VIATORUM

Contents

Editorial

Observations from the World of Kafka, Schweik and Havel: The Delicate Credibility of the Church

Many surveys in European countries about the position of churches in society and the engagement of citizens in religious communities contain somewhat curious data about the relation between faith and active participation in these communities. A significant number (sometimes more than half) of those, who say they are a member of a church community, identify themselves also as not being religious. At first sight this is confusing: How can someone who participates in church life also understand themselves as non-religious? Does it mean that many members of church communities do have doubts about Christian faith to such an extent that they can't identify themselves with it? Or does it mean that the practical life of Christian communities, public statements by church representatives (or the absence thereof), engagement of church leaders in public affairs are the cause of hesitation and doubt, whether these are expressions of Christian faith they would like to consider as their own? Is the discrepancy between engagement in a religious community and the inner conviction concerning the foundation of the community connected to the content of faith or to the role of the community in the wider circle of society? In any case, these statistics seem to indicate a lingering crisis about the credibility of Christian churches in Europe, their role in society, the way they express their faith, the way they function as a community and provide guidance to their members.

Credibility is a complex notion as it in not something one can easily obtain or eventually regain. It is based on a pattern of actions related to the declared aim or identity of the actor. A consistency between the two will strengthen the credibility of the actor, whereas a perceived contradiction will lead to a loss of it. Building credibility is a delicate process which requires time and patience, but damaging it is done rather quickly and easily.

The swift change in view of religion and church in Czech society of the first half of the 1990s could serve as an example of the sensitive nature of credibility of churches. During the 1980s especially the Czech Roman Catholic Church went through an inner renewal which were partly encouraged by the new course of the Vatican under pope John Paul II. Many informal groups started to organize themselves, composed of a mix of lay people and clergy, meeting on a regular basis for spiritual and practical activities. On the level of the leadership of the church, archbishop Tomášek initiated an informal group of advisors with experiences from imprisonment, from the underground church and from dissident circles around Václav Havel. The emancipation process that emerged out of this development resulted in a significant increase in credibility at the moment of the collapse of the communist regime in 1989. The Roman Catholic Church under the leadership of an old and fragile archbishop had identified itself with the needs of Czech(oslovak) society for freedom and had shown that it was able not only to speak for itself, but also for the wider context it was living in.

As a result, interest in religion and in church in the Czech society of the early 1990s reached high levels. Visits of the John Paul II, explicitly invited by Václav Havel in his role as president, in which the Polish pope addressed central traumata of Czech religious history, underlined the congruence of the largest Christian denomination with the moment of national history at the time.

This didn't last, however. Soon after the initial steps to a democratic political system and an open society were taken, the issue of restitution of property confiscated by the communist regime occurred on the political agenda. Also the Roman Catholic Church, which had been deprived of most of the buildings and land it had owned, issued demands for a reversal of the confiscations. Material interests pushed by the church – however they might have been legitimate in the light of a reversal of injustice – became counterproductive for the credibility the church had enjoyed during the previous period. Political opponents depicted the church as an antidemocratic institution hungry for power and property. In the eyes of the secular public it seemed that the church was not different from a significant part of society preoccupied with property in the transition to a capitalist economy. The overall message was that the church didn't offer other, better or higher values to society than those determining public life at that moment. Consequently, its credibility was seriously damaged and would never return to the levels of

the early 1990s. In the following period many left the churches, partly out of disillusionment, partly due to the discovery that churches did not offer relevant guidance in modern questions. The article of Tomáš Petráček in this issue of Communio Viatorum gives further insights in the developments of the Czech Roman Catholic Church.

A discrepancy between message and practice appears to be a neuralgic point concerning credibility and the loss of it. This might apply to many institutions, it certainly does to churches. One of the fields we could observe this in especially protestant circles is connected to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the destruction of Gaza following the terrorist attack by Hamas in October 2023. An increasing number of respectable international organizations in the field of human rights (Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International) and in October 2025 also the special rapporteur of the United Nations on human rights in Palestine have come to the conclusion that the actions of Israel in Gaza surmount to genocidal action. According to the last agency, also Western countries bear responsibility for this situation: "The ongoing genocide in Gaza is a collective crime, sustained by the complicity of influential third states that have enabled longstanding systemic violations of international law by Israel. Framed by colonial narratives that dehumanize the Palestinians, this live- streamed atrocity has been facilitated through third states' direct support, material aid, diplomatic protection and, in some cases, active participation. It has exposed an unprecedented chasm between peoples and their governments, betraying the trust on which global peace and security rest" (https://www.un.org/unispal/document/special-rapporteur-report-gaza-genocide-a-collective-crime-20oct25/; see also the report of the United Nations' independent commission of inquiry: https://www.ohchr.org/sites/default/files/documents/hrbodies/hrcouncil/sessions-regular/session60/advance-version/a-hrc-60-crp-3.pdf).

Many European Protestant churches have been silent on these reports, which often might be a result of inner divisions within the membership on this issue as well as a lack of theological clarity how to react when Israel is mentioned as the one responsible for grave violations of human rights of Palestinians. At the background of this silence stands the development European churches went through after the Second World War. Reflections on the extermination of European Jewry during the war and the role of Christian theology in anti-Semitism led to a change in the view on the Jewish people and its relation to God. In many theological concepts after the holocaust

the Jewish people got a special position as those who have the older rights in God's relation to mankind. In the light of this understanding, the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 became a legitimate and providential endeavour. Consequently, to criticize the state of Israel and its treatment of the Palestinians was easily considered suspicious.

The silence of important European churches (or at least their leadership) on the development in Gaza falls in the category of what the report of the Special UN-Rapporteur called "chasm". The discrepancy between the stress on justice and human rights as theological values and the silence in case of grave violations of them by Israel evokes unease among pastors and church members. Pastors of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren issued their own critical statement because the church leadership is silent. Their colleagues in the Netherlands demonstrated in public against their leadership because of its inaction. At stake is the credibility of the churches, as they are not able to explain their position in one of the most urgent questions in the current political and theological field.

It is the more important that the general council of the World Communion of Reformed Churches of October 2025 issued a statement which addressed an important theological aspect of the protestant debate about Israel and Palestine. In it, the churches (among them many European churches) rejected so-called Christian Zionism, calling it a "misuse of theology": "While a recent ceasefire and peace framework are in place, the Palestinian people continue to endure ongoing destruction of land, displacement, dehumanisation, violence, genocide and apartheid. These actions violate their fundamental rights to freedom, dignity and self-determination. The Church recognises that true and lasting peace can only come through justice, not domination, occupation, or violence. […] The misuse of theology to justify Zionism and colonialism further deepens the intergenerational trauma of both Palestinians and Israelis. The current global moral divide, shaped by many nations and Christians failing to uphold post-WWII values and international law, exacerbates this humanitarian crisis. Despite widespread condemnation, Western powers continue to support Israel with military aid and arms." The council urged to "discern and address the phenomenon of Christian Zionism in all its forms, which is understood as a political-theological ideology and distortion of the Biblical witness whenever it justifies violence or occupation in the name of God, while making a clear distinction between this and Judaism which is an ancient faith that shares with us the prophetic values of

justice and compassion. Rejecting Christian Zionism does not mean rejecting Judaism' rather, it expresses our commitment never to use faith to justify injustice, racism or violence" (https://wcrc.eu/wp-content/uploads/2025/10/WCRC-Drafting-Decision-Session-8-20251022-Public-Witness-Session-8.pdf). A part of the statement rejected also anti-Semitism, while acknowledging that the church's history of "anti-Jewish teaching and persecution" had played a role in it.

For churches, credibility is a delicate matter, as it is being formed in a relation with actors who identify themselves with faith communities because of the shared values and principles. However difficult it might be, people trusting their church expect leadership of it in difficult matters of personal and political life. The current development of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is certainly one of them. Even when some prominent European churches are not able to formulate a meaningful guideline in this question, it is a hopeful sign that an ecumenical platform as the WCRC had the courage to express profound concern and found words for a clear and relevant message about one of the most burning issues of church and theology in current times.

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Tschechien als Laboratorium der Säkularisierung und Ort christlicher Hoffnung
Einige Überlegungen zur aktuellen Lage und den Perspektiven der tschechischen römisch-katholischen Kirche

Tomáš Petráček

Abstract: The Czech Republic as a laboratory of secularisation and a place of Christian hope. Reflections on the current situation and prospects of the Czech Roman Catholic Church This study reflects on the current position of the Czech Catholic Church from a historical, fundamental theological, and pastoral theological perspective. It discusses the reputation of Czech society as one of the most secularized in the world and the recent shift of part of the Catholic Church elite toward identitarian anti-liberal political currents. It analyzes the impact of the Church's failure to accept its diaspora situation and the squandering of the potential of the legacy of the so-called hidden Church from the period of communist persecution. Finally, it suggests that the Czech Republic could be used as an experimental territory for the universal Church to test new paths of pastoral care and evangelization.

Zur Rolle der katholischen Kirche in der tschechischen Gesellschaft

Die Tschechische Republik gehört zu den am stärksten säkularisierten Ländern der Welt. Die katholische Kirche hat hier ein komplexes historisches Erbe, das ihre Bewegung im öffentlichen Raum und ihre Evangelisationsarbeit erschwert.[1] Dabei befindet sie sich in einer sehr ambivalenten Situation: Einerseits stellt sie eine radikale Diaspora dar – einige Diözesen, wie Pilsen und Leitmeritz, sind faktisch Missionsgebiete. Andererseits versteht sie sich immer auch als nationale Kirche und nimmt gerne die Position einer

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1   David Václavík, *Náboženství a moderní česká společnost* (Praha: Grada, 2010), 73–129.

institutionellen moralischen Instanz ein. Tatsächlich ging sie aus der langen Zeit der Verfolgung durch das kommunistische Regime nach 1989 zwar personell geschwächt, jedoch mit hohem Ansehen und großer moralischer Autorität hervor. Ihre Bemühungen, die privilegierte Stellung einer National- oder Staatskirche wiederherzustellen, sowie die wiederholten, unglücklich politisierten Auseinandersetzungen um die Rückgabe von Kircheneigentum machten diese öffentliche moralische Relevanz in den 1990er Jahren jedoch wieder zunichte.[2]

Auch – und das ist eine noch wichtigere verpasste Gelegenheit – das Wirkpotenzial der starken und eigenständigen Tradition der „verborgenen" Kirche (skrytá církev, Ecclesia silentii) wurde im Keim erstickt. Diese war unter dem kommunistischen Regime nur unter Erbringung großer Opfer illegal im Untergrund tätig, kam jedoch mit der Erfahrung von Verfolgung und Inhaftierung an vielen Stellen unabhängig und isoliert zu den gleichen Schlussfolgerungen wie die Theologen und Teilnehmer des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils. Die verschiedenen Zweige der verborgenen Kirche hatten das gemeinsame Anliegen, das Christentum in ähnlicher Form wie die sogenannten Arbeiterpriester im Westen in die Gesellschaft zu tragen. Sie versuchten, die Kirche als Communio zu leben, und weihten aufgrund der Verfolgung durch das kommunistische Regime und um das Überleben der Kirche insbesondere nach der sowjetischen Invasion 1968 zu sichern auch verheiratete Männer zu Priestern und Bischöfen. In der Brünner Zweigstelle der verborgenen Kirche weihte Bischof Felix Davídek sogar mehrere Frauen zu Priesterinnen. Zum einen, um für die langjährig inhaftierten Ordensschwestern und Laienaktivistinnen den sakramentalen Dienst zu gewährleisten. Zum anderen, weil die verborgene Kirche dies als „Kairos" betrachtete – als Erfüllung des Willens Gottes im gegenwärtigen Moment, der die Parusie beschleunigt. Sie maß der theologischen Bildung und der Rolle von Laien in der Kirche und bei der Verkündigung des Evangeliums einen großen Stellenwert bei. Gemeinsam war den Zweigen der verborgenen Kirche auch das Bestreben, die klerikalen und institutionellen Grenzen für die Entwicklung des kirchlichen Gemeinschaftslebens zu überwinden, die standesmäßigen klerikalen Privilegien abzuschaffen und synodale und partizipative Elemente zu entwickeln. Während das Regime bemüht war,

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2 Aleš Opatrný, *Kardinál Tomášek a pokoncilní proměna pražské arcidiecéze* (Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2002), 185–186.

das kirchliche Leben in den böhmischen Ländern auszulöschen, traf die verborgene Kirche mutig Entscheidungen, die außerhalb der damaligen Mentalität der katholischen Kirche und der Vorschriften des kanonischen Rechts lagen. In den 1960er- und 1970er-Jahren dachten mehrere Theologen und Priester über Lebensformen in der radikalen Diaspora und sogar über den Tod der Kirche auf institutioneller Ebene nach. Doch all diese wichtigen Impulse wurden nach der Wende 1989 nicht weiterentwickelt.[3] Stattdessen stürzte sich die tschechische Kirche in die Erneuerung der klassischen kirchlichen Institutionen und Strukturen. Die Appelle großer Theologen wie Josef Zvěřina und Bonaventura Bouše, das Ende des kommunistischen Regimes für einen Neuanfang und eine Befreiung von den alten Strukturen und der alten kirchlichen Mentalität zu nutzen, gerieten in der nachrevolutionären Begeisterung praktisch in Vergessenheit.[4]

Eine weitere der schmerzhaften, offenen Wunden war die von 1997 bis 2005 stattfindende Vollversammlung der tschechischen katholischen Kirche, die mit großzügiger finanzieller und moralischer Unterstützung der deutschen katholischen Kirche organisiert wurde. Ziel war es, die Stellung der Kirche in der Gesellschaft zu überdenken und neue Wege der Seelsorge und Evangelisierung zu eröffnen.[5] Tausende Gläubige in hunderten von Versammlungsgruppen arbeiteten mehrere Jahre lang engagiert an vielen Themen, erarbeiteten Berichte und hofften auf eine Erneuerung der Kirche sowie die Überwindung klerikaler Barrieren. Der Abschluss des Prozesses mit zwei Tagungen in Velehrad in den Jahren 2003 und 2005 war jedoch eine große Enttäuschung: Einerseits war die Auswahl der Personen, die zur Versammlung eingeladen waren und die Möglichkeit hatten, Einfluss auf die endgültigen Dokumente zu nehmen, enttäuschend. Andererseits bot der Inhalt dieser Dokumente kaum Ansatzpunkte für wirkliche Reformen, und nicht einmal die zaghaftesten Impulse aus der jahrelangen Versammlungsarbeit flossen in das reale Leben der örtlichen Kirche ein.[6]

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3   Dazu Eva Vybíralová, *Skrytá církev a tajná svěcení. Analýza situace v Československu v letech 1948–89 pohledem kanonického práva* (Brno – Praha: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury – Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, 2024), 227–288.

4   Zdeněk Bonaventura Bouše, *Epilegomena* (Praha: OIKOYMENH, 2000), 50–52.

5   Miloš Raban, *Sněm katolické církve. Obnova synodality* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2000), 110–134.

6   Michal Kaplánek, *Znamení naděje. Česká církev ve světle závěrečného dokumentu plenárního sněmu – kritická analýza* (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2016), 44–45; Tomáš Petráček, „Proměny uskutečňování a vnímání synodality v dějinách

In den letzten Jahren sah sich die tschechische katholische Kirche einer weiteren Abwanderung von Gläubigen gegenüber und nahm eine insgesamt eher problematische Entwicklung. Nach 1989 profilierte sie sich zwar als katholische Ortskirche, die alle politischen Integrationsbemühungen der tschechischen Gesellschaft in westliche Strukturen unterstützte – sie hatte eine eindeutig pro-westliche und pro-europäische Ausrichtung sowie enge Verbindungen zu Diözesen und anderen Partnern in Deutschland, Österreich und darüber hinaus. Im Jahr 2012 führte jedoch die Rückgabe von Kirchen-eigentum zu einer Welle antiklerikalen Widerstands. Es folgte der Schock der Migrationswelle 2015. Schließlich schlossen sich die tschechischen Bischöfe 2018 der slowakischen Bischofskonferenz im Kampf gegen den Istanbuler Vertrag zur Verhütung und Bekämpfung von Gewalt gegen Frauen und häuslicher Gewalt an[7] und kämpfen gegen alle emanzipatorischen Bemühungen der LGBTQ+-Gemeinschaft.[8]

Ein beträchtlicher Teil der kirchlichen Eliten – Bischöfe und Priester – hat sich in den Wirren der Kulturkriege auf die Seite konservativer, identitärer, populistischer und extremistischer politischer und gesellschaftlicher Kräfte geschlagen. Sie haben auf pro-russischen Desinformationsplattformen und in den Medien gesprochen und den Westen, die liberale Demokratie und die Europäische Union billig und unkonstruktiv kritisiert. Bis zu Putins Aggression gegen die Ukraine war es keine Seltenheit, dass Russland als ein Staat glorifiziert wurde, der christliche Werte im Gegensatz zum dekadenten liberalen Westen verteidigt. Dies führt zu einer weiteren Entfremdung der katholischen Kirche von großen Teilen der tschechischen Gesellschaft und erschwert die Weitergabe des Glaubens in katholischen Familien noch mehr.

Die tschechische katholische Kirche ist entlang der bekannten Achsen innerlich gespalten. Da sich die Katholiken in Tschechien, einschließlich des Klerus, jedoch ein größeres Maß an Freiheit und einen besseren Zugang zu

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katolické církve. Tři české synodální procesy 19.–21. století", *Verba Theologica* 21/2 (2022), 15–20. DOI: 10.54937/vt.2022.21.2.7-22.

7 František Jemelka, „Česká biskupská konference: Naše církev stojí před výzvou, jak nově hlásat a žít Evangelium", *Církev.cz* (2018), https://www.cirkev.cz/cs/aktuality/180411ceska-biskupska-konference-nase-cirkev-stoji-pred-vyzvou-jak-nove-hlasat-a-zit-evangelium (abgerufen am 16. 5. 2025).

8 Tomáš Petráček, „Der Weg der tschechischen katholischen Kirche nach 1989. Von einer europäischen zu einer identitären Kirche", *Münsteraner Forum für Theologie und Kirche* (2023). Source: https://www.theologie-und-kirche.de/petraczek-kirche-tschechien.pdf (abgerufen am 16. 5. 2025).

den Medien bewahrt haben als beispielsweise in der benachbarten Slowakei und Polen, manifestiert sich diese innere Spannung auch nach außen. Vereinfacht lassen sich zwei Kirchen unterscheiden: Diejenige von Kardinal Dominik Duka, ehemaliger Prager Erzbischof mit konservativer identitärer Auffassung von Christentum und Kirche, der der katholischen Kirche eine entsprechende Rolle in der Gesellschaft beimisst; und diejenige von Tomáš Halík, Universitätskaplan und Professor an der Philosophischen Fakultät der Karlsuniversität, der das Synodale Konzept der Kirche vertritt und die Werte der liberalen Demokratie schätzt.

Es liegt also auf der Hand, dass die Probleme der heutigen katholischen Kirche tiefer liegen. Mit unnötigen Kulturkriegen und internen Konflikten wird Zeit vergeudet, die an anderer Stelle sinnvoller verwendet wäre. Früher herrschte in der tschechischen katholischen Kirche oft die Ansicht, alle Probleme seien lösbar, wenn sie institutionell, personell und gesellschaftlich so aufgestellt wäre wie die Kirche in Deutschland. Aber in der heutigen Zeit kann sich die Kirche in Tschechien solche Illusionen nicht mehr leisten. Es ist notwendig, zum Wesentlichen vorzudringen. Deutlich wird dies durch die Worte von Bonaventura Bouše, einem langjährigen Häftling und Franziskanerpater, der 1997 in einem Brief an Kardinal Vlk über die tschechische Kirche Folgendes formulierte: „In einem seiner schwierigen Momente sagte mir ein Priester, dass ihm unsere Kirche wie eine Mühle vorkomme, die noch laufe, aber nicht mehr mahle. Schweren Herzens und mit Angst gestehe ich, dass ich oft gezwungen bin, ihm zuzustimmen."[9]

Reform und Wahrhaftigkeit

Werfen wir nun einen Blick auf die Gegenwart. Jan Loffeld kommt in seinem Buch zu dem Schluss, dass weder Reform noch Restauration die Probleme des Gläubigenverlusts und des nachlassenden Interesses an Kirchen und dem Christentum als Religion lösen werden.[10] In den konservativen und viel kürzeren Reformperioden der letzten 200 Jahre kirchlicher Entwicklung waren die Säkularisierungstendenzen jeweils ähnlich stark ausgeprägt – ganz

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9 Bonaventura Bouše, „Otevřený dopis Bonaventury Bouše kardinálu Vlkovi", *Protestant* 1 (1998). Source: https://protestant.evangnet.cz/otevreny-dopis-bonaventury-bouse -kardinalu-vlkovi (abgerufen am 16. 5. 2025).

10 Jan Loffeld, *Wenn nichts fehlt, wo Gott fehlt. Das Christentum vor der religiösen Indifferenz* (Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder, 2024), 83–88.

unabhängig davon, ob die jeweilige lokale katholische Kirche eher konservativ oder eher reformorientiert war. Auch aktuelle Reformbemühungen (Reformen des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils, der Synodale Weg von Papst Franziskus, stärkere Beteiligung der Laien am Leben der Kirche) wirken der zunehmenden Säkularisierung nicht entgegen. Und andere historische nicht-katholische Kirchen (Reformationskirchen), die einen Großteil der institutionellen und strukturellen Veränderungen aufweisen, die innerhalb der katholischen Kirche schon lange Zeit diskutiert werden, haben diese Trends ebenfalls nicht umgekehrt. Im Gegenteil: Säkularisierungstendenzen scheint es hier sogar noch stärker zu geben.

Meiner Meinung nach liegt das vor allem daran, dass die bisherigen Reformversuche seit dem Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzil sehr uneinheitlich und bestenfalls halbherzig waren. Wie Hubert Wolf in seinem Buch *Der Unfehlbare*[11] zeigt, hat sich die katholische Kirche kaum von ihrer Struktur aus dem 19. Jahrhundert entfernt. Durch ihre Größe, ihren Traditionalismus und den Druck, ein institutionelles Gefüge aufrechtzuerhalten, opfert sie bis zu einem gewissen Grad den Dienst an ihrer primären Mission, nämlich das Evangelium zu verkünden und die Nähe Gottes zu vermitteln. Dadurch scheint sie auch andere historische, reformierte Kirchen in eine gewisse Passivität und Unbeweglichkeit zu ziehen.[12]

Was der tschechischen katholischen Kirche fehlt, ist eine Wahrhaftigkeit, die schon in der Tradition der tschechischen verborgenen Kirche und ihrem Denken in den 60er/70er Jahren Hauptthema war: Es ist nicht möglich, bestimmte Werte und Tugenden zu verkünden, sie in der Praxis und sogar im institutionellen Rahmen aber zu verleugnen.[13] Es ist nicht möglich, wesentliche und radikale menschliche Gleichheit zu proklamieren, aber in Wirklichkeit eine Institution zu sein, die auf massiven Ungleichheiten im Verhältnis zwischen Klerus und Laien oder in einer unterlegenen Position der Frauen in der Kirche beruht. Es ist nicht möglich, Gerechtigkeit als eine zentrale, ja sogar kardinale Tugend zu verkünden, aber gleichzeitig einen internen Rahmen zu haben, der im Kirchenrecht schriftlich fixiert ist und

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11 Hubert Wolf, *Der Unfehlbare. Pius IX. und die Erfindung des Katholizismus im 19. Jahrhundert. Biographie* (München: C. H. Beck, 2020), 87–150.

12 Michael Seewald, *Reform. Dieselbe Kirche anders denken* (Freiburg – Basel – Wien: Herder, 2019), 111–120.

13 Oto Mádr, *Slovo o této době* (Praha: Zvon, 1992), 237–242.

keinen wirklichen Schutz gegen den Missbrauch kirchlicher Macht bietet sowie Ungleichheiten verstärkt.

Dies zeigte sich kürzlich im Fall eines besonderen Gottesdienstes namens „Hospodin v hospodě" (zu Deutsch „Herr im Gasthaus", ein Wortspiel, das nur im Tschechischen funktioniert) im Kloster Břevnov. Mit diesem besonderen Rahmen wollte man ein Publikum ansprechen, das aus verschiedenen Gründen keine traditionellen Sakralräume besucht. Aufgrund einiger geringfügigen Verstöße gegen liturgische Vorschriften wurde der Hauptzelebrant und das Gesicht des Projekts, der bekannte Priester Marek Vácha[14], ohne vorherige Kommunikation von seiner Kaplansstelle in der römisch-katholischen akademischen Pfarrei Prag (Kirche des Heiligsten Salvators, der Pfarrer ist Tomáš Halík) entbunden. Es folgten sofort empörte Reaktionen von Gläubigen und der breiten Öffentlichkeit.[15] Sie empfanden dies als Machtwillkür, zumal sich das Prager Erzbistum immer mehr in Ausflüchten verstrickte und sich herausstellte, dass viele Behauptungen des Prager Erzbischofs nicht der Wahrheit entsprachen.[16] Dies zeigte eine völlig unsynodale, intransparente und unkollegiale Ausübung der bischöflichen Macht sowie eine massive Abneigung gegen Machtmissbrauch in der tschechischen Gesellschaft und Kirche.

Man kann nicht verkünden, dass das Christentum die Freiheit unterstützt, zu der uns Christus erlöst hat, wenn gleichzeitig viele Strukturen und Prozesse der Kirche ein fest verwurzeltes und institutionalisiertes Misstrauen gegenüber der menschlichen Freiheit verraten. Die kirchlichen Machthaber halten Instrumente der Kontrolle bereit und bestrafen gelebte Freiheit. In der deutschen katholischen Kirche mag das nicht vorkommen, in Ostmitteleuropa ist es jedoch ein recht häufiges Phänomen. So häufig sogar, dass es gar nicht mehr nötig ist, es auszuüben, weil die Menschen sich in der Kirche selbst zensieren. Die tschechische katholische Kirche ist wahrscheinlich das letzte Umfeld in der Gesellschaft, in dem die Regel aus der Zeit der späten kommunistischen Regime noch gilt: „Das sollst du nicht denken… Wenn du es schon denkst, dann sag es nicht offen… Wenn du es schon sagst,

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14 Marek „Orko" Vácha (* 1966 Brünn) ist ein tschechischer römisch-katholischer Priester, Theologe, Molekularbiologe, Bioethiker, Pädagoge, Schriftsteller und Pfadfinder.

15 František Kunetka, „Liturgický skandál na Břevnově", *Getsemany* 380 (2025). Source: https://www.getsemany.cz/node/4365 (abgerufen am 20. 5. 2025).

16 Pavel Kopeček, „Ke stanovisku Liturgické komise ČBK", *Getsemany* 379 (2025). Source: https://www.getsemany.cz/node/4353 (abgerufen am 20. 5. 2025).

dann schreib es nicht… Wenn du es schon geschrieben hast, dann sei nicht überrascht."[17]

Die heutige europäische Gesellschaft hat Jesu Betonung von Wahrhaftigkeit und Authentizität ernst genommen. Was nicht dem gelebten Leben entspricht, kann nicht ernst genommen werden und verliert als Institution ihre Autorität und Glaubwürdigkeit. Aus Perspektive der Kirche geht es jedoch vor allem um die Treue zum Evangelium und darum, die Mentalität des vorläufigen Misstrauens zu überwinden, die das Leben der kirchlichen Gemeinschaft lähmt. Ein institutioneller Rahmen, der den Evangelien widerspricht, schadet nach und nach den Machthabern selbst, führt zu autoritärer Machtausübung und stört insgesamt die Beziehungen innerhalb der kirchlichen Gemeinschaft. Ganz zu schweigen davon, dass die Gemeinschaft der Jünger Jesu Wegbereiter für alles sein sollte, was zu mehr Freiheit, Gleichheit und Gerechtigkeit führt, und nicht die letzte Bastion alter Ungleichheiten und Ungerechtigkeiten sowie ideologischer Verbündeter derer, denen wirkliche Freiheit und Gleichheit zu viel sind. Was in traditionellen Gebieten vielleicht noch träge und mühsam funktionieren kann, stößt im Leben in der radikalen Diaspora eindeutig an seine Grenzen.

Das Leben in der Diaspora: als Geschenk und Gabe

Die grundlegende Aufgabe der tschechischen Kirche besteht darin, die Diasporasituation endlich und ernsthaft anzunehmen und als Geschenk und Chance zu begreifen. Das Trauma, sich immer mit der glorreichen, idealisierten Vergangenheit der National-, Volks- und Staatskirche zu vergleichen, muss überwunden werden, denn dies war nicht der normale, optimale oder natürliche Zustand der Kirche. Für die Verkirchlichung der gesamten Gesellschaft hat das Christentum einen hohen Preis bezahlt, auch in der massiven Säkularisierung des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts.[18] Die Kirche sollte sich damit abfinden, dass sie um ihre gesellschaftliche Relevanz kämpfen muss – allerdings mit Bedacht, denn: Je mehr und je heftiger die Kirche um ihre ge-

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17　Vgl. Jaroslav Šebek, *Hrdinou se člověk nerodí, ale stává: Kardinál František Tomášek, církev a stát (1965–1992)* (Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2025), 143–201; Tomáš Petráček, „Mezi Pacem in terris, liturgickou obnovou a přemýšlením o církvi umírající. Katolická teologie v kontextu normalizace humanitních věd v letech 1969–1989", *Slovo a smysl* 35/17 (2020), 81–93. DOI: 10.14712/23366680.2020.3.6.

18　Václavík, *Náboženství*, 52–91.

sellschaftliche Relevanz kämpft, desto schneller verliert sie diese. Dies gilt besonders, wenn sie sich als politische Kraft profiliert und Lobbying-Praktiken einsetzt. Das bedeutet nicht, dass die Kirche sich nicht äußern soll, aber sie sollte es vorsichtig und intelligent tun: sich in grundsätzlichen Fragen zu Wort melden, in denen die Menschenwürde auf dem Spiel steht, aber keine unnötigen Kulturkriege führen, schon gar nicht mit problematischen Verbündeten für problematische Ziele. Stattdessen sollte die Kirche den Fokus darauf legen, einfach Kirche zu sein, sich innerlich zu erneuern, das geistliche und religiöse Leben zu pflegen und darüber nachzudenken, wie Kirche jetzt und in Zukunft aussehen kann.

Je vollständiger, ehrlicher und ernsthafter die Kirche den Kampf um ihre gesellschaftliche Relevanz aufgibt, desto wahrscheinlicher ist es, dass sie am Ende dieses langen Prozesses wieder eine gewisse Relevanz erlangen kann. Nicht als Verbündeter des Staates und Teil der Machtstruktur der Gesellschaft, sondern durch das Gewicht ihrer inneren Autorität, die aus ihrem Dienst und ihrem Zeugnis für das Evangelium erwächst. Die Kirche wird ein Lebens- und Beziehungsmodell anbieten und bezeugen, das für andere inspirierend sein wird, denn es gibt nie genug Menschen als Kirchenersatz, die die Zeugen oder Vermittler von Hoffnung, Sinn und Trost für andere sind.[19]

Glaube in Europa hat eine einzigartige Chance: Die Kirche muss in vielen Bereichen nicht mehr an die Stelle des Staates treten und lebt in einer Gesellschaft, in der viele wichtige christliche Werte bereits gelebt werden – tatsächlich leben wir in einer viel christlicheren und jesuanischeren Gesellschaft als je zuvor in der christlichen Vergangenheit. Dies ist eine Gelegenheit, zu authentischen Wurzeln zurückzukehren. Weg von Begriffen wie Macht, Autorität und Gehorsam, hin zu Begriffen wie Vertrauen, Geschwisterlichkeit und Gemeinschaft. Wenn schon Gegenkultur, dann als eine Alternative zum ökonomistischen Reduktionsdenken der Gegenwart, dem überwältigenden Effizienzdruck und dem Erfolgsdiktat. Einfach Kirche, d.h. Salz und Sauerteig sein.

Die Tschechische Republik als Experimentierfeld

Vor einem Vierteljahrhundert wurde angesichts der radikalen Diaspora-Situation und der erstaunlichen tschechischen Tradition der verborgenen Kirche

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19 Josef Prokeš, *Pán se stará* (Praha: Portál, 2019), 106–112.

der Vorschlag gemacht, die Tschechische Republik – oder zumindest Böhmen als böhmische Kirchenprovinz – zu einem Experimentierfeld zu erklären. Mit einer leichten Übertreibung würde ich sagen, dass es in Bezug auf die traditionelle institutionelle Relevanz nichts zu verlieren gibt.[20] Stattdessen sollte das noch immer vorhandene beträchtliche menschliche Potenzial genutzt werden, um etwas Neues zu schaffen – insbesondere, weil in den letzten zehn Jahren die Erosion der traditionellen kirchlichen Autorität und Institutionen besonders stark fortgeschritten ist.[21]

Für eine Erneurung des kirchlichen Lebens müssen neue Formen der Seelsorge und Evangelisation sowie der kirchlichen Disziplin und Liturgie gefunden werden. Und es gab, wie oben beschrieben, in der Vergangenheit bereits Bereiche – und mögen sie im Vergleich zur gesamten mächtigen globalen katholischen Kirche noch so marginal und unbedeutend erscheinen –, in denen Neues erfolgreich ausprobiert worden ist. Für die katholische Kirche in Tschechien ist die Zeit gekommen, jetzt endlich auf der Erfahrung der verborgenen Kirche aufzubauen und sich ihres Erbes zu bedienen.

Im Bereich der Theologie bietet sich die Weiterentwicklung des Konzeptes an, alle anderen Sakramente seien nur eine weitere Ausformung der Taufe. Auch in den meisten traditionellen historischen Kirchen gibt es interne Debatten über das Wesen und den Inhalt des ordinierten Amtes.[22] Es ist kein Zufall, dass die lebendigen tschechisch-katholischen spirituellen Zentren diejenigen sind, in denen das klerikale Modell überwunden wurde und in denen die Priester nicht verbal für sich selbst werben, sondern ihrer Gemeinschaft tatsächlich gleichberechtigt dienen. Ein Beispiel ist die Gemeinde Neratov (Bärnwald), in der Josef Suchár, einst ein Geistlicher der verborgenen Kirche, eine verfallene Wallfahrtsstätte restauriert und eine Gemeinschaft von Menschen mit Behinderung gegründet hat.[23]

Beispiele für lebendige Orte des Dialogs mit moderner Kunst und Kultur, die die Tradition weiterentwickeln und die Spiritualität für den Menschen

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20 Václavík, *Náboženství*, 204–211.

21 Vgl. Tomáš Petráček, „Vytvořit opět pravé katolické klima. K recepci pontifikátu Benedikta XVI. se zvláštním přihlédnutím na katolickou církev v České republice", *Verba Theologica* 23/2 (2024), 23–40. DOI: 10.54937/vt.2024.23.2.29-42.

22 Dazu schon Bonaventura Bouše, *Malá katolická liturgika: Tradice, kritika, budoucnost* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2004), 72–104.

23 Sdružení Neratov. Source: https://www.neratov.cz (abgerufen am 19. 5. 2025).

von heute pflegen, sind in Prag die Fortna[24], ein offenes Kloster der Unbeschuhten Karmeliten, das dominikanische Projekt Dominikanergass 8[25] oder die Studentengemeinde am Heiligen Salvator.[26] Ein herausragendes Werk, das das Leben von Hunderten von Menschen verändert, ist die Gemeinschaft Chlapi (Männer), die, inspiriert von Richard Rohr, Männer in ihrer persönlichen und spirituellen Entwicklung unterstützt.[27] Es gibt starke spirituelle Persönlichkeiten wie den Salesianerpater Ladislav Heryán, der oft als „Pastor des Untergrundes" bezeichnet wird und dank seiner Wahrhaftigkeit und seiner zeitgemäßen Sprache Tausende von Menschen erreicht, während er gleichzeitig das Gottesbild der Bibel treu darstellt.[28] Und man könnte noch weitere Persönlichkeiten, Zentren und Bewegungen nennen.

Die Kirche tut sich schwer damit zu akzeptieren, dass viele Menschen einfach kein Interesse an der Religion haben, sich nicht von ihr angezogen fühlen, nicht verstehen, wozu sie gut sein könnte. Manche empfinden sie sogar als lästig oder aus verschiedenen Gründen als bedrohlich. Natürlich kann die Kirche sich fragen, ob dies wirklich gerechtfertigt ist, und versuchen, konkrete Gründe zu beseitigen. Viel wichtiger ist jedoch, dass sie beginnt, Menschen auf Augenhöhe zu begegnen und sie ernst zu nehmen, nicht nur als Objekte einer möglichen Evangelisation oder Christianisierung, sondern als Partner bei der Schaffung einer gemeinsamen Welt voller Respekt und christlicher Werte.[29] Die spontane Unterstützung für die Ukraine und die Aufnahme ukrainischer Flüchtlinge haben gezeigt, dass in der tschechischen Gesellschaft viel menschliches Potenzial steckt, und dass Säkularismus und Apatheismus nicht bedeuten, dass es keine christlichen Schlüsselwerte gibt: Opferbereitschaft, Mitgefühl, Entschlossenheit und Gerechtigkeitssinn.[30]

Viele Menschen in Tschechien leben authentische christliche Werte oft tiefer und intensiver als viele Gläubige, wenn auch nur intuitiv. Es wäre ein fataler Fehler, sich diejenigen unnötig zum Gegner zu machen, die auch

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24 Fortna – klášter bosých karmelitánů na Hradčanech. Source: https://fortna.eu/ (abgerufen am 15. 5. 2025).

25 Dominikánská 8. Source: https://dominikanska8.cz/ (abgerufen am 20. 5. 2025).

26 Norbert Schmidt, *Přímluva za současnost. Umění v sakrálním prostoru* (Praha: Triáda, 2016).

27 Hnutí Chlapi. Source: https://www.chlapi.cz/ (abgerufen am 22. 5. 2025).

28 Ladislav Heryán, *Exotem na této zemi: O Božím milosrdenství mezi námi* (Praha: Portál, 2016).

29 Josef Prokeš, *Síla křtu v životě* (Praha: Portál, 2024), 11.

30 Für Deutschland Loffeld, *Wenn nichts fehlt*, 100–103.

außerhalb des christlichen Glaubens versuchen, die Gesellschaft in Richtung mehr Gerechtigkeit und Mitgefühl zu verändern. Umso wichtiger scheint es stattdessen, ähnlich dem Synodalen Weg in Deutschland alle Kräfte zu bündeln, damit sich der Traum von einem Experimentierfeld zur Erprobung neuer Wege für die Zukunft der tschechischen katholischen Kirche erfüllen kann. Meiner Meinung nach sollte man damit in Tschechien nicht mehr warten – die Zeit drängt, denn der bestehende institutionelle Rahmen ist im Begriff, sich aufzulösen.

Zu den Geheimnissen des christlichen Glaubens gehören Verborgenheit, adventliches Warten und kenotischer Rückzug in den Hintergrund, damit der Glaube im Menschen wachsen kann. Es ist an der Zeit, dass historisch gewachsene Tradition und institutionelle Kirchlichkeit in den Hintergrund treten, damit die Saat des Evangeliums und einer neuen Kirchlichkeit aufgehen kann. Dafür ist es nicht nötig, dass Werte als christlich deklariert werden, damit die Kirche sich auf ihr Urheberrecht berufen kann. Viel wichtiger ist, dass christliche Werte gelebt werden – in allen Bereichen von Kirche und Gesellschaft. Die Kirche muss die Herausforderungen der Zeit und Gottes Wort in Einklang bringen, so wie es die alten Generationen der Jünger Christi konnten und taten.

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Triplex Usus Lectionis or On Reading the Bible Theologically, Philologically, and Spiritually[1]

Petr Sláma

Abstract: This survey, reflecting two and a half centuries of biblical criticism, proposes three distinct modes of reading the Bible, each determined by the reader's role: theological reading, practiced by conscious members of faith communities whose group and personal identities are shaped by the Bible and tradition; philological reading, employed by scholars using biblical criticism to analyze the Bible as literature; and spiritual reading, undertaken by individuals seeking personal guidance. The varied strategies inherent in these modes, and their interrelationships, are explored.

Introduction

This paper deals with the question of how we, descendants of the Western Christian tradition and particularly the Reformation, grandchildren of the European Enlightenment, and children of global Postmodernism, read the Bible today. The "we" referred in this paper represents the perspective of a Christian of Protestant background who engages in the debates of recent biblical scholarship.

This question becomes increasingly urgent at the intersection of the church and academia. Outside this intersection, within either church or academia, Bible reading often occurs under the respective rules of each of these two realms, without paying much attention to the rules of the other realm, because each realm asks different questions of the biblical text. Yet if mainline churches in Europe and America, with their tradition of academically trained ministers, navigate their students to just this intersection,

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they have to take some effort to endure and perhaps make positive use of its inherent tensions.[2]

As it is the case in other areas of human thinking, each of the previous epochs has left a certain lens of hermeneutical decisions through which the Bible was to be read, and these lenses, acting together, determine our present understanding of it. The Reformation of 16th century elevated the status of the Bible, set up in opposition to the Catholic attention to the tradition and the authority of the Church.[3] During the Enlightenment, though, it were predominantly Protestant scholars (with glorious exceptions of Richard Simon, Alfred Loisy and others) who pioneered the path of the so called higher or historical criticism,[4] an approach that I call philological (see below). This is sometimes being explained as a form of the confessionally motivated attention to the Bible,[5] but resulted in the dethronement of it as the supreme norm in the life of a Christian. The alliance with modernity became often more characteristic of Protestants than their alliance with the Bible. This enabled them to be better tuned in to questions of their time. Yet, at the same time, it also brought an identity crisis, as Karl Barth and other recognized.[6] It was

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2 A not very large group of works devoted to this topic represent e.g. David H. Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975); Christof Landmesser, Hartmut Zweigle and Ernst M. Dörrfuß (eds.), *Allein die Schrift!? Die Bedeutung der Bibel für Theologie und Pfarramt* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013). Recently, authors involved in so called theological interpretation of the Scripture pay attention to these questions, see 1.6 bellow.

3 See Martin Luther in his Diet of Worms in 1521, fulltext in Henry Bettenson and Chris Maunder, *Documents of the Christian Church* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 4th edn, 2011), 212. In Czech context see the *Iudex Egrensis*, a "hermeneutical agreement" between the Hussites and the representatives of the council in Basel about the norm of the forthcoming dispiue. According to the *Iudex*, it is going to be *lex divina, praxis Christi, apostolica et ecclesiae primitivae una cum conciliis doctoribusque, fundantibus se veraciter in eadem pro veracissimo et indefferenti iudice*, in *Monumenta concilio-rum generalium seculi decimi quinti. Concilium Basileense. Scriptorum, Tomus I* (Wien, 1857), 220, digitalized at https://www.digitale-sammlungen.de/en/view/bsb10483602 (accessed 7. 2. 2025).

4 Jan Rohls, "Historical, Cultural and Philosophical Aspects of the Nineteenth Century with Special Regard to Biblical Interpretation," in Magne Sæbø et al. (eds.), *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament III. The History of Its Interpretation from Modernism to Post-Modernism. The Nineteenth Century and Twentieth Centuries* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), 31ff.

5 Jéan Zumstein, *Le protestantisme et les premiers chrétiens: Entre Jésus et Paul* (Géneve: Labor et fides, 2002).

6 Programatically in Karl Barth, *Der Römerbrief* (München: Chr.Kaiser Verlag, 2nd edn, 1922) and later in Karl Barth *Kirchliche Dogmatik I/2* (Zollikon-Zürich: Evangelischer

then taken as a kind of relief for the religiously affiliated part of the academy when reader-oriented approaches gained their place in biblical scholarship, emphasizing the active, creative role of the reader, the strategies of reception and application.[7] An exegete, like an observer in a physical experiment, is an intrinsic part of the analysis. The observer's standpoint, or in other words, the questions he or she brings to the Bible, necessarily influence the outcome of the endeavour.

This paper aims to contribute to this debate by suggesting three possible reader's positions from which the Bible can be read, namely the theological, philological, and spiritual one. The distinction draws on the hermeneutical tradition that has accompanied the church from its very inception. In this tradition strategies have been developed to deal with discrepancies between biblical texts and dogmatic or ethical assertions of believing communities. This tradition is rooted in the Jewish practice of continuous adaptation, revision, and rewriting its normative text, alongside a parallel movement to fix and delineate its content.[8] One cannot go around Alexandria, which was the birthplace of allegory, reading strategy that considers a text to denote something else (*allos* means other) than just the plain or literal meaning.[9] Both Philo around the turn of Christian era, and a series of later Christian

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Verlag, 1945), 71. In Czech context and essentially refusing the legacy of historical-critical scholarship this position is formulated by Jaroslav Vokoun in his *Číst Bibli zase jako Bibli: Úvod do teologické interpretace Písma [Reading the Bible Again as Scripture: An Introduction to Theological Interpretation of Scripture]* (Prague: Česká biblická společnost, 2011).

7   Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953); Wolfgang Iser, *Theorie der Literatur: Eine Zeitperspektive* (Konstanz: Universitätsverlag, 1992); John Barton, "The Legacy of the Literary-critical School and the Growing Opposition to Historico-critical Bible Studies. The Concept of 'History' Revisited – *Wirkungsgeschichte* and Reception History," in Magne Sæbø (ed.), *Hebrew Bible / Old Testament. The History of Its Interpretation III/2* (2015), 96–124.

8   On the process of adaptation and re-writing see the classical works of e.g. Wilfried Thiel, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 26–45 mit einer Gesamtbeurteilung der deuteronomistischen Redaktion des Buches Jeremia* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener, 1981). In broader terms about the practice of re-writing see Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Michael Fishbane, "Inner-Biblical Exegesis," in Sæbø, *HBOT I/1* (1996), 33–48; and recently, blurring the clear border between literary and textual criticism, Nathan MacDonald, *The Making of the Tabernacle and the Construction of Priestly Hegemony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023).

9   Otto Kaiser, *Zwischen Athen und Jerusalem Studien zur griechischen und biblischen Theologie, ihrer Eigenart und ihrem Verhältnis* (Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter,

authors like Barnabas, Origen or much later Gregory the Great reckoned with a higher (or deeper) but hidden meaning behind biblical text. A synthesis of medieval hermeneutics, the *quadriga* of Augustinus of Dacia, speaks of four senses of the Scripture: not just the literary and allegoric, but also moral and eschatological meaning are to be discovered in biblical text.[10] In the 20th century the literary informed biblical scholarship has categorised various approaches to the Bible according to their respective scopes. Drawing on models developed by Meyr Howard Abrams[11] and Umberto Eco[12] distinguishing between *intentio auctoris*, *intention operis* and *intentio lectoris*, John Barton and Manfred Oeming with small variations would use this variety of scopes, understood as a guiding question, as a criterion for categorizing the research of the 20th century.[13]

It is from this scopus-based method that I embark on an approach that focuses on the particular role of a reader. As will be argued, our perception of the Bible is determined by the role we play as readers. It is our role as readers that sets the rules of the game of interpretation. I can see essentially three roles in which one, a professional exegete and to lesser extent also a non-professional reader, can read the Bible. One can read it as a conscious member of believing community, interpreting the Bible within the broader context of its theology. Alternatively, one can read it as a critical scholar, using philological tools to analyse the text like any other piece of ancient literature, putting consciously aside personal biases.[14] Finally, one can read it as an individual, believer or unbeliever, seeking in the text a personal,

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2023); James N. B. Carleton Paget, "The Christian Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Alexandrian Tradition," in Sæbø, *HBOT I/1* (1996), 476–542.

10 Put in verses, it says: "Litera gesta docet, quid credas allegoria, moralis quod agas, quo tendas anagogia," in Augustinus de Dacia, "Rotulus pugillaris examinatus atque editus," *Angelicum* 5 and 6 (1928–29), 253–278 and 548–574.

11 Meyr Howard Abrams, *The Mirror and the Lamp: Romantic Theory and the Critical Traditio* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1953).

12 Umberto Eco, *The Role of the Reader: Exploration in the Semiotics of the Text* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1979).

13 John Barton, *Reading the Old Testament Method in Biblical Study* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2nd edn, 1996), 237–236; and Manfred Oeming, *Biblische Hermeneutik: Eine Einleitung* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 1998).

14 An argument for a strict line between philological and theological approach, formulated in polemics with the idea of a biblical theology, has been provided by James Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968).

spiritual inspiration. The three statuses not only are not mutually exclusive; on the contrary, it will be argued for their mutual complementarity. Yet each one of them exhibits rules of their own, their particular *usus*. To understand the respective *usus*, its guiding question and the methods it employs, can help us to make use of reading the Bible in various contexts of today and avoid (or at least localize) the conflict that interpreting the Bible sometimes evokes.

As an appendix to each of the three chapters a sketch follows on how the respective approach interprets one and the same biblical passage.

1. Theological Reading of the Bible

By beginning with this approach to reading the Bible, I pay tribute to the longest period in history, where the Bible was read as a normative book (originally "The Books"[15]) with direct and often exclusive authority and relevance to the religious life of a believing community and its individual members. For centuries, this approach was unquestioningly taken for granted. The concept that not merely any text, but a deliberate set of texts, exhibits religious authority is described by the term canon, meaning "the measure." Its origin is explained in terms of *revelation*.[16] This term doesn't primarily mean ecstatic experiences. Rather, it claims an axiomatic status for certain set of texts within the believing community. In the Old Testament, the Torah given through Moses to the people of Israel epitomizes the external, not invented or developed character of this set. For Christians, the gospel of Jesus the Christ understood as the true embodiment of the God's will (eventually the will of the God of the Old Testament), recorded in epistles and other early Christian texts collected in the New Testament, became the very core of revelation, shedding new light on everything including the texts of the Bible of Israel, thus becoming the Old Testament of the Church. The theological reading of the Bible has therefore always been a biased enterprise, carried out under the following assumptions:

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15 John Barton, *A History of the Bible. The Book and Its Faiths* (London: Penguin, 2020), 246.

16 See the obligatory chapters De revelatione in classical systematic theologies, summarized in Horst Georg Pöhlmann, *Abriß der Dogmatik* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlaghaus Gerd Mohn, 6th edn, 1985).

1.1 It is understood to have a salvific effect. Both Judaism and Christianity are historical religions, rooted in events the Bible identifies as foundational for their respective communities. This historical anchoring in past events and future promises provides these communities with a distinctive framework and character. To be a member of such a community entails accepting this framework as a determinant for one's orientation in the world.[17] Besides, theological reading strengthens the collective memory and the social cohesion of believing community. The ultimate goal of theological reading of the Bible, though, is an encounter with the Word of God, a theological concept that involves the "fusion of horizons"[18] of the reader and the religious tradition implied in given biblical text. This is why the pragmatics of theological reading leans always towards worship.

1.2 To be used in this way, the Bible has to have – in spite of its inner plurality – a common denominator, that holds together its various disparate voices and invites the reader to perceive it as such. We can call this common denominator a theology or a *kerygma*. The plurality of Bible's voices is in itself not an obstacle to the claim of a kerygma behind the text. On the contrary, it can be seen as a reflection of the complexity of the world. The task of the theological interpretation would be to bring even the "naughtiest" texts of the Bible upon the common denominator of an overall kerygma. The theological reading resembles a holistic, *Gestalt* therapy approach, seeking to connect any particular passage to the whole. The "whole" of this endeavour is always more than just the sum of the Bible's individual voices. The meaning of a text arises from its engagement with questions posed to it from within a broader theological context. What might seem like circular reasoning in theological reading is actually a feature of its holistic approach, where the whole influences the parts and vice versa.

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17 It was especially Gerhard von Rad who in his *Theologie des Alten Testaments I: Die Theologie der geschichtlichen Überlieferungen Israels* (München: Kaiser, 4th edn, 1963), 117–128, emphasized the historical character of the faith proposed in the Old Testament. See the debate about it in Erhard Blum, William Johnstone and Christoph Markschies (eds.), *Das Alte Testament – ein Geschichtsbuch?* (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2005) and its evaluation in Petr Sláma, *New Theologies of the Old Testament and History. The Function of History in Modern Biblical Scholarship* (Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2017).

18 Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1960), 269.

1.3 The theological reading of the Bible is a sedimentary process. Previous exegetical decisions are remembered, re-evaluated and transmitted in light of new insights and perspectives.[19] As the sedimentary process of adaptation continues in the exegetical tradition of the church, the attested exegetical decisions become normative for the collective identity of Christianity – in a way, they become part of the canon. As mentioned above, the Bible itself provides numerous examples of both preservation and change.[20] These include e.g. the Deuteronomistic adaptations of the prophets[21] or the Priestly adaptation of Deuteronomy in the Holiness Code.[22] Far deeper adaptations of the Old Testament can be seen in the New Testament, as evidenced e.g. in Paul's letters or in most of the reflexive quotations in Matthew.[23]

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19 This is how all church dogmata came to being, determining subsequent theological interpretation, see Henri de Lubac, *Medieval Exegesis, Vol. 1: The Four Senses of Scripture* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1998, originally 1959); John Barton, *Oracles of God Perceptions of Ancient Prophecy in Israel after the Exile* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986); Jaroslav Pelikán, *Whose Bible Is It? A History of the Scriptures Through the Ages* (New York: Viking Adult, 2005). On the Jewish side, a case study is provided in M. Krupp, *Den Sohn opfern? Die Isaak-Überlieferung bei Juden, Christen und Muslimen* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1995). A parallel treatise of the sedimentary character of exegetical traditions is in Christoph Dohmen and Günter Stemberger, *Hermeneutik der Jüdischen Bibel und des Alten Testaments* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1996).

20 See Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Interpretation in Ancient Israel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); R. Walter L. Moberly, *The Old Testament of the Old Testament: Patriarchal Narratives and Mosaic Yahwism* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1992); Konrad Schmid, *Schriftgelehrte Traditionsliteratur: Fallstudien zur innerbiblischen Schriftauslegung im Alten Testament* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck 2011); Walter Bührer (ed.), *Schriftgelehrte Fortschreibungs- und Auslegungsprozesse. Textarbeit im Pentateuch, in Qumran, Ägypten uns Mesopotamien*, FAT II/108 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2017); Michael Fishbane, Inner-Biblical Exegesis: Types and Strategies of Interretation in Ancient Israel, in Michael Fishbane, *Biblical Text and Exegetical Culture* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2022), 147–162.

21 E.g. John Barton, *Amos's Oracles Against the Nations. A Study of Amos 1,3–2,5* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980); Winfried Thiel, *Die deuteronomistische Redaktion von Jeremia 26–45 mit einer Gesamtbeurteilung der deuteronomistischen Redaktion des Buches Jeremia* (Neukirchen: Neukirchener Verlag, 1981); Jakob Wöhrle, *Die frühen Sammlungen des Zwölfprophetenbuches. Entstehung und Komposition* (Berlin: Walther de Gruyter, 2008).

22 Christoph Nihan, *From Priestly Torah to Pentateuch* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 545–559; Mathias Hopf, *Recht, Ethos und Heiligkeit. Eine rechtsanthropologische und rechtstheoretische Studie zum Heiligkeitsgesetz (Lev 17–26)* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2024).

23 Petr Pokorný and Ulrich Heckel, *Einleitung in das Neue Testament Seine Literatur und Theologie im Überblick* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007).

1.4 The Enlightenment and the advent of historical criticism in 18th and 19th centuries dealt a severe blow to important parts of the framework that had hitherto viewed the kerygma within an accepted intellectual framework. As a result, theological reading of the Bible lost its innocent commonplace (and its closest ally: the philological reading, see below) and had to ask its very *raison d'etre*. Not only was the Bible shown not to be a geographical or biological book, but some of its central claims about salvation history, the historicity of key events, as well as the uniqueness of biblical religion and literature were challenged or simply rejected.[24] At this point, theological and philological readings of the Bible began to diverge.

1.5 This has led to the emergence of a new genre in biblical studies: Old Testament/New Testament theology. This genre can be seen as a response to the challenges posed by modernity to biblical scholarship. It is an attempt to make – after all – sense of the Bible in light of the deconstruction that modernity has brought about.[25] All respectable theologies of the Old/New Testament have to take into consideration the recent state of critical research, yet at the same time they have to find both a common denominator of the Old/New Testament and its relevance for present day. The attempts to do so range from religious or intellectual history,[26] through attempted recurs to narrativity[27] up

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24 Hans-Joachim Kraus, *Geschichte der historisch-kritischen Erforschung des Alten Testaments von der Reformation bis zur Gegenwart* (Neukirchen: Verlag der Buchhandlung des Erziehungsvereins, 1956).

25 Sláma, *New Theologies*, 79–96.

26 To mention just a few of the, we can start from the oldest title bearing this name, Georg Lorenz Bauer, *Theologie des Alten Testaments oder Abriß der religiösen Begriffe der alten Hebräer. Von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf den Anfang der christlichen Epoche. Zum Gebrauch akademischer Vorlesungen* (Leipzig: Weygandsche Buchhandlung, 1796); Bernhard Stade, *Biblische Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1905) or recently Konrad Schmid, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2019) and Michaela Bauks, *Theologie des Alten Testaments Religionsgeschichtliche und bibelhermeneutische Perspektiven* (Böhlau: UTB, 2018). Prominent in this discussion is the suggestion by Rainer Albertz to relinquish the endeavour of Old Testament Theology and to explicitly confine scholarship to the religious history of Israelite belief, as advocated in Rainer Albertz, "Religionsgeschichte Israels statt Theologie des Alten Testaments! Plädoyer für eine forschungsgeschichtliche Umorientierung," *Jahrbuch für biblische Theologie* 10 (1995), 3–24.

27 Von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments I*; Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments II: Die Theologie der prophetischen Überlieferungen Israels* (München: Kaiser, 4th edn, 1964); Rolf Rendtorff, *Theologie des Alten Testaments. Ein kanonischer Entwurf. Band 1: Kanonische Grundlegung* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1999) and Rolf Rendtorff, *Theologie des Alten Testaments Ein kanonischer Entwurf. Band 2: The-*

to dogmatic tracts or structuralist models.[28] However, they all interpret the Bible according to a proposed underlying system of belief and practice that has to have some bearing for the present reader.

1.6 Beyond this relatively nascent genre of Old Testament theology, in the last three decades some scholars have begun to advocate for a distinctively theological reading of the Old Testament.[29] Programmatic efforts in this direction include, for example, the work of Walter Moberly.[30] Drawing on Patristic exegesis, as presented by Henri de Lubac, and the Reformation tradition's focus on the canonical shape of Scripture, as articulated in Europe by the Amsterdam school[31] and in the United States by Brevard S. Childs,[32] and often informed by literary theory and Ricoeur's notion of *second naïveté*,[33]

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28 Walther Eichrodt, *Theologie des Alten Testaments I–III* (Leipzig: Heinrichs, 1933); Ludwig Köhler, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr,1936); Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament. Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1997).

29 See e.g. Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation f the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Baker Academics, 2005); John Goldingay, *Key Questions about Biblical Interpretation: Old Testament Answers* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2011).

30 R. Walter L. Moberly, *Old Testament Theology Reading the Hebrew Bible as Christian Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013). In Czech context, Moberly's endeavour has been introduced and advocated by Viktor Ber, "Starý zákon a teologie: Interpretace Písma podle Waltera Moberlyho," [Old Testament and Theology: The Interpretation of the Scripture according to Walter Moberly] *Teologická reflexe* 22 (2016), 145–157. Following Moberly's approach, Ber provides Czech readers with an example of this approach in Viktor Ber, *O Hospodinu Bohu živém: Texty a témata k teologii Starého zákona [The Living God in the Old Testament: Texts and Themes in Old Testament Theology]* (Prague: Návrat domů, 2016). From a systematic-theological perspective, this approach has been applauded by Jaroslav Vokoun, a Czech herald of Radical Orthodoxy; see his Reading the Bible Again as the Bible.

31 See Martin Kessler (ed.), *Voices From Amsterdam: A Modern Tradition of Reading Biblical Narrative* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994); Uwe F. W. Bauer, *All diese Worte. Impulse zur Schriftauslegung aus Amsterdam. Expliziert an Ex 13,17–14* (Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1991); Kornelis Heiko Moskotte, *Bijbels ABC* (Nijkerk: Callenbach, 1941).

32 Brevard S. Childs, *Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments Theological Reflection on the Christian Bible* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993).

33 The notion of *second naïveté* was coined by Paul Ricoeur in *The Symbolism of Evil* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967), 351: "Does that mean that we could go back to a primitive *naïveté*? Not at all. In every way, something has been lost, irremediably lost: immediacy of belief. But if we can no longer live the great symbolisms of the sacred in accordance with the original belief in them, we can, we modern men, aim at a second *naïveté* in and through criticism. In short, it is by interpreting that we can hear again. Thus it is

matische Entfaltung (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2001); Jörg Jeremias, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 2016).

these scholars attempt an interpretation of the Bible that proceeds from the two-part Christian canon, culminating in Jesus Christ. They are fully aware that reading Bible in this way inevitably alters the original meaning of numerous biblical passages. Yet, having caught biblical authors and redactors doing the same with previous traditions – and thus posing a justifiable question as to what the true original meaning of a text is – they feel fully justified in adopting this very interpretive method.

1.7 Finally, it should be mentioned, that what I call a theological reading can in essence occur outside the realm of specific denominations. In such cases, the holistic interpretation would relate the Bible to a different value system, such as e.g. humanism or Marxism. It may therefore be more appropriate to call the theological reading an ideological one. And it's also true other way round: from a non-confessional perspective, any theological reading is essentially ideological.

Excursus I: Exodus 3:1–4:17 read theologically

Theologically, the story of the commission of Moses is particularly significant due to its apparent explanation of God's name in Exodus 3:14. The elusive clause "I am who I am"[34] suggests the connection of the name *Yhwh* with the Hebrew verb *h-y-h*, "to be" o "to become". Yet the way the God's name is presented conceals more than in reveals. The language pun can be interpreted as the most artistic way of expressing God's invisibility and his transcendence. It can be disputed whether it really should be translated in present tense, as the RSV puts it, or rather in future tense, emphasizing God's eschatological character, or at least its progressive aspect. The fact that the verbal form *ehyeh* could possibly be both qal and hiphil enables ontological speculations about God as a primal cause of all being.[35] The Greek rendering of the clause, which says "I am the being" is in itself a parade example of how a general framework (in this case a discourse of popular Hellenistic philosophy) determines the interpretation.

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in hermeneutics that the symbol's gift of meaning and the endeavor to understand by deciphering are knotted together."

34 Quoted according to RSV. MT: אֶהְיֶה אֲשֶׁר אֶהְיֶה; LXX ἐγώ εἰμι ὁ ὤν.

35 So Ludwig Köhler, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr,1936), 264. Discussed in Brevard S. Childs, *Exodus. A Commentary* (London: SCM, 1987), 69ff; Rainer Albertz, *Exodus 1–18* (Zürich: TVZ, 2012), 84–87; Helmut Utzschneider and Wolfgang Oswald, *Exodus 1–15* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2013), 125–135.

Beyond the ontology of God and his transcendence, a theological reading would focus on God's faithfulness ("I will be with you," 3:12), as already evidenced to the patriarchs in Genesis ("the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob," 3:6 and 15). It would elaborate on his compassion ("[…] I know their suffering and I have come down to deliver them […] the cry of the people of Israel has come to me and I have seen the oppression […]," 3:7, 8, 9) and his control over events.[36] This, in turn, raises a series of ethical dilemmas that a theological reading must address: the hardening of Pharaoh's heart,[37] the expulsion of the Canaanites from the promised land, or the plundering of Egyptian neighbours (3:21. 22).[38]

A theological reading could also elaborate on the most extensive part of the pericope: Moses' reluctance to obey God's commission. The repetition of his name in Exodus 3:4 is a literary device also used in the callings of Abraham (Genesis 22), Samuel (1Sam 3:10), and Saul/Paul (Acts 9:4) in the New Testament. His reluctance to accept the task echoes Gideon (Judges 6:11–22) and Jeremiah (Jeremiah 1:6). The scene can be understood as a paradigm for the exogenous character of biblical faith, which was not invented by humans (hence Moses' initial reluctance is understandable) but rather intersected the lives of the elect ones and transformed them. A theological reading could further note various intertextual allusions enriching the story, such as the burning bush (*sane* in Hebrew) reminiscent of Mount Sinai, and the dialectic between seeing and listening.

2. Philological reading of the Bible

Philology is in this paper understood as "the scientific analysis of written records and literary texts"[39] or, in a slightly broader definition as "the branch

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36 Von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments I*, 195–200; Brueggemann, *Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy*, 124; Jörg Jeremias, *Theologie des Alten Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoek & Ruprecht, 2016), Michaela Bauks, *Theologie des Alten Testaments. Religionsgeschichtliche und bibelhermeneutische Perspektiven* (Böhlau: UTB, 2018), 338–352.

37 Edgar Kellenberger-Sassi, *Die Verstockung Pharaos. Exegetische und auslegungsgeschichtliche Untersuchungen zu Exodus 1–15* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006).

38 George W. Coats, "Despoiling the Egyptians," *VT XVIII* (1968), 450–458; Petr Sláma, "'Thus they despoiled the Egyptians' (Exod 12:36 and parallels): On the Scandal of Asking Silver and Gold from Innocent Neighbours," in Viktor Ber (ed.), *Nomos and Violence Dimensions in Bible and Theology* (Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2019), 37–44.

39 "Philology," *Dictionary.com*. Source: https://www.dictionary.com/browse/philology (accessed 24. 11. 2024).

of knowledge that deals with the historical development of languages, esp. as displayed in literary texts; literary or textual criticism."[40] As indicated above, I use the term philology applied to biblical scholarship as a synonym for historical criticism as developed in continental theology in the aftermath of Johann Philipp Gabler, who attributes biblical scholarship unanimously to "historical modus".[41] The roots of philology reach – similarly to theological reading – to Alexandria as well as to Pergamon in Asia Minor, where the heritage of classical Greek literature outside Greece was cultivated. The interest in historical and literary aspects of the Bible accompanied the Church from its very beginning, marked by the names of Origen,[42] Jerome,[43] or later the Parisian school of Saint Victor,[44] or even later Erasmus[45] or Johannes Buxdorf.[46] But it was only during the Enlightenment in Europe that the philological approach put the assumptions of Christian theological reading of the Bible aside. Series of "criticisms", methods of inquiry, emerged during the 19th and 20th centuries (be it the historical, the literary, the form or tradition, or the redaction criticism),[47] led by the question coined by Leopold von Ranke of "how was it really":[48] How was it really with the events narrated in the Bible, how was it with the assumed sources of Penta- or as the case may be Hexateuch and other larger units, how was it really with the fixed forms that would correspond with recurrent social events on a pre-literary stage of biblical texts, how was it with the editorial intentions of those who have united the existing pieces of texts to higher units. Each of the criticisms

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40 "Philology," *Oxford English Dictionary*. Source: https://www.oed.com/search/dictionary/?scope=Entries&q=philology (accessed 6. 2. 2025).

41 Johann P. Galbler, "De iusto discrimine theologiae biblicae et dogmaticae regundisque recte utriusque finibus," in Karl-Wilhelm Niebuhr and Christfried Böttrich, *Johann Philipp Gabler 1753–1862* (Leipzig: EVA, 2004), 15–41.

42 James N. B. Carleton Paget, "The Christian Exegesis of the Old Testament in the Alexandrian Tradition," in Sæbø, *HBOT I/1* (1996), 478–542.

43 René Kieffer, "Jerome: His Exegesis and Hermeneutics," in Sæbø, *HBOT I/1* (1996), 663–681.

44 G. R. Evans, "The Victorines at Paris," in Sæbø, *HBOT I/2* (2000), 257–260.

45 Erika Rummel, "The Textual and Hermeneutic Work of Desederius Erasmus of Rotterdam," in Sæbø, *HBOT II* (2008), 215–230.

46 Stephen G. Burnett, "Later Christian Hebraists," in Sæbø, *HBOT II* (2008), 785–801.

47 For details see last two volumes of Magne Sæbø, *HBOT III/1. The History of Its Interpretation from Modernism to Post-Modernism. The Nineteenth Century and Twentieth Centuries* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2013), and *III/2. From Modernism to Post-Modernism* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2015).

48 See Sláma, *New Theologies*, 59.

was promising to enable better understanding of the Bible by elucidating a particular aspect of its emergence – and in many ways it really did.

The assumptions and goals of the philological approach can be therefore put together as follows:

2.1 The philological approach is oriented historically. It seeks, to make use of Krister Stendahl's distinction, what the text meant, rather than – or as an inevitable prerequisite of – what it means.[49] It sees its task in reconstructing the communication situation(s) in which a text, as a part of this communication, came to being, i.e., was conceived as a plot or a poem, was put down in script, modified and accepted into larger unit(s).

2.2 The philological approach primarily involves comparing events and literary processes in cultures neighbouring biblical Israel. Historical and textual hypotheses are inferred by analogy with similar phenomena in these cultures. This approach hinges on the assumption that the Bible, the events it narrates, the poems and admonitions it proclaims, and the laws it stipulates are subject to the same historical and literary rules that run in other literary texts. Bible is therefore understood as any other piece of world literature.

2.3. Given the historical character of the Bible and the beliefs based on it, as it was discussed in the paragraph 1.1, it is no surprise that the subgenre of a "history of Israel" played a prominent role in philologically operating biblical scholarship. It provided, to use Marxist terminology, the material infrastructure upon which (and only thus) any literary superstructure was conceivable. Despite the variety of models of Israel's past (including the question of Israel's name and what exactly this name originally denoted), the minimal scholarly consensus of recent decades, informed by the rapid advancement of archaeology, recognizes two kingdoms of uneven size that emerged at the outset of the Iron Age, with the decline of Egyptian dominance in the region. Later, after the Assyrian conquest at the end of the 8th century BCE, the dominant northern kingdom declined, leaving the southern kingdom to carry on. But it was only after the shock of the Babylonian conquest of Jerusalem that the exiled elites of the southern state, probably in some connection with the attempts to restore the national life under

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49 Krister Stendahl, "Biblical Theology, Contemporary," *IBD I* (1962), 418–432, further elaborated in Krister Stendahl, *Meanings: The Bible as Document and as Guide* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 11–44.

Persians, started to shape the inherited traditions into a concise historical narrative reflecting its newly acquired monotheistic belief.[50]

2.4 It follows that the philological reading of the Bible is itself an atheistic enterprise. This does not, of course, imply that those who engage in this approach are necessarily atheists themselves. But in terms of method, the phenomena it explains are taken within the natural course of things. The category of revelation, that I spoke of above in connection with the theological reading, does not play a role in analysing the texts in this way.

2.5 On the other hand though, influenced by the linguistic turn in human sciences,[51] some proponents of the philological reading, especially those interested in the history of tradition (*Überlieferungsgeschichte*) or criticism of redaction, have learnt to appreciate the deliberate shape of the final form of text and the endeavour of composition and redaction that lingers behind it.[52] As we have already mentioned above (in paragraph 1.6), the process of continuous reinterpretation of older materials became the orientation for them to understand the complexity and inner plurality of the Bible. The final form of the text or more importantly the direction of its literary development bears some theological quality[53] – or at least presents a datum that has theological bearing. For some of them the model of intellectual history provides a model for explaining how the New Testament could be connected with the Old Testament.[54]

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50 I follow here the well informed and balanced summary of debate of archaeology and biblical scholarship as provided by Bernd U. Schipper in his Geschichte Israels in der Antike (München: C. H. Beck, 2023), and by Christian Frevel in the English update of his previous German monograph published as *History of Israel* (Atlanta: SBL Press, 2023). See also Filip Čapek, *Temples in Transformation: Iron Age Interactions and Continuity in Material Culture and in Textual Traditions* (Zürich: LIT Verlag, 2023).

51 In the aftermath of Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode. Grundzüge einer philosophischen Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1960), see especially Richard Rorty, *The Linguistic Turn Essays in Philosophical Method* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1967).

52 It is here that canonical criticism emerges, see James A. Sanders, *Torah and Canon* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1972); Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1986). For a critique of this approach, see e.g. James Barr, *Holy Scripture: Canon, Authority, Criticism* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983).

53 Von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments I*, 117–142; Rolf Rendtorff, "Die Hermeneutik einer Kanonischen Theologie des Alten Testaments Prolegomena," *JhBT* 10 (1995), 35–44.

54 Manfred Oeming, *Gesamtbiblische Theologien der Gegenwart das Verhaltnis von AT und NT in der hermeneutischen Diskussion seit Gerhard von Rad. Zweite, verbesserte und mit einem Nachwort versehene Auflage* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1988).

Excursus II: Exodus 3:1–4:17 read philologically

A comprehensive discussion of the philological and historical-critical inter-
pretation of this passage since the Enlightenment is beyond the scope of
this survey. The following remarks will only hint the way the philological
reading proceeds.

Within continental biblical criticism, the philological reading involves the
debate on the composition of the Pentateuch (or Hexateuch).[55] A recurring
questions of Pentateuchal studies concerns the existence and relationship
of two distinct commissions of Moses: the initial call in Exodus 3 and 4, and
a second commission in Exodus 6 and 7, whereby the latter shows several
motifs that also appear in the former.[56] On the narrative level, the second
commission is to be understood as a response to Pharaoh's refusal to listen
to Moses and the subsequent intensification of hardships for the enslaved
people. This puts the entire project under the question and makes a second
commission to reassure the faltering leader necessary. From a literary critical
perspective though, Exodus 6 and 7 present a priestly version of the com-
mission, while the account in Exodus 3 and 4 exhibits characteristics typical
of non-priestly literature.[57] Additionally, some scholars identify distinct ele-

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55 The debate has been marked by the seminal works of Julius Wellhausen, *Die Composition
des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des Alten Testaments* (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1899);
John Van Seters, *In Search of History Historiography in the Ancient World and the Origins
of Biblical History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983); Erhard Blum, *Studien zur
Komposition des Pentateuchs* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1990); Konrad Schmid, *Erzväter
und Exodus: Untersuchungen zur doppelten Begründung der Ursprünge Israels innerhalb
der Geschichtsbücher des Alten Testaments* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1999); and
Jan C. Gertz et al. (eds.), *The Formation of the Pentateuch* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2016).

56 The parallels between the two accounts suggest some kind of mutual dependence. As
Martin Noth observes: "Daß hier der Erzählungsgegenstand der Berufung des Mose,
der den Inhalt schon des Abschnittes 3,1–4,16 bildete, sich wiederholt, ist mit Händen
zu greifen." In Martin Noth, *Exodus* (Berlin: EVA, 1958), 42. These parallels range from
the motif of God's anthropomorphic compassion (3:7–8 // 6:5) and the reminiscence
of the patriarchs (3:6, 15, 16; 4:5 // 7:3, 8) to the command for Moses to lead the
Israelites out of slavery (3:10, 17 // 6:6–7) and the promise of land (3:8, 17 // 6:4, 8).
Notably, the name *Yhwh* is prominent in both passages. However, while Exodus 3:12,
14 features an intricate pun on God's name, emphasizing God's presence ("I am with
you," 12; "I am has sent me," 14b) and playing with ontology ("I am who I am," 14a),
Exodus 6:3 creates a historical scheme distinguishing two epochs of divine revelation
("I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as *el Shadday*, but by my name *Yhwh*
I did not make myself fully known to them").

57 So recognized by Wellhausen, *Composition*, 61 ff and repeated ever since.

ments of Yahwistic and Elohistic traditions within the passage of Exodus 3 and 4.[58] Proponents of tradition-criticism believe that these elements may have merged already at the level of oral transmission before being recorded in writing.[59] According to the priestly version, Moses was commissioned in Egypt, contrary to the non-priestly account which places the commission in Midian. Considering this dichotomy, the question arises: which version exhibits literary dependence on the other? Traditionally, the priestly version has been viewed as a later reworking of "earlier narratives, even in their interweaving with each other and in their supplementation by secondary additions."[60] However, some scholars argue for the primacy of the priestly version,[61] particularly in its treatment of the name *Yhwh*. While the priestly version proposes a gradual revelation of the deity ("I appeared to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, as *El Shaddai*, but by my name *Yhwh* I did not make myself known to them," Exodus 6:3), the non-priestly version makes use of the name *Yhwh* to create a pun, connecting God's proper name with the verb *h-y-h* ("to be" or "to become"), which can have both qal and hiphil forms, which results in a subtle ontological reflection, an idea wholeheartedly embraced by the Septuagint. Priestly authors would likely not have omitted such an important ontological reflection, if they were aware of it.

Another example of a motif with dual interpretations is Moses' reluctance to accept the mission. In the priestly narration, Moses' objections resemble those of later prophets (in Exodus 6:12 and 30 Moses speaks of his "uncircumcised lips," see Jeremiah 1:6 or 17:16). In contrast, the non-priestly account, which is itself an elaborated composition, reports on Moses' fourfold refusal to accept the call, which culminates in his statement "send, I pray, some other person" (Exodus 4:13), which provokes real anger from *Yhwh* and explains the origin of the priesthood's dominance. From the non-priestly point of view, the dominance of priests is an emergency measure caused by

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58 Wellhausen, *Composition*, 70; Axel Graupner, *Der Elohist. Gegenwart und Wirksamkeit des transzendenten Gottes in der Geschichte* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 2002).

59 Helmut Utzschneider and Wolfgang Oswald, *Exodus 1–15* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2013), 36.

60 Noth, *Exodus*, 44.

61 E.g. Konrad Schmid, *Genesis and the Moses Story* (Pennsylvania: Eisenbrauns, 2010), 66. Thomas Römer summarizes the debate in Thomas Römer, "Exodus 3–4 und die aktuelle Pentateuchdiskussion," in Riemer Roukema, *The Interpretation of Exodus. Studies in Honour of Cornelis Houtman* (Leuven: Peeters, 2006).

Moses' reluctance. It is an aetiology of this dominance from the perspective of non-priestly circles that have to come to terms with the second temple hierocracy during the Persian period.[62]

3. Spiritual reading of the Bible

Spiritual reading of the Bible is an approach that relates to the text – admittedly and programmatically – from within one's own context. Our own situation, problems, and questions set the horizon of our perception when encountering the text. This reading presupposes that God speaks to individuals, plans and guides their lives – and does so primarily through Scripture.[63] Since the main effort in spiritual reading consists in finding relevance of the text to the reader's situation, it can – and often does – disregard the literary and historical context of the text, leading to what can be called atomized or a-contextual reading. The danger of this way of reading is obvious: it can end up in mere subjectivism, and one can easily indulge in delusion. The text, torn out of its context, can serve various purposes, including the ones entirely remote from its original meanings.

Regardless of these dangers, there has been a long tradition of practising just this way of reading throughout the history, both among Jews and Christians. In the Second Temple Judaism, the *peseher* as attested in Qumran, is an example of expounding Bible in relation to sectarians' contemporary agenda. Anachronic usage of the biblical verses are characteristic for both the Gospel of Matthew with its fulfilment quotations[64] legitimizing aspects of Jesus' appearance as a fulfilment of Old Testament prophecies, and for Rabbinic *midrashim*, based on the assumption of dual Torah and its creative interpretation, legitimizing existing *halakhah*.[65] Original and surprising as these individual interpretations initially may have been, once remembered

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62 Elaborated in Petr Sláma, *Exodus 1–15: Jak jsem zatočil s Egyptem* [*Exodus 1–15: How I Screwed Egypt*, a commentary in Czech] (Praha: ČBS, 2018).

63 See the discussion of Frank Buchman, one of the proponents of this approach, in Dietrich Meyer, "Bibellese und stille Zeit," in Peter Zimmerling (ed.), *Handbuch Evangelische Spiritualität Band 3: Praxis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020), 478.

64 See Petr Pokorný and Ulrich Heckel, *Einleitung in das NT*, 444.

65 Günter Stemberger, "Die Schriftauslegung der Rabbinen," in Christoph Dohmen and Günter Stemberger, *Hermeneutik der Jüdischen Bibel und des Alten Testaments* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2nd revised edn, 2019), 82–119; Arnold M. Goldberg, "Die Schrift der rabbinischen Schriftausleger," in *Frankfurter Judaistische Beiträge* 15 (1987), 1–15.

and recorded by believing communities, they would push the limits of respective theological systems and become determinative for subsequent theological reading (as was described in 1.3).

In the Middle Ages, the individual existential reading of the Bible has been cultivated by Catholic orders. It was in the monastic milieu that *lectio divina*, meditative reading of prescribed biblical passages, emerged. According to the 12th century Carthuisan prior Guido II, *lectio divina* consists of 1) *lectio*, reading the biblical text, 2) *meditatio*, intellectual reflecting its meaning, 3) *oratio*, responding to God in personal prayer, and 4) *contemplatio*,[66] when the reader, submitting him- or herself to the God, experiences ecstasy of unity of creation and the Creator.[67] It is upon this distinction that Martin Luther builds his triadic model: reading, meditation, and temptation. In doing so, he substitutes contemplation – which leads to *unio mystica* – with its direct antithesis, thereby clearly defining humanity's stance before God.[68]

Among Protestants, the Moravians' Daily Watchwords (*Losungen*), originally introduced in the 1720s to strengthen the sense of belonging of the small missionary church,[69] can and often are used similarly: they are read oracularly – with the question of what message God is sending me today.[70]

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66 "One day, when I was busy working with my hands I began to think about our spiritual work, and all at once four stages in spiritual exercise came into my mind reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation […]. Reading is the careful study of the Scripture, concentrating all one's power on it. Meditation is the busy application of the mind to seek with the help of one's own reason for knowledge of the truth. Prayer is the heart's devoted turning to God to drive away evil and obtain what is good. Contemplation is when the mind is in some sort lifted up to God and held above itself, so that it tastes the joys of everlasting sweetness." Guido II, *The Ladder of Monks* (Kalamazoo: Liturgical Press, 1981), 67ff.

67 Ulrich Köpf, "The Institutional Framework of Christian exegesis in the Middle Ages," in Sæbø, *HBOT I/2* (2000), 153.

68 Sabine Bobert, "Den Himmel überall finden. Die Rolle von Schweigen und Meditation," in Peter Zimmerling (ed.), *Handbuch Evangelische Spiritualität. Band 3 Praxis* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020), 496.

69 Peter Vogt, "Aktuelles Reden Gottes: Die Herrnhuter Losungen," in Walter Klaiber and Wolfgang Thönissen, *Die Bible im Leben der Kirche. Freikirchliche und römisch-katholische Perspektiven* (Paderborn: Bonifatius Verlag, 2007), 185–198; and Dietrich Meyer, "Die Herrnhuter Losungen," in Zimmerling 3 (2020), 481–493.

70 It is made up of two biblical verses, one from Old Testament chosen by lot and the other from New Testament found deliberately on the base of theological reflection. The span between the two biblical verses and a dialogue between them invites the reader to join from his or her own situation.

Spiritual reading proposed in this paper should not be confused with the early medieval idea of *sensus spiritualis* that draws on Origenes. According to Gregory the Great's *Moralia in Iob,* the spiritual sense of a text – in contrast to its historical or literal sense – is a hidden but a deeper meaning of a text. This meaning has always been there, hidden *bellow the exterior* of the text. It is therefore a matter of proper exegetical tools to discover it. In essence, *sensus spiritualis* is just a particular form of allegory. The spiritual reading proposed in this paper, on the other hand, pertains to the way the text addresses the reader in his or her situation, as he or she stands – to use the spatial metaphor – in front of the text.

In the following paragraphs, a brief summary of its assumptions and goals is provided.

3.1 Spiritual reading exhibits elements of divination. A central assumption underlying this approach is that the text can be a medium of unique message from God for an individual reader. This message cannot be discovered solely through exegetical analysis, but through meditation: while oscillating between the text and his or her situation (*meditatio* and *oratio* in terms of Guido II), the reader starts to perceive the address intuitively, adjusting it to his or her own personal experiences and expectations.

3.2 The figure of a message communicated from God through the text to the individual reader creates a framework, where a prayer of the reader in connection with opening the Bible, asking for the assistance of Holy Spirit or, in other words, for God's illumination, makes sense.[71]

3.3 The goal of spiritual reading is to transform the reader's perspective. Initially, the text may be perceived as something alien to reader's world and the encounter with it may be rather uneasy. The reader tends to notice only the facets of the text that resonate with his or her own experience and they may not be many. Yet gradually, these facets may bring something of their own thrust to reader's thinking. The reader may glimpse in the text relational configurations that are analogous to his or her own situation.[72] Lured into the world of a text, the reader can experience reconfiguration of

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71 Andreas Kusch, "Das evangelische Gebet: Sehnsuch, Vielfalt, Zugänge," *Zimmerling* 3 (2020), 440–441.

72 David Tracy, *Analogical Imagination. Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981).

his or her own perception of the situation.[73] It is only then that the closed world structures (to use Charles Taylor's phrase) can break down, allowing us to begin to rediscover what the key plot of both the Old and the New Testament really is.[74]

3.4 Spiritual reading of the Bible bears features of a premodern approach to the Bible. The text perceived as a given medium of revelation defies the reifying rules of Cartesian thinking. It is therefore of no surprise that spiritual reading tends to apply methods practised in the past, e.g. in the era of Patristics or in Baroque. Also, in some aspects it echoes the archaizing ethos of Romanticism. Yet unlike in the past, the spiritual reading proposed in this paper is a deliberate methodological decision, the above mentioned *second naïveté* of Paul Ricoeur. It has been informed about the historical and literary complexity of a text. It does not claim to be the sole way of reading the Bible and it is well aware of other possible approaches to the Bible. At the same time however, it knows about the job the reader has to perform – and is ready to do so.

3.5 Given the existential character of spiritual reading, the message derived from it is and has to remain individual and subjective. While this message may be shared within a supportive community, it cannot be universally imposed on others (unless one wants to take path of a prophet with all its risks).

Excursus III: Exodus 3:1–4:17 read spiritually

To provide a universally applicable spiritual interpretation of this passage would be an oxymoron, because it would be incompatible with the existential and situational nature of spiritual reading, which requires readers to engage with the text personally. As we have seen, the spiritual reading differs from the *sensus spiritualis*, which was primarily an allegorical interpretation dominant in patristic literature. Originally though, the particular patristic interpretations were spiritual readings carried out amidst their respective contexts. Later on, these interpretations became part of Church tradition, normative for theological reading.

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73 The reader becomes – to use Brueggemann's words – "rescripted", see Walter Brueggemann, *Text under Negotiation. The Bible and postmodern Imagination* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1993), 22.

74 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 2007), 728.

There are numerous allegorical interpretations of the burning bush in patristic texts. Some understand its thorns as a prefiguration of Christ's crown of thorns (Clement of Alexandria),[75] while others expound its fire as an admonition to serve God fervently (Ephrem the Syrian).[76] However, the striking resonance between a biblical text and the reader's personal quest, when a clause becomes a mantic oracle addressing an existing problem, is uncommon. An exception can be found in Augustine's *Confessions*. He recalls his younger self, inspired by "Platonic books to return to himself."[77] Yet, having done so, he realized how far he was from God, abiding instead "in the region of dissimilarity." He nearly gave up his quest, "but then you cried from far away: 'I am who I am' (Exod 3:14). I heard it inwardly, and all doubt left me. I would have found it easier to doubt my own existence than this truth…"[78] For Augustine, the verse of Exod 3:14, torn out of its biblical context, became a missing piece of the puzzle. Similarly, the decisive step of his conversion, according to Augustine's famous story in Confessions XII about a children's voice urging him from behind the wall to read randomly opened verse from the epistles, was brought about by Romans 13:14. Here again, received as a direct message from God, it pushed Augustine on his individual life-crossroad.[79]

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75 Clemens from Alexandria, "Christ the Educator," in Joseph T. Lienhard (ed.), *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture OT 3* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

76 Ephrem the Syrian, "Ephrem's commentary of Exodus," in Joseph T. Lienhard (ed.), *Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy. Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture OT 3* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001).

77 Saint Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII, translated by H. Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

78 Augustine, *Confessions*, VII/10.

79 Augustine, *Confessions*, VIII/12: "As I was saying this and weeping in the bitter agony of my heart, suddenly I heard a voice from the nearby house chanting as if it might be a boy or a girl (I do not know which), saying and repeating over and over again 'Pick up and read, pick up and read.' At once my countenance changed, and I began to think intently whether there might be some sort of children's game in which such a chant is used. But I could not remember having heard of one […] So I hurried back to the place where Alypius was sitting. There I had put down the book of the apostle when I got up. I seized it, opened it and in silence read the first passage on which my eyes lit: 'Not in riots and drunken parties, not in eroticism and indecencies, not in strife and rivalry, but put on the Lord Jesus Christ and make no provision for the flesh in its lusts' (Rom. 13: 13–14)."

4. How they interact

The three ways of reading rarely occur in isolation. Usually, when we operate within the agenda of one of the three, elements of the remaining two are present as well. We can, however, imagine efforts to adhere strictly to a single approach and eliminate the others – for example, when writing a text-critical scholarly treatise or, conversely, during a spiritual meditation on a verse.

The three ways of reading are not just three arbitrary games that we play according to our mood. Rather, in an analogy to a literary genre (*Gattung*) that would always pertain to certain social situation (*Sitz im Leben*), the three ways of reading pertain to various roles the reader plays when he or she reads it. One and the same person behaves differently according to the role he or she is just playing (e.g. as a partner in a couple, as colleague in a job, and as a patient visiting dentist…), yet he or she has to pay attention not to lose one's integrity. The same fits for reading the Bible: the three ways of reading should remain, to use the Chalcedonian formulation, unconfused – yet undivided. To close this paper, I shall evaluate each of the three ways in their relation to the two other ways.

4.1 Starting with the theological reading of Bible, where the Bible would be taken taken as a book given *pro nobis*, the initial assumption that the Bible is the sole criterion for the church's faith and practice has proven untenable. Present-day Protestants' faith and practice have, in many respects, diverged from the faith and practice found within the Bible itself. When they remain engaged with the Bible and grapple with its beliefs and practices, they do so not as if taking it as a set of definitive answers to be held. Rather, they view the Bible as a contingent network of religious and ethical questions that they are advised by their tradition to confront. The centuries of biblical critical approach have revealed Bible as made up of discussions, developments, and quarrels surrounding key thematic nodes. These discussions have generated a network of interconnected trajectories that just in their polyphonic nature constitute the true biblical foundation of contemporary theological thought. An exegete's personal engagement, including his or her own spiritual agenda, should be acknowledged as a driving force for this endeavour.

4.2 Philological reading remains an essential component of continental biblical studies. Taken on its own, philologically conceived biblical studies could – and according to some even should – be pursued at departments of Ancient Near Eastern Studies, rather than at theological schools. Since the

Humboldtian reform of the German universities in early 1800s,[80] cooperation between biblical studies and ANE studies has yielded numerous results, clearly demonstrating multi-layered continuity between the culture and religion expressed in the Old Testament and those found in other ANE literatures. But then indeed: if they are so close, why should biblical studies be pursued in any other way than as a subcategory of ANE studies?

So far, we find biblical studies situated within the standard curriculum of theological faculties and seminaries. The scrutiny of the vast majority of contemporary biblical scholars focuses on themes imposed, implied, or at least inspired by the Bible. Their research, subversive to classical contents of faith as it may be, would already by the selection of their themes be determined by a broadly conceived theological agenda. The questions it poses to the Bible are typically shaped by the centuries-long reception history of the Bible. The distinction between theological and philological reading of the Bible, as proposed in this paper, may help to illuminate this state of affairs. It allows us to claim: If biblical studies are to remain focused on the Bible for reasons beyond mere institutional inertia, then there must be compelling theological and even spiritual arguments to justify its continued pursuit.

4.3 As to spiritual reading, I have defined it as reading from within the reader's context, guided by the reader's contemporary questions. This inherently intuitive approach tends toward, and indeed creates, personal involvement (*Betroffenheit*), as it seeks advice and inspiration from the text for the reader's existential crossroads. This, in the long run, is a vital condition for any engagement with the Bible, regardless of whether that engagement is public or private. Without this existential involvement in the drama of Scripture, the engagement with it necessarily dries up. The eventual slump into mere subjectivism, which can rightly be feared in spiritual reading, should be controlled precisely by both theological and philological readings. The other two ways would always intermingle to some extent, since one can never forget one's existing theological system – and his or her historical-critical knowledge. The former will inevitably connect the text to a broader theological discourse for the reader, populating it in an associative way with other biblical heroes and directing the reader to update and revive his or her theological system. The latter, binding one's perception it to the earth and to

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80 Heinz-Elmar Tenorth, *Wilhelm von Humboldt: Bildungspolitik und Universitätsreform* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

the literature, will provide the reader with a foil against which to appreciate the feat of faith behind the text.

To read a biblical text spiritually could perhaps be compared to a classical pair dance: I ask the partner, embrace her and slowly start to move with her on the floor in a way that is respectful and reciprocal, not just observing or commenting, but engaging in an encounter that is both collective and yet individual, structured and yet creative. Last but not least: it is supposed to be a loving encounter.

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The Czech Ecumenical Translation of the Bible: The Historical Contexts of Its Genesis

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Abstract: The paper concentrates on the circumstances of the genesis of the Czech Ecumenical Translation of the Bible (1961–1979). It presents the preparation and finalization of the project which can be labelled as unique in relation to the former Eastern Bloc countries and remarkable with respect to the church and religious history of the Czech Lands. The text consists of six contexts – the first one concerns global church history, whereas the remaining five contexts concern various aspects of Czech church history. 1) Global church history offers an insight into the paradigmatic shift of the Second Vatican Council in relation to Bible studies and ecumenism. 2) The second context describes the readiness of the non-Catholic and Catholic milieu for a new translation into the national language. 3) Subsequently, the process of the translation is briefly introduced as well as the non-implementation of this translation in the Roman Catholic Church with respect to liturgy. 4) The paper then shows contemporary pillars (i.e. at the time) of the communist church policy and the matter of the ecumenical relations between the Czech Christians. 5) Within an analysis, a paradoxical situation is shown when ecumenical activity was not systematically suppressed by the state; reasons for such an approach are considered. 6) The paper addresses a positive perception of the translation in the contemporary and later reception and in the church collective memory.

Introduction

"For biblical quotations in this book, we use the Czech Ecumenical Translation." A formulation of this kind can be found in a number of Czech publications which make use of the translation of the Bible made between 1961–1979 (and later revised in details). Such publications need not be from the fields of theology, philology, or translation studies, as their authors simply wanted to refer to the specific wording of a biblical passage in the Czech language and they often employed the Czech Ecumenical Translation (CET). This translation is also owned by households and is widely available

in Czech bookstores and libraries with a varying extent, format, and graphic and typographic treatment.

The foreword to the first edition of the Bible in CET (1979) addressed the tradition of Czech biblical translations, explicitly acknowledging the Bible of Kralice and ecumenical cooperation and observing the uniqueness of a collective effort: "The work that we present to the public on the 400th anniversary of the Bible of Kralice is the result of a long-lasting ecumenical cooperation (since 1961). In this regard, it is the first collective, inter-church biblical translation in our history. […] The translators thank everyone who has been of any assistance in their effort; they wish the ancient Book of Books in the new form could speak, with new urgency, to many and bring them as much benefit and spiritual enrichment as it has brought the translators."[1] The commencement and realization of the project were enabled by convenient happenstance.

In this paper, I focus on five historical contexts related to the genesis of CET. First, I introduce a general context of global church history in the form of a paradigmatic shift of the Second Vatican Council. Second, I deal with Czech church history. Next, I address the issue of the inner readiness for a new translation as well as basic information about the genesis of such a translation. Subsequently, I discuss the contemporary options of ecumenical cooperation and the state's interference in the whole process. Finally, I address the reception of CET in the intra-church collective memory.

CET was a remarkable feat that produced a complete and modern translation of the Bible into Czech, with the participation of Catholic and non-Catholic Christians in the context of rather unfavorable conditions. It remains influential to this day (for instance, the non-Catholic *Bible 21* from 2009 follows directly on CET). Ecumenical cooperation also occurred in other biblical translations of the last third of the 20th century, for example *Tradução Interconfessional em Português Corrente* (Portuguese, 1972), *Traduction oécumenique* (French, 1972/1978[2]), *Einheitsübersetzung* (German, 1979/1980),[3]

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1   *Bible. Písmo svaté Starého a Nového zákona. Ekumenický překlad* (Praha: Ústřední církevní nakladatelství, 1979), 6.

2   See Frédéric Delforge, *La Bible en France et dans la Francophonie. Histoire, traduction, diffusion* (Paris: Publisud, 1991).

3   See Helmut Haug, "Ein Vergleich zwischen den großen 'Gebrauchsbibeln.' Lutherbibel – Einheitsübersetzung – Gute Nachricht," in Walter Gross (ed.), *Bibelübersetzung heute. Geschichtliche Entwicklungen und aktuelle Herausforderungen. Stuttgarter Symposion 2000* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2001), 329–364.

and *New Revised Standard Version* (English, 1990/1991 – following of previous translations[4]). *Bibbia Concordata* (Italian, 1968) even interconnected Catholicism, Orthodoxy, Protestantism and Judaism in its preparatory team.[5]

In the same period and in the context of national translation traditions, confessionally grounded translation were also being published, for instance the Italian translation of 1971/1974 initiated by the local bishop conference,[6] the Italian non-Catholic translation *Nuova Diodati* (1991), and others. Confessionally separated projects were running in the former Eastern Bloc countries, too: for example *Biblia Tysiąclecia* (1965 – catholic), *Biblia Poznańska* (1975 – catholic) and *Biblia Warszawska* (1975 – protestant) in the Polish People's Republic;[7] *Szent István Társulati Biblia* (1973 – catholic) and *Bible of the Magyar Bibliatársulat* (1975 – protestant) in the Hungarian People's Republic; *Biblia adecă dumnezeiasca scriptura a vechiului şi noului testament* (1988 – orthodox) in the Socialist Republic of Romania.

In addition, there were instances of mere parts of the Bible being published in countries suppressing freedom of religion; sometimes, persecution even made any work on translations and their publishing impossible. It is also noteworthy that the Slovak ecumenical translation of the Bible was commenced in 1988, but published in 1995. The successful project of the new Czech translation is surprising not only with respect to the communist church policy, but also with respect to the church and religious history of the Czech Lands. Thus, the phrase "Czech Ecumenical Translation" must not be perceived in a trivial manner; it needs to be scrutinized productively and the layers of its genesis must be analyzed.[8]

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4 Cf. Bruce Manning Metzger, *The Bible in Translation. Ancient and English versions* (Michigan: Baker Academic, 2001), 144–174.

5 Cf. Ryszard Wróbel, "Przekłady Biblii na język włoski (XX wiek)," *Ruch biblijny i liturgiczny* 64:3 (2011), 197–219, here 204–205.

6 Cf. Wróbel, "Przekłady," 205–207.

7 See Bernard Wodecki, "Polish Translations of Bible," in Jože Krašovec (ed.), *The Interpretation of the Bible. The International Symposium in Slovenia* (Ljubljana, Sheffield: Slovenska akademija znanosti in umetnosti, Sheffield Academic Press, 1998), 1201–1233. See also Josef Bartoň, "Na okrajích moderního polského biblického překladu. Text Písma v nestandardních jazykových podobách," *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Theologica* 10:1 (2020), 163–186.

8 See Peter C. A. Morée, "The Making of the Czech Ecumenical Bible Translation (1961–1979). Shaping a new ecumenical community in times of communist oppression," in Henk de Roest and Wolfgang Wischmeyer (eds.), *Heiliger Text. Die identitätsbildende Funktion klassischer Texte innerhalb einer Gemeinschaft* (Groningen: Rijksuniversiteit Groningen, 2007), 144–158.

The context of global church history: The Bible and the end of the Pian era

The period between 1789–1958 (from the start of the French Revolution to the end of Pius XII's pontificate) is, in church history, known as "the Pian era" or "very long 19th century". The first phrase refers to "Pius" which was the most common papal name then; the second phrase alters an established historiographical term. In this period, the Roman Catholic elites were strongly opposed to modernity and its manifestations and they supported the conservative representatives of the Concert of Europe (or the Pentarchy) in order to forestall any further revolutions. The *Syllabus of Errors* (1864) is considered to be the essence of papal stances, listing unacceptable opinions and ideas. At the turn of the 20th century, the atmosphere escalated even more, owing to the "fight against modernism" in the church.[9]

Self-enclosing and striving for an immutable interpretation also applied to studying the Bible and commenting on it, exegesis, and biblical archaeology. Church representatives, specifically the Papal Biblical Committee (*Commisio Pontificia de re Biblica*), held the view that a potential revision of certain opinions – for instance considering Moses to have been the author of the Pentateuch – would lead to defamation of the entire institution and to the emptying of the spiritual contents of the Bible. As a result, the historical-critical method was rejected and theologians having progressive views were silenced.[10] It was only Pius XII's encyclical *Divino afflante Spiritu* (1943) that brought new possibilities of Bible studies into the Catholic milieu. This document highlighted the study of the actual sense of a text and respect for a variety of literary genres.[11] The exceptional position of the Vulgate was

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9 Cf. Christopher Alan Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World. 1780–1914. Global Connections and Comparisons* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 325–355; Tomáš Petráček, *The Bible and the Crisis of Modernism. Catholic Criticism in the Twentieth Century* (Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2022).

10 See Johannes Beumer, *Die katholische Inspirationslehre zwischen Vatikanum I und II. Kirchliche Dokumente im Licht der theologischen Diskussion* (Stuttgart: Verlag Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1966). See also Joseph Ratzinger, "Zum Hundertjährigen Bestehen der Päpstlichen Bibelkommission. Die Beziehung zwischen Lehramt der Kirche und Exegese." Source: https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/pcb_documents /rc_con_cfaith_doc_20030510_ratzinger-comm-bible_ge.html (accessed 30. 5. 2024).

11 Cf. Pius XII., "Divino afflante Spiritu," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (1943), 297–325. See also Tomáš Petráček, "Papež Pius XII. a biblická otázka. Geneze a poselství encykliky Divino afflante Spiritu," *Salve* 18:3 (2008), 77–97.

preserved. However, the encyclical stressed the need for interconnecting Latin translations with the original texts in Hebrew and Greek. In 1945, Pius XII issued the motu proprio *In cottidianis precibus* in which he authorized a revision of the translation of psalms in the breviary as well as pericopes read (sung) during the mass. The motu proprio, following on the encyclical, made it possible to modify Latin translations.[12]

Another significant impulse inwards the church (at first, it was only the French speaking Catholics) was the complete edition of *The Jerusalem Bible* (1956). This translation was entirely French, containing glosses and references to relevant pericopes. It was a collective work created by scholars from École Biblique and other specialists.

Between 1962–1965, the Second Vatican Council was held,[13] which meant a paradigmatic shift for Catholicism. Instead of the previous rejection of the modern era, the church opted for a dialogue with the world and reformulated its stances (typically from the Pian era) that had remained unchanged for a long time. For instance, the church accepted the hitherto dismissed concept of human rights,[14] began to communicate more obligingly with non-Catholic Christians and members of non-Christians religions[15] as well as with eastern Catholics; in the case of the Roman Catholic rite, the Church commenced

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12 Cf. Pius XII., "Motu proprio 'In cottidianis precibus'," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (1945), 65–67.

13 See Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, *History of Vatican II. Volume 1. Announcing and Preparing Vatican Council II. Toward a New Era in Catholicism* (Leuven: Orbis Books, 1995); Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, *History of Vatican II. Volume 2. The Formation of the Council's Identity First Period and Intersession October 1962 – September 1963* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1997); Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, *History of Vatican II. Volume 3. The Mature Council. Second Period and Intersession. September 1963 – September 1964* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2009); Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, *History of Vatican II. Volume 4. Church as Communion. Third Period and Intersession. September 1964 – September 1965* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2010); Giuseppe Alberigo and Joseph A. Komonchak, *History of Vatican II. Volume 5. The Council and the Transition. The Fourth Period and the End of the Council. September 1965 – December 1965* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2006).

14 See Martin Baumeister (ed.) et al., *Menschenrechte in der katholischen Kirche. Historische, systematische und praktische Perspektiven* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2018).

15 See e.g. Edward Idris Cassidy, *Ecumenism and Interreligious Dialogue. Unitatis Redintegratio, Nostra Aetate* (New York: Mahwah, 2016); Dennis Joseph Billy (ed.), *Continuing the Search for Religious Freedom. Fifty Years after Vatican II's Dignitatis Humanae* (Phoenix: Leonine Publishers, 2016).

an important liturgical reform.[16] In areas related to Bible studies and to the approach to the Bible as such, Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation *Dei verbum* (1965) became a normative text.

In *Dei verbum*, the part devoted to the translations of the Bible states explicitly: "Easy access to Sacred Scripture should be provided for all the Christian faithful. […] But since the word of God should be accessible at all times, the Church by her authority and with maternal concern sees to it that suitable and correct translations are made into different languages, especially from the original texts of the sacred books. And should the opportunity arise and the Church authorities approve, if these translations are produced in cooperation with the separated brethren as well, all Christians will be able to use them."[17] Another crucial provision, which significantly extended lessons read in the Roman Catholic liturgy, was included in Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy *Sacrosanctum concilium*: "The treasures of the Bible are to be opened up more lavishly, so that richer fare may be provided for the faithful at the table of God's word. In this way a more representative portion of the holy scriptures will be read to the people in the course of a prescribed number of years."[18]

The official incentives aimed at biblical studies soon influenced the social practice, so the atmosphere changed greatly not only within Catholicism. In the case of the hitherto clearly separated Catholic and non-Catholic biblical studies, there occurred shifts, for instance when Catholic theologians became members of a committee preparing critical editions of the Bible in the originally Protestant series *Nestle-Aland*. *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church*, an important document issued by The Pontifical Biblical Commission (1993), perceives the ecumenical translations of the Bible and their critical apparatus as the evidence of progress in ecumenical relationships

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16 See e.g. Gordon W. Lathrop and Martin Stuflesser (eds.), *Liturgiereformen in den Kirchen. 50 Jahre nach Sacrosanctum Concilium* (Regensburg: Verlag Friedrich Pustet, 2013). See also Annibale Bugnini, *The Reform of the Liturgy 1948–1975* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 1990); Alcuin Reid, *The Organic Development of the Liturgy. The Principles of Liturgical Reform and Their Relation to the Twentieth-Century Liturgical Movement Prior to the Second Vatican Council* (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2005).

17 Second Vatican Council, "Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation Dei verbum" (1965), art. 22.

18 Second Vatican Council, "Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy Sacrosanctum concilium" (1963), art. 51. See also ibid, art. 24, 36 § 4, 90, 101.

and it openly supports them, "since having a common text greatly assists reading and understanding together."[19]

The first context of Czech church history: the need for a translation

In the course of the 20th century, the Czech Catholic and non-Catholic Christians felt a need to create a new translation of the Bible under different circumstances. The translation effort was led by a dominantly Protestant group and after 1950, there was one significant aspect related to it – a purely practical point of view. In the non-Catholic milieu, the urgent need to translate the Bible into modern Czech had been present for years. In the Czech Lands, we can observe a vast and continuous tradition of biblical translations (beginning in the Middle Ages) which had its own style and directly influenced the formation of the Czech Language.[20] (Influences of biblical translations on languages are also known from other cultures, for example the influential Reformation translations by Martin Luther from 1534 for the German milieu or the *King James Version* from 1611 for the English milieu).

In the early modern era, however, the Bible and its translations (as well as catechisms,[21] liturgical handbooks,[22] devout literature, letters, and other sources[23]) became part of confessional conflicts. On the one hand, these documents and work on them contributed to mutual demarcation and estrangement. On the other hand, they were expected to lead to the deepening of knowledge about a particular tradition and to spiritual stimuli and consolation. Before the creation of confessionally grounded translations, the Czech

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19 Pontifical Biblical Commision, *The Interpretation of the Bible in the Church* (1996), cap. IV., C, art. 4.

20 For the history of the Czech biblical translation until the publication of St. Wenceslas Bible see Vladimír Kyas, *Česká bible v dějinách národního písemnictví* (Praha, Řím: Vyšehrad, Křesťanská akademie, 1997).

21 Cf. Tomáš Petráček, *Adaptace, resistence, rezignace. Církev, společnost a změna v novověkých dějinách* (Ostrava: Moravapress, 2013), 34–46.

22 Cf. Michal Sklenář, "Vznik žánru české laické katolické liturgiky jako součást procesu katolické konfesionalizace," *Historie – Otázky – Problémy* 14:2 (2002), 9–25.

23 See Radmila Prchal Pavlíčková et al., *Vytváření konvertity. Jazyková a vizuální reprezentace konverze v raném novověku* (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, 2021).

Catholics and non-Catholics (with some exceptions) used Melantrich's Bible, repeatedly published between 1549–1613. Utraquist modernization trends later met with a reaction from the Unity of the Brethren who created a translation known as the Bible of Kralice (1579–1593). The St. Wenceslas Bible, created by Catholics, interconnected a translation of the New Testament (1677) with two volumes of the Old Testament (1712, 1715).

Thus, in the course of the 18th and 19th century there existed two confessionally separated translation trends side by side: the Catholic one following on the St. Wenceslas Bible and subsequently the St. John Bible from 1888–1889 and the non-Catholic one following on the Bible of Kralice.[24] Whereas the series of the Catholic translations of the New Testament continued in the 20th century,[25] non-Catholic Christians still employed the Bible of Kralice, first in the form of reprints of the text from 1613, then (from 1887) in the form of a critical reprint containing slight modifications made by the future Protestant parish priest Jan Karafiát.[26] The first significant change in the non-Catholic milieu only came when a translation of the New Testament by the Protestant scholar František Žilka was published in 1933.[27]

The more years had elapsed since the publication of the Bible of Kralice, the more difficult it was naturally becoming to make sense of the distant, even archaic translation. For that reason, non-Catholics from individual denominations, despite their reverence for the Bible of Kralice, were in agreement that it was necessary to create a new and comprehensible translation corresponding to modern Czech. The mental readiness of the non-Catholic milieu, stemming from the need for a new translation, thus became interconnected with the openness of the Catholic milieu, stemming from the changes brought about by Vatican II, by the contemporary experience of religiousness being marginalized, and likewise by the need for a new translation.

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24 Cf. Josef Bartoň, "Století moderního českého biblického překladu (1909–2009)," *Listy filologické* 133:1–2 (2010), 53–77, here 57–58.

25 See Josef Bartoň, *Moderní český novozákonní překlad. Nové zákony dvacátého století před Českým ekumenickým překladem* (Praha: Česká biblická společnost, 2009).

26 Cf. Robert Dittmann, *Dynamika textu Kralické bible v české překladatelské tradici* (Olomouc: Refugium, 2021), 310–359; Vladimír Čapek, "Kralická 1613 a Jan Karafiát," *Český bratr* 39:10 (1963), 145–147.

27 Cf. Bartoň, *Moderní český novozákonní překlad*, 103–140.

The second context of Czech church history: the Genesis of the Czech Ecumenical Translation; the Roman Catholic liturgical translation

The initiative to create a Czech Ecumenical Translation (CET) emerged from the Protestant milieu. In 1961, the first meeting of a group of translators of the Old Testament took place, initiated by the Protestant theologian and biblical scholar Miloš Bič and attended by eight Protestant clergymen. In the same year, a group of translators of the New Testament commenced their work, led by the Protestant theologian and biblical scholar Josef B. Souček; it was made up of seven members of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren and one "invited expert", a member of the Czechoslovak Church. Both groups endeavored, apart from the translation work, to keep the believers informed about the effort and they published drafts of their translations in periodicals. In 1964, the New Testament group gained an ecumenical character (which was subsequently extended) by inviting Catholic Christians and by allowing the hitherto "invited expert" to become a regular member.[28]

An analogical process occurred in the Old Testament group, as recalled by Miloš Bič: "The censorship pressure eased off, the administration took a rather favorable stand towards the work of churches, and we ventured to apply for permission to print our commentary on Genesis (the First Book of Moses) in 1966. We had been working on this first biblical book for five years. It was a time of training when a group originally consisting of eight Brethren preachers expanded to become an ecumenical fellowship with representatives of six churches. […] There [at meetings where discussions took place], people collectively made decisions on the final form of both the translation and the interpretation. There was a crucial principle: controversial issues will not be dealt with by voting, for even a minority may be right. We observed this principle although our ranks soon increased into an ecumenical

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28 See Josef Bartoň, *Pět českých novozákonních překladů. Nové zákony od Českého ekumenického překladu do roku 1989* (Praha: Česká biblická společnost, 2013), 58–61, 69–104. See also Michael Pfann, *K svobodě je dlouhé putování. Život Českobratrské církve evangelické v letech 1968–1989* (Praha: Karolinum, 2024), 48–49.

empire of 27 members of six churches and discussions often took a great deal of time before reaching unanimity."[29]

First, the commissions produced, step by step, a 16-volume Bible published in 1968–1984. In 1979 – the anniversary of the Bible of Kralice – a one-volume Bible was published that corresponded to the Protestant canon without the deuterocanonical books of the Old Testament. Further publications followed and the Bible including deuterocanonical books was published in 1987. This final edition gained the Roman Catholic Church's official approval.[30] However, its text did not spread into the Catholic liturgy. That brings us to a fundamental limit of the CET which was initially meant to serve as a common text read (sung) in church services in the Czech Lands.

The Roman Catholic Church uses the translation prepared by the Roman Catholic priest and biblical scholar Václav Bogner, specifically the parts of the Bible presented in the liturgy and inserted in a lectionary. Bogner's translation includes the entire New Testament and selected Old Testament pericopes (those in use). Catholic Christians accepted, without any difficulty, the new translations from the first half of the 20th century and there was no cleaving to a specific wording of biblical passages. Up to Vatican II, there was no need for an official liturgical translation into Czech, as it was Latin that was preserved as the liturgical language. Starting in 1920, the clergy were allowed to read the epistles and gospels in Czech (after reading in Latin) even outside of preaching.

The liturgical translation by Václav Bogner was created within the great wave of translations of liturgical texts stemming from the reforms of Vatican II that made it possible for vernacular languages to enter dynamically into the liturgy of the Western Church. On the basis of Cardinal František Tomášek's authorization, Bogner was the head of a group preparing the Czech lectionary. The organization which implemented changes related to Vatican II in the Czech Lands was called the Czech Liturgical Committee (in relation to this paper, the Translation Group and the Secretariat were its most relevant parts). As late as in 1965, there occurred a debate about biblical texts appropriate for the newly implemented liturgy of the word and

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29 Cf. Miloš Bič, "Jak jsme překládali Starý zákon," *Česká biblická společnost*. Source: http://www.dumbible.cz/web/cs/vydavatelstvi/cesky-ekumenicky-preklad/jak-jsme-prekladali-stary-zakon (accessed 18. 11. 2025).

30 Cf. Bartoň, *Pět českých novozákonních překladů*, 58.

the members of the committee opted for a solution proposed by the priest Josef Bradáč, that is, not to produce a new lectionary and use all translations approved by the church, which Cardinal František Tomášek agreed with (he supported ecumenical activities, but within limited options[31]). The matter of the lectionary then returned repeatedly and there was controversy over the translation of the psalter; the organization could not reach an agreement in other matters either. The records of the committee from the late 1960s / early 1970s show that the work on the lectionary progressed. First, it was published in the form of a notebook, later as a book (one volume in 1973).[32]

The translation of the New Testament passages was closer to the CET than Bogner officially admitted. The New Testament Committee was surprised by his approach, which led to tensions. In any case, the New Testament parts in the later edition of the lectionary differ greatly from CET and Bogner's style of translation is much more evident here. There was a turn in 1974 when it became evident that the CET did not have sufficient support among the key representatives of the Catholic Church, so that it could not be accepted as a liturgical text. The reasons for that remain unknown.[33] It was probably Václav Bogner himself and internal processes under his influence that were the most responsible for the outcome; contemporaries' memories rule out any external intervention.[34]

The third context of Czech church history: church policy, ecumenical cooperation

Since the Reformation, relations and potential cooperation between Christians in Europe have been burdened and complicated not only by theological differences, but also by historical events. Specifically, there are differences in the understanding and interpretation of church history, inter-confessional

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31 Cf. Aleš Opatrný, *Kardinál Tomášek a pokoncilní proměna pražské arcidiecéze* (Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2002), 64–68.

32 Cf. Pavel Kopeček, *Liturgické hnutí v českých zemích a pokoncilní reforma* (Brno: Centrum pro stadium demokracie a kultury, 2016), 288–296; Bartoň, *Pět českých novozákonních překladů*, 63. See also Vojtěch Novotný, *Běda církvi: Bonaventura Bouše burcující* (Praha: Karolinum, 2012), 89 and following pages; Rupert Berger, "Knihy liturgické," in Rupert Berger, *Liturgický slovník* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2008), 195–200.

33 Cf. Bartoň, *Pět českých novozákonních překladů*, 63–66.

34 Cf. Ibid, 64, footnote n. 47.

conditions, and confessional law. They bring about cold distance, in the past also animosity and open hatred. In the 20th century, such tensions weakened greatly, even though difficulties and dissimilar expectations still remain. At the Second Vatican Council, Catholicism took a step towards a dialogue. In 1965, pope Paul VI and Constantinople patriarch Athenagoras brought the long-lasting mutual excommunication of Catholic and Orthodox Christians to an end. Near the jubilee year of 2000, pope John Paul II called upon reconciliation (in the Czech milieu especially the 1999 apology for John Hus' death resonated, with the acknowledgement that he had been a reformer).[35] The transformation of the official attitudes became interconnected with the shared experience of Christians who, regardless of the confession, had faced persecution and injustices from the state's side for religious reasons.[36]

The agents of the church policy in the Czechoslovak (Socialist) Republic systematically made use of controversies and antagonisms between Christians after 1948. In contrast to Moravia and even more Slovakia, it was possible for these agents to follow on latent anticlericalism in Bohemia.[37] Ecumenical cooperation was perceived from a purely ideological and political point of view as an undoubtedly hostile activity and the state meant to forestall its development.[38] This matter became once again topical during the era

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[35] Cf. Ioannes Paulus II., "Tertio milenio adveniente," *Acta Apostolicae Sedis* (1995), 5–41, art. 33–35.

[36] See e.g. Marek Šmíd, "The Catholic Church in the Czech Lands during the Nazi Occupation in 1939–1945 and after," *Studia Humanitatis Journal* 1:1 (2021), 192–208; Martin Schulze-Wessel and Martin Zückert (eds.), *Handbuch der Religions- und Kirchengeschichte der böhmischen Länder und Tschechiens im 20. Jahrhundert* (München: R. Oldenbourg, 2009); Leonid Luks (ed.), *Das Christentum und die totalitären Herausforderungen des 20. Jahrhunderts. Russland, Deutschland, Italien und Polen im Vergleich* (Köln: Böhlau Verlag, 2002); Martina Fiamová and Pavol Jakubčin (eds.), *Prenasledovanie cirkví v komunistických štátoch strednej a východnej Európy. Zborník z medzinárodnej vedeckej konferencie, Bratislava 30. September – 2. október 2009.* [Persecution of Churches in the Communist Countries in Central and Eastern Europe. Anthology of the International Conference, Bratislava September 30 – October 2, 2009] (Bratislava: Ústav pamäti národa, 2010).

[37] Cf. Stanislav Balík et al., *Der tschechische Antiklerikalismus. Quellen, Themen und Gestalt des tschechischen Antiklerikalismus in den Jahren 1848–1938* (Wien: Lit, 2016). See also Marek Šmíd, *Mission. Apostolic Nuncio in Prague. Czechoslovakian-Vatican diplomatic relations between 1920 and 1950* (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2020).

[38] Cf. Marie Bulínová, Milena Janišová and Karel Kaplan (eds.), *Církevní komise ÚV KSČ 1949–1951 I. Církevní komise ÚV KSČ ("církevní šestka"). Duben 1949 – březen 1950* (Brno: Doplněk, 1994), 21, 333; Jaroslav Cuhrad, *Církevní politika KSČ a státu v letech 1969–1972* (Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 1999), 12, 46–48.

of normalization when the security forces monitored a process of converging between the Roman Catholic and non-Catholic (mostly evangelical) milieu.[39] The paradigmatic shift of Vatican II as described above found its way also into the ideologically distorted language of the State Security, as illustrated by these words: "The clergy and laymen are expected to, in accordance with instructions from abroad, to observe the principles of the so-called 'sincere ecumenism', that is, in accordance with the documents of Vatican II, and to unify all Christian churches against the common enemy – communism."[40]

It was the diverse approach of the communist state towards the individual religious institutions that strengthened the historical barriers of a dialogue between Christians. This feature of church policy strengthened the mutual mistrust and stereotypes, deeply embedded in the collective memory of the communities. Similarly to other countries, the greatest attention and scope of persecution was aimed at the nominally strongest institution, which, in the case of Czechoslovakia, was the Roman Catholic Church. Particularly in eastern Slovakia, the decision to unify forcibly the Uniates (Greek Catholics) with Orthodoxy had a great impact (the union lasted from 1950 to1968). In the non-Catholic milieu, we can see a wide range of stances, from a declared pro-regime engagement of the Czechoslovak Church (Czechoslovak Hussite Church since 1971),[41] through the ambivalence and searching in the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren,[42] to the prohibition of the Seventh-day Adventist Church between 1952–1956.[43]

The eighteen years of working on the CET was marked by a number of distinct attitudes in the area of church policy. The 1960s are viewed positively, owing to political, cultural, and social thaw; however, changes in church

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[39] Cf. Archiv bezpečnostních složek (ABS), f. A 34 Správa kontrarozvědky I. díl (1947) 1954–1990, inv. j. 3212, 3214, 3215.

[40] Ibid, inv. j. 3215, a report on the activity of hostile church headquarters 1971.

[41] See Zdeněk R. Nešpor et al., *Encyklopedie Církve československé husitské* (Praha: Karolinum, 2022). See also Jan Randák, *V záři rudého kalicha. Politika dějin a husitská tradice v Československu 1948–1956* (Praha: Nakladatelství Lidové noviny, Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy v Praze, 2015).

[42] See Peter C. A. Morée and Jiří Piškula, *Nejpokrokovější církevní pracovník: Protestantské církve a Josef Lukl Hromádka v letech 1945–1969* (Benešov: Eman, 2015); Pfann, *K svobodě*, passim.

[43] See Michal Balcar, "Sobota jako znamení věrnosti Bohu. Adventisté sedmého dne ve střetu s totalitními režimy 20. století v Československu," *Teologická reflexe* 29:2 (2023), 174–188.

policy occurred belatedly and slowly.[44] On the other hand, the Prague Spring meant a great activation for Christians and the formulation of demands for religious freedom and return to the public space (such requirements had been unheard of for two decades);[45] furthermore, there was a connection with the generally enthusiastic reception of Vatican II. A renewal of religious orders was being considered and an intellectual debate known as the Marxist-Christian dialogue had already been taking place for some time.[46]

At the time of the publication of CET, the state was employing more subtle tools in relation to churches and believers than in the early communist era. The general framework was still determined by the so-called church laws and the new adjustment of confessional law from 1949 and other interventions, such as the prohibition of activities of religious orders, remained in force. Nevertheless, the massive antichurch campaign, fabricated trials, and extreme violence were replaced with emphasis on the omnipresent atheization of society. In the era of normalization the number of ideology-related civil ceremonies that accompanied significant life events corresponding to anthropological constants and liturgy increased. However, the raising of a "new socialist human" anticipated that the religious frameworks of life would be abandoned, or not acquainted with.[47]

The fourth context of Czech church history:

the state's intervention?

Although there was ecumenical activity *par excellence*, the state and its security forces applied the *laissez faire* approach: according to the available

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44 Cf. Vojtěch Vlček, "Církevní procesy konce padesátých let a začátku šedesátých let aneb 'zlatá šedesátá'," in Markéta Doležalová (ed.), *Církev za totality – lidé a místa. Sborník k životnímu jubileu opata Heřmana Josefa Tyla* (Praha: Ústav pro stadium totalitních režimů, 2016), 247–268.

45 See Tomáš Petráček, "Das Jahr 1968 in der Tschechoslowakei – ein europäischer Sonderfall in Politik, Gesellschaft und Kirche," in Sebastian Holzbrecher, Julia Knop, Benedikt Kranemann and Jörg Seiler (eds.), *Revolte in der Kirche? Das Jahr 1968 und seine Folgen* (Freiburg: Herder, 2018), 296–308.

46 See Ivan Landa et al., *Proměny marxisticko-křesťanského dialogu v Československu* (Praha: Filosofa, 2017).

47 Cf. Jaroslav Cuhra, "Ateizace a výchova k vědeckému světovému názoru," in Jaroslav Cuhra et al. *Pojetí a prosazování komunistické výchovy v Československu 1948–1989* (Praha: Ústav pro soudobé dějiny AV ČR, 2020), 31–56.

data, the state organs, State Security, and apparatus of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia did not actively forestall the creation of the CET. Surviving archives and published memories show that the regime merely monitored the process, causing sometimes minor complications, but there was no systematic activity or harsh intervention. That does not mean that the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic embraced and supported the project of the CET; nevertheless, it did not take any steps against the preparation and finalization of it.

The church policy of the state was effectively conducted by the Secretariat for Church Affairs, a part of the Ministry of Culture. The state's records give evidence of technical matters and procedures, Cardinal František Tomášek's personal effort in favor of the translation, contemporary ecumenical activities, and the celebrations of the 400th anniversary of the Bible of Kralice.[48] A separate agenda was formed by the import of Bibles from abroad, financial gifts from abroad, and the related matter of the publication of CET for the Roman Catholic Church's needs in 1988.[49] It is possible to attest a certain degree of disinclination in negotiations,[50] in the case of the 1988 publication for Catholics there was also a conflict over the high price of the book.[51] The records also prove that the state organs were worried about the activization potential of Vatican II.[52]

Materials created by security forces give clear evidence of general tendencies such as the effort to weaken ecumenical activity. In contrast, there is no information about the persecution of translators in clear connection with the CET – surely, some of them were being monitored, hindered, and prosecuted, but this was not happening on the basis of their translation work, but rather on that of other activities and contacts taking place in a different context. The security forces were informed about the work on the CET (also labelled

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48 See Národní archiv, fond NAD 995 Ministerstvo kultury ČSR/ČR, Praha (1945) 1967–1992 (2005) [Ministry of Culture Czech Socialist Republic/Czech Republic, Prague], Sekretariát pro věci církevní [Secretariat for Church Affairs], kart. 105, 106, 145.

49 Cf. Eva Richtrová, "Zahraniční dary pro římskokatolickou církev v ČSR v letech 1986–1988," – the paper is being peer-reviewed.

50 Cf. Ibid. See also Morée, "The Making," 154–155.

51 Cf. Richtrová, "Zahraniční dary."

52 Cf. Petr Slouk, "Státní orgány a koncil," in Aleš Opatrný (ed.), *Kardinál Tomášek a koncil. Sborník ze sympozia k 10. výročí úmrtí kardinála Tomáška a ke 40. výročí zahájení 2. vatikánského koncilu* (Praha: Pastorační středisko při Arcibiskupství pražském, 2002), 31–42.

as "the ecumenical translation of the Bible of Kralice" or otherwise) and this issue could find its way into inquiries,[53] but there was no intervention against the creators. The security forces concentrated on penalizing illegal activities related to the religious practice, that is, the crime of "thwarting the supervision of churches and religious denominations" (work with the young and children was monitored meticulously), the illegal import and distribution of religious literature and samizdat newspapers, secret admissions to orders or congregations, and public criticism of the domestic church policy. The specific matter of the Bible and its dissemination is more commonly found in the prohibited organization of Jehovah's Witnesses (also labelled as "Bible Scholars")[54] or in the imported and prohibited "Yugoslavian Bibles."[55] These were illustrated Bibles for the young, published in Zagreb in 1982 and printed in Bánská Bystrica.[56]

What reasons may have led to the exceptional inactivity of actors who were normally so agile when it came to an antichurch and antireligious agenda? It is possible to consider the following influences. 1) An independent and also harmless activity at first sight. Concerning practical church policy, ideological work, and atheization, the translation appeared to be a distinct course of religious activity that could not be easily assigned to other illegal activities, so that it was effectively a legal process, 2) The scope of the activity. It was a leisure activity of a very limited group of people – they were educated not only in theology, but they were also experts in the Bible and biblical translations from the original languages. The state probably perceived the translation as a scholarly output, not as citizens'

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53 On 6 August 1986, members of the State Security paid a visit to Antonín Liška in Poříčí nad Sázavou. One of the matters discussed was "the course of action during the ecumenical translation of the Bible. The administrator Liška said briefly that the ecumenical translation of the Bible was basically finished and only seminars of some kind are irregularly taking place in which potential ambiguities are being clarified." ABS, f. XV., sig. KR-805686 MV, fol. 97.

54 Here, we find a testimony about contemporaries' contacts with Jehovah's witnesses, conversions, formation meetings, statements of personal attitudes (albeit formulated in the language and style of the security forces), and attempts to obtain prints of the Bible or other literature.

55 Cf. ABS, f. AKR 36 Správa kontrarozvědky pro boj proti vnitřnímu nepříteli, X. správa, inv. j. 1841, 46, Stanovisko k dovozu a distribuci "Ilustrované bible" v ČSSR [Opinion on import and distribution of the "Illustrated Bible" in Czechoslovakia].

56 Cf. Martin Piętak, "Otazníky kolem dětských biblí," in Józef Szymeczek (ed.), *Katecheti-ka – historie – teologie – 2002* (Ostrava: Pedagogická fakulta Ostravské university, 2003), 236–248, here 239–240.

initiative. Here, we could speculate that the potential of the translation in relation to the otherwise rejected ecumenism was underestimated to a certain extent. Indeed, many from the translation group had been closely monitored by the State Security for years due to, for instance, their academic work, so they were hardly unknown persons, 3) The nature of the activity. On the outside, especially for less interested observers, it appeared to be a non-Catholic activity; after all, the foreword to the first edition (quoted above) explicitly acknowledged the Czech tradition of biblical translations and in 1979, four centuries had elapsed since the publication of the Bible of Kralice. This rather Protestant course, claiming allegiance to the Czech non-Catholic tradition, may have become a certain protection of a more varied and collective work.

These phenomena could have influenced the subsequent result in which the communist organs perceived the CET, to a large extent, as a matter of specialists and of an intra-church nature, thus not directly taking action against it. One needs to be rather careful here: on the one hand, the state interfered in internal matters of religious organizations on a daily basis and rather substantially; on the other hand, it did not disrupt activities taking place within the walls of a church (congregation, house of prayer) provided they did not radiate into the public space or did not undermine the hegemonial position of the Communist Party of Czechoslovakia and its ideology in any other way. Interestingly, that was not the only case of this kind.

An analogical approach, which was effectively paradoxical / schizophrenic, can be illustrated well in the case of Roman Catholic sacred buildings and small-sized sacred monuments. On the one hand, there occurred ideologically legitimized devastation, dilapidation, and even deliberate destruction of the cultural heritage connected with the church.[57] It was nearly impossible to carry out new projects[58] and sacred art ended up on the periphery

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57 Cf. Kristina Uhlíková and Michal Sklenář, "In other words. To care for the heritage properties of part of our nation's socialist construction. State heritage care in the Czech lands from the early 1950s until the publication of the Cultural Heritage Properties Act in 1958," in Jakub Bachtík, Tereza Johanidesová and Kristina Uhlíková (eds.), *In the Name of Socialism, in the Shadow of the Monarchy. Post-War Monument Care in Central Europe* (Prague: Artefactum, 2022), 65–87.

58 Cf. Michal Sklenář, *Postaveny navzdory. Vznik nových římskokatolických sakrálních staveb v českých zemích v letech 1948–1989* (Praha, Brno: Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2022).

of artistic activity.[59] On the other hand, the practical realization of the liturgical reforms of the Second Vatican Council (reconstructions, radical changes of interiors, modifications of movables) occurred entirely under clerical supervision at the level of individual parishes,[60] even though the commencement of the reforms at the countrywide level was accompanied by complications caused by the state[61] and the very same state worried about the application of the Second Vatican Council's documents due to their activization potential.[62]

Certain elements can also be found in the Czech Protestant milieu in connection with the limited possibilities of sacred construction and art[63] or with youth work.[64] A similar reaction can be observed in the case of the CET: the translation as such – a matter available only to an educated, highly elite (that applied to all the confessions) and small group – was of little interest. However, when the process of the CET did reach the areas of print, distribution and sale, that is, when it had entered into the public space, trouble emerged, as restrictions against "religious print" were applied.

The fifth context of Czech church history: historiography and collective memory

Czech church historiography, in concordance with contemporary witnesses, sees the CET as an extraordinary, favorably assessed and accepted work. In spite of unfavorable political conditions, the cooperation, finalization, and publication of the translation is perceived cross-confessionally in a positive

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59 Cf. Ivo Binder and Šárka Belšíková (eds.), *Posvátné umění v nesvaté době. České sakrální umění 1948–1989* (Olomouc, Praha: Muzeum umění Olomouc, Ústav pro studium totalitních režimů, 2022).

60 Cf. Tomáš Řepa, "Počátky obnovy liturgie po II. vatikánském koncilu na příkladu umělecké komise brněnské diecéze," *Zprávy památkové péče* 83:2 (2023), 103–112; Michal Sklenář, "Malé sošky z porculánu. Očista liturgického prostoru a počátky realizace liturgické reformy v královéhradecké diecézi na přelomu let 1966 a 1967," *Studia theologica* 25:4 (2023), 99–118.

61 Cf. Kopeček, *Liturgické hnutí*, 265.

62 See footnote n. 52.

63 Cf. Anna Boučková, *A ten chrám jste vy. Liturgický prostor ve stavbách Českobratrské církve evangelické* (Praha: Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2023), 48–61.

64 Cf. Pfann, *K svobodě*, 52–54, passim.

manner, both in texts from that time[65] and in later reception;[66] participation in the translation also appears as an important piece of information in biographical profiles and extensive works about the individual participants.[67] For instance, the Protestant theologian Jan Heller labels the CET in his memories as "a great work" which he could be part of and he provides a description of the lengthy work: "Both committees [for the Old and New Testament] would gather once in two months for two days; for me this meant four days a month as I was in both. At first, we would meet only in Prague, then in other places as well. Even more time than for the meetings as such was needed for the preparation of the draft. Everyone was given a stint, typed it for the others and then it was thoroughly discussed in a general meeting, word by word."[68] Heller was aware of the limits of the translation, but he defended it publicly.[69]

The Czech church historian Jiří Hanuš provides a wider framework and addresses four crucial areas connected with Vatican II: 1) the liturgical reform and vernacular languages in liturgy, 2) a different conception of religious freedom and freedom of conscience, 3) ecumenical cooperation, 4) inter-religious dialogue. In Czechoslovakia and other countries of the Eastern Bloc, general meetings were reduced and an open discussion was permitted just in 1968.[70] Despite that, "approximately three years of a more unrestricted environment enabled not only the application of the basic intensions of the council, but also (and primarily) the anchoring of certain reform-related ideas and, importantly, of inter-personal relations from the late 1960s that

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65 Cf. e.g. Petr Pokorný, "Kralická bible. Její duchovní a teologické dědictví," *Křesťanská revue* 47:5–6 (1980), 97–100.

66 Cf. e.g. Stanislav Balík and Jiří Hanuš, *Katolická církev v Československu 1945–1989* (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2007), 356; Tomáš Butta et al., *90 let Církve československé husitské* (Praha: Církev československá husitská Praha 6 ve spolupráci s Náboženskou obcí CČSH v Praze 1 – Starém Městě, 2010), 225, 265. See also Ladislav Tichý, "Který biblický překlad je nejlepší?" *Studia theologica* 19:4 (2017), 15–29.

67 Cf. Pavel Filipi, *Malá encyklopedie evangelických církví* (Praha: Libri, 2008), 150, 152–155, 157.

68 Jan Heller, *Podvečerní děkování. Vzpomínky, texty a rozhovory* (Praha: Vyšehrad, 2005), 84.

69 Cf. Ibid, 86–87, 290.

70 Cf. Jiří Hanuš, "Koncilní změny v českém prostředí," in Stanislav Balík, Jiří Hnauš et al. *Letnice dvacátého století. Druhý vatikánský koncil a české země* (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2012), 7–24, here 24. Translation of the book into German language: Stanislav Balík and Jiří Hanuš, *Das Zweite Vatikanische Konzil und die böhmischen Länder* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöning, 2014).

had a profound impact in the form of ecumenical cooperation (CET), underground cooperation (samizdat publications, non-public education), and a further search for the practical forms of Christian existence in the specific conditions of the normalization regime."[71]

For a variety of reasons, there could and still can – especially after 1989 – emerge alternative views on the translation of specific parts and on the issues of comprehensibility and the relation to the original text,[72] which can *de facto* be observed in the case of every translation into another language. Regarding Catholics, we can mention the prevalence of Protestant solutions as well as remarks and stylistic questions articulated in connection with another translation into Czech, the *Jerusalem Bible*.[73] Regarding Protestants with an attachment to the Bible of Kralice, we can mention the rejection of the new transcription of personal names, especially in the Old Testament.[74] Personal views or philological/scholarly debate, however, do not usually cast doubt upon the translation as a whole – they focus on partial problems and proposed solutions in a totally legitimate way (reservations on the evangelical side can be observed in the case of Milan Balabán, a member of the translation group and expert on the Old Testament[75]).

Conclusion

The phrase "Czech Ecumenical Translation" denotes the result of activities taking place in the Czechoslovak Socialist Republic from the early 1960s to the late 1970s. This project offers a number of impulses for a historical analysis. The initiative was born in the milieu of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren and the Protestant character was partly preserved in the final text. Nevertheless, the translation groups for the Old and New Testament provided a basis for actual ecumenical cooperation where there was a search not for the majority's point of view, but for a consensus between all the members.

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71 Hanuš, "Koncilní změny," 24.

72 Cf. e.g. Jakub S. Trojan, *Moc v dějinách* (Praha: OIKOYMENH, 1994), 49, 62, 83; Helena Kurzová, "K problémům biblické a křesťanské řečtiny," in *Problémy křesťanství* (Praha: Kabinet pro studia řecká, římská a latinská ČSAV, 1986), 187–197, here 190–191.

73 Cf. František X. Halas, *Co je Jeruzalémská bible a proč by se měl vydat její překlad do češtiny* (Praha: Petrov, 1991), 31–37.

74 Cf. Ivan Lutterer, "K starozákonní antroponymii v ekumenickém překladu bible," *Listy filologické* 115:2 (1992), 93–95, 94.

75 Cf. Milan Balabán, *Víra – nebo osud?* (Praha: OIKOYMENH, 1993), 11–12.

The preparation and finalization of CET was an exceptional process, taking place in communist Czechoslovakia.

Both the Catholic and non-Catholic milieu were prepared for a new translation of the Bible into the Czech language; in fact, they asked for it. Apart from the long-lasting tradition of translating the Bible or its parts into Czech, purely confessional stimuli found acceptance here. Concerning the Roman Catholic Church, it was the paradigmatic shift of Vatican II which brought a radical end to the previous and long Pian era, commenced a liturgical reform, introduced vernacular languages into the liturgy (and also the Bible in a much greater extent), and called upon an ecumenical dialogue. Although the Czech non-Catholic milieu acknowledged (and still acknowledges) the special position of the Bible of Kralice, its text was more and more incomprehensible for readers and listeners in the 20th century. Thus, ways to a new, acceptable translation were being searched for. It is clear that the Catholic and non-Catholic milieu went through certain preparatory stages that made participation in a common work easier; both milieus were also accepting contemporary impulses.

While it is true that inter-confessional cooperation on a biblical translation is also known from other countries (since the second half of the 20th century), a complete ecumenical translation created in a former Eastern Bloc country is rare. The Czechoslovak Socialist Republic did not support ecumenical activities; on the contrary, using the state, security, and the party's apparatus, it endeavored to forestall them. Here, the state could follow on the persisting Czech anticlericalism and anti-catholicism – albeit weakened by the experience of the Nazi occupation during the Protectorate and by religion related persecution – and make use of an ideologically distorted interpretation of the domestic non-Catholic traditions in order to cause division, employing deeply embedded prejudices and confessional hatred. Let us note that the church and religious history of the Czech Lands has been very unsettled.

The shared experience of persecution from the Nazi and communist side forms a contribution that cannot be omitted. For instance, Miloš Bič was kept in concentration camps in Buchenwald and Dachau and later he made use of his ecumenical contacts from abroad; for the Czech church history, ecumenical seminars and meetings in V Jirchářích street (Prague) have a significant status, owing to the philosopher and translator Jan Sokol. The CET is, among Christians in the Czech Lands regardless of the confession, usually

perceived in a highly positive manner due to its results and ecumenical character, even though there may exist alternative views on the translation of a specific formulation. Nevertheless, there are two paradoxes of Czech church history related to the CET: no implementation in the Roman Catholic liturgy and a basically undisturbed development.

The CET belongs to a period of intense internal processes in religious institutions. On the outside, these processes manifested themselves in the short period of the Prague Spring, but in the preceding and following years, they were much less evident. The Roman Catholic Church responded to the Second Vatican Council's decisions – limited primarily to the liturgical reforms in the Czech Lands – and a modification and publication of new liturgical books (starting in 1970) and the common hymnal (1973) occurred. However, the CET became part of the Catholic liturgy for merely a short time, for Václav Bogner's project was preferred. Although the CET was expected to become a common text of the Christian church service, this did not happen in the Roman Catholic Church. When it came to forming the identity, the translation played a greater role in the non-Catholic milieu, primarily in the case of the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren. The publication of the CET and *The Evangelical Hymnbook* (1979) shows that this particular church was self-confident and vital, which was visible even in the public space.

Even though the CET was an ecumenical activity *par excellence*, the finalization of which took place during the normalization era, there occurred no major complications. The available sources and contemporaries' testimonies show that there was no systematic effort of the state and its organs to bring the project to an end and prosecute its agents. Some members of the translation groups were actually prosecuted and pestered due to religion, but not in a direct connection with the translation, as it was their public engagement that mattered. The Secretariat for Church Affairs and the Czechoslovak security forces knew about the process, monitored it, but never took action against it.

From the outside, the notion probably prevailed that CET was a religious activity, but of an intra-church nature and limited to a small group of experts. This ill-informed perception and probably also a certain underestimation of the potential of ecumenical cooperation stemmed from the fact that the translation was not related to the contemporary issues of church policy, or policy as such (activities corresponding to the crimes such as "thwarting the supervision of churches and religious denominations", contact with

abroad, distribution of religious literature, samizdat prints, in the case of Roman Catholics also secret admissions, cooperation with monastic orders and congregations etc.).

The state perceived CET as an internal matter of the church, more precisely of the Roman Catholic Church and non-Catholic denominations. It directly acknowledged the matter of the domestic non-Catholic traditions; certain protection was also enabled by the connection with the 400th anniversary of the Bible of Kralice. However, as soon as the translation or a specific translator crossed the limits of socialist legality, trouble and delays occurred. A typical example of this is the omission of Milan Balabán's name from the list of the translators due to him having signed Charter 77; there were also complications concerning the import of paper, print, and donations for the purpose of publication. This, however, was not a controlled operation. Rather, these were difficulties stemming from the non-functional planned economy and from unwillingness and also partial reactions to specific matters. Problems accompanying print and distribution can be, with respect to the general context, seen as marginal – they were hindering, but certainly not threatening for the activity as such.

CET is the most commonly used and most available translation of the Bible into Czech made in the 20th century. It was created thanks to a strenuous effort of two committees (for the Old and New Testament); the whole work took eighteen years and the formerly evangelical activity succeeded in accepting other non-Catholic and also Catholic Christians into its ranks. In spite of the rather Protestant nature of the translation, it is still true that after centuries of religious wars, enmity, and contempt, the Czech Christians managed to agree on the wording of the entire Bible (let us not forget that the Reformation principle of *sola Scriptura* contradicts the Catholic notion of the key term *revelatio*[76]). Oto Mádr, a Czech Catholic moral theologian

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[76] The official stance of Catholicism as expressed at Vatican II in decree on ecumenism Unitatis redintegratio: "A love and reverence of Sacred Scripture which might be described as devotion, leads our brethren to a constant meditative study of the sacred text. […] But while the Christians who are separated from us hold the divine authority of the Sacred Books, they differ from ours – some in one way, some in another – regarding the relationship between Scripture and the Church. For, according to Catholic belief, the authentic teaching authority of the Church has a special place in the interpretation and preaching of the written word of God. But Sacred Scriptures provide for the work of dialogue an instrument of the highest value in the mighty hand of God for the attainment of that unity which the Saviour holds out to all."

and political prisoner, belonged to a group of theologians who pondered the contemporary and quite dismal state of the church in the 1970s. Mádr saw the suppression of ecumenical activities by the state as one of the tools of religious oppression.[77] At the same time, however, he optimistically pointed to various ecumenical activities including translations.[78] The CET corresponds to Mádr's statement, held by many others: "Much has already happened that was previously unimaginable for us."

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[77] Cf. Oto Mádr, *Slovo o této době. Výbor z díla* (Praha: Zvon, 1992), 257. A complete translation of the essay "How the Church Doesn't Die" was published in German: Oto Mádr, *Wie Kirche nicht stirbt. Zeugnis aus bedrängten Zeiten der tschechischen Kirche* (Leipzig: Benno, 1993). See also Vojtěch Novotný, "České teologie umírající církve 70. let 20. století," *Teologické texty* 15:1 (2004), 7–13.

[78] Mádr, *Slovo*, 65.

The Crown of Creation and Wild Flowers[1] (With Special Regard to Czech Literary and Professional Texts)[2]

Eva Vymětalová Hrabáková

Abstract: Humans, as the pinnacle of creation, strive to understand the meaning of their existence while confronting decay and ultimately accepting death. The idea of eternal existence, or immortality, appears frequently in ancient texts. This article examines four works from the ancient Near East: the Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh, the Ugaritic Epic of Aqhat, and the biblical Psalms 8 and 103. It will explore the possibility of human immortality and consider whether such a state can be achieved. These works remain central in the cultural memory of those familiar with the written tradition. How can we interpret these ancient texts in light of our current knowledge? Although paradoxically

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2   The first representative of Czech pre-transhumanist literature was the writer Karel Čapek. In his literary works from the 1920s and 1930s, the Czech author Karel Čapek was among the first to explore the relationship between technology and humans. The term "robot" entered the Czech language through his work *R.U.R. – Rossum's Universal Robots*. This literary piece addresses issues of artificial intelligence and robots functioning as independent entities. The ethical dilemmas it raises mirror the principles of transhumanism in Karel Čapek, *R.U.R.: Rossum's Universal Robots. A Collective Drama and Introductory Comedy in Three Acts.* (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1966). A new translation of Karel Čapek's play R.U.R., which famously coined the term "robot," and a collection of essays reflecting on the play's legacy from scientists and scholars working in artificial life and robotics in Karel Čapek, Jitka Čejková (ed.), *R.U.R. and the Vision of Artificial Life.* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, The MIT Press, 2024). For more information about the book see: https://www.robot100.cz/. War with the Newts explores human nature, evolution, and intelligent newts in Karel Čapek, *Válka s mloky*, ČS 4 (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1972). Another of Čapek's works *Továrna na absolutno*, deals with the desire to create a technological work that could be considered immortal: Karel Čapek, *Továrna na absolutno. Krakatit*. Spisy Karla Čapka (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1982). Emilia Marty (Elina) raises questions about the consequences of immortality in the drama novel *Věc Makropulos*. She drinks an elixir of life created by her alchemist father. After living for several centuries and constantly repeating the same turning points in her life, Emilia becomes disgusted and exhausted. Karel Čapek et al., *Dramata: Věc Makropulos*, translated *The Makropulos Secret*, in Writings of Karel Čapek (Prague: Československý spisovatel, 1992).

subject to decay, the characters of Gilgamesh, Aqhat, and the psalmist continue to inspire reflection on the concept of eternity. They serve as fundamental elements of our civilised self-awareness.

Introduction

Humans are a species consciously involved in the creative process, endowed with particles similar to those of the universe and elements akin to both living and non-living nature. As rational beings, they are aware of their mortality and strive to delay or even transcend it. Ancient texts document efforts to attain or question the idea of immortality, with several essential works addressing this theme directly. The following selection of ancient narratives and poems raises questions and offers potential answers about the meaning of human existence, destiny, and a broader understanding of immortality. These texts contemplate postponing or overcoming death to achieve a higher purpose. These principles underpin transhumanism,[3] a philosophy centred on enhancing humanity beyond biological constraints.

From birth, human beings encounter the relationship between life and death. They consciously strive to leave a mark on the world, which they perceive in various ways. The transitional phases of human existence[4] enable individuals to mature, accept social roles, and fulfil them to the best of their abilities. Ultimately, these phases lead to the end of life, which they must face. People are aware of their mortality, yet they endeavour to ensure that their personality survives. The fate of the individual is intertwined with that of humanity, and personal choices impact the collective, from

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[3]   Scott D. de Hart and Joseph P. Farrell, *Transhumanism: A Grimoire of Alchemical Agendas* (Port Townsend: Feral House 2012); Robin Hanson, *The Age of EM* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016); Yuval Noah Harari, *Homo Deus* (New York: New York Harper, 2017).

[4]   Mythologist and writer Joseph Campbell thoroughly analyses the rituals of heroes in his literary work. Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (California: New World Library, 2008).

family and society to the nation and the global community, including its perspective beyond our planet.

Since my professional interest lies in the intertextuality between the writings of the ancient Near East and the Tanakh, I have selected the following texts from several suitable options. Most readers will be familiar with *the Epic of Gilgamesh* and selected biblical psalms. Although less well known, *the Ugaritic Epic of Aqhat* is also a compelling narrative that explores themes related to mortality, immortality, and the interaction of life and death. Phenomena of mortality and immortality can be examined from both a cultural-biological and a linguistic perspective. Both perspectives play vital, complementary roles in considering the issues and significance of transhumanism.

Using four written sources, I will endeavour to characterise Gilgamesh (considered by some to be the proto-hero of transhumanism), Aqhat, who mocks any reliance on gods and blind faith in achieving unnaturally long life or immortality (pros and cons of transhumanism), and the texts of two psalms where the actors of the biblical narrative about human destiny – concerning man as the crown of creation and a fleeting lily (or wild flower) of the field in the presence of God – depict the human condition within creation through poetic turns of phrase woven with oriental wisdom. This article will focus on the search for transhumanism in texts from the cradles of Near Eastern civilisations, beginning with Sumer and Akkad, Babylon and Assyria, and concluding with the ancient Levant. In conclusion, the author will take a step towards a critical reflection on transhumanism within the framework of theological ethics.

1. The fate of man

According to the beliefs of the ancient Sumerians and later the Akkadians, humans possess divine blood, a spark within them, but their outer shell is formed of transient matter. We see this anthropology in the creation myth *Enuma Elish*,[5] in *The Epic of Atrahasis* (*Atra-ḫasīs*),[6] and in the heroic mythological story *The Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh*. Human nature dif-

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5   Philippe Talon, The Standard Babylonian Creation Myth: Enūma elish (Helsinki: University of Helsinki, 2005).
6   A. R. George and F. N. H. Al-Rawi, "Tablets from the Sippar Library VI. Atra-ḫasīs," *Iraq 58 (1996)*, 147–190.

fers from divine nature, yet it is also distinct from the nature of all other animals. *Lúšzizma lullá lú a·me·lu MUšu[7]* – *"let lulla* (entity) *be created, let it be named amelu* (personality)."[8] These references indicate that the living being *lullû*, called by the Sumerians, is also known as *amēlu* or *awīlu* in the Akkadian epic. According to myth, it is a living entity created by the gods in their image from earthly matter. The Sumerian *lullû*, man, exists between the divine and the human worlds.[9] In the Akkadian anthropogenic myth, the wisest of gods, ENKI, known as Ea in Akkadian, envisioned humans as free beings responsible for the world's management. The myth states that *lullû* (*awīlu*) was created to carry the gods' basket, to serve the gods. The idea of human destiny, rooted in the eternal order, is closely linked to the concept of work.[10] *In illo tempore*,[11] the gods performed this activity, but since the creation of man, it has been entrusted to humans. Nonetheless, this can also be interpreted as meaning that *awīlu* shares in ongoing divine creation, and that this role is an honour.[12] The assertion that humanity results from the union of the Creator's essence with the essence of creation implies that humans, though transient like all creation, can approach the gods, even to become like gods. When contemplating the hypothetical idea of eternal deities, humans tend to lean towards eternalism – a longing for eternity to be conscious of it.[13] The Sumerians, Akkadians, and Babylonians could no longer logically reconcile the long existence of their gods. Often, two contradictory descriptions are given: that gods are immortal, yet one kills the other. To kill signifies to diminish or exhaust the divine radiance, *melemmu*.[14] Since gods are associated with stars, whose radiance appeared infinite to ancient people, the depletion of this energy was seen as incomparable to the lifespan of humans. Hence, the gods seemed eternal. An inactive god is like an extinct star, or essentially, a dead god. People found it easier

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7 Talon, *Enūma elish* VI, 6.

8 Ibid., 62.

9 Ibid., 62nn.

10 Amy L. Balogh, "Myth, Meaning, and the Work of Life: Enuma Elish and the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:4–3:24) on the Value of Human Labor and Memory," *Religions* 13:8 (2022), 703. DOI: 10.3390/rel13080703.

11 In mythical Times and Worlds.

12 Balogh, "Myth, Meaning," 5–11.

13 Regarding the physical and metaphysical ideas of time and space.

14 *melemmu (ME.LÁM)* – a terrifying glow, an aura of gods and demons within Jeremy Black, Andrew George and Nicholas Postgate (eds.), *A Concise Dictionary of Akkadian* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz Verlag, 2000), 207.

to accept the existence of humans in their stories, but they also struggled with it due to their irreplaceable experiences. In this sense, humans are no different from the surrounding living nature; they age from birth and head towards the end, each with a predetermined *šīmtu*[15] – their destiny, which marks the end of their earthly existence.

1.1 Man is descended from the gods

There are several Mesopotamian gods and goddesses credited with creating humans.[16] However, the most notable is the Sumerian ENKI, also known as Akkadian Ea. ENKI is a demiurge god who creates divine-like beings and presents plans for humanity to the council of great gods. He is an experimenter who studies humankind without enforcing restrictions; he observes quietly and with curiosity about potential outcomes. He allows humanity to evolve freely, assigning it responsibility along with freedom. He supports people, granting them divine power. ENKI (Babylonian Ea)[17] thus embodies the idea of human transcendence and is among the earliest supporters of transhumanism.[18] The Babylonian myth of human creation, "*Enūma ilū awēlum*" (*When the gods were men*),[19] suggests that the gods completed their tasks on earth, for which being *awēlum*, man, was created. The narrative described above is known to scholars as Atra-ḫasīs. The change in the name alone reflects the transhumanist concept discussed here, indicating a shift from the gods' unique status to the extraordinary importance of Man, who has attained the gift of eternal life. The myth describes the creation of a supplementary force to continue the work of creation, explores human diversity, and examines the relationship between humans and the divine realm. It incorporates various etiological themes, including the origin

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15 *shīmtu – will, testament, fate (death; day of death), fate* in Ibid., 373.

16 Nicole Brisch, "Mother Goddess (Ninmah, Nintud/r, Belet-ili)," *Ancient Mesopotamian Gods and Goddesses* (2019). Source: http://oracc.museum.upenn.edu/amgg/listofdeities/mothergoddess/ (accessed 15. 4. 2025).

17 "Ea, god of underground waters and magical arts, the Babylonian equivalent of the Sumerian god ENKI, was also the patron of craftsmen, artists, and exorcists. […] He alone realises that the gods need the services of humans…" in Gwendolyn Leick, *Historical Dictionary of Mesopotamia* (Landham – Maryland – Oxford: The Scarecrow Press, Inc., 2003), 36.

18 Asen Bondzhev, "Enki's Seven Sages (Adapa/Oannes and the Apkallu). Humanity's Cosmic Guardians," *Open Journal for the Study of History* VII/1 (2024), 31–44.

19 George and Al-Rawi, "Tablets," 153.

of individuals with physiological defects and the causes of war, famine, and plague. The gods are responsible for human social and ecological issues, with Enki and Ninmah implicated in the first, and Enlil in the second story. The god Enlil, lord of the world, is alarmed by the growing human population and decides to wipe out humanity with a flood. The Flood narrative is a separate etiological story. Only the transhuman Atra-ḫasīs survives the flood, endowed with extraordinary abilities, including the foundational elements of civilisation.[20] According to the creation story within this narrative, the first human was transformed from the god *Wē*. Humanity was created by two collaborating deities, the god Ea and Bēlet ilī, *dmama* "the Mother of the gods". From the clay and blood of the sacrificial god *Wē*, they craft and animate a being called *lullû* (Akkadian *awēlu*), determining its earthly destiny, *shīmtu(m)*.[21] First Man carries a divine spark or image within himself, expressed by the term *ṭēmu*.[22]

2. Gilgamesh, the superhuman (source text: *The Epic of Gilgamesh*)[23]

The Epic of Gilgamesh can be described, with some exaggeration, as the founding text of transhumanism. Mathematically speaking, Gilgamesh is two-thirds god and one-third human. His father is the famous mythical ruler *dlugal-ban-da*,[24] and his mother is the goddess *dnin-sun*,[25] so the hero

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20 Ibid., 172–175. Knowledge of how to cultivate the mashshakku (*mushshakkū*) plant is a key aspect of civilisational competence. This plant was also believed to be used to enhance prophetic abilities.

21 Ibid., 162nn.

22 Ibid., 170. The wise goddess *MAMA* creates human beings, endowed with a destiny by divine order, whose task is to transfer the earthly work they take over from the lower gods, the Igig, to the *awīlū* (humans). The Igig belong to a kind of demiurges of the ancient world. By this act, humans removed the Igig's yoke of slavery and exhausting labour. In the context of transhumanism, humans have learned and are still perfecting how to transfer this entrusted work to their creations, i.e., machines, including AI.

23 Andrew R. George, *The Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh: Parts I and II: Introduction, Critical Edition, and Cuneiform Texts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003). The following are Czech critical editions of the Epic of Gilgamesh: Lubor Matouš, *Epos o Gilgamešovi* (Prague: Mladá Fronta, 1971); Jiří Prosecký and Marek Rychtařík, *Epos o Gilgamešovi* (Prague: Garamond, 2018).

24 George, *The Babylonian Epic of Gilgamesh*, 540.

25 Ibid.

Gilgamesh himself, whose Sumerian name is *ᵈGIŠ-gim-maš*,²⁶ is designated in the epic and other Sumerian-Akkadian texts, like his parents, with the divine determinative "d."²⁷ Both parents of the renowned Uruk ruler are bearers of divinity, with the mother, the "divine cow," being the mother goddess. Gilgamesh is more than an ordinary man, as he surpasses everyone around him in every way. He is a hero, a superhuman. However, he treats his superhuman qualities rebelliously and, therefore, receives a lesson that leads him to confront his limits and search for the meaning of life. When his exceptional counterpart Enkidu, a humanised being with abilities similar to Gilgamesh, dies, the Uruk bull Gilgamesh realises that his mortality threatens his unforgettable personality and work. So he attempts to achieve personal immortality.

Gilgamesh's quest for immortality can be seen as a heroic journey marked by liminality and profound change.²⁸ After returning from his quest to escape his fate, Gilgamesh is reconciled with himself and motivated to accept his destiny, which is expressed by the phrase *šiāti alākum*,²⁹ meaning to follow one's destiny and ultimately die. Gilgamesh endures more and probably lives longer, but he is still heading towards death. Yet, the idea of immortality remains with him. He comes to accept his death but gains insight into the collective vision. Through a conversation with Siduri, the barmaid of the gods and practical life teacher, he revises his sexual, family, intellectual, and spiritual pursuits. He chooses to pass on all he has gained to future generations. Symbolically, he conceals his name and life's legacy within the walls of his capital city as a message to those to come. Gilgamesh's story, and thus the story of this particular man, endures across generations. A notable shift in understanding Gilgamesh's transhumanism occurs in the move from individual to societal future potential. Heroic greatness and glory are weighed against weakness and failure. However, the story raises a fundamental final question: who truly cares for humanity's welfare? At the start of the epic, the contemptible Gilgamesh commits *kukittu*,³⁰ an

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26 Ibid.
27 Dietz Otto Edzard, *Sumerian Grammar* (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2003), 9.
28 Andrew R. George, "The Mayfly on the River: Individual and Collective Destiny in the Epic of Gilgamesh," *Kaskal* (2012), 227–242.
29 Black, George and Postgate, *A Concise Dictionary*, 373 explains that *ana shīmtim alākum* usually means "to die a natural death."
30 Incorrect behaviour in table I, 67, Ibid., 228.

unworthy and even malicious act, through which he, as a usurper, threatens his surroundings and harms society. He overcomes and humiliates others, embarking on a journey of suffering *mānaḫtu*,[31] which transforms his desire for transhumanism. By the story's end, he dedicates his extraordinary potential to his people in Uruk, as evidenced by the noble walls of the city. Personal transcendence shifts into collective social transcendence. Instead of seeking immortal glory, Gilgamesh attains unmatched wisdom. He views his city and the future generations of his people as eternal.

The ending shown in Gilgamesh through the metonymy of cut reeds closely resembles the cut flowers or grass of the field in Psalm 103:15[32] and Job 14:1–2,[33] a common Eastern image symbolising the conclusion of earthly life.[34]

The following Akkadian verbs indicate the conclusion of Gilgamesh's journey:

illikamm	verbum, 3rd sg. m., present tense	Comes (came) to
anit	verb, stative	was exhausted
šupšut	verb, stative	was assured
šaki	verb, stative or transitional?	Was/was set?

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31 "hard work, misery, fatigue" in Miguel Civil and al., *Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1977), 203; "fatigue, exhaustion, drudgery, work" in Black, George and Postgate, *A Concise Dictionary*, 195.

32 אֱנוֹשׁ כֶּחָצִיר יָמָיו כְּצִיץ הַשָּׂדֶה כֵּן יָצִיץ in Karl Elliger und Wilhelm Rudolph (eds.), *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS)*, 5th ed. (Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft: Stuttgart, 1977 und 1997); *"As for mortals, their days are like grass; they flourish like a flower of the field"* in *New Revised Standard Version Updated Edition (NRSVUE)*.

33 וְשֵׁבַע־רֹגֶז׃וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תֹהוּ וָבֹהוּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל־פְּנֵי תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל־פְּנֵי הַמָּיִם אָדָם יְלוּד אִשָּׁה קְצַר יָמִים in *BHS*; *"A mortal, born of woman, few of days and full of trouble, comes up like a flower and withers, flees like a shadow and does not last,"* in *NRSVUE*.

34 This oriental depiction of the end of human life is followed, for example, by the Czech theologian, philosopher, and educator J. A. Comenius (Komenský), who describes personified death in allegorical language in his work. Comenius' work, Labyrinth of the World and Paradise of the Heart, deals with the development of human potential, in which man combines his reason, moral consciousness, and spiritual orientation for his ennoblement and prolongation of life. A suitable method of ennobling man is education in the knowledge of immortality. Man finds this in his relationship with his Creator. According to J. A. Comenius, man is a being reflecting God, endowed with intelligence and a rational soul. Man's free will enables him to create his future, which, according to Comenius' syncretic formulation, is a return to paradise, communion with God. Jan Amos Komenský, *Labyrint světa a ráj srdce*, Česká knižnice (Brno: Host, 2014).

Today, in research on extending life and exploring its significance, the term "Gilgamesh project" has been introduced as a technical term. *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is significant in modern research and influences scientific inquiry due to its adaptable and timeless narrative.[35]

In my reflection on intertextuality, I consider it essential to mention that *The Epic of Gilgamesh* found a successor in the modern literary work *Projekt Gilgameš* (*The Gilgamesh Project*) by Czech writer Štěpán Kučera.[36] This captivating fictional narrative[37] tells the story of how artificial intelligence in a research centre reconstructs the story of Gilgamesh, entrusting the leading role to a marginal character from the original epic, the ferryman Urshanabi. In his youthful recklessness, Urshanabi accidentally comes across the plant of life ("The Old Man Becomes Young"). Gilgamesh had unsuccessfully sought the plant that he gradually grinds into powder for repeated consumption. By consuming this plant, he repeatedly rejuvenates, but at the same time becomes infertile. In his satirical science fiction novel, Štěpán Kučera presents Urshanabi as a shadowy figure, or the reverse of Gilgamesh's journey. Urshanabi strives for personal immortality but ultimately chooses to relinquish it. He exists from ancient times into the future, and at the end of his very long life, he encounters the AI mentioned earlier. He renounces his decision to live forever. Štěpán Kučera's captivating literary style fills the ancient mythopoetic shell with pressing questions of the present and fictions of the future. In the novel's interludes, he presents ancient narratives rooted in the oldest cultures and their languages, alongside postmodern tales with science fiction elements. Accidentally immortal, Urshanabi witnesses humans destroying nature and polluting the ocean, through which he gained immortality by recklessly playing God with the plant of life. For centuries, the transhuman Urshanabi observes how the powerful or insane tamper with human intentions and mutilate creation. The bioethical dilemma and ecological crisis motivate him to relinquish his immortality because the world he

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35 Sophus Hell, *Gilgamesh: A New Translation of the Ancient Epic* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2021); Yuval Harari's philosophical reflection on the Gilgamesh project in Harari, *Homo Deus*.

36 Štěpán Kučera, *Projekt Gilgameš* (Brno: Druhé město, 2019).

37 Literary critic Jan M. Heller describes the work as an anthropological novel: Jan M. Heller, "Román antropologický," iLiteratura.cz (2019). Source: https://www.iliteratura.cz/clanek/41629-kucera-stepan-projekt-gilgames (accessed 28. 12. 2024).

inhabits is no longer worth it. The artificial intelligence narrating this fictional version of the Gilgamesh epic reveals the darker tendencies of human nature that Urshanabi confronts. In the future world, according to the project as mentioned earlier, a superintelligence-an unseen AI whose location remains unknown-reigns supreme. The conclusion of the anthropological novel *Projekt Gilgameš* (*The Gilgamesh Project*) oscillates between the stark reality of the final report of the fictional Gilgamesh project and the joy of family life, reflecting confidence in the positive prospects of science held by one of the novel's characters.[38] Readers can either confirm or refute whether a predestined path or human algorithms dictate human nature. What remains clear is that the purpose of human existence is to value one's own life and that of other creatures.

3. Aqhat's fate

Aqhat is the son of Danil,[39] the patriarch of a West Semitic semi-nomadic family, and the hero of *the Ugaritic Epic of Aqhat*.[40] He is a respected and long-awaited son, important because he will carry his father's name into the future and provide him with all the care a son should, including posthumous worship for deceased family members. According to the ancient view of the role of male offspring and the prevailing patrilineal line, Aqhat embodies the immortality of his tribe and, essentially, that of Danil himself. The story features an intriguing encounter and verbal skirmish between man and god, as well as a confrontation between the male and female representations of existence. The goddess of love and war, Anat, meets Aqhat during his adolescence, seemingly at a feast, which confirms the rite of passage, and decides to test Aqhat's devotion and piety.[41] She asks for

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38 It should be noted that the author did not link humanity's promising prospects to transcendent good or God, but to man's own decision to reduce the centre of aggression in the amygdala.

39 The name of his father, Danilu, appears frequently in ancient Near Eastern literature. For biblical scholars, the similarity to the name Daniel and the biblical book of the same name is significant, as well as the reference to the three wise men of the ancient world, who included Joseph, Job, and Daniel.

40 Manfried Dietrich, Oswald Loretz and Joaquín Sanmartín, *The cuneiform texts from Ugarit: Ras Ibn Hani and other places (KTU: 3ed.)*, 3rd ed. (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 2013), KTU 1.17–1.19.

41 KTU 1.17 VI 1nn.

Aqhat's bow, probably a gift symbolising his transition from childhood to adulthood and affirming his competence as an adult. From their conversation, it is clear that the goddess mainly wants the bow so she can control Aqhat, and she promises him the usual sacrifices to the gods, such as gold and silver, in return. When Aqhat refuses the bribe, the goddess promises him eternal life, a state that, according to other Ugaritic mythological sources, has been achieved or repeatedly achieved by her brother, the god Baal.[42] It is known that the atmospheric god Baal is a dying and rising deity, and Ugaritic texts tell of his resurrection, immortality, and sovereignty over eternity.[43] But what does this mean for humans?

KTU1.17 VI 30–31

At this stage of the epic, a unique linguistic game develops, establishing a language domain of its own.

mt	nom. sg.	Mot; Death; Mortal; human being
mwt	verb	to die
ḫyy/ḫwy	nom. sg.; verb	a Life; to life

"Ask for life, O Aqhat" (irshḫym laqht)
"life – without death" (ḫym … bl mt)[44]

From other Ugaritic texts, we learn that Anatin's task was to defeat the god Mot – the Grim Reaper, who embodies death. Although the broken clay tablets complicate the understanding of life and death, we can assume that Anatin's battle with Mot on the battlefield ended 1:0 in favour of life and love for Baal. Still, outside the fighting, Mot continues to exist. In the mythical struggle between Anat and Mot, however, the writers could not realistically allow death to triumph. Death must either be overcome or replaced by a higher power. From a human perspective, this higher value remains unclear, even if the metaphor of denying mortality is accepted. An immortal being ceases to be strictly human – mortal. A common literary synonym for the word "human" in Semitic terminology is *mt*, which can mean both "mortal" and "earthling." From a human perspective, Aqhat

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42 Ibid.

43 KTU 1.6 VI 28–29.

44 In Czech translation also "Ask for life, Aqhate…". "life, […], immortality" in Ondřej Stehlík, *Ugaritské náboženské texty*, Světová náboženství (Prague: Vyšehrad, 2003), 221.

astutely notes that Anat's statement about *bl mt* – "without death"– is therefore confusing.

With the following expressions, Aqhat concisely discusses the unavoidable end of every human and, unequivocally, calls the goddess Anat a liar.[45] Simultaneously, he diminishes her skill in hunting and warfare.[46]

KTU 1.17 VI 33; 38

"Do not lie, O Maiden (Virgin), for your lying is a swamp" (al tshrgn y btltm dm l ġzr shgrk ḫḫm)

"And so I will die the death of all, and I will die by death" (apmt kl amt w an mtm amt)

KTU 1.17 VI 35–36

While Anat clings to Aqhat's favour, Aqhat firmly and subtly rejects her demands.

mt	nom. sg.	Moth; death; Mortal
uḫryt	Compare the verb nom.	finiteness
mh	pronomen	what
yqḥ	verb. 3rd person singular masculine perfect	*l-k-ḥ* (to take) – *takes*

"What does a mortal (human) take according to his finitude?" (mt uḫryt mh yqḥ)

mh	pronoun	what
yqḥ	verb. 3rd person singular masculine perfect	*l-k-ḥ* (to take) – takes
mt	nom. sg.	Moth; death; Mortal
atryt	Compare the verb nom.	Finitude; future/goal

"What does a mortal (human being) take away when they are fulfilled?" (mh yqḥ mt atryt)

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45 What she promises within the scope of divine power is not transferable to humans. However, we also see a clash between two self-assured beings: a pragmatic and proud young man and a proud goddess. A mortal dismisses the attention of a being generally believed to be immortal. Aqhat clearly chooses certain death over the "rumour" of immortality.

46 Cf. KTU 1.3. This section of the Ugaritic Baal cycle is called the Anat texts, where the goddess Anat appears with a bow and arrows.

Anat promises that, under certain conditions, she will grant or send Aqhat life in Baal's manner. However, Aqhat's reaction raises a fundamental question: How does one deal with mortality? How does one face the future? What can one accomplish? For a hero like Aqhat, death is ultimately unavoidable for all created beings. Human nature and destiny are intertwined with mortality, while horizontal transhumanism asserts itself through offspring. Aqhat's reluctance to submit to unconditional obedience to a deity is evident in his sophisticated search for hidden meaning in Anat's deceptive statements. The Ugaritic youth seeks a unique heroic path characterised by vertical transhumanism,[47] which, in his view, surpasses the traditional concept of obedience to the gods. The length of life cannot be compared to its value in a specific heroic moment[48] when one can attain an unforgettable name, remembered by descendants. Instead, the hero Aqhat advocates liberation from dependence on divine authority, whether imposed or voluntarily accepted. He is at peace with his mortality and does not seek ways to prolong his existence, even when it is offered to him directly. In this, he differs from Gilgamesh, who seeks eternal life according to the advice of various divine and human sources.[49] However, in terms of liberation, Aqhat's behaviour is similar to Gilgamesh's; both ultimately face their demise. They refuse to accept or are unable to act as intermediaries between mortal man and immortal god in the story of life.[50] *The Epic of Aqhat* concludes with Aqhat being killed by Anatin's hired assassin, whose murder triggers the inevitable destruction of nature itself. Nature reflects the end of the hero Aqhat, who went to meet his fate. His

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47 The superhuman is therefore already a theme from antiquity.

48 Philosopher Michal Hauser speaks of progressive resublimation in Michael Hauser, "From Posthumanism to Hyperhumanism," *Critical Posthumanism: Special Issue of the Philosophical Journal* 2 (2024), 25.

49 Aqhat frees himself from dependence on the gods, Gilgamesh from the existential desire to achieve eternal life.

50 Transhumanism offers a vision of humanity and society that, through technological and biotechnological progress, can exceed the natural boundaries of the human race or species. Fascinating insights into transhumanism from the perspective of the historical development of various texts, starting with the Epic of Gilgamesh and their interpretation up to today, are provided by researcher A. Thomas in Alexander Thomas, "A Brief History of Transhumanism and its Critics," *The Politics and Ethics of Transhumanism* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2024), 1–31. The author briefly summarises the three aims of the superhuman: "super-longevity, super-intelligence, and super-wellbeing…"

legacy is carried on by his family, led by his sister, who takes her brother's place. Aqhat's story is that of a hero who pragmatically chooses finitude over the illusory chimaera of immortality. His creed is that mortality is inevitable and that life is valuable because of its uniqueness and irreplaceability.

4. Psalm 8: The Fate of Man – Humanity

מֶה-אֱנוֹשׁ *"What/who is man?"*[51]

The psalm mentioned above can serve as a literary image of the Anthropocene.[52] Some scholars characterise it as an expression of Hebrew humanism.[53] The psalm celebrates God's greatness and glory from the perspective of His creation, especially man as an individual, but also the human race as a whole. Poetic images of the mouths of infants and sucklings show several human characteristics that reveal human limitations, but at the same time articulate God's power, which transforms them into beings resembling God. God comes to them from outside but becomes part of their existence.

Verse 6[54][5][55] : וַתְּחַסְּרֵהוּ[56] מְעַט מֵאֱלֹהִים וְכָבוֹד וְהָדָר תְּעַטְּרֵהוּ[57] *"You have elevated him to almost divine stature and You have crowned him with glory and dignity."* emphasises humanity as a delicate yet noble part of creation. Man is created in God's image, and it is clear from the subsequent part of the psalm that its authors and transmitters are intensely focused on this theme in Gen1:26a : וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם בְּצַלְמֵנוּ כִּדְמוּתֵנוּ

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51 אֱנוֹשׁ – *homo* – *biological species, mortal, male; man in his fragility and transience; contracted form* אֱנוֹשׁ < נשׁ* – *creature subject to disease; Menschheit, Menschen, Leuten* in Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebrew and Aramaic Dictionary of the Old Testament* (Berlin – Göttingen – Heidelberg: Springer Verlag, 1962), 53.

52 I use this widely debated and common term, which comes from geochronology, as a methodological idea in theological anthropology.

53 Benjamin Sommer, "Hebrew Humanism: A Commentary on Psalm 8 כרך יא ופרשנות עיוני מקרא" (Ramat Gan: Bar-Ilan University Press, 2020), 7–32.

54 *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia.*

55 *"Yet you have made them a little lower than God and crowned them with glory and honor,"* in *NRSVUE.*

56 Piel, *to cause to want.* In Wilhelm Gesenius, *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament* (London: Bagster, 1857), 295.

57 Piel, *to surround with a crown.* Ibid., 621.

"God said, 'Let us make human in our image, after our likeness'"[58] and Gen1:27a : וַיִּבְרָ֨א אֱלֹהִ֤ים ׀ אֶת־הָֽאָדָם֙ בְּצַלְמ֔וֹ בְּצֶ֥לֶם אֱלֹהִ֖ים בָּרָ֣א אֹת֑וֹ : *"God created human in His own image, in the image of God He created him."*[59]

The statements explicitly expressed in Genesis are developed creatively. Linguistically and semantically, there is a connection between the expression כבוד from the eighth psalm and the term אלהים from Gen 1:26a; 27a.[60] The sixth verse of the psalm also poetically elaborates on the correlation between royal majesty and humanity, recognising that people have the right to aspire to the royal role.[61] However, this power is always inextricably linked to responsibility and protection. In addition to the traditional literary and theological resonance of the psalm and the beginning of Genesis, I will focus on the relationship between humans and their environment, the nature of which entitles them to rule or be ruled. Within the microcosmos, humans increasingly control their environment. However, in terms of global reach, they are still bound to the earth and many events on their planet, not to mention the cosmos, and are entirely at the mercy of forces beyond their control. The psalm poetically points to human limitations and God's mercy without stating whether we are moving closer to or farther from God. Like the first chapter of Genesis, the psalm anticipates the Anthropocene, in which humans play a central role. It certainly bolsters human confidence, but it also celebrates God's grace, which comes to humans from outside.

The table provides an overview of the linguistic development of the word "man," which also influenced its conception in the aforementioned poetic text.

lullû	Sumerian-Akkadian	biological species, transient being
mt	Ugaritic	biological species, transient being
אֱנוֹש	Hebrew	biological species, transient being

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58 *"Then God said, 'Let us make humans in our image, according to our likeness',"* in *NRSVUE*.

59 *"So God created humans in his image, in the image of God he created them,"* Ibid.

60 Sommer, "Hebrew Humanism," 21.

61 We observe that humanity possesses greater authority to intervene in creation and manage it than in *Enūma elish* and *Enūma ilū awēlum*. An intriguing idea of man as ruler of creation in the Ugaritic and Biblical traditions is examined in Nick Wyatt's work. Nick Wyatt, *Myths of Power: A Study of Royal Myth and Ideology in Ugaritic and Biblical Tradition*, Ugaritisch-biblische Literatur 13 (Münster: Ugarit-Verlag, 1996).

amēlu/awīlu; adamu	Akkadian	name of a biological species; humanity; noble person
adm	Ugaritic	name of a biological species; humanity
אָדָם[62]	Hebrew	name of a biological species; humanity

The psalm also reinterprets the journey of a singular, paradigmatic hero – worthy or unworthy of imitation-as the journey of all humanity, which follows the messianic path.[63] In the psalmic context, the Messiah is seen as a being who has attained a higher state of humanity than others. His uniqueness truly lies in the balance between his anointing by the people and his election by God, whether this is an obvious and objective fact or not. The messianic path serves as a model of individual transhumanism extended to the messianic community, with the aspirational aim of reaching all of humanity and thereby achieving collective transhumanism.[64]

Humans have the potential to go beyond themselves, and biblical psalms, which talk about human possibilities and limits, state that humanity reflects the image of the Creator, who continues to influence or call to the world through His mercy, symbolised figuratively by open arms. If this is true, people must show respect for other beings. This idea of sustainable development, essential for humanity's survival, appears in both biblical and non-biblical traditions and is expressed through the Noahide principles.[65]

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62 אָדָם – "man, human being" – perhaps derived from the redness of blood; human destiny from the beginning of creation to the end of the human race; the prototype of man in *Bereshit raba: The First Man, Ber Rab 8,1ff*. Source: https://www.sefaria.org (accessed 26. 1. 2025).

63 בֶּן־אָדָם – "son of human"; man Ps 8:5; Messiah in connection with Dan 2:38; 5:21.

64 The Messiah is a superhuman; a new Adam – from the Akkadian *adāmum; ada(m)mu* synonymum for "important person" in Black, George and Postgate, *A Concise Dictionary*, 4; and from the Assyrian root *adam* – "an important, a noble person," Civil, *Assyrian Dictionary*, 95.

65 Eva Vymětalová Hrabáková, "Noahide Laws in the Past and Today from the Perspective of Christian Ethics," in Kamila Veverková (ed.), *Bible a etika v kontextu doby a myšlení* (Praha – Chomutov: Husitská teologická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy v Praze, L. Marek, 2014), 39–50. Adam was given six commandments: a) prohibition of worshipping false gods; b) prohibition of cursing God; c) prohibition of murder; d) prohibition of incest and adultery; e) prohibition of theft; f) the commandment to establish laws and courts. Although we received all these commandments from Moses, and they are concepts that the intellect tends to accept, it is clear from the words of the Torah that Adam was commanded regarding them… *Mishneh Torah, Kingdom and Wars 9–10*. Source: https://www.sefaria.org (accessed 26. 1. 2025).

The Noahide rules for coexistence, based on Gen 9:1–7, serve as a guide for the nations and extend Adam's principles of coexistence to everyone. The foundation is built on respect for oneself and others in all parts of life. The principles of coexistence established by Adam and Noah greatly raise human dignity and create a barrier against abuse. Still, a deep respect for human limits remains strong.

5. Psalm 103: The Crown of Creation and Wild Flowers

[14] כִּי-הוּא יָדַע יִצְרֵנוּ זָכוּר כִּי-עָפָר אֲנָחְנוּ: *"He knows that we are transient beings, and remembers that we are dust."*[66]

זָכוּר	verb. Imperative/3rd person singular perfect	to remember
כִּי	conjunction	that
עָפָר	nomen. nom. sg.	dust (polysemic sentence)
אֲנָחְנוּ	pronomen	we (humanity)

While Psalm 8 emphasises human dignity through its uniqueness and universality, Psalm 103 also reflects this theme in contrast.[67] It is evident that the psalm aligns with the first three chapters of Genesis, developing the idea of man's origin from the dust of the earth, for הָאָדָם is an earthling connected to the (red) earth and entrusted with the stewardship of terrestrial things.[68] The stewardship of heavenly matters, the gateway to paradise, remains under the Lord's protection. The biblical God shows mercy, evidenced by God's knowledge (יָדַע) and memory (זָכוּר) towards mankind, whom He directly cares for, sharing His image (צֶלֶם/תְמוּנָה) with him. Man, like the face of the whole world, passes away. Human individuality and society are fragile, undergoing cycles that lead to their end, changing form much like wildflowers or desert plants that bloom and then wither within hours. Ultimately, they are transformed into biological matter, metaphorically described as dust. Humans originate biologically, their bodies withering, decaying, and ultimately disintegrating. Human nature, like all forms

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66 *"For he knows how we were made; he remembers that we are dust,"* in *NRSVUE*.

67 Roberto Manzocco, *Transhumanism – Engineering the Human Condition. History, Philosophy and Current Status* (Cham: Springer, 2019).

68 Balogh, "Myth, Meaning," 20–22.

of existence, tends, at least from a human perspective, towards finitude.[69] Humans have no different point of view because they lack other experiences. However, in transcendence, they can imagine totality, something entirely different. This is where the potential of collective transhumanism, or rather posthumanism, resides: an ongoing openness to the new, rooted in the past, which remains preserved in memory. Just as Gilgamesh stored his story in a precious box, the story of man's cooperation with God/gods remains sealed within the box of memory. If the humanity of the Anthropocene forgets its origins, it will turn to dust. This is not the inevitable fate of the individual but a threat to all earthlings-a reminder, indirectly expressed by the hero Aqhat.

Theologians view this openness as a fragile human being, standing at the peak of creation within divine time and space. From the Psalms presented, I believe that biblical language concerning humanity employs the metaphor of God's memory, represented by the terms זָכַר/זָכוֹר.[70] The eternal existence of humankind depends on whether it is preserved in the memory of its Creator. It is enough that the original cause of our existence remembers us as dust, from which we can rise again as new beings. Yet, God allows humanity to determine for itself the kind of beings it will become and to decide freely according to its conscience, and thus its responsibility.[71] From the perspective of theological anthropology, however, it is necessary to move from earth to the universe. An intercultural, interreligious, and anthropocentric interpretation considers man as part of creation, which he rules over thanks to his intelligence, but which he also can threaten and even destroy. When examining the psalms in the context of biblical texts, the first three chapters of Genesis, in particular, come to mind.

The hero Gilgamesh abandons his desire for personal immortality and focuses on his legacy for future generations. His shadow figure, Urshanabi, in a modern adaptation of Gilgamesh's quest, recognises the pitfalls of artificially prolonging life and the values that fulfil human destiny and give it meaning. The hero Aqhat does not consider prolonging or repeating the

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69 The Ugaritic hero Aqhat reckons with his mortality.

70 Gesenius, *Hebrew and Chaldee Lexicon*, 244–245; Cf. Gesenius, *Hebrew and Aramaic Dictionary*, 197–199.

71 For a reflection on past research on the Psalms and an assessment of the current state of affairs, readers are recommended to consult the thorough overview study by E. McDonnell Jr.: Eric McDonnell Jr., "The Role of Context in the Study of the Psalms," *Currents in Biblical Research* 23:3 (2025), 197–242. DOI: 10.1177/1476993X251345835.

life cycle to be a path worthy of a hero. The heroic life is clear and straight-forward, as his descendants will attest to his name. The messianic, unique personality of Psalm 8, portrayed with the royal majesty of man, ultimately refers, as in previous narratives, to the potential of all humanity, which will prevail thanks to grace from above, from the Lord. Psalm 103 offers a message about human and divine memory, in which the earthly world and human ideas about the Creator's intervention in creation are mythopoetically intertwined. It draws a parallel between the soil of *ha-adama* and *Adam*. The derivative of the soil is dust, which man was and will be. However, the Creator can, if man so desires, create a new man from dust, another generation, a post-humanity, one that will reevaluate its relationship to the whole of creation and to the Creator.

The poetic language of the psalms beautifully complements the grand narrative of Gilgamesh and the smaller story of Aqhat. It is natural for humans to contemplate endings by comparing them with the world around us. Every interpretation of the ancient works mentioned above is deeply connected to our human experience and provides endless opportunities for understanding. Through the creative connection between ancient texts and actual theological and philosophical discussions, we see that although we shape our future, how it unfolds does not solely depend on us or our creations.

Conclusion

In my view, the risk of transhumanism[72] lies in its wavering between ideology and utopia. Science, including technological progress and artificial entities, should coexist with the naturalness of all creatures, combined with a belief in the value of all creation and, above all, in the value of the creator, however personally or otherwise defined. Faith in humanity's future involves trust in the memory of creation (the imprint of divine memory), which embodies the essence of the prototype of humankind. Unlike transhumanism, I prefer posthumanism,[73] which establishes new ethical guidelines for the coexis-

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72 In my view, transhumanism from a theological ethics perspective fails to recognise the delicate boundaries of creation, where humans can collaborate with other beings and develop living and non-living aspects of nature, and even contribute to the accessible universe. It often advances through various scientific and technological achievements at the expense of other entities, whether known or yet to be discovered.

73 In 2022, a conference on posthumanism was held in the Czech Republic. Besides exploring and reflecting on all aspects of posthumanism, the conference suggested ways to

tence of all components of being and recognises their value from their own perspective, not solely from a human point of view, providing a framework for theological discourse and theological anthropology.[74] This view assumes that humanity is evolving within an ongoing process of creation. A related discipline to posthumanism is process theology, which uses the familiar metaphor of God, who encourages the development of creation with His call. Humanity responds to this voice when it engages in the process, learning humility and maintaining reverence for the mystery of creation.[75] Posthumanism seeks to promote a positive and beneficial coexistence between humans and other elements of the world. In my opinion, posthumanism is a form of humanism that learns from past mistakes and aims to prevent them from happening again. When pride takes over, humanity risks self-induced extinction. The potential that lies beyond our current limits serves as a warning of humanity's future as an open, rather than closed, perspective, implying this either directly or indirectly, as reflected in ancient philosophical sources. Therefore, it makes sense to revisit the ancient texts presented here through the perspective of posthumanism.

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consider the possibilities of humanity as a living being. Humanity must strive for life. "In general, it can be assumed that in our time, a struggle for the future conception of man has begun." Hauser, "From Posthumanism to Hyperhumanism," 10–29. Posthumanism is not about developing humans at the expense of other beings, but about expanding humanity's potential to improve relations with other creatures. Naturally, it also considers a functional and beneficial relationship between humans, other creatures, and human creations.

74 Among the most respected representatives are Charles Hasthorne, *Omnipotence and Other Theological Mistakes* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1984); Czech systematic theologian Petr Gallus, *Perspektiva vzkříšení: Trinitární christologie [Perspective of Resurrection: Trinitarian Christology]* (Prague: Karolinum, 2022); Petr Gallus, *Člověk před Bohem* (Prague: Karolinum, 2024).

75 It can be viewed as a counterpart to the committed and active repair of the world, which embodies the concept of *tikkun olam* in Judaism. It is believed that performing virtuous deeds helps repair the world and preserve life (*nefesh chaj*). From a theological anthropology perspective, this signifies a form of cooperation with a divine entity to secure the salvation of creation. Cf. Rebbe Nachman of Breslov explains that each person should see the world as created for their sake, feeling a personal obligation to improve and pray for it. This prominent Chasidic master emphasises the individual's role in bettering the world. *"Now, each person must say: 'The entire world was created only for my sake' (Sanhedrin 37a). Consequently, because the world was created for my sake, I must constantly look into and consider ways of making the world better; to provide what is missing in the world and pray on its behalf." Likutei Moharan 5:1:2.* Source: https://www.sefaria.org (accessed 26. 8. 2025).

The ancient texts mentioned (Gilgamesh, Aqhat, and the two Psalms) serve as a fundamental starting point for human action concerning the future. These texts should not be regarded merely as relics of the past; they hold the potential to shape the future development of civilisation. Their messages offer essential insights into choosing civilisation's destiny.

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