in most cases the grievances are real. The imagination of an enemy usually takes place against the background of violations, such as years of colonial oppression or a terrorist attack. In the context of such grievances, the idea of a non-negotiable, intractable, and evil enemy easily takes root and grows.

Similarly to Nipkow, Juergensmeyer warns against simplified images of the other, and pleads for thoughtfulness about the difference between act and person. He stresses that in contexts of war, evil things are often carried out by ordinary people who think they respond to evils perpetrated against themselves. Violence is countered by violence. Therefore, in contexts of war,

11 Karl Ernst Nipkow, “Education for Peace: A Multidimensional Approach,” in *Peace or Violence: The Ends of Religion and Education?*, eds. Jeff Astley, Leslie J. Francis, Mandy Robbins (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2007), 113–16, 122–24. See also Karl Ernst Nipkow, *God, Human Nature, and Education for Peace: New Approaches to Moral and Religious Maturity*, 2nd edn. (London: Routledge, 2018), 85–98, 129–55.

12 Cf. Putney, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 63–64, 75–78.

the construction of imagined enemies usually takes place from two sides at the same time. The consequences may not only include the determination to destroy the other, but also the imagination of the war as a battle between good and evil, religion and irreligion, right and wrong.¹³

Juergensmeyer's discussion is illustrative of the way imagination can underlie hostilities that increase the risk of war. It confirms the statement from London 1945 that wars can begin in the minds of human beings. However, if recalling the continuation of that statement, it is also in the minds of human beings that the defences of peace must be constructed. This calls for further reflection on the possible ways in which imagination can serve the construction of peace.

Insights from the preparations of UNESCO's Culture of Peace Programme, on the eve of the new millennium, can provide a springboard for this course of reflection. At that point in time, the work by the researchers of psychology and religion David Adams and Michael True called attention to the presence of a parallel inclination in human imagination – towards war and towards peace.¹⁴ In preparation for launching the Culture of Peace Programme, they stated that, "peacemaking requires at least as much courage, imagination, patience and strategic planning as war making, with infinitely more positive results."¹⁵ Hence, imagination is a capacity which can serve both war and peace. It can underlie the heightening of conflicts but can also provide keys for resolving conflicts. It can form imagined enemies, but it can also be at the heart of an empathy which embraces both enemy and friend.

5. Empathetic Imagination

The cognitive scientist Mark Johnson emphasizes that the capacity for empathy is one of our most important moral capacities. In his work on moral imagination he stresses the need for an empathetic imagination, which means to imaginatively take up the experience, part, and place of another

13 Mark Juergensmeyer, "Religion in the Global Jihadi War," in *Gods and Arms: On Religion and Armed Conflict*, ed. Kjell-Åke Nordquist (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013), 24–29. See also Mark Juergensmeyer, *Terror in the Mind of God: The Global Rise of Religious Violence* 4th edn. (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 174–80.

14 David Adams, Michael True, "UNESCO's Culture of Peace Programme: An Introduction," *International Peace Research Newsletter* 35:1 (1997), 1–3.

15 Adams and True, "UNESCO's Culture of Peace Programme," 1.

person. Empathetic imagination means trying to inhabit imaginatively someone else's world, not just by rational calculation, but in feeling and expression. It involves participating empathetically in another person's experience – in suffering, pain, and frustration as well as in joy, fulfilment, and hope. This, says Johnson, is perhaps the most important imaginative exploration we can perform. Imagination, he underscores, is communal and transformative in its character and makes it possible for us to understand each other, share the world, and reach out to each other in caring ways. Empathetic imagination is, in other words, not a private activity but the chief way in which we are able to inhabit a common society. According to Johnson, imagination is the primary means by which our social relations are constituted.¹⁶

Johnson's approach to imagination emerges in stark contradiction to the inclination of imagining the enemy, as outlined by Juergensmeyer. It can be observed that the notion of community lies in the background of this contradiction. Whereas imagined enemies tend to take shape through explorations in isolation, empathetic imagination is based on the desire for community and sharing, also with those who are different from oneself.

Johnson stresses that imagination can be passionate in the sense of creating non-instrumental relations to others and moving beyond fixed characters and social roles. In other words, it can engender sensitivity to the reality of others with whom one interacts, and who one's actions might affect.¹⁷ As such, empathetic imagination closely connects to the meaning and implication of hope, as outlined by theologian Anthony Kelly. Following Kelly, hope begins with a new ability to imagine a larger sense of life and community. Hope for oneself expands to hope for others. It thrives in mutual assistance, cooperation, and compassion. Kelly insists that hope begins to stir when discovering oneself not as isolated, unreachable, or beyond all help, but as belonging to a larger community of care. By allowing oneself to be helped by others, the helper comes to represent healing and recovery. The presence of the helper marks the beginning of ways to imagine things differently. When isolation is broken, life recovers its momentum.¹⁸

16 Mark Johnson, *Moral Imagination: Implications of Cognitive Science for Ethics* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993), 199–202.

17 Johnson, *Moral Imagination*, 199–200.

18 Anthony Kelly, *Eschatology and Hope* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2006), 5–10.

6. Hope and Memory

These perspectives are further developed by the theologian Werner G. Jeanrond, who stresses that the horizon of genuine hope includes the hope of others and of otherness. He emphasises that no one hopes for oneself alone. Instead, hope relates to our collective future. Jeanrond explains that in the Jewish and Christian traditions, hope results from trust in God and God's promises. Hence, in the framework of these religious traditions, hope is a relational concept. Turning to the Christian tradition, he points out that the church is a community of hope. Here, hope not only concerns the human quest for meaning. It also concerns the expectations of the peace, justice, well-being, and good relationships that are included in the vision of God's *shalom*.¹⁹

Nevertheless, Jeanrond also points to factors in contemporary times that challenge hope in its relational sense. He argues that even though we live in an ever more inter-connected world, currents of nationalism, extremism, and populism may bring limitations to one's imagination of the other by promoting tribal divisions between "us" and "them." The definition of "we" is made in opposition against an imagined other who is potentially threatening.²⁰ Jeanrond maintains that in this situation hope can inspire processes of change, not by turning against others, but by seeking community with others. Expressions of hope, he contends, can encourage acts of resistance. In resistance to suspicion, hatred and enmity, a new culture of remembrance can reinvigorate trust. Mindful of how memories of broken relationships can inform and shape our approaches to the future, he calls for new ways of remembering, which retrieve new energy for hope. This does not mean to deny the horrors or remove the guilt of a violent past, but to face the violent past together. It means to search for a different approach to the future, in aspiration for reconciliation and lasting peace.²¹ Here, however, Jeanrond points to the centrality of an existing desire for encountering, relating to, and developing trust in others, and for finding out more about them. If that desire exists, hope may flourish and encourage acts of resistance to old and new divisions.²²

19 Werner Jeanrond, *Reasons to Hope* (London: T&T Clark, 2020), 1–15, 161.

20 Jeanrond, *Reasons*, 162–65.

21 Jeanrond, *Reasons*, 100–101, 171–74.

22 Jeanrond, *Reasons*, 198–99.

This leads back to the question of how defences of peace can be constructed in human minds. In pursuit of this question, insights from the field of ecumenical theology point to how hopes for a peaceful future can be related to the ways of remembering the past. Accounts of history might affect the way religious others are imagined, not only in the past but in contemporary times too, and thus also in terms of future interaction. In hopes for a more peaceful future, ecumenical theological work has entailed longstanding endeavours of remembering differently and trying to imagine one's religious others in new and more nuanced ways. This is well exemplified by the Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity which prepared for the common commemoration of the Reformation in year 2017. Hence, the subsequent discussion necessitates going back to their work.

In the document *From Conflict to Communion*, the theologians of the Commission underline that remembrance makes the past present. They maintain that the violent history of the relations between Lutherans and Catholics risks repeating itself if it is not approached with the aspiration for peace. Therefore, they stress that Lutherans and Catholics have many reasons to re-tell their histories in new ways. They admit that what happened in the past cannot be changed. Nevertheless, they insist that what is remembered of the past and how it is remembered can change – that the presence of the past in the present is changeable. The point is not to tell a different history, but to tell that history differently.²³

This recalls the walk of Bishop Putney in Rome, motivated by his interest in the reformer Martin Luther. While stressing the importance of togetherness in exploration, research, and education, he highlights the possibility of changing the perceptions of the other. Following Putney, explorations which have been carried out in dialogue, and not in isolation, have contributed to the formation of a different mindset among Lutherans and Catholics. The willingness to take the hand of a former antagonist and try to remember one's common history in new ways, has contributed to the development of a more nuanced and comprehensive picture of that history.²⁴

Accordingly, the discussion by Putney indicates that when Christians have escaped their previous isolation and explored history together, in dialogue, they have arrived at new ways of imagining each other. Thus, in spite of

²³ Lutheran-Roman Catholic Commission on Unity, *From Conflict*, 16.

²⁴ Cf. Putney, *My Ecumenical Journey*, 63–78.

historical adversary, there may be reasons to hope that mutual trust can grow and nurture a readiness to evaluate self-critically the history of one's own church community. This leads back to the debate on imagination, which indicates that such a readiness finds important roots in imagination and its capacities for breaking violent cycles.

7. Breaking the Grip of Violent Cycles

According to Mark Johnson, our ability to self-critically challenge our established points of view depends on our capacity to imagine alternative viewpoints. If we are able to see beyond our present vantage point, we are also able to imagine new directions for our relationships with others. Imagination is, in this way, transformative. It accommodates the power to break outside settled frameworks and patterns.²⁵ Inspired by Johnson's work concerning a moral imagination, the peace and conflict researcher John Paul Lederach translates the former's theories on imagination into the field of peacebuilding. Here, moral imagination entails the capacity of reaching beyond those patterns of thinking that perpetuate cycles of violence. In reference to peacebuilding, imagination forms an act of giving birth to that which does not yet exist. Thus, imagination implies the ability of initiating processes towards peace through discerning potential ways for breaking the grip of violent cycles.²⁶

In the field of ecumenical theology, dialogue between Christians of different traditions may initiate such processes. In the longstanding endeavours of Lutherans and Catholics for turning conflict into communion, dialogue formed a starting point for breaking habits of mind and for challenging settled patterns of hostility and mistrust. Their efforts exemplify how contexts of ecumenical dialogue may be grounded in aspirations for overcoming violence, but also nurtured by hope in the way described by Jeanrond: as based on the desire for encountering, relating to, developing trust in, and knowing more about the religious other.²⁷

The Common Commemoration of the Reformation, celebrated in the Swedish cities of Lund and Malmö in October 2016, communicated such

²⁵ Johnson, *Moral Imagination*, 203.

²⁶ John Paul Lederach, *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 25–29.

²⁷ Cf. Jeanrond, *Reasons*, 199.

a hope. In the Cathedral of Lund, the common commemoration took place with significant representation from the Lutheran as well as Catholic sides, while the participants witnessed how historical antagonists affirmed their mutual affinity, and even articulated this affinity in a Joint Statement.²⁸ In that sense, the event in Lund disclosed a turning point with regard to imagination. The imagined enemy had eventually turned into a friend, physically present here and now. However, as indicated in the Joint Statement, this change could not have taken place without a persistent ecumenical dialogue, which had engaged generations of Lutherans and Catholics for no less than fifty years in the desire for deeper communion and friendship.²⁹ Beyond the limelight, long-term endeavours of ecumenical dialogue had eventually led to new ways of understanding, and thus also of imagining, one other. This provides a hopeful response to the 1945 message of the UNESCO representatives. Even in contexts of longstanding antagonism, defences of peace *can* be constructed in human minds.

In the context of historical antagonism between Lutherans and Catholics, ecumenical dialogue has shown that the endeavour of constructing defences of peace in human minds means to engage in a process that is inward-looking and mutual at the same time. It involves a process of self-critical introspection and willingness to discuss the shortcomings of one's church through history. Simultaneously, it implies seeking and desiring mutual exchange. The history of antagonism between Lutherans and Catholics is elucidative of how the construction of defences of peace needs to take place not in isolation, but rather by means of breaking isolation. Their persistent ecumenical dialogue testifies to how mutual exchange can lead to transformation of mindsets and prevention of new outbreaks of violence. When isolation is broken, there is greater space for imagining the other in new and constructive ways. Empathetic imagination may thrive, and togetherness may become imaginable despite historical controversy.

However, the outcomes of this exploration have shown that discussions on imagination may acquire further depth if related to hope. Hope, in the sense of hoping not only for oneself but for the other as well, may contribute

28 See: *Joint Statement on the Occasion of the Joint Catholic-Lutheran Commemoration of the Reformation*, Lund, 31 October 2016, available at: <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/events/event.dirhtml/content/vaticanevents/en/2016/10/31/dichiarazione-congiunta.html>.

29 Cf. *Joint Statement*.

to the development of aspirations for the overcoming of violence. Hopes of a common future can hearten capacities of imagining former enemies as friends and even as helpers. Ecumenical dialogue provides examples of such a hope. Simultaneously, it testifies to the need for a sincere desire for building trustful relations and gaining more knowledge of the other, if new and constructive ways of imagining the other are to be discovered. Hence, ecumenical aspirations for overcoming violence are intertwined with aspirations for trust and knowledge.

This recalls the metaphor of the wells. Aspirations for encountering each other in conversations at the wells inspire the exchange of knowledge and the building of trust. The ecumenical dialogue between former antagonists, elucidated in this article, creates awareness of the possible impact of such aspirations for the deconstruction of imagined enemies, and thus also of the part they might play in the construction of defences of peace in human minds. Nevertheless, ecumenical efforts of dialogue also make clear that the way from mutual condemnation to the conversations at the wells might be a long and winding path. In times of international unease and need for renewed efforts for the prevention of war, this is a path that needs to be found again and again. It needs to be continuously discerned and paved anew.

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Paradoxical Hope: Fr Aleksander Schmemann's Sermons on Radio Liberty

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Abstract: This article explores Father Aleksander Schmemann's radio broadcasts that began in 1953 on Radio Liberty, coinciding with Joseph Stalin's death. The article argues that his broadcasts represent a unique form of hope, particularly from an Orthodox Christian perspective. A core aspect of his theological thought emphasizes personal religious experiences, both internal and external, expressed effectively through literature and poetry. The article examines one of Fr Schmemann's sermons, which discusses Russian poet Joseph Brodsky's poem "The Meeting of the Lord" ("*Sretenie*"). Through this sermon, the article demonstrates Fr Schmemann's view of literature's role in conveying spiritual insights. It underscores Fr Schmemann's belief of the significance of personal religious experiences in one's relationship with God, conveyed primarily through words, whether in liturgical settings or creative expressions like poetry. This profound connection between language, faith, and personal experience forms the foundation of Fr Schmemann's paradoxical hope, inspiring him to reach out to a distant and suppressed audience.

Keywords: Liturgy; Experience; Word; Poetry; Meeting

DOI: 10.14712/30296374.2024.6

Introduction

In 1953, the same year that Joseph Stalin died, Father Aleksander Schmemann began broadcasting a series of sermons on Radio Liberty. From a studio in New York, he spoke weekly for thirty years to an audience he had never met in a country where he had never been, the Soviet Union. He had nothing in common with his listeners but language and the culture steeped in this language, Russian language and Russian culture. These weekly sermons could have been a hopeless endeavour; he did not even know if anybody would listen. Yet he continued. I argue that Fr Schmemann's broadcasts demonstrate hope, a different kind of hope that is paradoxical, but which nevertheless shows us what hope can be from an Orthodox Christian perspective.

Fr Schmemann's seemingly simplistic sermons do not only teach a kind of Orthodoxy Christianity 101 to his listeners, but are also a way for him to convey his understanding of the concept of the Word, Logos. He seems

to realize that his sermons allow his listeners to participate in a personal experience of the sacredness of language. One of the central aspects of his theological thought is the emphasis on personal religious experience; a personal encounter with God which reaches beyond both itself and the self of the individual. This encounter continues in two directions: it is internal, in that it nurtures further spiritual growth, as well as external, when the experience is shared with others. The spoken words of a voice carry within themselves an inspirational seed for their listeners. Thus, testimony of a personal encounter with the Truth – Logos – Christ creates a two-dimensional relationship. One is vertical with the Triune God, whereas the other is horizontal, with fellow human beings. For Fr Schmemmann, literature, and especially poetry, contains the most powerful examples of this salvific process and therefore become the central focus in several of his sermons.¹ Here, I have chosen his sermon on the Russian poet Joseph Brodsky's poem "The Meeting of the Lord" ("Sretenie," 1972)² to demonstrate Fr Schmemmann's interpretation of the salvific role of literature. However, this particular sermon needs contextualization before it can be analysed; therefore, I will first discuss his understanding of the Sacrament of the Liturgy.

Throughout Fr Schmemmann's weekly sermons, there is an organic unity between his liturgical experience and the themes that he selects. Most of his sermons were published in English translation in 2021.³ Additionally, the recordings are available on the YouTube channel *Rasshirenie Mirovozreniia* (*Expansion of the Worldview/Ideology* – my translation) so that we still today can hear his distinct baritone voice.⁴ Whether one reads or listens to him,

1 "Whatever they may claim, no matter what nonsense we are fed by the state-approved literary critics, what remains striking is this undeniable, obvious link between Russian literature and God, this pervasive sorrowful longing for God and, at the same time, this praise of him." A sermon on 'A Single Intuition,' Alexander Schmemmann,, *A Voice for Our Time, Radio Liberty Talks*, Vol. 2, transl. by Alexis Vinogradov and Nathan Williams (Yonkers, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2021), 185.

2 "The Meeting of the Lord' (Sretenie) by Joseph Brodsky," in Schmemmann, *Voice for Our Time*, 206–10.

3 The collection of sermons of Fr Schmemmann was published for the first time in Russian in 2009 by Saint Tikhon's Orthodox Theological Institute in Moscow in two volumes as transcriptions of archived audio files located in the archives of the Radio Liberty and Saint Vladimir's Theological Seminary in Yonkers, NY. Translation and publication in English was done by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press in 2021.

4 The YouTube Channel in Russian *Rasshirenie Mirovozreniia* published Fr Schmemmann's sermons pronounced by him at Radio Liberty for thirty years. There are eleven audio parts available on the YouTube channel. The first part titled *Vera i Neverie* can be seen/

his approach to the Orthodox faith appears steeped in his experiences as a priest. From the first sermon, "I believe in God..." to the last, he covers numerous theological themes,⁵ yet always considers them in the light of his own personal religious experience:

The whole point of Christianity is that it has made the value of religion dependent on how it solves the religious problem—that is, how it answers the question that is addressed to each person and requires an extremely personal response... Christ only spoke about faith. Faith only can be personal.⁶

He follows the generic tradition of sermons, which emphasizes the preacher's personal experience and encourages his listeners to initiate or continue with their own spiritual awakening.⁷ He also seems to understand that the sermon, as a genre and a part of liturgy, may have been absent in the lives of his listeners in the Soviet Union. The communist state was atheist and actively, even violently, persecuted religious speech. Those who attended church services would not hear sermons based on personal religious experiences. Soviet authorities sent "listeners" to church to ensure that the priests' sermons were nothing but short briefings about schedules, feasts, or topics sponsored by the state such as global peace movements or freedom for nations still under colonial rule.⁸

listened to here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0czWAb2I-6U> (accessed 3. 7. 2023).

- 5 The editors selected approximately 560 sermons into seven categories: Faith and Unbelief, Man, Sources of Christianity, Religious Experience, and United in What is Essential (On Christian Culture), Feasts, and the last category, Christianity and the World.
- 6 Schmemmann, *Voice for Our Time*, 16.
- 7 Traditionally, in the Orthodox Church, the didactic aspect of preaching proceeds from a missionary approach of *martiria* where personal witness ties both theory and practice. Anastasios Yannoulatos, Orthodox Archbishop of Tirana and All Albania and one of the leading Orthodox missionary theologians through his missionary and academic work represents a contemporary example of the *martiria*, in which preaching is one of the essential aspects. See: Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Mission in Christ's Way, An Orthodox Understanding* (Boston MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010); Nicholas Tsirevelos, "Christian Witness, Communication and Education: The example of Archbishop of Tirana, Durres and all Albania Anastasios (Yannoulatos)," *Theology & Culture* 1:1 (2020), 9–32, https://www.academia.edu/43542063/Christian_Witness_Communication_and_Education_The_example_of_Archbishop_of_Tirana_Durres_and_all_Albania_Anastasios_Yannoulatos (accessed 4. 7. 2023).
- 8 The best known case from the 1970s was a Moscow priest Father Dmitri Dudko (1922–2004), who tried to follow the traditionally established practice of using a sermon as a way of personal witness with didactic intention. He asked his parishioners to write their questions anonymously and, in his sermons, he answered them. After several months of preaching about faith in response to those questions and doing it from his

Such sermons were disconnected from the personal and religious life of ordinary Soviet citizens.⁹

Fr Schmemmann understood the Soviet context and knew its hostility toward religion. He used his sermons to introduce “forbidden” topics, via clandestine broadcasts, to his “imaginary” flock.¹⁰ Nevertheless, he avoided open criticism of the political system, as he believed that this external, repressive context could ultimately not restrict internal, personal religious experiences. Thus, he speaks to an individual person in the USSR, rather than to the Soviet context *per se*.¹¹

In the first published sermon, “I believe in God...,” Fr Schmemmann focuses on what he calls the “personification of Christianity.” The sermon is part of a theme entitled “Faith and Unbelief.” This sermon, together with several

own personal experience Father Dudko started to face various forms of prosecutions and arrests which finally led to his public humiliation in 1980, when he was forced by the KGB to confess his ‘anti-Soviet’ activities on the Soviet TV. These “activities” included his sermons that were nevertheless able to circulate as *samizdat* among a great number of readers and finally were smuggled out of the USSR and published in French in 1976 and English in 1977. See Dmitri Dudko, *Our Hope* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1977).

- 9 *Zhurnal Moskovskoi Patriarkhii* (The Journal of the Moscow Patriarchate) is the official newsletter of the Russian Orthodox Church and the issues published in the period between the 1950s and mid-1980s cover predominantly the official views of the Russian Orthodox Church presented on domestic or international arenas mostly omitting spiritual and theological topics relevant for the further growth of local parishes or individual persons.
- 10 Radio Liberty started its programming in 1953, broadcasting news and information into the USSR in Russian and other national languages spoken in the former Soviet Union that could not be censored by the Soviet authorities. Three years earlier Radio Free Europe had been established with the same mission but targeting only the former Soviet satellite states in Central, Eastern and South-Eastern Europe - Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Romania and Bulgaria. These two corporations finally merged in 1976. On the Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty official website it is written that: “The ‘radios’ provided news, features, and music aimed at communist and non-communist elites as well as the general population. RFE and RL also gave a voice to dissidents and opposition movements that, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, would emerge as leaders of the new post-communist democracies.” See more about the RFE/RL history and mission on its official website: <https://pressroom.rferl.org/history> (accessed 7. 7. 2023).
- 11 In his essay on Solzhenitsyn published originally in *Vestnik KSKhD* in Paris in 1970, Fr Schmemmann writes: “The Soviet world is so organically and wholly his world, his reality, that it is possible to say he is free not *from* Soviet reality, but *within* Soviet reality.” Alexander Schmemmann, “On Solzhenitsyn,” *Communio: International Catholic Review* 3:9 (2008), 72–87, <https://www.communio-icr.com/files/schmemann35-3.pdf> (accessed 14. 11. 2022).

others, shifts the listeners' focus toward their inner being and their own experiences of personal encounters with God. This focus on the person and on variations in religious experiences continues in other sermons, for example, "Men," "Sources of Christianity," "Religious Experience," and "United in What is Essential." In them, the main theme is the relationship between a person's religious experience and how the person's creative power is embodied in different cultural forms, especially in literature and poetry. Between 1970 and 1971, his talks focused specifically on the relationship between faith, context, and the works of several Russian writers and poets. The historical period these talks cover is extensive: from Peter the Great until 1971. In Russia, these sermons form a separate volume called *Osnovi Russkoj Kultury* (Foundations of Russian Culture).¹²

In the final set of sermons, "Christianity and the World," Fr Schmemmann articulates the idea of wholeness, the starting point of which is the act of creation and the fulfilment of which happens in the return back to God. The main role in this process is given to the human being, who, as the steward of creation, together with his or her own return to God simultaneously returns with him or herself the rest of the creation. Therefore, I argue that Fr Schmemmann's paradoxical hope is ultimately realized in eschatological reality.¹³

1. Literature based on personal experience

Juliana Schmemmann, Fr Schmemmann's wife, writes in her memories that her husband was a man of words who enjoyed reading, teaching, writing, as well as giving talks and sermons. According to her, poetry was an inseparable part of his identity: he read extensively and often memorized poems by heart.¹⁴ His love of poetry informs his approach to language and his understanding of the sacred significance of words. In his talks, culture, and especially Russian

12 The book was published in Russian as *Osnovi Russkoj Kulturi* in 2021 by the Saint Tikhon's Orthodox University of Humanities in Moscow, Russia. See Aleksandr Schmemmann, *Osnovi Russkoj Kulturi* (Moscow: Pravoslavnii Sviato-Tikhonovskii Ghumanitarnii Universitet', 2021) See more on the official website of the university: <https://en.international.pstgu.ru/> (accessed 8. 7. 2023).

13 Fr Schmemmann's idea of wholeness occupies one of the primary places in a work published first in 1963 and entitled *For the Life of the World*. During the time of the book, Fr Schmemmann continued with his regular weekly sermons in which these ideas became inseparable elements.

14 Juliana Schmemmann, *My Journey with Father Alexander*, second edition (Montreal: Alexander Press, 2007), 88–89.

literary culture, becomes connected with his eschatological and soteriological views. The dream of Russian literature, Fr Schmemmann maintains, is to unite heaven and earth.¹⁵ For him, poetry can express insight and inspiration which cannot be expressed through formal academic theological language.¹⁶ His understanding of the power of poetry seems to illustrate his idea of the personification of Christianity, which receives its highest expression through the soteriological aspect of poetry where both poet and readers meet through “sacred words.” This meeting through words also brings readers to an encounter with their own internal religious awakening: the initial spiritual impulse initiates further religious conversion, which leads toward the *eschaton* as a person’s final destination.

In the sermon “Witnesses,” Fr Schmemmann explains the term “personal religious experience” as the experience of a human being’s encounter with God. He shares his vision of such an encounter and cites the Old Testament scene in the Third Book of Kings (in the Western Christian tradition, the Second Book of Kings) in which God encounters the Prophet Elias through a still small voice. For Fr Schmemmann, God’s “still small voice” is found in poetry. The human part in this act of synergistic meeting with God is to be able to hear that “still small voice.”¹⁷ It is a voice that is tangible, yet elusive. In poetry, there is no abstract “humankind,” he argues, that can be described by science. Rather, this voice can only belong to singular, inimitable, living, concrete persons who do not completely fit into any law. God reveals Himself directly to each of them through poetry, in which words become symbols that tie the inexpressible with the expressible.¹⁸ “Every poem is a victory,” he declares.¹⁹ What is won here is the truth of the meeting between God and a human being – that it has happened. Poetry witnesses this meeting both

15 Schmemmann, *Voice for Our Time*, 189.

16 In one of his observations about a famous Russian poet Alexander Sergeievich Pushkin (1799–1839) and the role of poetry in the expression of theological doctrines experienced through a person’s life, Fr Schmemmann writes: “After all, it is one or the other: either poetry, art, and literature are mere décor, life’s ornamentation, something for recreation; or else they are a whole unique expression of what is deepest in man. It is clear to all of us that Pushkin is not just for fun, not simply a diversion, but the embodiment of truth in beauty and beauty in truth. But then this verse also, which expresses such perfection, such solemn simplicity, is part of Pushkin’s soul and our own, and it too is truth, as necessary to us as it is to him.” Schmemmann, *Voice for Our Time*, 200.

17 Schmemmann, *Voice for Our Time*, 169–71.

18 Schmemmann, *Voice for Our Time*, 75.

19 Schmemmann, *Voice for Our Time*, 207.

to those who write/recite and to those who listen/read. He reminds us that nothing external can stop poetry from transmitting the still small voice. It will always witness the encounter between God and a human being: "[...] one thing cannot fail to astound us: the higher and more pure man's experience, and the more authentic his creativity, the more obvious is his religious inspiration, and the clearer in him is tremulous, radiant awareness of God."²⁰

2. Fr Schmemmann's concept of the word

I interpret Fr Schmemmann's belief that the word receives its unique, authentic, and personal features – the inherent sacredness of language – in the connection between Logos and *Golos* (the Russian word for "voice"). For him, a literary/poetic word is always invested with religious power. Thus, the sacredness of language appears in the identification of the eschatological soteriology with literary creativity based on religious experience and practice. The starting point for any analysis of his concept of the Word must be liturgy: this is the time and space in which he was most comfortable and where he gathered his ideas.²¹ Juliana Schmemmann notes the importance of liturgy in his life:

But in the early morning Liturgy was a blessed time spent in the Kingdom. For him, it was everything – the joy of nature, the opportunity to empty himself from daily cares, the standing at the foot of the cross, the ultimate joy of Communion at the Altar because it is where he wanted to be since early childhood, where he preached the Kingdom, where he suffered the most and was the happiest. Why suffered? Because that is where he actually felt the inadequacy of his life, of what he was trying to do, to teach, to preach – inadequate because the Kingdom was where he was during the Liturgy and the Kingdom is love and peace and thanksgiving.²²

²⁰ Schmemmann, *Voice for Our Time*, 86.

²¹ All the works of Fr Schmemmann have strong liturgical connotation. However, it is especially the focus of two of his well-known works: *The Eucharist*, which was published posthumously in English in 1987 and *For the Life of the World*, his best-known and most translated publication. As he wrote himself in the introductions of both books, they came out as reflections based on his own religious experience, especially from its liturgical aspects. Both books cover all parts of the central sacrament of the Eastern Church where Fr Schmemmann found inspiration for his interpretation of the meaning and role of words in their sensuality and physicality. See Alexander Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World, Sacraments and Orthodoxy* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1973), 7; Alexander Schmemmann, *The Eucharist* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1987), 9.

²² Schmemmann, *My Journey with Father Alexander*, 86.

For him, liturgy is unimaginable without words in their written as well as oral forms. His perception of liturgy as the reality of human participation, through the Communion with Christ, in the eschatological nature of Church as the Body of Christ, is founded upon an ancient Christian perception of the words. A contemporary Orthodox theologian, Fr Cyril Hovorun, writes that from the earliest days of the Church, the concept of the words was expressed in a triangular circulation based on the relationship between God and people. According to this early Christian perception, there are three types of words. The first type is directed from God to people through His revelation written through the texts of the Old and New Testament. The second type are words of humans written or spoken toward God both individually and communally. Finally, the third type represents Christians' experiences of their relationship with God shared with other Christians.²³

In Fr Schmemmann's texts, especially his comments on Liturgy, all three types of sacred speech appear in the sacrament of the Liturgy. There are readings from the New Testament, the Gospels and Letters of the Apostles; there are liturgical prayers; and, finally, the entirety of the liturgical act serves as a collective witness of personal religious experiences which invites others to participate in this sacred gathering. This perception echoes the Apostle Philip's words to Nathaniel: "Come and see" (John 1:46). Fr Schmemmann says of the centrality of the Eucharist: "Meanwhile, all early evidence we possess points to the fact that the *gathering* or *assembly* (συναξίς) was always considered the first and basic act of the eucharist."²⁴ He builds his concept of the words on his liturgical experience of this triangular circulation, where all three types of speech receive their full realization in the Divine revelation, a person's experience of God, and his/her internal necessity to witness to this experience.²⁵

23 Cyril Hovorun, *Eastern Christianity in Its Texts* (London – New York – Dublin: T&T Clark, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc., 2022), 237–39.

24 Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 15.

25 The concept of internal necessity to witness experienced relationship with God serves as the central point in Anastasios Yannoulatos' description of the Orthodox understanding of Mission, where he argues that this concept prevails in the missionary work of the Eastern Orthodox Churches throughout the centuries. See Anastasios Yannoulatos, *Mission in Christ's Way* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2010) and *Facing the World; Orthodox Thoughts on Global Perspectives* (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2007).

The triangular perception of the words appears elsewhere in the Christian tradition of the East, from the earliest days of the Church, especially in the fields of Christology, and more particularly in doctrines concerning the Incarnation of Christ as well as in comparative approaches between a theology of the Incarnation and the act of Creation. This is first mentioned in "The First Apology" by Justin Martyr, also known as the Philosopher (born between 90–100 and died around 165).²⁶ The concept of words entered into Russian thought with the rise in religious philosophy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Initially, the concept focused solely on the relationship between word and reality.²⁷ However, the interest in words migrated from philosophical and academic circles to become a living part of liturgical and spiritual praxis.²⁸

In texts on his personal spiritual experience, especially from a liturgical aspect, Fr Schmemmann keeps returning to the concept of the words. This concept, from the Sacrament of the Eucharist, became central to his missionary vision. Throughout the thirty years in which he broadcast sermons to the Soviet Union, the primary source of his talks is the Sacrament of Eucharist. In it, he sees the salvific action as a sacred movement. This sacred movement is conveyed in words that transmit the entire liturgical act and thus reveal the eternal truth. He understands words as bearers of the truth, which is not only an experience of this sacred movement, but also the rule of life and the rule of faith which are organic and essential parts of Church tradition.²⁹ The words as bearers of the truth that we experience in the liturgical act have the same role of transmitting (revealing, witnessing) this truth experienced in liturgy in the educational (catechetical, missionary) aspect of the Church:

26 See A. W. F. Blunt (ed.), *The Apologies of Justin Martyr: Ancient Text and Translations Edition* (London: Halcyon Book, 2006).

27 See Prot. Sergei Bulgakov, *Filosofia Imeni* (Paris: YMCA, 1953) and *Svet Nevechernii; Sozertsaniia i umozreniia* (Moscow, 1917); Alexander Potrebniia, *Mysl' i iazyk* (Kiev: Gosuderstvennoe Izdatelstvo Ukrainii, Kiev, 1926).

28 Stephen Pax Leonard, "Words to Things: Religious Cosmologies in the Context of the (Russian) Orthodoxy Philosophy of Language," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 22:65 (2023), 145–58, <https://thenewsri.ro/index.php/njsri/article/view/365> (accessed 30. 8. 2023).

29 Alexander Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life: Christian Development through Liturgical Experience* (New York: Department of Religious Education of the Orthodox Church of America, 1993), 7.

It is certainly of importance to us that this catechesis was liturgical in its character. The explanation of Scripture, the unfolding of the meaning of the Creed (i.e. Church doctrine), the teaching of morality – in other words, the entire content of Christian education – was transmitted in direct connection with liturgical services, partly even during such services.³⁰

Fr Schmemmann emphasizes the non-static transmitting aspects when he discusses the form of the words in liturgical and catechetical contexts. Moreover, he underscores a person's relationships and personal experience as the primary source when he writes about the meaning of the words: "The question may seem a naïve one, but one cannot really act without knowing the meaning not only of action, but of the life itself in the name of which one acts."³¹

Here, Fr Schmemmann enters into dialogue with early twentieth-century Russian religious philosophy. He considers whether or not words can be seen as entities infused with a cosmic force that comes from a greater power – in his context, from God – through His relationship with a person. He proposes that words are not entities that only fulfil their roles as transmitters. Rather, he sees this transmitting role as an aspect of the word's external form that appears simultaneously within the constitution of the word in its wholeness. Through the relationship between God and a human being, the truth reveals itself from God's side and the human's experience of this truth becomes verbally expressible. When a person verbalizes this relational experience with God, this experienced truth (God who reveals Himself to a person) is infused into the word and becomes a constituting part of it. Thus, the word is the verbal expression of the relational experience and a product of the synergic work between God and a human being.

I argue that Fr Schmemmann's emphasis on the words as the vessels of the revelation of God's truth and the verbal expression of human's experience of this Divine-Human salvific relationship proceeds from his understanding of

30 Schmemmann, *Liturgy and Life*, 8–9. Words as bearers of the entire sacred movement organically tie liturgy with Church mission (Great Commission – Mt. 28:18–20) where the truth is unfolded through words – through readings from the Bible and liturgical texts and prayers and they, as Fr Schmemmann notices, need to be pronounced aloud as was the ancient practice in the Church. See Ciprian I Streza, "Understanding the Liturgy's true meaning to counter church secularization: Father Alexander Schmemmann," *HTS Theological Studies/Theological Studies* 79:1 (2023). Art. #7892, 9 pages (DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v79i1.7892>).

31 Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 14.

the importance of the two-dimensional (horizontal and vertical) relational experience in the spiritual life of person. Stephen Pax Leonard writes that the Orthodox Christian understanding of words, especially in the theological works of Vasili Rosanov and Fr Sergii Bulgakov, is based on world-reality relations revealed through experience:

Language is a web of experiences and these personal experiences should be at the center of language study and not on the distinct periphery. Ethnography should surely be about experiencing the reality of things, and not just defining things... Bulgakov reminds us that for Protestantism the ministry of the word is 'meaning' only, but Orthodoxy understands the 'power' of the word and this ministry forms the basis of its sacramental life. Words for these Orthodox thinkers were roots of cosmic self-expression and word-symbols are interconnected with the elements of the cosmos itself. They referred to a connection between words, spirituality, and the sacred and its connection was not characterized by bipolarity. They believed that if we no longer perceived words as simply shells for entities and instead as symbols, living entities and bearers of energy, then we would embrace a richer, more holistic and multi-dimensional ideology of language.³²

Fr Schmemmann centres in his texts as well as in his talks on the God-human relationship. This is the place of participation of a human being in the sacramental, especially Eucharistic, life of the Church. This is where a person's search for the truth receives its conclusion by giving the person the role of *homo adorans*, who through his/her acts of blessing God offers to God the gift which God gave to a human to take care of – the creation:

As Christians we believe that He who is the truth about both God and man, gives foretastes of His incarnation in all more fragmentary truths. We believe as well that Christ is present in any seeker after truth. Simone Weil has said that though a person may run as fast as he can away from Christ, if it is toward what he considers true, he runs in fact straight into the arms of Christ.³³

For Fr Schmemmann, the ultimate goal for a human being is to become a part of the Sacrament of Eucharist, which is the entrance of a human being into unity with God, where he/she now as the member of the Church experiences the complete joy of this salvific unity. Consequently, we are called to witness this joy into the world. This becomes for the Church her central act – *central liturgia*³⁴ – the action of witnessing, which directly proceeds

32 Pax Leonard, "Words to Things," 145–58.

33 Schmemmann, *For the Life of the World*, 19.

34 My italics.

from the Eucharist and is also embodied in words as the constitutive parts of this experience. The bond between the Sacrament of the Eucharist and personal witness (mission) is as natural as it is continuous:

The proclamation of the Word is a sacramental act *par excellence* because it is a transforming act. It transforms the human words of the Gospel into the Word of God and the manifestation of the Kingdom. And it transforms the man who hears the Word into a receptacle of the Word and the temple of Spirit... This is why the reading and the preaching of the Gospel in the Orthodox Church is a liturgical act, and integral and essential part of the sacrament. It is heard as the Word of God, and it is received in the Spirit – that is, in the Church which is the life of the Word and its ‘growth’ in the world.³⁵

These words show that for him, personal experience is the zenith of the Divine-human unity offered through the Sacrament of the Eucharist and can be expressed only through verbalization. The liturgy is an example of verbal expression that can be used in all other personal experiences – sermons, prose, or poetry – and it can witness faith and affect and/or inspire others. Here, we see the foundation for what I have chosen to call his “paradoxical hope”: what it was that inspired him, and kept motivating him for thirty years, to offer catechetical talks to people he never met. Moreover, his emphasis on the relational experience in both “Liturgy” and “Liturgy after Liturgy”³⁶ reveals why he was interested in verbalized expressions of human creativity, such as prose and poetry.

3. Brodsky’s poem “The Meeting of the Lord” – Metaphor for Schmemann’s talks

Fr Schmemann’s emphasis on the personification of Christianity through the act of the inner encounter of God with a concrete person can be demonstrated through a consideration of his discussion of Brodsky’s poem “The Meeting of the Lord.” Speaking about the poem, Fr Schmemann explores how words become bearers of an experienced truth which, in its turn, is transmitted through verbalization.

³⁵ Schmemann, *For the Life of the World*, 33.

³⁶ To find more about the Orthodox Christian perception of missionary work and witness see: Ion Bria, *Liturgy after Liturgy, Mission and Witness from An Orthodox Perspective* (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1996).

Brodsky dedicated "The Meeting of the Lord" to Anna Akhmatova, a prominent twentieth-century Russian poet.³⁷ The poem is based on the event described in the Gospel of Luke 2:22–29, in which Mary and Joseph, following the Jewish law, bring their first-born child forty days after his birth to the temple to dedicate him to God. In the temple, they encounter two other important Biblical figures, the wise and holy man Simeon and the elderly prophetess Anna. Simeon takes the child in his arms and confesses Christ's Divinity as he pronounces prophetic words about his salvific death and Resurrection. The prophetess Anna gives praise to the Lord for being chosen to meet the incarnated God – Logos – the Messiah for whom both of them were patiently awaiting. The early Church incorporated this Biblical event in its liturgical life, but during Justinian's era the Feast, known now as the Presentation or Meeting of the Lord, was celebrated more splendidly.³⁸ Brodsky's poem, which uses the same Biblical plot, made a strong impression on Fr Schmemmann and he shared this impression with his listeners. It seems to me that the poem, together with his discussion of it, can serve as a metaphor for his radio talks: it reflects his paradoxical hope.

This biblical story, as just noted, describes the encounter between Christ – the Incarnated Logos – and two individuals, Simeon and Anna, as well as their meeting with Mary and Joseph. For Fr Schmemmann, this encounter appears to provide also a model for his thirty years of transmissions to his listeners in the Soviet Union. Simeon was searching for the Truth – the Messiah – and, at the very end of his long life, he encounters the truth. He takes the incarnated Logos, holds the Messiah in his arms, and reveals to the world the experience of this encounter. Simeon's words become this experienced Truth, not simply about any truth, and his words went through the walls of the temple. They both shocked and surprised the world which received this ultimate truth – the incarnated Logos – the Messiah, in an unexpected time and place. Nevertheless, Simeon holds the Truth and bravely shares it with the world. His own words, while holding the Messiah, represent the moment when the Logos becomes *Golos* (Voice):

37 The entire text of the poem in Russian can be found here: <https://www.culture.ru/poems/30582/sretene> (accessed 15. 3. 2023).

38 See more: Nikolai Velimirovic, *The Prologue from Ohrid*, 2 vols. (Los Angeles: Western-American Diocese of the Serbian Orthodox Church, 2008).

The rustle of time ebbed away in his ears.
 And Simeon's soul held the form of the Child –
 its feathery crown now enveloped in glory –
aloft, like a torch, pressing back to black shadows,
*to light up the path that leads into death's realm,*³⁹
 where never before until this present hour
 had any man managed to lighten his pathway.
 The old man's torch glowed and the pathway grew wider.

The paradoxical hope of Fr Schmemmann's radio talks lies in his unwavering belief that a human being is called to witness – to speak only of the truth – and to give his personally experienced truth a verbal form. He sees a person's encounter with God in the reality of liturgy expressed through its verbalization, which is also reflected in all other aspects of a person's life, which as the poem shows, is entering into a reality known as "Liturgy after Liturgy". He too is moved to witness, and his witness takes the verbal form of a voice that travels across the Earth every Sunday. He saw his witness as following in the tradition of Russian literature, which he also recognized as a witness to an experienced reality. For him, Brodsky reflects the same sacred tradition through his poem. This understanding of words stands in stark contrast to the mundane language of his contemporary American society, which he saw as "noise" rather than a voice:

We live immersed in events and problems, and in their endless, dull and noisy discussion. We are inundated by a constant stream of words, inflated and diluted by the muddy sludge of all kinds of propaganda and smug, worthless truths, acquired without any labor or effort.⁴⁰

Words cannot be spoken before the labour and/or effort of experience – before they become an expression of the human part of the salvific encounter between God and humankind, they are "worthless." We must contemplate in silence to gain the ability to listen and to hear that "small still voice" of God somewhere inside us. In "The Meeting of the Lord," Fr Schmemmann finds examples of this stillness in individuals, such as Simeon and Anna, who practiced silent contemplation for decades. Unlike noise filled with meaningless words, voices hold experienced truths and the force of the cadence, the authority, and the wrath, and the joy reaches people. In this process, the voice destroys the barriers that divide speakers from their listeners. He

³⁹ My italics.

⁴⁰ Schmemmann, *Voice for Our Time*, 206.

maintains that words, once they pronounce the experienced truth, “destroy something, break and sweep away something hindering them, something that gives them no space in this dim, deaf air, space and time, which are stripped of the acoustics of the spirit.”⁴¹ Here, he returns to his understanding of the nature of the words in which this sacred mystery constantly remains completely unfolded.

Fr Schmemmann sees in this encounter between the content of the word and a revealed God the soteriological and eschatological aspect of poetry, which does not simply conclude in the voice-transmitted truth and disappears somewhere in the ether. Rather, words with their authority and authenticity continue to reach others, as the New Testament declares: “The spirit breathes where it wills... but you do not know where it comes from and where it goes.” (John 3:8). The salvific aspect of poetry is also in its audible form, when it is being heard. He listened to Brodsky recite this poem and contemplated the continuation of this salvific process:

When the voice falls and silence ensures, it is not that the reading is finished, it is not that a poem has been presented to us in its completeness, but rather that a certain high, pure and bright thing has been done, a good deed for all those blind and deaf people who do not understand, do not know and do not see what kind of fight is fought in this world at the ultimate depth, or for what it is fought.⁴²

The soteriological aspect of his approach to poetry does not only gesture to the Divine-human encounter, but also to the importance of the meeting between the poet and his listeners. This meeting reflects the meeting between him and God in the reality of Liturgy. In Brodsky's poem, this kind of meeting is described in Mary's meeting with the prophetess Anna and Simeon. When she brings the Messiah in her arms into the temple, she shares the Truth

41 Fr Schmemmann's talk describing the occasion where he heard Joseph Brodsky reciting this poem says the following: “For a moment you are surprised, even alarmed; did his poems really sound like that when read with the eyes alone or aloud to yourself? You are almost frightened. But immediately you give yourself over to this strange, incomparable chanting, and you understand why Akhmatova called these poems ‘magical’. The spell, the force of the words, the force of the cadence, the authority, the wrath, the joy, and the strength of this force, as if these poems not only have to be born in sound, to be given voice and to reach people, but also to destroy something, to break and sweep away something that hinders them, something that gives them space in this dim, deaf air, space, and time, which are stripped of the acoustics of the spirit.” Schmemmann, *Voice for Our Time*, 206–07.

42 Schmemmann, *Voice for Our Time*, 207.

with those whom she meets. These two are silent, patient, and vigilant and thus able to discern the truthful voice of Mary from the world's "worthless" noise. When Simeon receives the Messiah in his arms, he experiences his own encounter with the seen/heard truth. However, at the same time, the incarnated Christ becomes the centripetal figure who brings these three persons closer to Himself and closer to each other:

The temple enclosed them in forests of stone.
Its lofty vaults stooped as thought trying to cloak
the prophetess Anna, and Simeon, and Mary –
to hide them from men and to hid them from Heaven.

In "The Meeting of the Lord," Brodsky envisions Christ as the foundation for a human being's life, which means that a human being is fulfilled in the encounter with him. Even though this process is personal, it always requires a meeting between those who are messengers and those who are listeners. In the poem, we have Mary, Simeon, and Anna whose interaction implies both silence and voice, such as in the following instances: "It had been revealed to this upright old man" or "The silence, regarding the temple's clear space" or "Mary [...] said nothing – so strange had his words been" or "deep in the hearts of all people" or "Mary, now stooping, gazed after him, silent," or "it was not the loud din..." This mix of voice and silence is also present between the poet and his listeners. Listeners sit in vigilant silence and await a voice transmitting through sacred words an experienced reality, as Fr Schmemmann sat and listened to Brodsky reciting this poem:

In the random hall in front of an almost random crowd Joseph Brodsky is reading his poems. [...] We have heard so much about him, and now we will hear him in person. He begins... not to read, for there is no text in his hands, but—what should I call it? — to sing or declaim his poems. And it becomes immediately clear that a real event is taking place here, in this room, accomplished by this voice, by this poetry, reborn in its primordial form, here before us and for us and in us. The sound of his voice... For a moment you are surprised, even alarmed: did his poems really sound like that when read with the eyes alone or aloud to yourself?⁴³

He considers the meeting between Mary, Simeon, and Anna around the baby Christ in their midst through the prism of his personal experience of the encounter with this biblical truth in the voice of Brodsky. When Fr Schmemmann positions himself as a listener, he reminds his listeners that

⁴³ Schmemmann, *Voice for Our Time*, 207.

a voice is able to transmit the truth only if it proceeds from the experienced encounter with it. On the other hand, one needs to observe vigilant silence in order to hear this voice.

Conclusion

Was anybody listening to Fr Schmemmann and his Sunday catechetical talks? Did he actually cut through the noise of the communist, atheist Soviet Union? We know that he did. We know that after one particular person listened to his sermons, neither Russian literature nor Soviet history were ever quite the same again. This person was a captain in the Red Army, an ex-prisoner in the Gulag, and, when he started listening to Radio Liberty in the 1950s, an exiled schoolteacher teaching mathematics in Kazakhstan. He was also an aspiring writer and, furthermore, an aspiring Orthodox Christian. His name was Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn. He appreciated the hands-on catechism offered by Fr Schmemmann's sermons and they would leave an indelible mark on all of his future writing, by his personal experience of participating in the concept of the words that Fr Schmemmann offered. Together, they shared the same paradoxical hope. Solzhenitsyn must have realized the hopelessness inherent in the idea of becoming a Christian writer in the atheist Soviet Union, but that did not stop him. Just as Fr Schmemmann conquered the hopelessness of being alone in a studio speaking to strangers across the globe, Solzhenitsyn held out the same hope. And they both continued. Paradoxically enough, when they would eventually meet, they found more differences than similarities between them – but that is a story for another article.

I conclude today with how Fr Schmemmann describes what helped him conquer his hopelessness, when he sat in a New York radio station studio and spoke to his listeners across the globe in the USSR every Sunday for more than 30 years. The final purpose of the concept of the words expressed in the liturgy and subsequently through its mission – the “Liturgy after Liturgy,” in all its varieties including prose and poetry – is to bring a human being into the eschatological reality and for us to gain eternal life. This, for him, is not a transmission of “religious knowledge,” but the completion of the salvific history on a personal level:

The word presupposes the sacrament as its fulfilment, for in the sacrament Christ the Word becomes our life. The Word assembles the Church for his incarnation in her. In separation from the word the sacrament is in danger

of being perceived as magic, and without the sacrament the word is in danger of being 'reduced' to 'doctrine.' And finally, it is precisely through the sacrament that the word is interpreted, for the interpretation of the word is always witness to the fact that the Word has become our life. 'And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth.' (Jn. 1:14). The sacrament is his witness, and therefore in it lies the source, the beginning and the foundation of the exposition and comprehension of the word, the source and criterion of theology.⁴⁴

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⁴⁴ Schmemmann, *The Eucharist*, 68.

Creation as Sacrament: An Orthodox Contribution to the Cultivation of an Ecological Ethos

Viorel Coman

Abstract: This article looks at the contribution of Dumitru Stăniloae’s theology of the sacramentality of creation for the cultivation of an ecological sensitivity, attending in particular to his ideas that the entire created reality is God’s gift to humanity and that the cosmos has a mysterious or apophatic dimension. This helps in developing a Christian ecology whose central idea is of non-possession or non-domestication of the world by human beings. Understanding the world thus is seen as world-affirming and a reminder that creation cannot be treated as mere utility, property, or raw material, but is always also a vehicle of grace and spiritualization.

Keywords: Dumitru Stăniloae; theology of creation; apophaticism; theological anthropology; grace; sacramentality

DOI: 10.14712/30296374.2024.7

The sacramentality of creation is one of the defining elements of the Orthodox Christian understanding of the world in relation to God and humanity. As John Chryssavgis has pointed out, “a central feature of the sacramental ethos of the Orthodox Church is the perception of creation as sacrament, a unique and fundamental image in contemporary religious experience.”¹ This is not, of course, to say that the theme of creation as a sacrament is absent from the theological experience of other Christian churches and traditions; it is rather a statement about its centrality in Orthodox Christianity. Given this sacramental dimension of the created world, John Zizioulas preferred to speak of human beings as “priests of creation,” which is a much more useful model to describe the adequate human approach to creation than that of “proprietor,” “steward,” or “possessor.”² The present article revisits the theme

- 1 John Chryssavgis, “Ecology and Mystery: Creation as Sacrament,” in id., *Creation as Sacrament: Reflections on Ecology and Spirituality* (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 85–108, here at 85.
- 2 John Zizioulas, “Proprietors or Priests of Creation?” in John Chryssavgis and Bruce V. Folts (eds.), *Toward an Ecology of Transfiguration: Orthodox Christian Perspectives*

of creation as sacrament in Orthodox Christianity, with particular focus on two of its theological aspects that help nourish the development of an ecological ethos:³ (i) creation as a vehicle of God's grace for humanity and as a gift, which prioritizes a form of interaction with the world that resists egoistic possession and exploitation; (ii) creation as a mystery that escapes control or mastery. In so doing, the article takes inspiration from Dumitru Stăniloae's vision of creation as sacrament, which has much to offer to our concern for an ecological human responsibility towards the world in which we live.⁴

1. Dumitru Stăniloae (1903–1993): A Sacramental Approach to Creation

Dumitru Stăniloae's academic career at the Faculties of Orthodox Theology in Sibiu and Bucharest in Romania spanned more than fifty years, providing Eastern Christianity with an impressive corpus of work that continues even today to serve as a source of inspiration for many theologians and scholars.⁵ The theme of sacramentality interested Stăniloae as early as the

on Environment, Nature, and Creation (New York: Fordham University Press, 2013), 163–71. See, also, John Chryssavgis and Nikolaos Asproulis (eds.), *Priests of Creation: John Zizioulas on Discerning and Ecological Ethos* (London: T&T Clark, 2021).

- 3 Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople is widely known for his ecological initiatives, which draw inspiration from the teachings of Orthodox Christianity on creation. See John Chryssavgis, *On Earth as in Heaven: Ecological Vision and Initiatives of Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew* (New York, NY: Fordham University Press, 2012); John Chryssavgis (ed.), *Cosmic Grace, Humble Prayer: The Ecological Vision of the Green Patriarch Bartholomew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2003).
- 4 For a comprehensive introduction into Stăniloae's theology of the church and creation as sacraments, see Viorel Coman, "The Sacramentality of the Church in Dumitru Stăniloae's Theology," *Pro Ecclesia*, 27:2 (2018), 203–24; Viorel Coman, "Dumitru Stăniloae's Theology of the World: Reflections on the Margins of the Relationship between Humankind and Creation," *Communio Viatorum* 59:2 (2017), 189–209. See, also, the article of Ivana Noble on Stăniloae's theology of creation, "The Common Home," in id., *Essays in Ecumenical Theology II: Conversations with Orthodoxy* (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 272–300. For an analysis of the way in which the Orthodox theology of creation could inspire an ecological vision defined by sustainable development, see Viorel Coman, "Sustainable Development: Insights from an Eastern Orthodox Theology of Creation," *Analecta of the Ukrainian Catholic University* 9 (2022), 165–182.
- 5 See, especially, the following doctoral dissertations on Dumitru Stăniloae's theology, which engage with several aspects of his thinking. Anne-Sophie Vivier-Mureșan, *Le dialogue de l'amour trinitaire. Perspectives ouvertes par Dumitru Stăniloae*, Col. Cogitatio Fidei 312 (Paris: Cerf, 2021); Viorel Coman, *Dumitru Stăniloae's Trinitarian Ecclesiology*:

1950s and 1960s, when his first articles on the seven sacraments, as well as on the Church as a sacrament, were published in several Romanian theological journals: “The Nature of the Sacraments according to the Three Main Christian Confessions” (1956);⁶ “The Number of Sacraments, the Relationship between Them, and the Question of the Sacraments Performed Outside the Church” (1956);⁷ “Of the Sacramental Aspect of the Church” (1966);⁸ and “The Mysterious Reality of the Church” (1984).⁹ Over time, Stăniloae’s approach to sacramentality expanded to include a vision of creation as a sacrament or mystery. Although present in his early writings in an embryonic form, the topic of creation as a sacrament found its most elaborated formulation in the 1976 article, “Creation as Gift and the Sacraments of the Church,”¹⁰ as well as in the third volume of his magnum opus *Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, which was published in 1978–1979.¹¹

In the strict sense of the term, Stăniloae defines the sacraments of the Church as “holy works, which in a visible form impart to us Christ’s invisible grace or Christ himself in his saving actions in order to make us share in the perfection of his humanity or partakers of salvation.”¹² In other words,

Orthodoxy and the Filioque (Lanham – London – New York: Lexington Books/Fortress Academic, 2019); Dănuț Mănăstireanu, *A Perichoretic Model of the Church: The Trinitarian Ecclesiology of Dumitru Stăniloae* (Saarbrücken: LapLambert Academic Press, 2012); Radu Bordeianu, *Dumitru Stăniloae: An Ecumenical Ecclesiology* (London: T&T Clark, 2011); Sorin-Constantin Șelaru, *L’Eglise, image du mystère de la Trinité: les accents ecclésiologiques de la théologie de Dumitru Stăniloae*, unpublished PhD thesis (Strasbourg: Faculty of Protestant Theology, Marc Bloch University, 2008); Ștefan Lupu, *La sinodalità e/o conciliarità, espressione dell’unità e della cattolicità della Chiesa in Dumitru Stăniloae (1903–1993)*, unpublished PhD thesis (Rome: Pontifical Gregorian University, 1999); and Ronald Roberson, *Contemporary Romanian Orthodox Ecclesiology: The Contribution of Dumitru Stăniloae and Younger Colleagues*, unpublished PhD thesis (Rome: Oriental Pontifical Institute, 1988).

6 Dumitru Stăniloae, “Ființa tainelor în cele trei confesiuni,” *Ortodoxia* 8:1 (1956), 3–28.

7 Dumitru Stăniloae, “Numărul tainelor, raportul dintre ele și problema tainelor din afara bisericii,” *Ortodoxia* 8:2 (1956), 191–215.

8 Dumitru Stăniloae, “Din aspectul sacramental al bisericii,” *Studii Teologice* 18:9–10 (1966), 531–62.

9 Dumitru Stăniloae, “Realitatea tainică a bisericii,” *Ortodoxia* 36:3 (1984), 415–20.

10 Dumitru Stăniloae, “Creația ca dar și tainele bisericii,” *Ortodoxia* 28:1 (1976), 10–29.

11 Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. III, 3rd edition (București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe, 2003 [1978–1979]), 7–34; English translation by Ioan Ionita and Robert Barringer: *The Experience of God. Vol. V: The Sanctifying Mysteries* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2012), 1–25.

12 Stăniloae, “Ființa tainelor în cele trei confesiuni,” 4.

a sacrament is “a visible work that represents, contains, and communicates God’s grace. The sacrament appears to us as a symbol, sign, and icon, which not only represents the invisible reality but also embraces it, because whoever partakes of the symbol partakes *eo ipso* of the invisible reality that pervades that symbol.”¹³ However, Stăniloae claims that the notion of sacrament cannot be reduced to the seven sacraments of the Orthodox Church (Baptism, Chrismation, Eucharist, Priesthood, Confession, Marriage, and Holy Unction). On the contrary, it has a larger meaning than the seven sacraments in the sense that the entire creation, Christ, and the Church should be considered as sacraments or as having a sacramental dimension. In the larger sense of the word, the notion of sacraments refers to the union between human beings and Christ. Or, as Stăniloae emphasizes, “the general meaning of the sacrament is the union of God with the creature.”¹⁴

In light of this, Stăniloae speaks of the entire created world *as the first sacrament*. In so doing, he made an important contribution to the Orthodox discussions on the cosmic dimension of sacramentality, which touches every single aspect of the created existence. Other decisive Orthodox explorations in the field of the sacramentality of creation were made by Alexander Schmemmann, Philip Sherrard, and John Chryssavgis.¹⁵ In Catholicism, a revival of the topic of the sacramentality of creation occurred in the post-Vatican II era under the influence of theologians such as Edward Schillebeeckx, Karl Rahner, Louis Chauvet, and Leonardo Boff,¹⁶ to name but a few. In the Anglican Church, David Brown is one of the most prominent theologians who has engaged with the question of the world as a sacrament.¹⁷ As ex-

13 Stăniloae, “Ființa tainelor în cele trei confesiuni,” 4.

14 Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. III, 8; Stăniloae, *The Experience of God*, vol. V, 3.

15 Alexander Schmemmann, “The World as Sacrament,” in Christopher Derrick (ed.), *The Cosmic Piety: Modern Man and the Meaning of the Universe* (New York: P. J. Kennedy and Sons, 1965), 119–30; Philip Sherrard, “The Sacrament,” in A. J. Philippou (ed.), *The Orthodox Ethos: Essays in Honour of the Centenary of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North and South America* (Oxford: Holy Well Press, 1964), 133–39; and John Chryssavgis, “The World as Sacrament: Insights into an Orthodox Worldview,” *Pacifica* 10:1 (1997), 1–24. Chryssavgis has published many articles on the sacramentality of creation.

16 See, for example, Leonardo Boff, *Cry of the Earth, Cry of the Poor*, trans. Philip Berryman (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1997). The work was published originally in Portuguese: *Ecologia: Grito da terra, grito dos pobres* (São Paulo: Ática, 1995).

17 See David Brown, *God and Enchantment of Place: Reclaiming Human Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); Id., “A Sacramental World: Why It Matters,” in Hans

pected, the revival of Western interest in the sacramentality of creation is the result of Catholic and Anglican theologians' struggle to overcome the post-Enlightenment gap between the sacred and the profane, acknowledging that there is "a likeness-in-the-very difference between that which sanctifies (God) and that which is sanctified (creation), between uncreated and created."¹⁸ The rediscovery of the sacramentality of creation was instrumental in the post-Vatican II switch in the Western theological understanding of the relationship between the Church and the world. This switch allowed for a more positive approach by the Church to the social, economic, cultural, and political developments of the modern era.

Stăniloae states that the union by grace between God and the created world needs to be broadly understood as "the most comprehensive mystery"¹⁹ or "the first sacrament"²⁰ in the larger sense of the word. Drawing inspiration from the Greek Fathers of the Church, especially from Maximus the Confessor and his theology of divine *logoi*, Stăniloae is of the opinion that both the cosmos and the human person should be regarded as sacraments, as the entire created reality can become a vehicle or channel of the divine presence, without losing its created status. The union between the divine and the cosmos, which is the basis of Stăniloae's vision of the world as an "all-embracing sacrament," "begins at the very act of creation and is destined to find its fulfilment through the movement of creation toward that state in which 'God is all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28)."²¹ The rich theological doctrine of *theosis* or deification so characteristic to Eastern Christianity²² is the framework that

Boersma and Matthew Levering (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Sacramental Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 616–30.

18 Chryssavgis, "The World as Sacrament," 1.

19 Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. III, 8; Stăniloae, *The Experience of God*, vol. V, 3.

20 Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. III, 13; Stăniloae, *The Experience of God*, vol. V, 7.

21 Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. III, 9; Stăniloae, *The Experience of God*, vol. V, 3.

22 For an overview of how *theosis* is understood by Eastern Christianity, see Petre Maican, *Deification and Modern Orthodox Theology: Introduction to Contemporary Debates*, Brill's Research Perspectives in Theology (Leiden: Brill, 2023); Aristotle Papanikolaou and George Demacopoulos (eds.), *Faith, Reason, and Theosis, Orthodox Christianity and Contemporary Thought* (Fordham, NY: Fordham University Press, 2023); and Norman Russell, *Fellow Workers with God: Orthodox Thinking on Theosis* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2005); id., *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004); and Emil Bartoș *Deification in Eastern*

shapes Stăniloae's notion of the world as a sacrament: the original vocation of the created world is to be deified by grace and become a vehicle of God's love. Throughout this process of cosmic deification, the human being holds a place apart, as every man and woman is called to deepen the *logoi* of creation and bring the world into God's hand as a gift to be returned to the Creator. Unfortunately, because of sin, the relation of the human being with the rest of creation has been distorted to the extent that the reactivation of the sacramentality of creation needs a new mediator, Christ: "Since God's union with the world has significantly been weakened through the human sin, *a new mystery* [sacrament] comes into being, that of an even closer union between the Creator and his creature. This is the mystery/sacrament of God's Incarnate Son."²³ Therefore, in Stăniloae's theology, the sacramentality of creation is intimately linked with both Christology and ecclesiology.

For Stăniloae, Jesus Christ, in whom divinity and humanity are united in the supreme and most intimate way, is *the new sacrament*.²⁴ This is to say that the communion between the uncreated and the created, which was brought into existence in the act of creation and was wounded by sin, was restored and emerged in God's Incarnate Son in a totally new way.²⁵ Because Christ embodies the perfect presence of God within the created reality, Stăniloae referred to the Incarnate Logos as *the original, primordial or fundamental sacrament*: all sacramentality derives from and expresses the

Orthodox Theology: An Evaluation and Critique of the Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2002).

- 23 Viorel Coman, "The Sacramentality of the Church in Dumitru Stăniloae's Theology," *Pro Ecclesia* 27:2 (2018), 203–24.
- 24 Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. III, 12; Stăniloae, *The Experience of God*, vol. V, 5.
- 25 Stăniloae subscribes to a Chalcedonian understanding of Christology. Based on the doctrine professed by the Council of Chalcedon (451), divine nature and human nature are united in the pre-existed hypostasis of the divine Logos without confusion, without change, without division, and without separation. Stăniloae developed his Christology in a series of works. Among them, the most important are the following: *Iisus Hristos și restaurarea omului* [Jesus Christ and the Restoration of the Humankind], *Opere Complete* 4 (Bucharest: Basilica, 2013 [1943]); *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. II, 3rd edition (Bucharest: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe, 2003 [1978–1979]). English translation by Ioan Ionita: *The Experience of God. Vol. II: The Person of Jesus Christ as God and Savior* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2011); and *Iisus Hristos, lumina lumii și îndumnezeitorul omului* [Jesus Christ, the Light of the World and the Deifier of the Human Being], *Opere Complete* 6 (Bucharest: Basilica, 2020 [1993]). His Christology is also inspired by the theology of Maximus the Confessor.

sacrament of Christ. Said differently, Christ represents the *root sacrament*, the sacrament *par excellence*, or the source from whom all sacramentality comes: “The original sacrament of Christianity is Jesus Christ, who comprises the Son of God under a visible form [...] Christ himself is a sacrament, a mystery, namely the fundamental sacrament and the basis of all other sacraments.”²⁶

In Stăniloae’s understanding, Christ as a sacrament extends his deified body into humanity through the Church, which is a sort of *incarnatio continua*. The Church is, therefore, “the social extension of the Risen Christ”²⁷ or as “the communitarian Christ who has to walk, together with Christ, on the path of the personal Christ.”²⁸ That being so, Stăniloae speaks of the Church as *the third sacrament in the larger sense of the world*, since it “is nothing more than the extension of the mystery of Christ; all of it is filled with the mystery of Christ.”²⁹ The sacramentality of the Church is anchored in the first sacrament (the sacrament of creation), but it is brought into existence through the primordial and original sacrament, God’s Incarnate Son.

After this outline of Stăniloae’s approach to the sacramentality of creation in connection to Christology and ecclesiology, I now turn in this article to the analysis of two key aspects of his vision of the world as a sacrament: (i) creation as a gift; and (ii) creation as a mystery. They both unlock insights into how the theme of creation as a sacrament serves the cultivation of an ecological ethos in Eastern Christianity. It is important to say that Stăniloae’s reflections on the sacramentality of creation were not shaped by the discussions on the ecological crisis that affects our lives today.³⁰ Although his reflections on creation as a sacrament have much to offer to the contemporary

26 Stăniloae, “Ființa tainelor în cele trei confesiuni,” 4.

27 Dumitru Stăniloae, “Sinteza ecleziologica,” *Studii Teologice* 7:5–7 (1955), 267–84, at 267. This article contains one of the first ecclesiological reflections published by Stăniloae.

28 Stăniloae, “Sinteza ecleziologica,” 268. See, also, Coman, *Dumitru Stăniloae’s Trinitarian Ecclesiology*, 134–40. For a more critical approach to the understanding of the Church as a sort of *incarnatio continua*, see the following article by the French Dominican theologian Yves Congar, “Dogme christologique et ecclésiologie: vérité et limites d’un parallèle,” in id., *Sainte Église: études et approches ecclésiologiques*, Unam Sanctam 41 (Paris: Cerf, 1963), 69–104. Stăniloae was equally critical of a theology that tends to identify Christology with ecclesiology.

29 Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. III, 12; Stăniloae, *The Experience of God*, vol. V, 5.

30 See Coman, “Dumitru Stăniloae’s Theology of the World,” 193–94. See, also, Charles Miller, *The Gift of the World: An Introduction to the Theology of Dumitru Stăniloae* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000).

debates on ecology and anticipated a few solutions to them, this was not the main concern of his theological writings. The debates on ecology in Orthodox theology emerged a few decades after Stăniloae's explorations in the field of creation and sacramentality.

2. Creation as A Gift: The World Cannot be Entirely Domesticated

The vision of the world as God's gift to humanity is one of the many ramifications of Săniloae's theology of creation as a sacrament. What stands at the center of this vision is the idea that the whole of creation is a vehicle of God's love and grace, as well as a material and spiritual gift to be gratefully returned to the supreme Creator, the ultimate source of the gift. Three fundamental implications derive from such a claim. The first is that the materiality of the world and its constitutive elements function as a medium of God's presence, that is, as the place of the most real encounter and communication between the divine and human beings. The world becomes a sort of language addressed by God to us. It becomes God's speech to humanity; in other words, a form of revelation. As Stăniloae points out, "[t]hrough the world as a gift and word, God maintains a dialogue with men."³¹

Stăniloae's idea that the world is the medium of God's communication with the world comes very close to what the Anglican theologian, Rowan Williams, emphasized in one of the chapters of his book *Faith in the Public Square*: "creation is itself an act of communication, a form of language... Creation itself is an act of divine self-giving, the bestowing of God's activity in and through what is not God. In other words, despite sin, corruption, and death, the world in all its diversity stands in front of us as a revelation of the Creator's beauty, love, and generosity, and as a means of receiving something of the life of God."³²

The second implication is that the idea of gift implies circularity between the source of the gift (the giver: God), the gift itself (the world), and the

31 Dumitru Stăniloae, "Orthodoxy and the World: An Orthodox Comment," *Sobornost* 6:5 (1972): 297–300, at 298. See, also, the English article by Stăniloae, which represents a synthesis of his understanding of the world as a gift: Dumitru Stăniloae, "The Cross on the Gift of the World," *Sobornost* 6:2 (1971): 96–110. This is one of the very few articles that Stăniloae published in English.

32 Rowan Williams, *Faith in the Public Square* (London: Bloomsbury, 2012), 177.

one who receives the gift (the human person). The movement is initiated by God, the origin of the gift, who offers the created world to human beings as a sign of love and affection to be shepherded, explored, and transfigured. Humans receive the gift with gratitude and return it to God; but the gift is not returned in its initial state but creatively transformed.³³ This act of transformation does not mean an egoistic and narcissistic interaction with the world that exploits the riches of creation. On the contrary, it is a Eucharistic approach to creation that makes the world reflect in itself the beauty and splendor of the Creator.

The third of the implications is that the world is a gift offered by God to all of us. In this sense, the world is not an individual object that should create competition and antagonism between the receivers of the gift (individuals or nations). If the world becomes such an object, then it leads to countless forms of injustice, discrimination, and even war. The world is meant by God as a common gift to be shared and given in love and respect for the others and the gift itself. It is not something to be possessed and exploited for egoistic purposes. In other words, nature and the entire cosmos, with all their riches and resources, are not a property which human beings can rule over at will. Creation is ultimately a gift to all of us. It traces its source of existence to and is ultimately dependent upon someone who is infinitely higher than all of us.

The vision of creation as a gift of God helps the cultivation of an ecological ethos in the sense that it pushes us to approach the world in a way that is no longer driven by sinful passions such as greed, egocentricity, self-interest, and the instinct of possession. The idea that the world is not an object for exploitation but God's gift to us should motivate people to control their desires so that they do not over-dominate our lives to the extent that our interaction with the world is not driven by our egoistic feelings and intentions.³⁴

33 Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. I, 3rd edition (Bucharest: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe Române, 2003 [1978]), 354–60; English translation by Ioan Ionita and Robert Barringer: *The Experience of God: Orthodox Dogmatic Theology*, Vol. 2: *The World: Creation and Deification* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000), 21–27. See, also, Miller, *The Gift of the World*, 58–64, and Coman, “Sustainable Development,” 171.

34 Purification from passions is the first stage of the ascetical process in Eastern Christianity, which is followed by illumination, and deification. See, for example, Dumitru Stăniloae, *Ascetica și mistica ortodoxă: Purificarea, Iluminarea, Desăvârșirea*, Opere Complete 13 (Bucharest: Editura Basilica, 2019). The original version of this book was published in 1982. English translation: *Orthodox Spirituality: A Practical Guide for the*

In a way, one can say that the theological vision behind the notion of the world as a gift motivates a praxis of self-questioning of our hidden agendas guided by the appetite for control, exploitation, mastery, and self-interest. The world as a gift and sacrament indicates that, when freed from our egoistic and sinful struggle to possess and dominate the rest of creation, the human person has the capacity and vocation to interact with the world as a steward, guardian, and priest of creation, who imprints the gift with a human creative vision and refers it back to God. When the world is understood as a gift and sacrament, nature or creation is not simply raw material whose use is limitless regardless of the consequences. Nature is not simply a source of exploitation “to produce goods, gain profit, and achieve economic growth.”³⁵ It is also a sacred reality, a palpable mystery of God’s presence, whose beauty and harmony point towards the loving Creator.

The understanding of creation as a gift does not exclude development and the transformation of the world. However, this development treats the world as a gift and sacrament in all its aspects and manifestations. Therefore, it is not a social, economic, cultural, and political development that damages creation and perpetuates its rapacious exploitation by human beings; on the contrary, it is a reconciliatory form of development, which considers and promotes the well-being of creation. Furthermore, it is a development that persuades people to treat creation with respect and thanksgiving, acknowledging the fact that the survival of the gift means the survival of the recipients of the gift and their future generations.

3. Creation as a Mystery: The Preservation of the World’s Freedom

One of the particularities of the Romanian theological language is that its vocabulary includes three terms to express the notion of sacrament: a) *taină*: from the Slavic word ‘*taina*’; b) *sacrament*: a word of Latin origin; c) *mister*: a noun with Greek roots. Although in his early articles on sacraments and the Church’s sacramentality, Stăniloae made use of all these terms without any reservation and distinction, after 1964, he preferred, however, the word

Faithful and a Definitive Manual for the Scholar, trans. Jerome Newville and Otilia Kloos (South Canaan, PA: Tikhon Seminary Press, 2002).

35 Chryssavgis and Asproulis (eds.), *Priests of Creation*, 62.

‘*taină*’ to any other notion.³⁶ The choice made by Stăniloae was not without theological implications, as the notion of ‘*taină*’ denotes both the sacramental dimension of the world and its apophatic contours or mysterious contours. As Stăniloae points out, even though the world has a rationality that the human being is invited to explore, the world remains an inexhaustible ‘light’.³⁷ For Stăniloae, “[t]he cosmos is a mystery (*taină*); the world around us is a mystery; my own person is a mystery and my fellow human beings are a mystery.”³⁸

For Stăniloae, apophaticism is not only a way of approaching the divine, but also an epistemological category that applies to both anthropology and cosmology. The human person and the world are a mystery. As a matter of fact, it is not only God’s existence that is not exhausted by theoretical formulation and conceptualization; the human person and the rest of creation are also irreducible to words and exceed acts of imaginative and conceptual mapping. Therefore, any attempt to understand the world can only be an exercise in approximation, because the reality behind all such talk and conceptualization escapes easy naming and categorization. In other words, the world remains a mystery, irreducible to any system of thought and complete domestication. The relevance of apophatic cosmology for an ecological hermeneutics is manifold.

Apophaticism is, so to say, the guardian of the freedom and mystery of the world, not in the sense that creation is totally and radically unreachable; but in the sense that apophaticism is a form of resistance to any strategy to possess what in this form of otherness, which is the world, should always

36 Coman, “The Sacramentality of the Church,” 212.

37 See, for example, Stăniloae’s rich reflections on the rationality of the cosmos in the first volume of his Dogmatic Theology. His theology of the world’s rationality has been influenced by Maximus the Confessor’s ideas. Dumitru Stăniloae, *Teologia dogmatică ortodoxă*, vol. I, 3rd edition (București: Editura Institutului Biblic și de Misiune al Bisericii Ortodoxe, 2003 [1978]), 360–74; English translation by Ioan Ionita and Robert Barringer: Dumitru Stăniloae, *The Experience of God. Vol. V: The Sanctifying Mysteries* (Brookline, MA: Holy Cross Orthodox Press, 2000), 27–43.

38 Dumitru Stăniloae, “The Mystery of the Church,” in Gennadios Limouris (ed.), *Church, Kingdom, World: The Church as Mystery and Prophetic Sign* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 1986), 50–56, here at 50. See, also, the article by Dumitru Stăniloae, “Dinamismul creației în Biserică” [The Dynamism of Creation in the Church], *Ortodoxia* 29:3–4 (1977), 281–91, especially 285. Also, Paul Evdokimov, “Nature,” *Scottish Journal of Theology* 18 (1965), 1–22. Evdokimov speaks of all creation as “secretly sacramental” and “as a conductor of divine grace, the vehicle of divine energies.” Although limited due to its created nature, the world has an apophatic dimension because of its relationship with God, who makes himself known via the elements of the created world.

escape our grasp, monopoly, and exploitation. What the apophaticism of creation teaches us is that the reality of the world cannot be captured, entirely named, and pigeonholed to fit our restrictive categories and consumerist agendas. The apophaticism of the world is the very condition and possibility of its existence, freedom, and manifestation.

Apophaticism prioritizes, therefore, a form of interaction with the world that destabilizes our habit of fully objectifying the rest of creation and makes room to apprehend it in its own terms and conditions. The mystery of the world serves as a reminder that any interaction with God's creation must be a hospitable encounter, which does not confine the elements of the world in a tight straitjacket that does not allow them to breathe but welcomes and brings out the unexpected and the unforeseen dimensions of creation. The awareness of the apophatic side of the created world is a celebration of the unfamiliar and strange, which invites us to interrupt our old habits of thinking and to destabilize our secured narratives about the world in order to embrace the new, the unthinkable, the uncomfortable, and even the subversive truth the world might confront us with: the world is a mysterious reality that escapes our domination and domestication. The apophatic dimension of creation nourishes an ecological ethos in the sense that it celebrates the mystery of creation and refuses to see the world as a pure raw material for consumption and exploitation. There is something more in creation than its material dimension.

Conclusions

This article has reflected on the contribution of Dumitru Stăniloae's theology of the sacramentality of creation for the cultivation of an ecological sensitivity, particular attention being offered to his ideas that the entire created reality is God's gift to humanity and that the cosmos has a mysterious or apophatic dimension. What a theology of creation as God's gift to humanity and a vision of the apophatic dimension of creation offer to the development of a Christian ecology is the idea of non-possession or non-domestication of the world by human beings. Two main conclusions are worth being mentioned.

When the world is understood as God's gift to all of us, it is primarily the idea that human beings do not have the right of an unlimited exploitation of creation that emerges with great emphasis, which sanctions any human

tendency towards an absolute possession of creation and its transformation into an unexhausted source of goods to satisfy our wants and needs. In other words, a vision of creation as a gift of God to us calls into question all our interactions with the world that are guided by sinful agendas in the pursuit of egocentric and individualistic goal. A theology of creation as a gift to us encourages our liberation from an excessive, destructive, and selfish attachment to this world, which confuses the creation with an unlimited reservoir of resources and riches to satisfy individual pleasures and desires. The understanding of the creation as a gift of God is world-affirming precisely because it defends the right of creation not to be reduced to a passive object to be monopolized by an individual appetite.

When the world is understood as a reality of an apophatic nature, its mysterious dimension is a reminder that the whole of creation cannot be treated as mere utility, property, or raw material. It is also a vehicle of grace and spiritualization. This vision promotes the adoption of a human lifestyle that respects the right of creation to non-domestication and freedom. The mysterious and apophatic contours of the world's sacramentality encourage human persons to control their tendencies to control, manipulate, and domesticate the rest of creation. This is to say that any human impulse to approach creation with greed, selfishness, and obsession of power and control goes against the idea that the world is a mysterious channel of grace, not a place to be arrogantly and stubbornly exploited, devoured, and conquered.

The ecological crisis that confronts our world today is also a spiritual crisis, which requires a radical change in our interaction with the rest of creation, a new and sustainable way of being in the world; no longer as destructive agents of God's creation but as loving and respectful indwellers of a world that has been given to us as a gift, as a mysterious vehicle of God's grace. A theology of the sacramentality of creation and its many ramifications is crucial for the cultivation of a relationship with the world that treats it with dignity and respect. The goal of the article was to identify the way in which Dumitru Stăniloae's understanding of creation as a sacrament can make an important contribution in this direction.

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Book review

Tim Noble, **Liberation against Entitlement: Conflicting Theologies of Grace and Clashing Populisms**. Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2022, 262 p.

Pickwick Publications have recently released a study in the field of theology which focuses on current social and political issues, in particular the experience of division. The author is Tim Noble, a British Catholic theologian living and teaching predominantly in Prague. As in his previous works Noble draws again on his broad knowledge of Latin American liberation theology which forms the main theological framework. Familiarity with the Brazilian and Czech political contexts give him the opportunity to make an unexpected but highly interesting comparison.

The book aspires “to return to the idea of a search for an all-encompassing unity, both on the personal level (the *Gemüt* that Marx speaks of) and on the communal level (here I shall speak more of *shalom*)” (p. 2). Tim Noble identifies two competing political positions, not easily reducible to “right-left” or “conservative-liberal”. Only one of them promotes the above mentioned unity and harmony for the whole human community. The other position serves for individual gains, although the individual can be seen as a group, such as a nation. The author argues that both political positions are backed by different theologies, in particular when it comes to the question of grace. He calls the first type a theology of liberation while the second type is a theology of entitlement. The book leaves no doubt which theology is truly Christian. It unambiguously shows how theologies of entitlement are fundamentally and necessarily idolatrous. Grounded in liberation theology Noble argues that “God does take sides, God has made an irrevocable option for the poor” (p. 8).

The argument of the book develops in seven chapters. The first chapter introduces the causes and nature of social division successively in Brazil and the Czech Republic. The author reveals reasons behind the sense of despair in both countries, desire for fast solutions, and the role religion plays in it. While the first chapter tells the stories, the second one is more theoretical. It brings a particular interpretation of populism using the insights of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe. Key to Noble’s interpretation is the concept of hegemony: a dominating explanation of the particular contingent relationality. All forms of social organization are hegemonic. Hegemony is closely tied

to the construction of a people. Noble argues that there always is a need to be met that brings people together. A conflict occurs when a partial need or group claims universality. Much more on political theory can be found in this chapter; ultimately, however, Noble aims to show that liberation and entitlement as “theological visions are essentially competing hegemonies in the sense that Laclau and Mouffe use the term” (p. 73). Is there some place for reconciliation and can the competing hegemonies lead to something positive? At this point Noble explicitly turns to the theology of grace.

Grace as entitlement is subject to criticism in chapter three. The author presents in detail prosperity theology and shows its persuasiveness as well as shortcomings. Inherent in this theology is a certain understanding of sacrifice which Noble, using the work of one of its founding fathers, Kenneth Hagin, claims to be in risk of idolatry. A clear manifestation of this practice is tithing: “God is made into at best a banker and at worst a servant, who must do what he is paid to by the believer” (p. 109). The opposite of this transactional “human investment” view of grace is liberation from dis-grace which Noble develops in chapter four. He follows a personalist track from Nikolai Berdyaev and Emmanuel Mounier to Juan Luis Segundo and other Latin American liberation theologians. The move from the ontological to the phenomenological enables one to argue for a social dimension of grace and identify its absence as social sin. A vision of grace is beautifully captured in a parable of a group of people travelling on a train by Leonardo Boff. Noble concludes that “there are a number of human reactions to being enclosed within the [train of the] grace of God, ranging from welcome, through acceptance, to indifference, or attempted rejection” (p. 137). The chapter culminates in a passage on grace and freedom. The reader encounters the broadly personalist approach which assures that “there is no freedom without relationship, and there are no relationships without freedom” (p. 140). This leads the author to this observation, “The question is not whether there is a hegemonic Christian discourse, but over which one is the most faithful to the Good News” (p. 142). In the following two chapters Noble finds inspiration for discernment in the pontificate of Pope Francis.

Chapter five situates Francis’s theology within the Argentinean and Latin American context. Noble pays special attention to the four principles that already appeared in the Pope’s inaugural exhortation, *Evangelii gaudium* (2013), but goes more deeply into the history of his theological maturation. Both Francis’s theology of the people and the four principles serve Noble well

to show the problem of theologies of entitlement and to promote theologies of responsibility and service. The Pope shares with liberation theologians the conviction that “the poor are not poor because of some natural law or because God wants them to be poor: the poor are poor because they are made poor” (p. 159). In other words, and here Noble believes we cannot do without hegemonic language, “systems are set up in such a way that some are rich and many more are poor; and these same systems lead to the dehumanization of the poor (and ultimately of the rich)” (p. 159). It is the task of the Church to be with the poor and to refuse the existing status quo. Moreover, Noble recalls Guardini with his teaching on *Gegensatzlehre* as the pope’s key source of inspiration. Francis’s reading of Guardini rejects a synthesis of the opposing views and finding some kind of “centrist” position. It allows for the coexistence of both poles viewed as complementary. The Pope sees the diversity of perspectives to be appreciated, for example, in the diversity of cultures.

The next chapter deals with Francis’s encyclical *Fratelli tutti* (2020) which appeared when Noble was about halfway through writing the book and which treats of much the same content (cf. p. vii). It is especially in this chapter where Noble provides illuminating comparisons of translations; his linguistic erudition allows him to do so. Noble contrasts theologies of entitlement with the Pope’s idea that “Christian values can never be defended by behavior that runs contrary to fundamental Christian beliefs” (p. 185). The detailed analysis of *Fratelli tutti* is conducted in dialogue with the theoretical basis developed in previous chapters. It culminates in the section on the role of religion in the construction of shalom. Here Noble recalls Francis’s idea that even though religion is not to be mixed with politics, neither can religious ministers forget “the political dimension of life itself” (p. 212, FT 276). It means making choices based on the criterion of the common good and a concern for integral human development. Commenting on the encyclical’s reference to Charles de Foucauld, Noble concludes, well in line with Christian social teaching as well as liberation theology, that “to be brother or sister of all means first to become brother or sister to the least. The universal is always incarnated in the particular” (p. 213).

In the final chapter the author focuses on the Spirit who gives life, transforms, and liberates. There are two points which illustrate well the overall approach of the author. Reflecting on the interference of religion in politics Noble argues that eschatological overlap allows Christian discourse to see

all political positions as penultimate. In this sense the purpose of politics is not to win the political struggle, but to promote unity. “Political hegemonic discourses will ultimately be judged according to how far they enable or hinder the journey towards that union” (p. 225). Besides, the author believes in small stories rather than grand narratives. Small stories are less inclined to hegemony. As a form of narrative knowledge they discern the presence of God in the world without referring to an overarching discourse that is susceptible to proof or falsification. “The common good is self-legitimizing, through a series of small stories that build up the good of all” (p. 226).

The book contains an extensive bibliography. Conveniently, it includes also a detailed index. As regards factual reliability of the book, I came across confusing information on the membership of the Communist Party in the Czech Republic/Czechoslovakia: seven million people given by the text (p. 61) does not correspond to the membership in 1989 which was slightly over 1.5 million. Perhaps the author meant membership for the entire duration of the party (1921–1990)? Apart from this rather minor detail, the book is generally very clear and well-supported by sources.

The nature of works reflecting specific contexts and events inevitably includes obsolescence from the moment the book reaches the reader. Thus, Tim Noble’s publication could not include Lula’s return to the Brazilian presidency. More importantly, it could not take into account in its migration considerations Ukrainians fleeing the attack by Putin’s Russia after 24 February 2022. It can be presumed that these and other events would rather confirm Noble’s analysis, worries and hopes. While it is true that a professional study must be based on facts that have already taken place, its contribution can be seen in helping us to orient ourselves theologically to the events that are taking place. And for that we can be grateful for Tim Noble’s book.

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DOI: 10.14712/30296374.2024.8



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