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**Conflict Resolution in Different
Theological Traditions**

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CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION	5
THEME	
Conflict Resolution in Different Theological Traditions	
TIM NOBLE	
The Role of Time in Conflict Resolution in the Thought of Pope Francis	11
TABITA LANDOVÁ	
Religious and Secular Rituals in Conflict Resolution and Reconciliation	29
NAJIB GEORGE AWAD	
The Role of Identity-Remembrance in the Syrian Refugees' Adaptability: An Interdisciplinary Assessment.....	55
PAVEL KOLÁŘ	
Rituals Reflecting Various Forms of Human Sociality as Means of Coping with the Covid Crisis.....	75
VARIA	
JEAN REAIDY	
La miséricorde, mère des affects divins et humains : une lecture théologique et phénoménologique	101
MAGDALENA MARUNOVÁ	
Gregory of Nyssa's Use of the Expression <i>ἀπαύγασμα</i>	113

PETR MACEK
Marxism and Catholic Intellectual Milieu in Interwar Czechoslovakia 135

ONDŘEJ HAVELKA
Contemporary African Postcolonial Theology: Found Balance,
Interreligious and Interdenominational Dialogue, Rehabilitation
of Relations with Traditional Religions, and Reflection on Syncretisms 153

INTRODUCTION

In October 2024 a conference took place in Prague with the title ‘Beyond Wars and Anathemas: Hermeneutics of Conflict Resolution in Different Theological Traditions’.¹ The aim of the conference was to see how different theological and indeed religious traditions presented ways to move beyond the language of necessary conflict and exclusion to search for resolution and hope. Writing this amidst ongoing conflict in the Middle East and the appalling claims to religious justification for it issued by certain self-styled ‘Christians’ in the USA, the need for this search for overcoming conflict is still all too relevant.

This issue of our journal contains articles based on four contributions to the conference. The first article from the conference turns to the late Pope Francis. Tim Noble, from the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University, looks at two of the pope’s four principles, that time is superior to space and that unity prevails over conflict, and shows how these relate to his condemnation of war as always a failure. It then goes on to look at the approach of Pope Francis to the war in Ukraine, noting that it was criticised by some in Ukraine, though also attempting to show that it is consistent with his overall thought.

The second article is one of two that deal with questions of ritual, pointing to the central importance of varying forms of ritual in

¹ The conference was organized by Professor Ivana Noble and her teams working on the projects Charles University Centre of Excellence: Theological Anthropology in Intercultural Perspective (No. UNCE/24/SSH/019) and the European Regional Development Fund project ‘Beyond Security: Role of Conflict in Resilience-Building’ (reg. no.: CZ.02.01.01/00/22_008/0004595). This editorial and the relevant articles are part of the work supported by these two projects.

understanding and working with situations of conflict. In her article, the Protestant liturgical theologian Tabita Landová looks at the role which such rituals, both secular and religious, can play in helping to come to terms with the emotional and psychological aspects of conflict and their healing.

The political philosopher Chantal Mouffe speaks of agonistics, of the struggles between conflicting hegemonies. If played out according to the same rules, then these struggles can occur peacefully, but when one side refuses to play by the rules, we have antagonism and conflict. In these circumstances, forms of resolution are required, and if they are to be successful, they have to be enacted, and this requires ritual expression. Landová's article looks at this, first in terms of secular and religious rituals, with the stress on religious ritual in the reparation of relationships between humans but also between humans and God. Ritual brings about transformation and this is seen in a short reflection on post-World War Two Czech – German relations, which sought to deal with the traumatic events associated in the first half of the century with the Sudeten regions of the country.

The third article is by a Syrian Protestant theologian Najib George Awab. It reflects on the ways in which Syrian refugees are forced to seek their identity in different settings, using a hermeneutical tripod of identity, relationality and othering. Seeking refuge is one obvious response to situations of conflict, and once again we are seeing that nations who refuse to accept those who seek refuge are among those most likely to cause the need for refuge in the first place. From a Christian theological point of view, refugees have long been regarded as almost archetypical for those to whom a special duty of care is commanded. They are the landless, the widows and orphans and strangers. Pope Francis, the subject of the first article, was merely continuing a long tradition in voicing his support for such people. Accompanying refugees in their search for a new or reinforced identity in new settings is a key task for churches today, even against the rhetoric of so many political parties across Europe and beyond.

In his contribution, the Hussite liturgical scholar Pavel Kolář returns to questions of ritual, in his case especially linked to events around the time of Covid. Here conflict is not in terms so much of violence or war, but in how we deal with challenges to human social life, the conflict in the case of Covid being between our needs for interaction and the demands of lockdown that made normal human socialization

often almost impossible. The article looks at the different ways in which societies in general and Christian communities in particular sought to invent or reinvent forms of social participation, even in the midst of isolation.

Whether or not Covid was the cause, it is clearly the case that social media have led to a widespread desocialisation of society, in which interaction with the other has been replaced by interaction with versions of the self (those who agree with me). This is what Emmanuel Levinas calls totality, the reduction of the other to the I, and as a result the sense of entitlement, that my world is the only one, and that everyone is obliged to agree with me. It is not surprising that this finds political expression in extremism and hatred, here in the Czech Republic as well as elsewhere. Public rituals are one way of rediscovering the other and a sense of community that moves beyond the same, beyond homogeneity to an embrace of difference.

It has to be acknowledged that if conflicts could be resolved by writing, the world would probably be a more peaceful place. And yet, it is the task of theologians both to reflect on what happens, pointing out strengths and weaknesses, and at the same time to dare to imagine another world, where conflict is not the first step and where peace and justice can flourish. This is possible and experienced in many of the small everyday encounters, where people negotiate shared spaces with humour and kindness and attention to the other. God is found at work in our world, and the task of theology is to speak of this God, against all attempts to tame him for people's own nefarious uses, in our theological faculties or elsewhere. The articles in this issue are a contribution to that task.

Tim Noble

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THEME

**Conflict Resolution in Different
Theological Traditions**

THE ROLE OF TIME IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION IN THE THOUGHT OF POPE FRANCIS

TIM NOBLE

ABSTRACT

This article engages with the way in which Pope Francis worked with his principle that time is superior to space, and how this influences his approach to conflict resolution. It begins by offering a short introduction to the principle itself, also in relation to another of the pope's four principles, that unity prevails over conflict. It then addresses Pope Francis's opposition to war, showing how he saw it as always a failure, given his vision of what it is to be human before God. The final part of the article critically investigates the pope's response to the Russian invasion of Ukraine, pointing both to the problems that have arisen from it, especially in Ukraine, and yet seeking to show the consistency in the pope's approach.

Keywords

Pope Francis; Four Principles; Time; Space; Ukraine; Resilience; Theological Anthropology

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One of the inevitable tasks faced by the papacy, at least since the Middle Ages, is to try to engage in conflict resolution.¹ Mostly, at

¹ For more on the medieval practices of the Roman curia, see the essays in Jessica Nowak and Georg Strack (eds.), *Stilus – Modus – Usus : Regeln der Konflikt- und Verhandlungsführung am Papsthof des Mittelalters / Rules of Negotiation and Conflict Resolution at the Papal Court in the Middle Ages* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2019), which point to the ways in which the church dealt with conflict of various kinds (what we might call today international, as well as local or even monastic). For ways in which what we might call conflict resolution techniques were used even earlier, in respect of doctrinal or ecclesial matters, see also Bronwen Neil, 'Addressing Conflict in the Fifth Century: Rome and the Wider Church,' *Scrinium* 14 (2018): 92–114.

least at a diplomatic level, this is done behind the scenes, with varying degrees of success.² Some of the conflicts are within the Roman Catholic Church itself, others with other Christian bodies or other faiths, but many of them are the conflicts we see or hear or read about every day – at the time of writing, especially Russia’s invasion of Ukraine or the conflict between Israel and Hamas with its devastating repercussions for the Palestinian people, especially those living in Gaza.

Arguably to a greater degree than any of his predecessors, Pope Francis engaged publicly in commenting on these and other conflicts, not always in ways that have pleased those involved in them.³ Whether the criticisms of his stance are valid or not will not be my major focus in this paper, however. Rather, I want to look at the grounds on which his stance is built, to show that at least there is a coherency to his position, even if for many it is not acceptable or popular. To do this, I will start first with a brief consideration of two of his four principles, namely that time is superior to space and second, that unity prevails over conflict. I will then look at the late pope’s treatment of conflict in *Evangelii Gaudium* and *Fratelli Tutti*, before moving on to consider his responses especially to the war in Ukraine.

1. The four principles of Pope Francis

The history of the development of Pope Francis’s four principles is long, and I have dealt with it in more detail elsewhere.⁴ Here it is worth noting the influence of Romano Guardini on Francis’s thinking,

² One of the best-known examples is the intervention of the Holy See in resolving the Beagle Channel dispute between Chile and Argentina, which almost led the Argentinean dictatorship to declare war on Chile in 1978. Given his background, it is likely that this act of mediation is not insignificant for Pope Francis. See on the dispute and its resolution, Santiago Manuel Alles, ‘De la Crisis del Beagle al Acta de Montevideo de 1979. El establecimiento de la Mediación en un «juego en dos niveles»,’ *Estudios Internacionales* 44, no. 169 (2011): 79–117, and Peter van Aert, ‘The Beagle Conflict,’ *Island Studies Journal* 11, no. 1 (2016): 307–314.

³ An example would be the criticism voiced by Major Archbishop Sviatoslav, head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, cited in Thomas Mark Németh, ‘The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Pope Francis, and Russia’s War against Ukraine,’ especially the section entitled ‘UGCC Major Archbishop Sviatoslav’s Position,’ available at <https://talkabout.iclrs.org/2023/09/18/the-ukrainian-greek-catholic-church-the-pope-francis> (accessed 11 November 2024).

⁴ Tim Noble, *Liberation Against Entitlement: Conflicting Theologies of Grace and Clashing Populisms* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2022), especially pp. 162–174, with bibliography.

especially Guardini's concept of opposition,⁵ or, as my wife and I have called it elsewhere, non-synthetic dialectics.⁶ That is to say, two concepts are kept in tension (Francis often refers to it as 'bipolar tension', which is to say, a tension between two opposing poles), and both are recognised as important, without any need to synthesise them. Thus, in general, the principles deal with comparatives (time is superior to place, the reality is more important than the idea, the whole is greater than (or superior to) the parts).⁷

Time is superior to space

As elaborated in *Evangelii Gaudium*,⁸ the first of the four principles is that time is superior to space. It is worth quoting what Pope Francis has to say about this principle in full:

A constant tension⁹ exists between fullness and limitation. Fullness evokes the desire for complete possession, while limitation is a wall set before us. Broadly speaking, 'time' has to do with fullness as an expression of the horizon which constantly opens before us, while each individual moment has to do with limitation as an expression of enclosure. People live poised between each individual moment and the greater, brighter horizon of the utopian future as the final cause which draws us to itself. Here we see a first principle for progress in building a people: time is greater than space.¹⁰

Although he uses the word 'time', the concept of plenitude (or in more theological language *plēroma*) really goes beyond the chronological, just as space goes beyond the 'topical' or geographical. It is

⁵ For a very brief overview and references, see Noble, *Liberation against Entitlement*, 163–164.

⁶ Ivana Noble and Tim Noble, 'A Non-Synthetic Dialectics between the Christian East and West: A Starting Point for Renewed Communication,' in *Kommunikation ist möglich: Theologische, ökumenische und interreligiöse Lernprozesse. Festschrift für Bernd Jochen Hilberath*, ed. Christine Büchner et al. (Ostfildern: Matthias Grünewald Verlag, 2013), 273–281.

⁷ The other principle, that unity prevails over conflict, is also to some extent comparative.

⁸ The Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* was the first major document solely authored by Pope Francis, and was issued on 24 November 2013. Originally written in Italian, the official English translation can be found at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium.html. References will be to this version, using the abbreviation EG and the relevant paragraph number.

⁹ The Spanish text reads 'una tensión bipolar.'

¹⁰ EG 222.

important to remember this, since the pope does not want to ignore the importance of the local, which is indeed at the heart of a lot of what he said and did – a synodal church necessarily involves embarking on a journey together, and all journeys have to be located somewhere, and that ‘where’ matters. Moreover, the emphasis on culture, central to the Argentinean theology of the people¹¹ that has influenced Pope Francis’s thought, is a clear indication of the role of place.

Rather, what this principle is interested in is something like the difference between a short-term approach (governed by electoral terms, for example) and a long-term approach. In the short term, which he here names ‘space’, there is the need to jockey for power, to act immediately or as fast as possible, ultimately to colonise the space. Now here it is necessary to remember the comparative of the principle – time is superior to space, it does not replace it. That is to say, within the limitations of the present moment – ‘limitation as an expression of enclosure’¹²– actions have to be taken. When the escape artist is padlocked in a box under water, they need to get out, not look to the long-term implications on society or the environment of their actions. Or, when someone hungry comes looking for food, it is not enough to promise to change the system so that they will not have to go hungry in the future, but it is also necessary to give them something to eat.

And yet, as that last example suggests, to be stuck in the moment is not sufficient or the most desirable. In terms of hunger, the word ‘fullness’ is indeed appropriate. How can a system be created that means that people do not go hungry? It is not that there is insufficient food in the world to feed everyone,¹³ but that it is not shared evenly and not well-used, and that is something that can be changed. But short-term

¹¹ For a brief overview of Argentinean theology of the people, see Noble, *Liberation against Entitlement*, 151–162. See also Guzmán Carriquiry Lecour, ‘The “Theology of the People” in the Pastoral Theology of Jorge Mario Bergoglio,’ in Brian Lee and Thomas Knoebel (eds.), *Discovering Pope Francis. The Roots of Jorge Mario Bergoglio’s Thinking* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press Academic, 2019), 42–69.

¹² EG 222.

¹³ ‘Global agricultural systems produce 4 million metric tonnes of food each year. If the food were equitably distributed, this would feed an extra one billion people. [The figures are taken from Matti Kumm et al., ‘Lost Food, Wasted Resources. Global Food Supply Chain Losses and their Impact on Freshwater, Cropland and Fertiliser Use’, *Science of the Total Environment* 458, no. 1 (2012): 477–89]. But while we already produce enough food for more people than currently live on Earth, it doesn’t necessarily mean we will be able to feed a growing population.’ Lauren Lewis, ‘Why Producing More Food Doesn’t Mean Less Hunger,’ at <https://www.foodunfolded.com/article/feeding-a-growing-population-do-we-really-need-to-produce-more-food#:~:text=Global%20>

approaches have created a world of entitlements, of expectations in many parts of the world that we should be able to eat what we want when we want it. Thus while some throw out food, others do not have enough.¹⁴ That all might be full requires escaping from the limitations of the current moment, or, in Francis's words, recognising that time is superior to space.

At first glance, none of the pope's principles appear to be directly theological.¹⁵ For the first three, it is true, he adduces a couple of scriptural references, but these are more illustrative than probative. The only other citation in the paragraphs (222–25) in *Evangelii Gaudium* on the principle that time is superior to space is from Romano Guardini: 'The only measure for properly evaluating an age is to ask to what extent it fosters the development and attainment of a full and authentically meaningful human existence, in accordance with the peculiar character and the capacities of that age.'¹⁶ Nevertheless, even this quotation points to the importance of the eschatological – how does an age enable people to become what they are,¹⁷ how does it open up the path

agricultural%20systems%20produce%204,an%20extra%20one%20billion%20people (accessed 20 September 2024).

¹⁴ For example, in the UK, 9.5 million tonnes of food is thrown out each year. At the same time, over eight million people are using food banks, because they cannot afford to buy food for themselves or their families. See <https://www.businesswaste.co.uk/food-waste-the-facts> (accessed 20 September 2024). Although the UK may be worse than many other countries, the problem is not unique to there. See, for example, Petra Nováková, Tomáš Háek, and Svatava Janoušková, 'An Analysis of Food Waste in Czech Households – A Contribution to the International Reporting Effort,' *Foods* 10, no. 4 (2021): 875. doi: 10.3390/foods10040875. They calculate the average waste as 57 kg a year per person, or roughly 610 000 tonnes a year. The same paper states that global food waste is in the region of 1.3 billion tonnes a year, whilst at least 11% of the world population suffers from chronic undernourishment. This is without taking into account the carbon dioxide emissions of decaying food waste, with 8%–10% of global greenhouse gas emissions associated with unconsumed food (see Introduction, page 1 of 17).

¹⁵ As Álvaro Mendonça Pimentel, 'O tempo é superior ao espaço: O princípio das mudanças sociais e eclesiais no magistério de Francisco,' *Perspectiva Teológica* 54, no. 3 (2022): 683–701, says in the introduction to his excellent essay on the principles, they appeared 'mysterious for some, abstract for others, and even far removed from a theological, biblical or Wisdom perspective' (684).

¹⁶ *Evangelii Gaudium* 224, citing Romano Guardini, *Das Ende der Neuzeit* (Würzburg: Werkbund, 1965), 30–31.

¹⁷ For a recent book, looking at this movement from who we are to who we are to become, see Ivana Noble and Zdenko Širka, eds., *Kdo je člověk? Teologická antropologie ekumenický* (Praha: Karolinum, 2021). English translation: Ivana Noble and Zdenko Širka, eds., *Who Is the Human Being? An Ecumenical Approach to Theological Anthropology*, trans. Tim Noble (Leiden: Brill, 2026).

to *plēroma* and theosis, the fullness of human life in God?¹⁸ Or as Pope Francis puts in EG 222, ‘People live poised between each individual moment and the greater, brighter horizon of the utopian future as the final cause which draws us to itself.’

However, the question remains as to how this principle links both to the next principle, that unity prevails over conflict, and to the role of time in relation to conflict resolution in the thought of Pope Francis. It is to this that I now turn.

2. Conflict resolution

To begin with the relation between the two principles, we can turn to *Fratelli Tutti*,¹⁹ where without specifically citing the principle, the pope has this to say:

Today too, outside the ancient town walls lies the abyss, the territory of the unknown, the wilderness. Whatever comes from there cannot be trusted, for it is unknown, unfamiliar, not part of the village. It is the territory of the ‘barbarian,’ from whom we must defend ourselves at all costs. As a result, new walls are erected for self-preservation, the outside world ceases to exist and leaves only ‘my’ world, to the point that others, no longer considered human beings possessed of an inalienable dignity, become only ‘them.’ (FT 27)

Remembering the definition of space as the limitations of the moment, the problem is the self-limiting caused by the rejection and alienation of the other. Such alienation has become, sadly, an increasing common feature of our present political landscape, where practices of scapegoating the other are an everyday occurrence, even if, as

¹⁸ See Tim Noble, ‘*Theosis and Pleroma in East and West: Integral Freedom*,’ in John Arblaster and Rob Faesen (eds.), *Theosis / Deification: Christian Doctrines of Divinization East and West* (BETL 249) (Leuven: Peeters, 2018), 129–147.

¹⁹ *Fratelli Tutti* is the third encyclical issued by Pope Francis, on 3 October 2020. For a close reading of the text, see Noble, *Liberation against Entitlement*, 175–213. The English text can be found at https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20201003_enciclica-fratelli-tutti.html. At the top of the page of this document are choices for different languages, including Italian and Spanish. The translation is a good English one, but that inevitably leads to the loss of some nuances. The text will be cited according to the Vatican website, using the abbreviation FT and the relevant paragraph number (these are the same across the texts).

René Girard convincingly demonstrated, scapegoating never works in the long run.²⁰

In acting thusly, conflict is more or less hardwired into the world, because the interest is in possessing spaces – cultural, geographical, mental, perhaps even spiritual. The latter is because there is a regression to a spatial sense of divinity, a kind of twisted *genius loci*. Our god is god of our space, and no other god can be worshipped here – and I use lower case advisedly, for claims to be defending Christianity are blasphemous in the strongest sense of the word, for they deny the presence of the Holy Spirit at work throughout the world.

Now it is also necessary to remember that, for the pope, there are certain struggles that are legitimate. The English subheading for paragraphs 241–43 of *Fratelli Tutti* is ‘Legitimate Conflicts and Forgiveness’. The Spanish text speaks, though, not directly of conflicts but of ‘luchas’, struggles. In this sense, there is always necessarily present what the London-based Belgian political scientist, Chantal Mouffe, calls ‘agonistics’.²¹ That is to say, between competing hegemonies, competing ways of seeking to organise the world, there is always a struggle. Mouffe deliberately distinguishes between ‘agonistic’ encounters and ‘antagonistic’ ones. An agonistic approach is something like a football match, especially one that cannot end in a draw. Both sides want to win and are prepared to struggle for supremacy, but (generally speaking) they do so within the laws of the game and within the boundaries of the football pitch. If they transgress the laws, they accept the punishments (more or less willingly, of course). Thus politics is agonistic when both sides accept the basic rules of engagement in a liberal democracy and are prepared to accept the results of a free and fair vote. The alternative approach, without naming names, is antagonistic, both refusing to accept and abide by the laws of the game, and in terms of seeking out and enhancing conflict, not for the common good, but for one side’s own gain.

The expression of *agon*, *lucha*, struggle, is necessary and right. As Francis says in FT 244, ‘Authentic reconciliation does not flee from conflict, but is achieved *in* conflict, resolving it through dialogue and open, honest and patient negotiation.’ In this sense, conflict is not necessarily

²⁰ See, for example, René Girard, *The Scapegoat*, trans. by Yvonne Freccero (London: Athlone, 1986).

²¹ Chantal Mouffe, *Agonistics. Thinking the World Politically* (London: Verso, 2015).

negative, but rather neutral. It can be used for good or for ill, for finding ways to reconciliation or for oppressing and harming the other. But if it is to be used for good, it will take time – ‘patient negotiation’, the pope calls it. So part of the problem and what does need time is to move from seeing conflict as antagonistic, in which only the destruction (at least in some sense) of the other will satisfy, to embracing it as potentially agonistic, a struggle between two opposing, even ultimately irreconcilable, positions that are nevertheless prepared to recognise the other as legitimate.

Unity prevails over conflict, not by creating a lowest-common denominator uniformity (let’s find something, however banal, we can all agree on), but simply by recognising that diversity is not or need not be a threat, but a blessing, a cause not of division and conflict but precisely of unity. Of course, this is what is sometimes dismissed as a utopian view, the dream in Isaiah of the lion and the calf lying down together,²² of the sword being turned into a ploughshare.²³ Even if there are enough (perhaps fake) videos on YouTube and elsewhere of strange pairs of animals adopting each other to make us hope the first could happen, the second, especially in today’s world, seems less likely. Even if realistically it would appear that it is never going to happen, the question is always ‘why not?’. The reversal to the traditional childhood cry of ‘You started it’ is all too familiar but remains childish in the worst possible sense of the term. That the world rarely appears to be other does not in itself mean that it cannot be, or that there is no eschatological vision worth holding as a goal.²⁴

It is also worth pointing out here that most of what the pope has to say about conflict is related to larger-scale problems, rather than the kind of conflicts that occur between individuals, in relationships at home or in work. On the other hand, it is probably true that most of our actual experience of conflict is at this level. The principles may be similar – the need for open, honest and patient [transparent, sincere and patient in Spanish] negotiation is a requirement for overcoming

²² Isaiah 11:6–9.

²³ Isaiah 2:4.

²⁴ One of the best introductory texts on utopia and eschatological hope remains João Batista Libanio, ‘Esperanza, utopía, resurrección,’ in *Mysterium liberationis: Conceptos fundamentales de la teología de la liberación*, ed. Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuría, 2 vols. (San Salvador: UCA Editores, 2nd ed., 1992), 2: 495–510 (= ‘Hope, Utopia, Resurrection,’ in *Systematic Theology: Perspectives from Liberation Theology*, ed. Jon Sobrino and Ignacio Ellacuría (London: SCM, 1996), 279–290).

intrapersonal conflicts as much as ones at a larger social level, such as between unions and employers, or at an international level. However, it is helpful to distinguish between different types of conflicts, and to begin at the level of the conflicts people face most often. By learning to deal with these in a creative and constructive way, that takes time, that involves both sides ceding claims for total control of space, that privileges unity, societies can learn to be societies of conflict resolution rather than conflict initiation.

Unambiguous examples of this are, it has to be said, rare. The usual cases that are adduced are those of places like Rwanda,²⁵ South Africa, or Northern Ireland,²⁶ but in all of them conflict is present to a greater or less extent. These countries, with their direct engagement with the history of conflict between their peoples, have at least made some effort to acknowledge and deal with the suffering. In other places, the failure to deal with conflict, between a safeguarded if limited past and a seemingly free yet equally or more limited and insecure future has had a similar impact, leading people to seek security in far-right populisms that, as already noted above, create scapegoats out of even weaker minorities. Faced with these political choices, Christians will have to be engaged in conflict, for justice, for hope, for unity. This will take time, listening, trying to understand, rejecting what is evil and searching for ways forward that take seriously the fears and needs of those who feel excluded from their own history and look back to false golden ages.

This means that there will have to be responses from Christians, which is not quite the same as saying a ‘Christian response’, to situations of conflicts. Not surprisingly, the papal documents are not the places to search for concrete proposals for particular situations. But there are other ways in which the pope did respond to particular situations, so it is time now to look at how he did this and whether it is right

²⁵ See with reference to the religious dimension, Christine Schliesser, ‘Christian perspective: Religion in pre-genocide and genocide Rwanda,’ in Christine Schliesser, S. Ayse Kadayifci-Orellana, Pauline Kollontai, *On the Significance of Religion in Conflict and Conflict Resolution* (London: Routledge, 2020), 49–60. doi: 10.4324/9781005002888-8 and Samuel Cyuma, *Unity and Reconciliation in Rwanda: Lessons from South Africa* (Minneapolis, MN: 1517 Media, 2019).

²⁶ On both South Africa and Northern Ireland, as well as Palestine/Israel, see Benjamin Gidron, Stanley N. Katz, and Yeheskel Hasenfeld (eds.), *Mobilizing for Peace: Conflict Resolution in Northern Ireland, Israel/Palestine, and South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

to accuse him of a failure to understand, or whether he was trying to apply his principles.

3. Pope Francis and the War in Ukraine

It would probably be fair to say that the pope's stance on the war in Ukraine raised criticism, especially from the Ukrainian side, which considered him too soft on Russia and on Putin.²⁷ This at least adds another layer of conflict that needs to be resolved, and to do that would require both sides to take time to listen to each other and to try to understand each other. Here I am going to present especially what I understand to be the position of Francis, emerging from his principles. But it has to be admitted that at the level of communicating his position he was not always able to choose the happiest phrasing, and it is understandable that what people heard him saying (as opposed sometimes to what he actually said) caused considerable hurt.

There is not time to go through all of the pope's comments on the war, but it is clear that he saw his main task to call for what he termed 'the audacity of peace'. He used the phrase in a message addressed to participants of an interfaith prayer meeting for peace in Berlin, held in August 2023, where he had this to say:

We need the 'audacity of peace', which is at the heart of your meeting. Realism is not enough, political considerations are not enough, the strategic approaches implemented so far are not enough. More is needed, because war continues. What is called for is the audacity of peace – right now, because too many conflicts have lasted far too long, so much so that some never seem to end. In a world where everything speeds by, only the end to war seems slow. It takes courage to know how to move in another direction, despite obstacles and real difficulties. The audacity of peace is the prophecy required of those who hold the fate of warring countries in their hands, of the international community, of us all.²⁸

²⁷ See the reference above in footnote 5 to the article by Németh, 'The Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Pope Francis, and Russia's War against Ukraine,' for more examples of this.

²⁸ Pope Francis, 'Message of the Holy Father Francis to the Participants in the International Prayer Meeting for Peace Organised by the Community of Sant'Egidio,' (Berlin, 10–12 September 2023), available at <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2023/documents/20230905-messaggio-sant-egidio-berlino>

This courage to pursue peace²⁹ and simultaneously to refuse war is at the heart of Francis's vision. A Belgian church historian, Jan De Volder, argues in a recent article, however, that Russia's invasion of Ukraine 'constitutes a difficult test for Pope Francis's discourse and action, forcing him to walk a thin tightrope between the dream of peace and the logic of war'.³⁰ To refuse war is one thing, but there has to be a response to threat to life, and this is the dilemma that Francis faced, and which his critics would say that he failed to address adequately. De Volder suggests that, in line with his predecessors for the past hundred years at least, Francis engages in '(1) a vocal prophetic advocacy for peace; (2) a vocal condemnation of acts of violence combined with concrete solidarity with victims; and (3) an agent in international diplomacy',³¹ with the main difference being that his public comments are arguably at odds with the third of those strands of engagement.

Thus, Francis has followed on from the line that was developed by John Paul II, in showing a strong unwillingness to speak about the possibility, even theoretical, of just war. De Volder quotes him as saying 'No war is just. The only just thing is peace.'³² For this reason, it was hard for the pope to defend any form of war, even though he roundly condemned the Russian invasion as 'unacceptable, repugnant, senseless, barbaric, sacrilegious aggression'.³³ He also did not deny the right of Ukraine to defend itself against Russian aggression,³⁴ pointing out that '[t]o defend oneself is not only lawful but also an expression of love of country', and that '[w]ar itself is a mistake... But the right to defense

.html. The Sant'Egidio community, founded in Rome in 1968, has a long history of engagement in conflict resolution and in interfaith activity.

²⁹ A relatively recent collection of the pope's messages on peace, in Italian, is entitled *Contro la guerra. Il coraggio di costruire la pace* (Milan, Vatican: RCS Media Group, Libreria Editrice Vaticana, 2022).

³⁰ Jan De Volder, 'Pope Francis's Contribution to Catholic Thinking and Acting on War and Peace,' *Theological Studies* 84, no. 1 (2023): 30–43, at 31.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 32.

³² Francis and Dominique Wolton, *The Path to Change: Thoughts on Politics and Society* (London: Pan Macmillan, 2018), 27, cited in De Volder, 'Pope Francis's Contribution,' 35.

³³ He reiterated this in remarks made to Jesuits during his visit to Kazakhstan in September 2022: see <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2022-09/pope-francis-jesuits-russia-region-kazakhstan-journey.html#:~:text=Pope%20Francis%20offered%20that%20plea,as%20the%20'Russian%20Region>, (accessed 21 September 2024).

³⁴ He was more explicit in terms of the bombing of Islamic State territories in northern Iran to protect minorities, where he specifically acknowledged the right to stop the aggressor – see De Volder, 'Pope Francis's Contribution,' 34.

yes, that yes, but one must use it when necessary.⁵⁵ Nevertheless, for Francis, violence remains a sign of failure, and the less good path.

There is, then, a deep internal logic to Francis's position. Inclusive time must remain superior to the logic of a space that seeks to exclude. His attitude is also, for some commentators, linked to his recognition that the Roman Catholic Church is no longer a European and North American church, but a worldwide church, with most of its members in the Global South (Africa, Asia and Latin America). John Allen, a noted American commentator on the Vatican, argues that the

best way to make sense of Francis, then, isn't in terms of left versus right, or even East versus West, but North versus South. Across the global South, the conflict in Ukraine is seen largely as a European affair, one without an obvious hero or villain. The pope's call for a halt to arms transfers, an end to the fighting, and negotiations that all sides could support coincides with the majority sentiment among Catholics who don't live in NATO member states.⁵⁶

For those of us much closer to the reality and with connections to those whose country is under threat, this might seem a harsh judgement, and it is almost certainly not the only reason for the pope's position, which as I have argued is more to do with his refusal of war as a solution to any problem. And yet it is a reminder that European problems are no longer the sole defining factor when it comes to papal interest. It may also lead us in Europe to reflect on our attitudes to conflicts in other parts of the world – for example, in the Congo or in South Sudan or Myanmar.

However, even if the pope's position is understandable and consistent, the question can still be reasonably asked if he is right. Francis is arguably referencing his principle that time is superior to space, calling for people to escape from the limitations of space, the desire for control and power over the moment, to look at the longer-term picture, which will require different needs to be satisfied. But on the other

⁵⁵ See <https://www.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/speeches/2022/september/documents/20220915-kazakhstan-voloritorno.html>.

⁵⁶ John L. Allen, 'Why Pope Francis Isn't With the West on Ukraine,' *The Atlantic*, May 5 2023, available at <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2023/05/ukraine-war-pope-francis-position-vatican-geopolitics/673955> (accessed 21 September 2024).

hand, the critiques of his position have come also from people who feel that they are being forced too quickly to accede to demands that they are not yet ready to accept. It is, after all, in a very literal sense, their space that is being attacked, and time is superior to space, but it does not substitute it.

Most of the critiques even from within the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church⁵⁷ could be read in this light, for they take the pope to task for seemingly wanting to impose on them a solution that is not, certainly in their eyes and probably in most other people's eyes, just. To this degree it seems to them that the pope is trying to box them in to a stance that they cannot in conscience take. Part of the problem here is the classic one of who gets to set the agenda in a discussion. For Francis, war is wrong, only peace is just, and therefore all steps must be taken in the search for peace, including negotiating with the enemy. For the Ukrainian hierarchs and others who share their position, war is also wrong, but there is no way in which you can negotiate with an aggressor bent on doing evil – you simply do not sup with the devil, however enticing the menu he offers you may be.

Francis would probably argue that in the end there will have to be negotiation, or a long-drawn out war costing too many human lives that might end in Russian withdrawal or remaining in occupied territory as a *de facto* ceasefire takes place. Given that, it would be better to start the process now, rather than wait. On the other hand, and equally reasonably, the Ukrainian Greek Catholic bishops might argue that there is nothing or no one to negotiate with until such time as Russia changes its leadership and war aims.⁵⁸

A similar dilemma faces the principle of privileging unity over conflict. Here it is perhaps worth commenting briefly on two symbolic actions that led to widespread criticism in the Ukraine. During the Stations of the Cross that take place around the Colosseum on Good Friday, in both 2022 and 2023, Pope Francis invited first a Ukrainian and a Russian young woman, and then a Ukrainian and a Russian boy

⁵⁷ See Thomas Mark Neméth, 'Pope Francis and Russia's War against Ukraine,' *Studia UBB Theol. Cath. Lat.* 68, no. 1 (2023): 92–109. doi: 10.24193/theol.cath.latina.2023.LXVIII.1.04, as well as the online article cited above.

⁵⁸ Neméth, 'Pope Francis and Russia's War against Ukraine,' 94, quotes the nuncio in Kyiv, Archbishop Visvaldas Kubokas, saying 'Reconciliation must come when aggression is stopped. When Ukrainians will be able to save not only their lives but also their freedom. And, of course, we know that reconciliation occurs when the aggressor admits their guilt and apologizes.'

to take part. From his perspective, this is a symbolic action portraying the privileging of unity over conflict. These young people were not at war, even if the countries they came from were, and in and under the cross there is a unity that goes beyond conflict. But for many in Ukraine or supporters of Ukraine elsewhere, it was perceived differently, again partly because it seemed to give superiority to space over time. It was in a sense asking for mutual forgiveness, when the perpetrator of the crime, Russia, had not made any moves even to seek forgiveness or to acknowledge that it needed forgiveness.⁵⁹

Francis has referred on several occasions to the story of the visit of St Francis of Assisi to the Sultan al-Malik al-Kami of Egypt during the time of the Crusades.⁴⁰ On the one hand, then, there is the need to take a first step, to open oneself to the other. But, it needs to be recalled that strictly speaking in the Crusades, as a western European, St Francis was from the side of the aggressor, and for this to work as an example, it would be necessary for Patriarch Kirill to undergo a conversion and go, in whatever is the modern equivalent of sackcloth and ashes, to Kyiv to seek pardon. Symbolic gestures only really work when the interpreters of the symbols agree over their meaning, and unity can only prevail over conflict when both sides are prepared to admit that there is a conflict.

It may be precisely here that time is needed. Whatever the justifications for the conflict,⁴¹ only over time can the courage for peace overcome the brutality and failure of war. The pope's impatience for peace is, from a more universal perspective, understandable, but it does fail to take seriously the centrality of the cultural, the 'theology of the people' to which, as an Argentinean he is so indebted. Thus it runs the risk of, and indeed has been perceived as, supporting the guardians of the 'space' over the walking together through time (literally the synodal

⁵⁹ With reference to the first instance, Neméth, 'Pope Francis and Russia's War against Ukraine,' 94, quotes the head of the Ukrainian Greek Catholic Church, Major Archbishop Sviatoslav Shevchuk: 'For the Greek Catholics of Ukraine, the texts and gestures of the 13th station of this Way of the Cross are incoherent and even offensive, especially in the context of the expected second, even bloodier attack of Russian troops on our cities and villages.'

⁴⁰ See, for example FT 3. On this, see Paul Moses, *The Saint and the Sultan: The Crusades, Islam, and Francis of Assisi's Mission of Peace* (New York: Doubleday, 2009).

⁴¹ And in this case, clearly, from an ethical standpoint, Russia is an unjustified aggressor, carrying out a brutal war with complete disregard for the well-being not only of the citizens of Ukraine, but even for that of its own citizens.

journey), confronting, like Christian in John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress*, the many temptations, trials and tribulations of the journey.

Again, the response from Francis would probably be that war is always of 'space', a limitation and a captivity in violence. At times it may be necessary, and the lesser of two evils is not an evil but a good, but it is still a failure, and especially so to engage in stopping the aggressor without seeking peace. Although it may be true that Pope Francis never experienced directly a country under external invasion and aggression, it should be remembered that one of the defining moments for his life was his time as Jesuit provincial during the Argentinean military dictatorship in the late 1970s and early 1980s.⁴² This was a particularly brutal period, which saw some thirty thousand people lose their lives, and many more suffer torture and oppression. It is often called the Dirty War and was in effect a form of civil war. So he knew what it is to live under the threat of arbitrary aggression and violence.

Conclusion

In the final years of his papacy Pope Francis returned less often in an explicit way to his four principles, though they are, it seems to me, behind his argument in *Fratelli Tutti* and also behind his commitment to the process of synodality. But the idea that time is superior to space, or to put it more sharply that liberation is superior to captivity, is a permanent mark of this thought. This both informs and is born out of his commitment to peace. His choice of the name Francis is as much linked to St Francis's commitment to being a vehicle and a promoter of peace as it is out of the saint's commitment to a poor church for the poor.

But if the phrasing is memorable and at times helpful, any principle has to be applied in some way to concrete cases. As I mentioned above, part of the problem, as so often, is to do with who gets to define the criteria for discussion. None of Francis's four principles really help here, because all of them can be called on to support different positions. In conflict resolution, we begin with the question of who is the

⁴² Specifically, it began in March 1976, following a coup that ousted President Isobel Perón (third wife of Juan Perón – the musical *Evita* is about his second wife, who had died in 1952). It ended in December 1983 with the democratic election and installation of Raúl Alfonsín. Francis (Jorge Mario Bergoglio) was Jesuit provincial for the first three years of this period.

liberator and who the captive, and how far the liberator has to attend to the needs of the captive. Time is superior to space, but it does not and cannot entirely do away with space. I was going to write that it cannot replace space, though in a sense this is precisely the aim – to create a different reality, another possible world. And even if it is important – and I believe that it is – to follow Francis’s claim for the superiority of time, the question remains of what to do in the ‘meantime’, in the gaps.

For, to draw on another of Francis’s principles, the reality is greater than the idea. Here again it depends on how one describes the reality, but war, being under attack by an aggressor, is a reality, whilst in such situations for many people peace, however desirable, may seem like an idea which does not really correspond to any perceivable reality. And yet. This article is based on a presentation at a conference that engaged in a discussion of how to go beyond wars and anathemas⁴⁵ – the denial of the other through violence, physical and/or verbal with reference to different Christian hermeneutical traditions. Francis’s four principles are clearly a hermeneutics of peace. I refer back to the paragraph I quoted earlier from *Evangelii Gaudium*, where he first introduced them. The introduction begins ‘Progress in building a people in peace, justice and fraternity depends on four principles’. This is a framework, a hermeneutical key, for constructing a different world.

To engage with any conflict, any expression of violence at whatever level, is to seek to understand it, to ‘read’ it, and that is always a hermeneutical exercise. Thus for Francis the question is not perhaps about what is right or wrong about a given action from some more or less acceptable moral or even geo-political position. He asks rather: does this action lead to the construction of peace, justice and fraternity, both now and in the long run? And he will always answer that war cannot do that. Only by opening up to a world where peace is not only a distant goal but what shapes and moves concrete actions – that is, that engages over time – can things change. Of course, some people may not want change, or may want change for the worse, but that is not an excuse to

⁴⁵ The conference was entitled ‘Beyond Wars and Anathemas: Hermeneutics of Conflict Resolution in Different Theological Traditions’, organised by Professor Ivana Noble and her team between 5 and 6 October 2024, and supported by the European Regional Development Fund project ‘Beyond Security: Role of Conflict in Resilience-Building’ (reg. no.: CZ.02.01.01/00/22_008/0004595), and Charles University Centre of Excellence: Theological Anthropology in Intercultural Perspective (No. UNCE/24/SSH/019). I am grateful for the invitation to present at this conference and for the feedback that I received there.

give in to them. The path to peace has to be walked always, against the limitations of the given moment and the jostling for power.

This leads to the final point. Mostly, I have been following Francis in using time in a generally more chronological sense. Peace takes time, a lot of time and a lot of hard work, and it is the most challenging and most costly option, not least because the search for peace goes on alongside the space of war and the senseless killing that involves. And yet if there is one thing that even the least diligent student of theology has learned, it is that in the New Testament, there are two words for time. So far we have looked at *chronos*. But there is also *kairos*,⁴⁴ and although Pope Francis does not refer very much to this dimension, it is the most important, because it is the realisation and the acceptance that there is another way to go (synod, again). That time begins always now and is an eschatological time, that irrupts into chronological time and questions and challenges it. By accepting that each moment or space is not an opportunity for gaining power or privilege, but for allowing the fullness of God's grace to enter, conflicts can and are resolved, and unity can come to prevail over those conflicts, not at the cost of the gifts of each, but by strengthening each other and rebuilding a destroyed world.

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⁴⁴ On *kairos* and *chronos* see the relevant entries in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*: Hans-Georg Hahn, 'καιρός,' and 'χρόνος,' in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology*, vol. 3, ed. Colin Brown (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 833–839, 839–844.

RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR RITUALS IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION AND RECONCILIATION

TABITA LANDOVÁ

ABSTRACT

This article explores the vital roles that religious and secular rituals play in the processes of conflict resolution and reconciliation. Drawing on an interdisciplinary framework combining ritual studies, communication theory, and theological perspectives, the study argues that ritual acts function as more than symbolic markers of a resolved conflict. As presentational symbols, rituals have the potential to address the emotional and relational dimensions of conflict. They can serve as active, transformative tools for psychosocial change, initiating healing processes and reframing broken relationships. Furthermore, the study explores the differences between secular and religious – particularly Christian – reconciliation rituals. It emphasizes that Christian rituals are grounded in the reconciliation between God and humanity in Christ, understood both as a gift and a responsibility: to live out God's forgiveness and mercy in interpersonal relationships. The article also examines how rituals contribute to the transformation of worldviews, the humanization of former adversaries, and the formation of new social frameworks. These theoretical insights are illustrated by a brief case study of the long-term process of Czech-German reconciliation following World War II.

Keywords

Rituals; conflict resolution; reconciliation; Christian faith; ritual studies; conflict studies; peace studies; practical theology; liturgics

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Conflicts exist in all spheres of human society, as do mechanisms for resolving conflicts and achieving reconciliation. Experts in the field of peace and conflict studies have explored different ways to resolve conflicts peacefully through verbal negotiation, persuasion,

and the use of pressure or reward as a positive incentive. They study real possibilities for transforming intractable conflicts.¹ However, the search for conflict resolution involves not only rational and logical verbal negotiation, but also non-verbal acts, symbols and rituals. The role played by symbolic and ritual action in the process of conflict resolution and reconciliation is commonly experienced. It is known, for example, that eating together helps people to overcome misunderstandings, establish relationships and become closer. Rituals of reconciliation are also a common part of Christian and church life.

In the last two decades, the role of rituals within the context of conflict resolution and reconciliation has become the subject of theoretical research. This research has also been encouraged by the development of ritual studies, which have emphasised the importance of rituals for interpersonal communication, personal and communal identity, social change, social cohesion and culture. American peace studies scholar Lisa Schirch has attempted to apply some of these insights to traditional approaches to conflict resolution and peacebuilding. She argues that ritual can function as a liminal space that is capable of transforming world-views, identities and relationships, which is essential for productive peacebuilding.² The American political scientist Marc Howard Ross holds a similar viewpoint, but the key framework of his reflections is the concept of reconciliation. In his view, it is not enough merely to make peace, but rather it is essential to seek a real transformation of relations, namely reconciliation. This requires a fundamental psychosocial transformation, which can be supported by symbolic actions and rituals.³

¹ See e.g. John Paul Lederach, *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 1998); Louis Kriesberg and Bruce W. Dayton, *Constructive Conflicts: From Escalation to Resolution* (Lanham, Boulder, New York, Toronto, Plymouth Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2012); Peter Wallensteen, *Understanding Conflict Resolution: War, Peace and the Global System* (London: Sage, 2023); Oliver Ramsbotham, Tom Woodhouse, Hugh Miall and Harmonie Toros, *Contemporary Conflict Resolution* (Cambridge: Polity, 2025); Berghof Foundation, *Berghof Handbook for Conflict Transformation* [online], [accessed 25. 10. 2024], available at <https://berghof-foundation.org/library/berghof-handbook-for-conflict-transformation>.

² Lisa Schirch, *Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding* (Bloomfield, CT: Kumarian Press, 2005), doi: 10.1515/9781565496187. Lisa Schirch, 'Ritual and Peacebuilding,' in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Religion and Peace* (Hoboken: Wiley, 2022), 255–263. doi: 10.1002/9781119424420.ch21.

³ Marc Howard Ross, 'Ritual and the Politics of Reconciliation,' in *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, ed. Yaakov Bar-Siman-Tov (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 197–224.

The aim of this article is to further explore the roles that ritual can play in conflict resolution and reconciliation, to reflect on how religious and secular rituals of reconciliation differ and how their differences translate into the process of reconciliation. In seeking answers to these questions, I will combine insights from ritual studies and communication theory with theological and liturgical perspectives. The study consists of six parts. The first part deals with different types of conflicts and conflict resolution strategies. The second part addresses reconciliation as an outcome and as a process. The third part focuses on the symbolic dimension of rituals and their transformative power, which can also be useful in the process of conflict resolution and reconciliation. The fourth part considers the differences between secular and Christian rituals of forgiveness and reconciliation. Part Five discusses ritual as a symbolic performance of reconciliation and as a means of psycho-social change that involves a transformation of worldviews, identities, and relationships. Part Six illustrates the role of rituals in the process of reconciliation through the example of relations between Czechs and Germans after World War II.

1. Conflicts and conflict resolution strategies

Conflict (from Latin *confligere* = to clash, to struggle, to interfere) is a situation in which different ideas, opinions, attitudes or interests clash between individuals (*interpersonal conflicts*), within a group (*intragroup conflicts*) or between two or more groups of people (*intergroup conflicts*). There are also internal, intrapersonal conflicts, within a single person who may be at odds with himself or herself.⁴ Conflicts exist in every society, in different social systems. They arise between different political, social, ethnic, religious and cultural communities, and ultimately between states and large power blocs. The forms of conflicts range from covert disagreements and tensions, through open disputes and arguments, to violent struggle.

Conflicts introduce instability into the existing social system, which has a number of negative consequences. Conflicts between individuals disrupt family, friendship or partnership relationships and cause psychological problems (stress, anxiety, depression). Conflicts between groups with different interests and worldviews contribute to

⁴ Jaro Křivohlavý, *Konflikty mezi lidmi* (Praha: Portál, 2008), 17–20.

the polarisation of society and can result in violent behaviour, riots and crime. International conflicts that are resolved by military means cause enormous loss of life, damage to infrastructure, humanitarian and natural disasters.

Taking into account the negative effects of conflict, it is easy to conclude that it is best to avoid conflict altogether. However, there are situations where conflict is inevitable or even desirable, because it is an inherent aspect of social change. Conflicts uncover problems that need to be solved, pointing to the need for transformation and better communication. Through conflict, people can clarify their needs, opinions and attitudes, they have a chance to figure out ways to manage problems, and this can benefit the whole society.⁵ Without conflict, social systems such as families, organisations and societies lose their internal dynamism and stagnate.

The main problem, as the Czech psychologist Jaro Krivohlavý points out, is not that conflicts exist among us, but *how* we resolve them: 'We can resolve them in various ways... It is possible to resolve them in a friendly or hostile spirit. To put it in psychological terms: conflicts can be resolved through competition or cooperation.'⁶ If a mode of conflict resolution degenerates into a process that deepens human suffering and causes environmental destruction, it can hardly be judged as beneficial.

Each society has its own mechanisms and strategies for resolving conflicts in a non-violent way. In addition to the parties to the conflict, other actors are involved in the solution, helping to move towards more constructive ways of resolution and taking into account the many different aspects of the problem. It is often in civil society that original ideas and concepts for alternative and non-violent conflict resolution emerge, which are then adopted by state institutions (e.g., the idea of restorative justice).⁷

Alternative peaceful tools for conflict resolution include mediation, conciliation, restorative circles and restorative conferences.⁸ The

⁵ Ute Finckh-Krämer, 'Friedensaufbau und Konfliktbearbeitung in der Zivilgesellschaft,' in *Friedensethik der Zukunft: Zugänge, Perspektiven und aktuelle Herausforderungen*, ed. Alois Halbmayr and Josef P. Mautner (s. l.: transcript Verlag, 2024), 217–234, 218.

⁶ Krivohlavý, *Konflikty mezi lidmi*, 12.

⁷ Finckh-Krämer, 'Friedensaufbau und Konfliktbearbeitung in der Zivilgesellschaft,' 219.

⁸ Martin Leiner and Christine Schliesser, *Alternative Approaches in Conflict Resolution* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018). doi: 10.1007/978-3-319-58359-4.

common denominator of these practices is that they all have a certain predefined framework that provides a safe space for their participants to move around in. The established procedures provide a basis for their communication and action. They use strategies of formalisation, standardisation and repetition, which are often used in ritual, and thus resemble ritual in some ways. Their main communication tool, however, is negotiation and bargaining based on rational logic, the aim of which is to reach an agreement acceptable to the opponents or their representatives.

Not all types of conflict can be resolved in any of these ways. There is a great difference between consensual and non-consensual conflicts. As noted by Christopher W. Moore,⁹ *consensual conflicts* usually concern different interests and views on the distribution of resources. They presuppose a consensus between the parties with regard to competing for the desired outcome, so that they can be resolved through negotiation, mediation or compromise. In contrast, *non-consensual conflicts* concern different values. They are often rooted in cultural, religious or ideological differences and ‘focus on such issues as guilt and innocence, what norms should prevail in a social relationship, what facts should be considered valid, what beliefs are correct, who merits what, and what decisions should guide decision makers.’¹⁰ These conflicts are very difficult to resolve using the above procedures because there is essentially no common framework for finding a compromise.

Non-consensual conflicts are particularly difficult in situations where religious and spiritual beliefs are involved. As Jayne Docherty has pointed out,¹¹ where values are perceived as sacred and immutable, conventional mediation techniques (used in consensual conflicts) do not work, and alternative modes of dialogue must be sought. Parties with fundamentally different worldviews must first deal with reality, or ‘name the world’. Each side must know its own worldview and try to understand the worldview of its counterpart. Only when both sides understand their different value systems can they begin to solve problems. Docherty built her theory on the case of the negotiations between federal authorities and the Davidians in Waco (1993). While the authorities understood

⁹ Christopher W. Moore, *The Mediation Process: Practical Strategies for Resolving Conflict* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1996).

¹⁰ Moore, *The Mediation Process*, 215.

¹¹ Jayne Docherty, *Learning Lessons from Waco: When Parties Bring Their Gods to the Negotiation Table* (Syracuse, N.Y.: Syracuse University Press, 2001).

the conflict as a legal matter and dismissed the Davidians' efforts at communication as 'biblical mumbo jumbo', the Davidians viewed the conflict as a religious struggle. As each side used a different language of naming, framing and blaming, this lack of a common framework led to the escalation of the conflict.

2. From conflict resolution to reconciliation

Experience from a number of deep group conflicts, such as those in Northern Ireland or the Middle East, shows that official conflict resolution, such as a peace agreement, does not always mean the establishment of truly peaceful relations between the former opponents. The majority of a society that has long lived in fear and hatred of its enemy may not accept the compromises that have been agreed upon, or even if they do, continue to hold the worldviews that fuelled the conflict.¹² Within this context, it becomes apparent that a distinction needs to be made between 'conflict resolution' and 'reconciliation,' although one is closely related to the other. Reconciliation can be said to be a component and logical outcome of conflict resolution.

In general, scholars agree that reconciliation means the 'formation or restoration of a genuine peaceful relationship between societies that have been involved in an intractable conflict, after its formal resolution is achieved.'¹³ According to Ross, reconciliation involves transforming the relationship between the former opponents, both instrumentally and emotionally, in a more positive direction so that both sides can more easily envision a shared future.¹⁴ At the same time, however, it does not mean, as Herbert C. Kelman points out, 'that reconciliation comes into play only after an agreement has been reached. ... it should ideally be set into motion from the beginning of a peace process and as an integral part of it.'¹⁵

¹² Daniel Bar-Tal and Gemma H. Bennink, 'The Nature of Reconciliation as an Outcome and as a Process,' in *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, ed. Yaakov Bar-Siman-Tov (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 11–38, 13.

¹³ Bar-Tal and Bennink, 'The Nature of Reconciliation as an Outcome and as a Process,' 14.

¹⁴ Ross, 'Ritual and the Politics of Reconciliation,' 200.

¹⁵ Herbert C. Kelman, 'Reconciliation as Identity Change: A Social-Psychological Perspective,' in *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, ed. Yaakov Bar-Siman-Tov (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 111–124, 112.

Reconciliation can be studied from two perspectives: as an outcome and as a process.¹⁶ The analysis of reconciliation as an *outcome* focuses on how the relationship between the two parties to the conflict has changed and what characterizes it. Analysis of reconciliation as a *process* looks at how reconciliation develops and what specific steps contribute to it. Let us first turn our attention to the question of what elements can be identified as signs of reconciliation as an outcome.

Louis Kriesberg identifies four dimensions of reconciliation that are essential for conflict transformation and peacebuilding in post-war societies: common truth, justice, respect, and security.¹⁷ Firstly, reconciliation requires a *new perspective on the past*. The past usually includes two narratives about the conflict. The complexity of truths tends to vary in different phases and contexts of conflict transformation. In addition, the truth is often far more clear with regard to the transgressions of one party than the transgressions of the other. Reconciliation requires a transformation of these social representations of the past. Each group must learn about the collective memory of the opposing group, acknowledge the suffering of the other side, admit its own mistakes, and take its share of responsibility for the outbreak of the conflict. A new, shared narrative needs to be created.¹⁸

Achieving *justice* is the second important aspect of reconciliation. Kriesberg notes that the parties to a conflict are often driven by a sense of suffering injustice, and therefore recommends the following: 'Reducing the sense of injustice is essential, then, to removing the basis for many conflicts.'¹⁹ It can be done by punishing the guilty or correcting the original unjust conditions. If the principle of collective guilt is applied, there is a risk of a new conflict.

The third necessary element of reconciliation is *respect*, i.e. the recognition of the humanity and identity of other people. It is this element that is often expressed not only verbally, but also in a non-verbal way, by means of a symbolic act, a gesture, a ritual, such as in the case of the

¹⁶ E.g. Bar-Tal and Bennink, 'The Nature of Reconciliation as an Outcome and as a Process,' 11–38; Ross, 'Ritual and the Politics of Reconciliation,' 204.

¹⁷ Louis Kriesberg, 'Comparing Reconciliation Actions within and between Countries,' in *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, ed. Yaakov Bar-Siman-Tov (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 81–110. See also Louis Kriesberg, *Constructive Conflicts: From Escalation to Resolution* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998).

¹⁸ Bar-Tal and Bennink, 'The Nature of Reconciliation as an Outcome and as a Process,' 18.

¹⁹ Kriesberg, 'Comparing Reconciliation Actions within and between Countries,' 83.

mutual recognition between the Palestine Liberation Organisation and Israel, which was expressed in the 'Declaration of Principles' signed on 13 September 1993 and in the handshake between Yitzhak Rabin and Yasser Arafat.²⁰ This handshake had a strong impact on creating an understanding of a new stage in the relationship.

The fourth major dimension of reconciliation is *security*, which can range from refuge from physical violence, through the absence of structural violence and the achievement of positive peace, to a high degree of security where members of previously antagonistic parties can live in co-operation and a high degree of harmony.²¹ All these dimensions of reconciliation, as Kriesberg remarks, may not be fully realised simultaneously. The reconciliation actions relating to each of them sometimes reinforce each other, but at other times are contradictory.²²

The need for reconciliation applies not so much to short-term conflicts that take place between political leaders and are barely noticed by society, but especially to long, deep conflicts when the society involved in the conflict shares beliefs, attitudes, motivations and emotions that negate the possibility of a peaceful resolution and peaceful relations.²³ These widely shared societal beliefs, such as fear, anger, and hatred of the enemy have been formed during the conflict and have spread among the members of the society. They are supported by social institutions, mass media and collective memory. So while the leadership takes steps towards reconciliation, many people on one or both sides may remain in a position of irreconciliation. Some may passively oppose the new arrangement, while others may not only reject it but also actively seek to continue the struggle or undermine the peace agreements.

For stable and lasting peace, it is necessary to change the various manifestations of conflict by addressing its root causes and by targeting not only structural changes but also behavioural and attitudinal changes. Structural changes alone are usually not enough to establish peaceful relationships. Reconciliation is needed. For true reconciliation to take place between the two sides of a conflict, both must undergo a profound *psychosocial change*. As Bar-Tal and Bennink claim: 'The essence of reconciliation is a psychological process that involves changes in the

²⁰ Kriesberg, 'Comparing Reconciliation Actions within and between Countries,' 84.

²¹ Kriesberg, 'Comparing Reconciliation Actions within and between Countries,' 85.

²² Kriesberg, 'Comparing Reconciliation Actions within and between Countries,' 85–86.

²³ Bar-Tal and Bennink, 'The Nature of Reconciliation as an Outcome and as a Process,' 13.

motivations, goals, beliefs, attitudes and emotions of most members of society.²⁴ This transformation is a process that does not occur naturally but requires active effort in order to overcome obstacles and is very time-consuming. Bar-Tal describes five key areas in which psychological transformation is required in the reconciliation process: societal beliefs about the group's goals, about the rival group, about one's own group, about relations with the past opponent, and about peace.²⁵

The process of reconciliation – especially in the case of deep ethnopolitical and religious conflicts – tends to take a very long time to achieve. In some cases, even after the conflict has been resolved, reconciliation is emotionally rejected by some groups in society.²⁶ One of the tools that can help in the process of reconciliation is ritual. Rituals have special qualities and functions, which can promote the psychosocial changes that are a necessary part of reconciliation.

3. Ritual as symbolic action, formation and transformation

Ritual is an action that is outside of ordinary life. Although it uses activities from everyday life, it uses them within a ritual context that gives them a new, symbolic meaning. Ritual should therefore be defined primarily as a symbolic action.²⁷

Symbolic action in ritual is physical action that communicates mainly through so-called *presentational* symbols. This concept was developed by the American philosopher Susanne K. Langer, who distinguished between discursive and presentational symbols in her theory of symbolic thought.²⁸ While discursive symbolism refers to logical-rational, predominantly linguistic expressions of meaning, presentational symbolism refers primarily to non-linguistic, sense-capturable ways

²⁴ Bar-Tal and Bennink, 'The Nature of Reconciliation as an Outcome and as a Process,' 17.

²⁵ Daniel Bar-Tal, 'From Intractable Conflict Through Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation: A Psychological Analysis,' *Political Psychology* 21 (2000): 351–365. Bar-Tal and Bennink, 'The Nature of Reconciliation as an Outcome and as a Process,' 20–22.

²⁶ Dan Bar-On, 'Will the Parties Conciliate or Refuse? The Triangle of Jews, Germans, and Palestinians,' in *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, ed. Yaakov Bar-Siman-Tov (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 239–254, 239 points to two profound conflicts: 'the German-Jewish situation after the Holocaust and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.'

²⁷ Ronald Grimes, *The Craft of Ritual Studies* (Oxford: University Press 2014), 5.

²⁸ Susanne K. Langer, *Philosophie auf neuem Wege – das Symbol im Denken, im Ritus und in der Kunst* (Frankfurt: Fischer Verlag, 1965), 86ff, 102–105.

of expression, e.g. through space, light, colour, images, objects, clothing, movements, gestures, sounds, music, smell, or even the language of poetry or myth. It is characteristic of presentational symbols that the perception of their meanings does not take place in partial sequences and successive steps, but rather all at once, comprehensively and holistically (for example, the perception of a photograph). Thus, presentational symbolism usually involves multiple senses and produces an experience that cannot be fully expressed by means of discursive language. It stimulates meaning-making in the realm of emotions.

Furthermore, communication within the context of ritual can be described as *analogue*. This term is taken from Paul Watzlawick's distinction between analogue and digital communication. Whereas digital communication is communication using symbolic systems that have well-defined meanings and thus allow for the unambiguous transmission of information, analogue communication includes non-verbal elements such as tone of voice, gestures or spatial proximity. Its meaning is interpreted intuitively, depending on the situational context, and conveys mainly meanings within the realm of emotions and relationships.²⁹ Every communication to a greater or lesser extent includes both digital and analogue components, which complement each other.

In terms of its pragmatics, ritual is directed towards the *formation* of the human worldview, identity and relationships. Ritual can thus be a tool for building and affirming identity and the current worldview, as noted by Theodore Jennings: 'Ritual action is a means by which its participants discover who they are in the world and "how it is" with the world.'³⁰ However, some scholars, following Victor Turner, also emphasise the *transformative* function of ritual. Robbie Davis-Floyd defines ritual in this sense, arguing that ritual is 'a structured, repetitive, and symbolic representation of a cultural belief or value; its primary purpose is transformation.'³¹ Or as Lisa Schirch states: 'Some rituals reinforce the status quo by affirming people's worldviews, identities, and

²⁹ Werner Jetter, *Symbol und Ritual: Anthropologische Elemente im Gottesdienst* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck und Ruprecht, 1978), 168–169. See also Paul Watzlawick, *Pragmatika lidské komunikace: Interakční vzroce, patologie a paradoxy* (Praha: Portál, 2024), 59–66.

³⁰ Theodore Jennings, 'On Ritual Knowledge,' *The Journal of Religion* 62, no. 2 (Apr., 1982): 111–127, 113.

³¹ Robbie E. Davis-Floyd, 'The Technological Model of Birth,' *The Journal of American Folklore* 100, no. 398, *Folklore and Feminism* (Oct.–Dec., 1987): 479–495, 480.

relationships. Other rituals mark and support the process of change. In the course of a ritual, people's worldviews, identities, and relationships may be transformed.³²

All of these qualities and aspects of ritual – its ability not only to communicate content but to evoke emotions and shape relationships, and its ability to affirm or transform worldview and identity, also play an important role in rituals used for conflict resolution and reconciliation.

4. Religious and secular rituals of reconciliation

Lisa Schirch points out that many Native American communities use symbols and rituals rather than verbal negotiation to resolve conflict: “The rituals of smoking, passing the peace pipe, sweat lodges and other ceremonies were a kind of “negotiation without words.” Indigenous societies seem to prefer symbols and rituals as a means of communication, in contrast to Western industrial societies, which prefer more direct means of communication.³³ However, even in Western societies, symbolic actions and rituals can have their place in conflict resolution and reconciliation processes, not as a substitute for political negotiation but as a valuable complement to it. Ritual does not solve problems by negotiating the best solution, but by creating a new framework for interpreting problems.³⁴ This makes rituals a useful complement to traditional models of negotiation. It is an approach that attempts to reframe conflict by focusing on common ground and harmony between people. Ritual shifts the focus from ‘conflict’ to ‘opportunities for peace’.³⁵

The results of ritual studies show that symbolic actions and rituals help to communicate meanings especially within the realm of relationships and emotions. ‘Symbolic acts can penetrate the impenetrable, overcome defensiveness, and convey complex messages without a single word being spoken.’³⁶ Thus, they can help in the search for conflict resolution, peacemaking and reconciliation, for example, in situations where it is difficult to express a direct apology, when words are perceived as too easy to utter while symbolic action appears more sincere, or when a more emotional expression than a verbal apology

³² Schirch, *Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding*, 17.

³³ Schirch, *Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding*, 6.

³⁴ Schirch, *Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding*, 104.

³⁵ Schirch, *Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding*, 64.

³⁶ Schirch, *Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding*, 4.

is needed.³⁷ Victor Turner pointed out in his theory of social drama that the performance of a public ritual can help to effectively remedy social conflict.³⁸ This direction is also followed by the proposals of psychoculturally oriented theorists such as Herbert C. Kelman, Joseph V. Montville and Vamik D. Volkan. According to them, ritual mobilises deep-seated cultural understanding, emphasises what groups in conflict have in common, and provides reassurance that future relationships will be less threatening than past ones. As Ross points out: ‘Ritual, therefore, is an important mechanism for redefining ethnic conflict away from incompatible differences and threatened identities to agreed-upon relations, or to separation as the best solution.’³⁹

Reconciliation rituals can be divided into individual rituals, concerning conflicts between individuals, and supra-individual or communal rituals, concerning reconciliation between communities, ethnic groups or states. Rituals of reconciliation take both religious and secular forms. Distinguishing between religious and secular rituals is sometimes difficult, since all rituals reflect certain social beliefs, worldviews, attitudes and values. Some authors even insist that ritual itself is inherently religious or cosmological in nature, that it refers to supernatural, transcendent forces.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, it can be argued that some rituals are explicitly linked to religious beliefs, to how people understand their place in the cosmos, and to their ideas of God or a higher power (e.g. Christian services, baptisms, Buddhist meditations, Muslim prayers), while others express certain worldviews and values without explicitly referring to religious beliefs (e.g. celebrations of national holidays, political inaugurations or university graduations). Thus, a distinction can also be made between religious and secular rituals of reconciliation.

In Western culture, individual rituals of reconciliation usually include expressing regret with an apology, or mutual acknowledgement of shared guilt, and a handshake. This is a gesture that is taught to children from a young age. Sometimes reconciliation is also accompanied by the presentation of a flower or gift, or a hug and a meal

³⁷ Ross, ‘Ritual and the Politics of Reconciliation,’ 211.

³⁸ Victor Turner, *Drama, Fields, and Metaphors: Symbolic Action in Human Society* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1974), 37–41.

³⁹ Ross, ‘Ritual and the Politics of Reconciliation,’ 214.

⁴⁰ See e.g. Emile Durkheim, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* (Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1915), who described ritual in religious terms.

together.⁴¹ In the case of community reconciliation, e.g., after a war, reconciliation rituals include assemblies at which a public apology is made or forgiveness is asked, the suffering of the victims is acknowledged and the victims are remembered, and the prospect of a shared future is opened up. These ceremonies are often accompanied by symbolic gestures, such as a handshake or the presentation of a gift, or the installation of a joint memorial. For example, in 1994, on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising against the German occupiers, the President of the Federal Republic of Germany Herzog acknowledged his country's guilt with the words: 'I ask forgiveness for that which has been done to you by the Germans.' The Polish writer Szczypiorski replied: 'The Polish people have been waiting forty years for those words.'⁴²

Even if reconciliation rituals are conceived in secular terms, a certain spiritual dimension can be seen in them precisely because of the forgiveness and reconciliation that take place or are symbolically represented in them. 'Spiritual for me signifies moving beyond the issues and toward an encounter. It is a journey toward an encounter with self and the other. The purpose of the journey of reconciliation is healing.'⁴³ In reconciliation, individuals, groups, and societies that have been in conflict rebuild or establish at least a neutral relationship that is not burdened by mutual hatred. Reconciliation thus brings collective healing.

There are also rituals of reconciliation that are explicitly linked to a particular religious tradition. In Christian churches, a distinction can be made between individual rituals of reconciliation, which for example include personal confession, and collective rituals, which may include a communal confession of guilt, forgiveness and reconciliation as part of a worship service. The laying aside of all the grievances that one has against the other, forgiveness and the restoration of mutual relations is often symbolically represented by a greeting of peace with a handshake. Reconciliation is also closely associated with the communal participation in the Lord's Supper, a ritual that makes present the core of the Christian message of reconciliation between God and

⁴¹ Gerard Lukken, *Rituals in Abundance: Critical Reflections on the Place, Form, and Identity of Christian Ritual in our Culture* (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 420.

⁴² Lukken, *Rituals in Abundance*, 420.

⁴³ John Paul Lederach, 'Beyond Violence: Building Sustainable Peace,' in *The Handbook of Interethnic Coexistence*, ed. E. Weiner (New York: Continuum, 1998), 236–245, 244.

man through Jesus Christ. The eating of one bread and drinking from one cup visibly embodies the union of believers with Christ, as well as their union with one another.

In contrast to secular rituals, Christian rituals of reconciliation presuppose the framework of Christian doctrine in which reconciliation of humanity with God is one of the central ideas. Although, according to Wilfried Härle, the Christian doctrine of reconciliation belongs to the most demanding parts of Christian dogmatics, its essence can be summarized in the words: ‘God himself, whose very being is love, in Jesus Christ takes upon himself the sin of the world, bears it, endures it, and thus forgives.’⁴⁴ From the perspective of biblical testimony, the initiative for reconciliation comes from God – from his act of forgiving human sin, which consists in humanity’s separation from God’s love. The goal of reconciliation is the ‘restoration of the sin-broken fellowship of humanity with its Creator, the source of its life’,⁴⁵ or, in the words of Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, ‘healing and bringing together broken relationships’.⁴⁶ God’s forgiveness is a prerequisite for reconciliation. However, reconciliation with God as the healing of a broken relationship requires a human response. As the apostle Paul urges: ‘We plead with you on Christ’s behalf, “Be reconciled to God!”’ (2 Cor 5:20, NET). A fitting human response to God’s open arms is remorse, repentance, and faith (cf. Luke 15:11–32).

God’s forgiveness and reconciliation with God, as experienced in the life of Christians and churches, is both a gift and a responsibility. This dual nature is exemplified in the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt 18:23–35), which shows that the only appropriate response to the master’s forgiveness is to act according to the same logic of grace. This theological dynamic is further affirmed by the apostle Paul, who explicitly states that God ‘reconciled us to himself through Christ’ and ‘has given us the ministry of reconciliation’, namely ‘the message of reconciliation’ (2 Cor 5:18–19 NET). Christians are thus gifted with reconciliation with God and called to proclaim it and invite others into reconciliation with Him. At the same time, they are not to receive God’s grace in vain (2 Cor 6:1), but reflect it in their daily lives and

⁴⁴ Wilfried Härle, *Dogmatik* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2000), 351.

⁴⁵ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology, Vol. 2* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), 449–50.

⁴⁶ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Christ and Reconciliation* (A Constructive Theology for the Pluralistic World; vol. 1) (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Eerdmans, 2013), 364.

interpersonal relationships. Reconciliation with God serves both as an impetus for acknowledging one's own guilt, when one is guilty, and as a foundation for the willingness to forgive when one has been wronged by others. The gift of God's unconditional forgiveness and acceptance provides the motivation and strength for these actions.

Christian reconciliation ceremonies therefore always take into account the vertical dimension of human existence and the fact that conflicts disturb not only relationships between people but also the relationship between Man and God. In the Christian perspective, guilt has a transcendent dimension. This distinguishes Christian recognition and confession of guilt, whether in the form of individual confession or communal confession of guilt in worship, from its secular counterparts. It is not only a conflict between human parties, but it also concerns Man's standing before God. Reconciliation with one's neighbour and reconciliation with God are closely intertwined.

Christian rituals of reconciliation proclaim God's forgiveness and the possibility of a new beginning, and this message serves as an important spiritual and motivational resource for confessing guilt, forgiving 'our trespassers', and pursuing reconciliation. At the same time, these rituals remind believers who live as justified sinners to pass on what they themselves have received. They affirm that each person is responsible before God for their relationships with others and encourage to seek ways of reparation, mutual forgiveness, and reconciliation. The connection between divine and interpersonal forgiveness is clearly expressed in the Lord's Prayer: 'And forgive us our debts, as we ourselves have forgiven our debtors' (Mat 6:12, NET). In the Christian tradition, forgiveness is not seen as a sign of weakness but rather as an expression of faith, gratitude for God's mercy, and authentic Christian identity. For this reason, every Christian worship service includes – more or less formally – a confession of guilt and a request for forgiveness. To live as a Christian is to live out of God's forgiveness and to forgive others, to rejoice in reconciliation with God and to seek reconciliation with people.

5. Ritual as a symbolic performance of reconciliation and a means of psychosocial change

Reflecting on the role of rituals in the reconciliation process, we find that the role of rituals depends on the stage of the reconciliation process that the parties to the conflict are currently in. Reconciliation

can be conceived, as Kriesberg and Ross propose, as a continuum, meaning that there may be different degrees of reconciliation, not just its presence or absence. Ross distinguishes between instrumental and moral (emotional) reconciliation, or between weak and strong versions of reconciliation: 'The strong version involves a total transformation in the relationship between former opponents; in the weak version there is sufficient change so that interactions between the groups are increasingly constructive and violence comes to an end.'⁴⁷

Following this distinction, the role of reconciliation rituals can be characterized as follows: If a 'strong version' of reconciliation has been achieved, the ritual is a symbolic *representation* of reconciliation that has been reached. Such a ritual can also be described as a rite of passage, symbolically representing the transition from a state of conflict to a state of reconciliation. This transition can be intensely experienced by the participants, even though the key steps leading to reconciliation have already occurred prior to the ritual. In the case of the 'weak form' of reconciliation, the ritual functions as a tool that sets the process of reconciliation in motion, supports its continuation, deepens its impact, and expands its reach. It contributes to a reframing of the conflict, a transformation of one's worldview, one's view of the adversary, one's own self-understanding, and the development of a vision of a peaceful relationship. Even after the ritual is over, the process of reconciliation is not finished but continues.

We have already stated that rituals of reconciliation have not only a representative function, but also a transformative one. Ritual can be an effective promoter of the psychosocial transformation that both parties to a conflict need in terms of their worldview, self-understanding and understanding of the other in order to ensure that the reconciliation process is successful. In the text that follows, we focus on three key functions of rituals in the process of conflict resolution and reconciliation.

5.1 Transformation of worldviews

As the sociologists Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann have shown, rituals have an important place in the process of creating symbolic worlds that participate in the secondary legitimation of an already

⁴⁷ Ross, 'Ritual and the Politics of Reconciliation,' 200.

formed social reality.⁴⁸ Symbolic worlds are particularly important in liminal situations that go beyond the reality of everyday life. They help to integrate the experiences of these situations, which often appear incomprehensible and frightening, into a meaningful framework, thus helping us to cope with fear and to alleviate the threat of disintegration of the reality of everyday life. The symbolic world ‘puts everything in its place’ and allows the person who has experienced a liminal situation to ‘return to reality’.⁴⁹ Rituals have the function of re-constructing and reaffirming reality.

Rituals can also perform this function in the case of the reconciliation process. Reconciliation is the process by which a society moves from a divided past to a shared future. To do this, it is necessary to rebuild the existing symbolic world marked by conflict and to gain a new perspective on both sides of this conflict. It is necessary to open up a view of commonly shared values. The task of disseminating a new, jointly shared narrative about the past is not only for official joint statements. As Kriesberg noted, ‘for the truths to be widely shared, official statements do not suffice. Novels, songs, films, textbooks, sermons, and many other media of popular communication must convey the information about what injuries were inflicted by whom and against whom.’⁵⁰ Ritual also presents an opportunity to evaluate the past in terms of shared suffering and collective responsibility, while offering space for visions of a shared future in realigned relationships.

5.2 Transformation of identities

Another important transformation must take place in the image of the former adversary and the social perception of one’s own group. Bar-Tal notes:

In times of conflict, the opposing group is delegitimized in order to explain its aberrant behavior, the outbreak and continuation of the conflict, and to justify actions taken against the adversary... It is important to legitimize and personalize its members; legitimization grants humanity to members of the adversary group, after years of its denial. It allows viewing the

⁴⁸ Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966). Czech transl.: *Sociální konstrukce reality: Pojednání o sociologii vědění* (Brno: CDK, 1999), 9.

⁴⁹ Berger and Luckmann, *Sociální konstrukce reality*, 99.

⁵⁰ Kriesberg, ‘Comparing Reconciliation Actions within and between Countries,’ 83.

opponent as belonging to the category of acceptable groups, with which it is desired to maintain peaceful relations.⁵¹

The observation that each side of a conflict tends to attribute positive characteristics to itself and consider itself moral, just, and peaceful, while it attributes negative characteristics to the adversary and considers it immoral, unjust, and aggressive, is also supported by empirical studies. Ifat Maoz refers to studies on US-Soviet relations that found a consistent bias involving the use of a double standard, with American students rating the same actions as more negative when attributed to the Soviets and less negative when attributed to the United States.⁵² Similar biases are also found in studies of Arab-Israeli relations, which have shown that both sides are more likely to mention and emphasize hostile and extreme behaviour by their adversaries while downplaying the value of positive indications and moderate actions by their opponents.

Rituals open up a space in which the former adversary can be legitimized, humanized and personalized, i.e., members of the former enemy group can be approached as individuals who have their own roles in everyday life, their own legitimate needs and goals, with whom they can establish relationships and be trusted. The new image of the former adversary can then differentiate between people with positive and negative characteristics, not least by recognizing that the other side has also been a victim of the conflict and has suffered as a result. Similarly, there is room in the ritual for correcting the group's self-image:

During the conflict, groups tend to view themselves in a one-sided way involving self-glorification and self-praise, ignoring and censoring any information that might shed negative light on the group. But in the reconciliation process, the group must take responsibility for its involvement in the outbreak of the conflict, if that was the case, as well as its contribution to the violence, including immoral acts, and refusal to engage in a peaceful resolution.⁵³

⁵¹ Bar-Tal and Bennink, 'The Nature of Reconciliation as an Outcome and as a Process,' 21.

⁵² Ifat Maoz, 'Social-Cognitive Mechanisms in Reconciliation,' in *From Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation*, ed. Yaakov Bar-Siman-Tov (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 225–238, 230.

⁵³ Bar-Tal and Bennink, 'The Nature of Reconciliation as an Outcome and as a Process,' 21.

Rituals are an opportunity to express a more critical self-view, to admit wrongdoing in past behaviour, to express regret and to apologize.

5.3 Transformation of relationships

Last but not least, ritual is a tool for transforming the relationship between the parties to a conflict. Whereas during the conflict an attitude of confrontation and animosity was encouraged on both sides, ritual is an opportunity to adopt an attitude of recognition of the other side, cooperation and at least neutral, if not outright friendly relations. Joint processing of the past is important for establishing newly framed joint relations, but it sometimes proves more expedient to start with the present or the future, i.e. addressing people's current needs and developing a vision of living in peace, and to proceed to joint processing of the past only after peaceful relations have been established.⁵⁴

The multi-layered role of ritual in the reconciliation process can be illustrated by the ritual described in detail by Lisa Schirch. She depicts the joint dinner and dance held between the opposing sides in Cyprus, namely Greek and Turkish Cypriots, which accompanied a series of ten-day workshops in 1994 organised by a group of American conflict resolution trainers. The joint eating and dancing taking place in the company of enemies became symbolic and took on new meanings. It helped to set up a situation in which a transformation of the understanding of oneself, of one's 'enemies' and of the conflict as a whole took place: 'Instead of viewing each other by their ethnic identity as "Turkish Cypriot" or "Greek Cypriot," as they primarily did during the daytime training, during the evenings the participants seemed to view each other by other identities: mother, father, fellow victim of the war, teacher, musician, dancer, man, woman.'⁵⁵ In other words, the enemy's image was reshaped, the enemy was humanised, and his human qualities were uncovered. The mutual contact defined by the framework of a common meal and dance opened up the opportunity for establishing relationships within a completely different framework than that of conflict. Beyond this, dance requires individuals to play male and female roles, so that in this atmosphere gender identity became more important than ethnic identity. Not only that, but one trainer reportedly

⁵⁴ Bar-Tal and Bennink, 'The Nature of Reconciliation as an Outcome and as a Process,' 22.

⁵⁵ Schirch, *Ritual and Symbol in Peacebuilding*, 5.

noticed that Greek Cypriots and Turkish Cypriots sang the same songs and danced the same way. Singing and dancing together brought them back to the old days when they lived in the same village and did the same things, thus helping to uncover their common past, shared culture and values. It highlighted their similarities rather than their differences, namely the identity of Mediterranean islanders who have lived side by side for centuries.

This example illustrates the transformative power of ritual action as pointed out by Victor Turner.⁵⁶ Building on Arnold van Gennep's theory of rites of passage, he identified the important role of ritual in bringing about social change. According to him, rituals are antithetical to the existing social structure and encourage new relational possibilities. In ritual, people experience *communitas*, a community of equals, which deepens the perception of the value of community and leads to greater sensitivity to others, to a reassessment of attitudes and relationships. Shared ritual promotes conflict resolution and reconciliation between conflicting parties by encouraging personal transformation – namely, a more sensitive view of the nature of humanity, critical self-reflection of one's own thinking and actions, a new view of the world as a space for living in healthy relationships, and values such as forgiveness, belonging, solidarity and cooperation that are conducive to human coexistence. Shared rituals can thus help to heal relationships and motivate work on them.

6. Rituals in Czech-German Reconciliation

Reconciliation is usually a difficult and long-term process. In the case of major military conflicts, the process of reconciliation takes decades after the conflict has ended and requires active support and stimulation. Ritual is one of the tools that offers a space for expressing a self-critical view of one's own past and a transformed view of one's former adversary. In this last part, I would like to reflect on the role of rituals in the reconciliation between the Czechs and the Germans after World War II. Although the open conflict ended 80 years ago, the feelings of injustice and hurt to people on both sides, negative

⁵⁶ Victor Witter Turner, *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (Chicago: Transaction Publishers, 1969).

perceptions and stereotypes have been passed on from generation to generation. Therefore, the process of admitting guilt, forgiveness and reconciliation has taken a very long time.

When the independent Czechoslovak Republic was established in 1918, its population also included some three million Germans, living mainly in the borderlands. The economic crisis of the 1930s hit the German minority hardest, which is why, after the political rise of Adolf Hitler, some Czechoslovak Germans succumbed to his propaganda. In the elections in the mid-1930s, sixty per cent of them voted for Konrad Henlein's Sudeten German Party, which sought autonomy for the Sudetenland and later annexation to the German Reich. This finally took place in 1938 with the signing of the Munich Agreement and the subsequent conversion of the remainder of Czechoslovak territory into a Protectorate. At the end of the Second World War, this resulted in a wave of Germanophobia among Czechoslovaks. Many applied the principle of collective guilt to the German population, excluding and abusing them. Later came the state-controlled expulsion of Germans and the seizure of their movable and immovable property. This resulted in a situation wherein the Germans also felt like victims after World War II, and demanded apologies and reparations.

In socialist Czechoslovakia, the tragic post-war history remained a taboo for several decades. It was only after November 1989 that the question of whether and for what Czechs should apologise to the expelled Germans who had lived within the Czech territory in the past was revived. Some sympathetic steps were taken by Václav Havel, who, as a dissident before 17 November 1989, expressed his regret for the expulsion in a letter to the German president and repeated his apology before his election to the post of Czech president. However, the representatives of the Sudeten German Landsmannschaft interpreted his words as an admission of guilt and correspondingly demanded compensation for the expelled Germans and the annulment of the Beneš Decrees.⁵⁷ Havel refused any compensation.

The official reconciliation of the two countries was brought about by a joint Czech-German declaration on mutual relations and their future development, adopted on 21 January 1997, more than 50 years after

⁵⁷ The Sudeten German Association 'Sudetendeutsche Landsmannschaft' did not remove the obligation to seek the restoration of civil rights and property in the Czech Republic from its statutes until 2015.

the end of the war, and signed by then Czech President Václav Klaus and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl. In the Declaration, both former parties to the conflict confess:

The German side acknowledges Germany's responsibility for its role in a historical development, which led to the 1938 Munich Agreement, the flight and forcible expulsion of people from the Czech border area, and the forcible breakup and occupation of the Czechoslovak Republic. It regrets the suffering and injustice inflicted upon the Czech people by the National Socialist crimes committed by Germans...

The Czech side regrets that, by the forcible expulsion and forced resettlement of Sudeten Germans from the former Czechoslovakia after the war as well as by the expropriation and deprivation of citizenship, much suffering and injustice was inflicted upon innocent people, also in view of the fact that guilt was attributed collectively. It particularly regrets the excesses which were contrary to elementary humanitarian principles as well as legal norms existing at that time, and it furthermore regrets that Law No 115 of 8 May 1946 made it possible to regard these excesses as not being illegal and that in consequence these acts were not punished.⁵⁸

The Declaration therefore contains a mutual acknowledgement of responsibility and a confession of regret for the wrongs done, which is one of the key elements of reconciliation. It also describes a vision of a common future and plans support in a number of areas to promote mutual peaceful relations and cooperation. In addition to this official declaration, rituals and symbolic events held at local levels also had – and still have – a role to play in dealing with the past and realigning Czech-German relations. These include mainly civilian activities, such as the construction of memorials and the installation of commemorative plaques on the sites of displaced German populations, joint commemoration of the past in the form of exhibitions, but also events organised by churches. In 1995, joint Czech-German services were held in Dresden, which included a confession of guilt for past wrongs. Since then, joint services promoting mutual reconciliation have been held in various places and churches in the border areas. Sometimes the

⁵⁸ 'Czech-German Declaration on mutual relations and their future development,' accessed 26 February 2025, available at https://mzv.gov.cz/berlin/cz/vzajemne_vztahy/cesko_nemecka_deklarace_o_vzajemnych.html.

reconciliation process also incorporates former local customs, as in the case of the Easter horse rides held in the Czech village of Mikulášovice near the border with Germany and Poland, connecting three nations, different generations and members and non-members of churches.⁵⁹

Conclusion

Rituals and symbolic actions constitute an integral part of interpersonal communication. They are important for the formation of worldviews, identities and relationships in society. Thanks to the strong interplay between verbal and non-verbal means of expression, they have a strong impact on emotions, self-understanding and the view of others. These qualities also make rituals and symbolic elements powerful communication tools in situations of conflict. It is true that ritual can be not only constructive but also destructive, i.e. ritual and symbolic action can help to resolve and reconcile conflicts, but they can also provoke, deepen and escalate conflict, or, after the conflict has ended, reinforce the former parties' irreconcilable positions and reinforce their sense of victimhood.⁶⁰ Ritual is an effective neutral tool, and its effect depends on the strategic intentions with which it is used.

Within the context of attempts to achieve conflict resolution and reconciliation, rituals can recognise reconciliation as a state that has been achieved, but they can also serve as tools for enabling the gradual psychosocial transformation of the conflicting parties within a long-term reconciliation process, which begins, in essence, with the search for a solution to the conflict. Rituals can help to achieve progress in the search for solutions to complex, deep-seated conflicts, such as ethnopolitical or religious conflicts in particular, where both parties to the conflict need to undergo a certain psychosocial transformation of their own worldview, their view of themselves and of their former adversary, and thus arrive at an emotional and moral reconciliation.

⁵⁹ 'Mikulášovice,' Wikipedia, <https://cs.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mikulášovice> (accessed 28 February 2025).

⁶⁰ See Martin J. M. Hoondert, 'Srebrenica: Conflict and Ritual Complexities,' in M. Hoondert, P. Mutsaers and W. Arfman (eds.), *Cultural Practices of Victimhood, Victims, Culture and Society* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018), 20–38. The study examines how rituals and counter-rituals related to the commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide shape the collective identities of the involved ethnic groups and raises the question of how Bosnia and Herzegovina can overcome these divisive memory practices on the path toward post-war reconciliation.

The process of reconciliation between population groups in national conflicts or between nations in international conflicts requires long-term and targeted support. This must come from above, through mechanisms such as state institutions, the mass media, educational and cultural institutions, as well as from below, through civil society and non-governmental initiatives. Unfortunately, it is often the media and social networks that reinforce sections of society in their entrenched positions against others, contributing to polarisation and deepening conflicts.

Helping resolve conflicts and bring about reconciliation between persons, people groups, and nations represents a major challenge, even a mission and task for Christian churches. It is a practical consequence of the gospel of reconciliation, which the churches have accepted and which they continue to proclaim to the world. Since efforts to resolve conflicts and achieve reconciliation belong to the very essence of Christian existence, churches should work actively in this direction also in relation to the society in which they find themselves and the conflicts that affect it. Within the context of contemporary Czech society, which is experiencing strong divisions in terms of worldviews, this especially means striving to overcome antagonisms and polarisation, to humanise those whose image is dehumanised in society, and to develop a vision of relationships based on mutual respect, forgiveness, recognition, and solidarity. The Bible offers Christians a wealth of resources for these visions, and public worship is the most common ritual that can express, embody and pass them on.

Rituals as communication tools for conflict resolution and reconciliation also have their clear limits. Some people lack the sensitivity to perceive communication that takes place on a non-verbal and symbolic level and in which all the senses and emotions are intensely involved. Above all, ritual cannot adequately address issues of inequity in the distribution of resources or power imbalances between groups. Therefore, rituals are of significance primarily within the symbolic dimension of conflict. They represent a complement to conflict resolution through dialogue, negotiation or mediation. However, they can also prepare the right conditions for this solution by reframing the conflict, expressing shared values and creating a bridge within the emotional dimension.

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THE ROLE OF IDENTITY-REMEMBRANCE IN THE SYRIAN REFUGEES' ADAPTABILITY: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY ASSESSMENT

NAJIB GEORGE AWAD

ABSTRACT

This article examines self-perception and its impact on the adaptability to new living contexts symptomatic of different socio-cultural and religious/theological identity-formation contexts. By relying on an interdisciplinary hermeneutic, it touches upon the issues of selfhood and otherness from an interdisciplinary theological and social-theoretical perspective by laying its foundations deep in the connections of theological/religious and cultural perceptions of the identity formation of displaced people in their new host life-settings. Such connectedness is demonstrative of self-perception trajectories, which foreigners go through in their attempts at integration and adaptation, or lack thereof, to the new and challenging living spheres they join. The article focuses on the Syrian refugees in Europe and analyses how their religious or theological self-perception relates to their confrontation with the new challenge of forming a new self-identification strategy that can enable them to answer the question 'who am I?' in the heart of their strife to exist in their new expatriate lands. The article touches upon this complex and multi-faceted matter from the specific perspective of the role of memory and remembrance in the journeys of self-perception and identity reformulation of these Syrians and their hosts, and in their religious and cultural ramifications.

Keywords

Syrian refugees; Self-perception; Religio-cultural identity; Integration; Anamnesis; Amnesia

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Today social anthropologists, sociologists of religion, and socio-political theologians principally concur that all religiously-embedded self-perception and identity-formation processes are naturally rooted in historiological, cultural, and religiously-grounded webs of

awareness. This fact makes them inherently anchored in human memory and in remembrance activities and these two aspects' relatedness to the person's belief-systems and their relatedness to the 'wholly Other' idea. The question of 'who am I as this or that religious person?' is deeply harbored in the question of 'who was I?'. It represents as well the horizon of anticipation and envisioning of answers for the question of 'who will I become?' or even 'who would my "sacred Other" want me to transform into?' Within this framework, this article reflects on the case of the Syrian refugees in Europe and how their religious and cultural self-perceptions are connected to the challenge of forming a new answer to the question 'who am I?', which they now confront in the heart of their strife to exist in new living spaces. The article will touch upon this complicated and multifaceted matter from the specific perspective of the role of memory and remembrance in the journey of self-perception and identity-formation, which is going to be analyzed within the framework of the studies of memory's relatedness to systems of religious belief.

Concerning the methodological approach of this study, this article constitutes a second stage in a project I worked on between 2015 and 2018.¹ During these years, I developed a hermeneutic tripod operating around the three key notions of 'identity-relationality-othering'. I used this tripod in deciphering the understanding of the Syrian refugees' presence in the hosting European societies after 2015 in terms of 'crisis'. The implemented hermeneutic tripod was used in naming epistemic natures and theoretical contents related to these refugees' existence in, and interaction with, the publics of the hosting countries. This methodological instrument has proven then its ability to 1) probe the nature of the refugees' situation; 2) decipher the components of thought-forms related to the refugees and their hosting communities alike; and 3) map and re-map the webs of meaning that underpin the manners of conduct, the behavioural patterns and the down-to-earth treatments, which the people who face such challenges, opt for and rely on in approaching them.

¹ See Najib George Awad, 'Deciphering the *Genome* of "Crisis" in the Syrian "Refugee Crisis": Towards a Hermeneutic Tripod,' in *The Church, Migration and Global (In)Difference*, eds. Darren J. Diaz, Jaroslav Z. Skira, Michael S. Attridge and Gerard Mannion (Springer Nature: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021), 167–199. doi: 10.1007/978-3-030-54226-9_10.

This article constitutes the second chapter of the abovementioned project. I now use the very same hermeneutic tripod of 'identity-relationality-othering', moving from the narrow circle of migration-refugee studies into the broader and more interdisciplinary circle of reasoning and interpretation, where key notions and components derived from theological reasoning, religious studies, religious sociology, cultural studies, identity studies, and memory studies intertwine and interconnect. I use the same hermeneutic tripod to probe, decipher and map another aspect of the Syrian refugees' life and self-perception in the European hosting societies. This time, I expand my hermeneutic of the Syrian refugees' 'crisis-like' presence in Europe from an attentive concentration on the impacts of the theologico-religious and cultural interpretation of the notion of 'identity' and its interdisciplinary connectedness to 'relationality' and 'othering'. I achieve this by unpacking some of the meanings and implications of the phenomena of 'remembrance' on the processes of self-perception and identity-formation. The ensuing sections of the article will pursue this reflection on the identity-formation process in connection to the Syrian refugees' endeavors to re-imagine and re-construct new personal and communal religious and cultural self-perceptions that are demonstrative of their adaptation attempts in new hosting societies.

1. Theoretical framework: identity, memory and religiosity

In 2009, the lecturer at Fordham University, New York, Benjamin Dunning, produced a study on self-perception, identity-formation, and alterity in Christian antiquity.² Dunning relates that the earliest Christians theologically perceived themselves as 'alien outsiders and sojourners' called by God to merely wander over the earth as strangers who long for their true home in the afterlife in the kingdom of God.³ In his investigation on the core-theological rationale that underpins this view, Dunning proposes that what was at stake for these Christians was not primarily how to emphasize their absolute otherness as 'believers in specific faith' existing within a surrounding 'non-believers' world'. They just wanted to set up a marker by means of which they can single

² Benjamin G. Dunning, *Aliens and Sojourners: Self as Other in Early Christianity* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009), 1. doi: 10.9783/9780812201819.

³ Dunning, *Aliens and Sojourners*, 3.

out their faith-centered self ‘over and against cultural others who are in many [human] ways too much like them [yet in as many faith-based ways very different from them].’⁴ The crux of the matter, Dunning maintains, is fundamentally a preoccupation with setting up boundaries and limits to practices of self-construction and other-relatedness that maintain both one’s own particularity as a human being and also one’s faith-centered understanding and relatedness to the divine Wholly Other’s reality.⁵

Far, however, from being an unprecedented Christian religious invention, speaking about oneself as an ‘alien sojourner’ was known in pre-Christian Greek philosophy (Platonic), and it was used in the literature of the parallel early Roman context (like in Plutarch’s (c. 46–120 A.D.) text, *On Exile*) as well. In that literature, one finds a speech that ‘depicts the human soul as a sojourner on earth that seeks its true fatherhood in heaven.’⁶ The difference between such early and contemporaneous Roman references and the Christian ones is that the followers of Jesus Christ talked about themselves as aliens and sojourners because they wanted to imitate Jesus of Nazareth’s particularity by ‘performing their alien status not through radical practices of differentiation, but through behaving more or less like everybody else’.⁷

Dunning ultimately concludes that speaking about identity in terms of the notions of ‘aliens’ and ‘sojourners’ means that ‘identity’ is, by default, expressive of a state of being that is processive, just as the states of being that are expressed in the terms of ‘aliens’ and ‘sojourners’. Dunning articulates this vis-à-vis Stuart Hall’s take on identity’s fluxive nature:

Cultural identity is not a fixed essence at all, lying unchanged outside history and culture. It is not some universal and transcendental spirit inside us on which history has made no fundamental mark. It is not

⁴ Dunning, *Aliens and Sojourners*, 5.

⁵ Dunning, *Aliens and Sojourners*, 5. See also Jonathan Z. Smith, *Relating Religion: Essays in the Study of Religion* (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 2004); and J. Z. Smith, ‘What a Difference a Difference Makes,’ in *To See Ourselves as Others See Us: Christians, Jews, ‘Others’ in Late Antiquity*, eds. Jacob Neusner and Ernest S. Frerichs (Chico, CA: Scholars Press, 1985), 3–48.

⁶ Dunning, *Aliens and Sojourners*, 41. See also Plutarch, *Moralia*, trans. F. H. Sandback (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1927–1969), 607.

⁷ Dunning, *Aliens and Sojourners*, 61. See also Miroslav Volf, ‘Soft Difference: Theological Reflections on the Relation between Church and Culture in 1 Peter,’ in *ExAud*, 10(1994), 15–30.

once-and-for-all. It is not fixed origin to which we can make some final and absolute return... it is always constructed through memory, fantasy, narrative, and myth. Cultural identities are... not an essence but a *positioning*. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position, which has no absolute guarantee in an unproblematic, transcendental 'law of origin'.⁸

This demonstrates that identity and self-perception are fluxive in nature even from religious and theological perspectives, not just from purely cultural ones. As Philip Wood relates, they are 'fluid and reactive; often an assertion of difference in response to a moment of [theological perception,] political stress or cultural uncertainty'.⁹ This indicates that, in their historical recollected past, the religious people go through situations wherein theologizing on self-identity's particularity witnesses a shift in emphasis: From relating to the other in terms of integration, assimilation, and accommodation; into connecting to the other from the perspective of self-alienation and self-othering. The notion of 'Wholly Other' here is not only designative of the otherness of the divine Being, but also expressive of the total otherness of one human being over-against others in the name of that divine Other's 'otherness'. One must realize here that both perspectives are evenly and genuinely relational in nature. Both are rooted in correlation, not in confrontational altercations, between two sides. They are not just 'I-thou' states of relatedness but also an 'I-I' one as well. Both are grounded in attached, not segregating, states of co-existence or of relatedness to an opposite 'other', whether metaphysically (with the divine) or physically (with the human). Both manifest interaction and reciprocation with the other. What is more significant still is that both forms of otherness make self-perception and self-identification totally fluxive or fluid in nature. They turn the human subjects that are involved in them into 'sojourners' not merely through the curves of reality, but also across the history

⁸ Stuart Hall, 'Cultural Identity and Diaspora,' in *Theorizing Diaspora: A Reader*, eds. Jana Evans Braziel and Anita Mannur (Malden, Mass: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), 255–246, 257.

⁹ Philip Wood, 'Introduction,' in *History and Identity in the Late Antique Near East*, ed. Philip Wood (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 2015), xi–xxii, xiii. doi: 10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199915408.001.0001. See also R. Mathisen and D. Shanzer, *Romans, Barbarians, and the Transformation of the Roman World* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2008); and see also the earlier discussion in Erik Hobsbawm, *Nations and Nationalism Since 1700: Program, Myth and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992). doi: 10.1017/CCOL0521439612.

of the human's relatedness to the divine; not only through life and existential presence, but also through memory and its rootedness in belief systems.

Since the first decade of the 21st century, biblical scholars in the realm of Christian theology have embraced the above-stated understanding. They started to produce studies on memory and remembrance in the Biblical attestations and to interpret them from theological and socio-anthropological perspectives. Theologians began to examine attentively the Biblical understanding of the nature of the Greek notion of 'anamnesis' (remembrance/recollection) – which was used intensively by the fathers of the church during the first four centuries – from the perspective of the question of 'what [does] it mean to be human together in time and over time under God?'¹⁰ For instance, in his attention to the Biblical perception of *anamnesis* (*μνησκόμαι/μνημονεύω*, etc.), Stephen Barton suggests that the scriptural attestation depicts a dialectic language-game that swings between 'remembrance' (*anamnesis*) and 'forgetting' or 'erasure of memory' (*amnesia*).¹¹ Barton pauses at Paul the Apostle's stance on memory in relation to self-perception, especially in his expression 'in Christ Jesus' (*ἐν χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ*), which one finds, for example, in Ephesians 1:1 & 2:6, 13; Corinthians 4:15; Romans 6:11 & 16:3; and Galatians 3:26. In the Pauline literature, Barton notices, this idea of 'remembering in relation to God' connotes a state of being, a state of self-awareness, or an identity. It is not merely a title or a mystical experiential situation.¹²

In his similar attentiveness to the notion of 'remembrance' (the sense of *μνημονεύειν*/commemoration included) and its use in the New Testament's Pauline and non-Pauline texts, Bruce Morrill also highlights the connection between the notion of 'memory in relation to God' and identity-formation and self-perception processes. Morrill states the following on the Pauline and other New Testament's senses

¹⁰ Stephen C. Barton, 'Memory and Remembrance in Paul,' in *Memory in the Bible and Antiquity: The Fifth Durham-Tübingen Research Symposium (Durham, September 2004)*, eds. Stephen C. Barton, Loren T. Stuckenbruck and Benjamin G. Wold (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2007), 321–340, 322.

¹¹ Barton, 'Memory and Remembrance in Paul,' 324.

¹² See a similar attention in Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, trans. Asheleigh E. Moorhouse (London: The Faith Press/Bangor, ME: American Orthodox Press, 1966), 50; 85; 99; and Bruce T. Morrill, S.J., *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue* (Collegeville, Min: The Liturgical Press, 2000).

of 'memory': '[Remembrance is not merely] recalling or recollection of its object (as Aristotle defines remembrance), but also a processive, subjective thinking and involvement, both cognitively and experientially. Here, remembrance exceeds mere recollection, and it becomes 'integrally related to one's present thought and decisions for action'.¹³ On this understanding specifically, Stephen Barton once commented by relating that Paul develops a particular 'epistemology at the turn of the Ages'.¹⁴ Here, 'the turn of the ages' means the moment of the human transformation from old self-awareness into a new self-perceptivity. It is a moment of forming a new identity, so to speak. In this sense, Paul does not attach self-perception to remembrance alone. He also connects it to a state of erasing the memory of old things. To say this in theological terms, he not only relates it to *anamnesis*, but also to *amnesia*. Within this theological rationale, identifying oneself within a new state of being equally demands 'disjunction, rupture, [and] transformation.'¹⁵

2. Syrian refugees between memory and religio-cultural self-perception

How is the above theological understanding related to the self-perception process of the Syrian refugees' relatedness to their new hosting societies in Europe? Answering this question invites us to travel beyond the narrow boundaries of classical theological reasoning towards the circle of interdisciplinary reasoning that is pertinent to the overlap between theology and socio-cultural realms of understanding. This is why, in this section, I turn to the realm of sociological religiosity and anthropology that are directly related to Refugee Studies and Memory Studies alike.

¹³ Morrill, *Anamnesis*, 146–147. See also Nils Alstrup Dahl, *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976).

¹⁴ Barton, 'Memory and Remembrance in Paul,' 328.

¹⁵ Barton, 'Memory and Remembrance in Paul,' 328. See also Markus Bockmuehl, 'New Testament Wirkungsgeschichte and the Early Christian Appeal to Living Memory,' in *Memory in the Bible and Antiquity*, 341–368, 345; John Lukacs, *The Historical Consciousness: The Remembered Past* (New Brunswick & London: Transaction, 1994); and Donald A Yerxa and Karl W. Giberson, 'Vegetables Don't Have a History: A conversation with Historian John Luckacs,' *Books and Culture: A Christian Review* 6, no. 14 (2000): www.booksandculture.com/articles/2000/julaug/6.14.html (accessed 14 March 2024).

When people from different cultural backgrounds sojourn searching for a new ‘home’ and they settle, eventually, in a new land, among new people, under new human existential conditions, their instinctive, primordial, and often protectionist reaction mechanisms and attitudes (in their theological and religious depths indeed) manifest a resilient mode of suspicion, fear, resistance, and even rejection, not merely of the relatedness or non-relatedness to God which others manifest, but equally of the cultural identity and webs of meaning which they see operating within the host community’s *Sitz im Leben*. This form of protectionist self-alienation might take religious, cultural, or religio-cultural forms and ramifications. This would be the case even when the new refugees and the hosting communities share the very same religious worldview (e.g., both deem the notion of ‘God’ central to their understanding of reality), or theological, faith-based perception of reality (e.g. both are Christian in background and believe in Jesus Christ). This would also be the case when both sides happen to share two cultural identities that hold many common and harmonious features and value systems. The tense and fracturing altercation between the hosted and the hosting circles of existence, be it religious/theological only or cultural/societal alone, can fairly be deemed inevitable and inescapable.

The central question in the abovementioned situation is, why does this outcome tend to be the case? It is my conviction that this ‘fraction due to otherness’ is not necessarily rooted in, or generated from, religiosity or culture as such. It is grounded in the strife of the refugees (the ‘alienated sojourners’ in their religious self-imagination) for re-imagining, and even re-inventing, their identity or self-understanding in new life-conditions. The interesting and intriguing thing here is that they travel through such a striving journey in the heart of a parallel striving process, which their new living context’s people sojourn through in their equal endeavor to refigure their own identity and selfhood in the light of the hosting societies’ inflection with newly residing strangers. What turns this process of self-identification on both campaigns into an unknown, dangerous, and daunting journey, rather than a stable, smooth trip, is the fact that the newcomers and the hosts alike delve, volitionally or unwillingly, into inquiring ‘who am I now?’ The newcomers and the hosts alike find themselves arriving at this question through their inquiry about the past: ‘Who was I before I came here (refugee)?’, or ‘Who was I before I welcomed these strangers in my land (host)?’. This inquisition demonstrates

a connectedness between identity and memory/remembrance; not only on the religious and metaphysical levels of theological reasoning, but also on the profoundly existential and praxis-centered ones of cultural reasoning as well.

It is because of this that the past two-and-a-half decades (from 2010 onwards) witnessed a rapidly growing interest in 'Memory Studies' among theologians and sociologists, and we started to witness a renewed attention to classical research on remembrance.¹⁶ A considerable number of scholars from theological studies, religious studies and social sciences vouch today for the vitality of studying the phenomenon of 'remembrance' in relation to 'how groups and societies create and sustain a sense of who they are and how they want to be locating themselves in relation to time, especially past time.'¹⁷ These scholars realize that, in their perpetual, volitional or obligatory, re-discernment of the fundamental question 'who am I?', human refugees and natives alike do not inquire outside time or space. Memory and remembrance play a substantial role in pursuing identity-formation processes on a broad horizon of temporality.¹⁸

Be that as it may, if the Syrian refugees, who have inhabited European societies since 2015 and who hail from overwhelmingly diverse religious and cultural backgrounds, are subjects, perpetrators, or victims of societal tensions and conflicts in their host life-settings, this conflictual situation is not primarily symptomatic of religious or cultural resilience that is expressed in defensive behavior or cognitive violence. It, rather, digs its roots far more deeply in these Syrians' recent, almost eliminative, struggle with a remembrance-centered process of

¹⁶ Barton, 'Memory and Remembrance in Paul,' 521. See also Steven Rose, "You Must Remember This": Review of Douwe Draaisma, *Why Life Speeds Up AS You Get Older: How Memory Shapes Our Past* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004),' in *The Guardian*, Saturday, 11 December, 2004. Barton also refers to the important work on memory from the field of social sciences and historiographical studies of Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. Lewis A. Coser (Chicago, IL: Chicago University Press, 1992). doi: 10.7208/chicago/9780226774497.001.0001. See also studies of memory in the areas of cultural geographical studies, archaeology and psychology, like K. Hodgkin and S. Radstone (eds.), *Contested Pasts: The Politics of memory* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction Publishers, 2005). doi: 10.4324/9780203591471; Jan Assmann, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity,' in *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 125–135. doi: 10.2507/488558; and Avishai Margalit, *The Ethics of memory* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002). doi: 10.4159/9780674040595.

¹⁷ S. C. Barton, L. T. Stuckenbruck and B. G. Wold, 'Introduction,' in *Memory in the Bible and Antiquity*, 1–8.

¹⁸ Barton, Stuckenbruck and Wold, 'Introduction,' 2.

self-reflection, which they resorted to as an attempt to recollect what kind of humans they were back home. They escaped into this cocoon because they are desperately longing for finding in this self-perception secure and reassuring answers to the inquiry ‘who am I today, and where will this take me in the future?’. This is not necessarily a purely religious or theological cognition journey. For the Christians, the Muslims, and the non-religious among the Syrians are equally blown by the same identity-formation hurricane. They struggle with it regardless of their belief systems, theological imaginations, the faith traditions they hail from, as well as the belief systems their hosting societies uphold and identify with. On the other hand, this is not a culturally loaded quest, for Syrians of widely diverse cultural backgrounds encounter the very same fate, and they equally try to handle the very same demands.

Principally speaking, the existence of conspicuous nuances among the Syrian individuals in their self-perception-via-remembrance journey is natural and needs no further comment. However, on the communal level, the distinction between one Syrian group’s practice of this self-reidentification process and another group lies in the specific narratives, traditions, metaphysical imaginations (theologies), and experiential histories, wherein each group grounds its memories and each shapes its remembering activities thereafter. One has to pause at these discrepancies and to ponder the seriousness of the possibility that, when it comes to identity-perception and identity-formation in relation to remembrance, an expression like ‘collective memory’ becomes truly redundant, if not artificial. There are serious grounds for rejecting Emil Durkheim’s reduction of individual consciousness and thinking, his preconditioning of it by socially collectivist existence, as well as his proposal that human individuals develop self-awareness reflectively (not reflexively) in dependence on socio-collectivist determinations. I fully concur with Jerrold Siegel’s skepticism towards ‘every attempt to portray thinking as wholly absorbed into, or dominated by, some set of social relations.’¹⁹

¹⁹ Jerrold Siegel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 22. doi: 10.1017/CBO9780511818141. See also Michelle Rosaldo, ‘Toward an Anthropology of Self and Feeling,’ in *Culture Theory: Essays on Mind, Self and Emotion*, eds. R. A. Shweder and R. A. LeVine (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 137–157; and Emile Durkheim, *On Morality and Society*, ed. Robert Bellah, trans. Charles Blend (Chicago & London: Chicago University Press, 1973).

A more plausible and realistic alternative to 'collectiveness' would circle, instead, around thinking of 'common events', 'common matters', or even 'common experiences; which may have been "known" to a community'.²⁰ People will not hold *collective* memory even if they subscribed to the very same religious imagination, theological reasoning, or the same cultural background. They will always shape their identities and self-perception through different ways of remembering their common belief systems, cultural backgrounds, and their interpretations of both. To the Syrian refugees, but also their European hosts, as I believe, applies also the fact that 'we can [merely] speak of a range of various kinds of memories in real historical groups'.²¹ The variety of the forms and contents of memorization stands as a realistic, down-to-earth demonstration of the mistaken presumption that 'subjectivity can be wholly formed by, or absorbed into, social and cultural relations.' Such presumption breeds only unsustainable forms of integration that fail to take into consideration not just 'the complexity and intricacy of human culture and language,'²² but also the diversity and nebulous nature of human remembrance and self-perception. The human being comes to know a living system via 'mindful interaction' and by means of acting not like a disciple, but also like 'a *judge*,' as Emmanuel Kant confirmed centuries ago.²³ A similar situation is applicable to those refugees who came from one, single religious and cultural sphere as well: 'Who I am' as someone hailing from the particular religio-cultural contexts of Syria would also be determined through a broad range of alternative microcosmic memories that are quite diverse in their identity-creating capacities and results. This will be the case despite the fact that the five million Syrian refugees who have gone to Europe and other parts of the world since 2015,²⁴ equally fled from their country

²⁰ Doron Mendels, 'Societies of Memory in the Graeco-Roman World,' in *Memory in the Bible and Antiquity*, 143–162, 143.

²¹ Mendels, 'Societies of Memory,' 144. See also Doron Mendels, *Memory in Jewish, Pagan and Christian Societies of the Graeco-Roman World* (London: T&T Clark/Continuum, 2004); and Jan Assmann, *Religion und Kulturelles Gedächtnis* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2000).

²² Siegel, *The Idea of the Self*, 22.

²³ Siegel, *The Idea of the Self*, 23. See also Martin Hollis, 'Of Masks and Men,' in *The Category of the Person: Anthropology, Philosophy, History*, eds. Michael Carrithers, Steven Collins and Steven Lujes (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 217–235.

²⁴ Ahmad Barakat, 'The Syrian Refugee Crisis and Global Security Threats – a case Study of Germany,' in *Syria Studies* 15, no. 2 (2023): 1–34.

driven by an instinctive survival attempt from the common catastrophic crisis, which the entire Syrian population equally endured. No wonder that, once in his *Republic*, Plato attacks ‘collective memory’ (as imitation and mimicry), and he forbids it in his utopic city-state imagination. Plato deems collective memory merely a worthless entertainment for those who do not know the truth, thus he calls for banishing it from the *Republica*.²⁵

Such skepticism towards ‘collective memory’ is plausible, I reckon, particularly in relation to the case study of this article. It stands against turning memory into an instrument for creating a collectivist self-perception or identity-formation that is controlled by, and shaped after, ideological, discriminative, and radically otherizing preconceptions. Such ideologized otherness is not symptomatic of the refugee groups (the Syrians in this case) alone. It is as effectively prominent in the hosting societies, whose members tend to promote and defend a static, collectivist cultural identity that is equally based on a mythical imagination. It is important here to realize that, in their turn, the hosting communities are equally clinging to a collective memory in their zeal to defend and protect their imagined mono-cultural identity from the fantasized ‘hazardous’ impacts of the newly coming Syrian ‘alien sojourners’. Both states of self-perception by means of remembrance (in the case of the religio-cultural identity of the refugees and that of the hosting societies alike) do not seem to take into consideration that memory is also embedded in a natural process of selectivity, which creates a space for a benign distortion inherent to the process itself. Here, ‘distortion’ does not necessarily breed negative, detrimental consequences. It is just an articulate expression of a natural tendency within the attempt of human recollection to ‘distort the past, to render it intelligibly to the present... [or to lean towards] distorting uninteresting shapes into interesting abstractions’.²⁶ In other words, both the identifi-

²⁵ Plato, *Republic*, in *Plato: Complete Works*, eds. John M. Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson, trans. G. M. A. Grube and C. D. C. Reeve (Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997), 971–1223, X.598.b.c–606.b–c (1202–1206); X.607.b–d (1211). This, Plato sees manifested in poetry as the ideal expression of collectivity. So, he bluntly criticizes Homer and his poetic legacy.

²⁶ Anthony Le Donne, ‘Theological Memory Distortion in the Jesus Tradition: A Study in Social Memory Theory,’ in *Memory in the Bible and Antiquity*, 163–177, 167. See also Michael Kommen, ‘Some Patterns and Meanings of Memory Distortion in American History,’ in *Memory Distortion: How Minds, Brains and Societies Reconstruct the Past*, ed. Daniel Schachter (Cambridge & London: Harvard University Press, 1995), 329–345.

cation which the Syrians make of themselves as 'Muslims or Christians from the Syrian world', as well as what the Europeans say about their own belief-cultural identities as 'Christian/Jews/secular/non-religious from the French/English/German/Czech cultural heritage', are equally erected upon certain connectedness to historical memory, which includes within it a considerable extent of distortion (one that must not be confused with non-historicity).²⁷

3. Syrians re-inventing themselves in Europe

The Syrian refugees who ended up trying to establish a new life in the European context (others among them are still imprisoned in a limbo of oblivion and confusion) found themselves confronted with a more primordial inquiry: 'Whom are you going to become?' This question-like expectation was addressed to the Syrian refugees by the hosting populations, to whom, ironically enough, the concept of 'identity' seems equally to form an integral part of their self-perception. The irony here lies in that, while the European hosting societies were strictly expecting the refugees to compromise their diverse religious and cultural legacies and fully adopt and integrate into European religio-cultural value systems and webs of meaning, these European publics – contrary to what some of their academic elites and intellectuals have relatively recently conceded²⁸ – have quite rarely apprehended that the very notion of 'identity', be it religious or cultural, 'has become an increasingly problematic concept,' and it breeds dire suspicions about whether 'it is still possible to speak in an intellectually responsible way about identity', in the first place.²⁹

²⁷ Le Donne, 'Theological Memory Distortion in the Jesus Tradition: A Study in Social Memory Theory,' 176.

²⁸ For some texts that demonstrate a recent, still elitist attentiveness to the challenge of identity in the European context, see Christophe Venet and Blandina Barnes (eds.), *European Identity Through Space: Space Activities and Programs as a Tool to Rein-vigorate the European Identity* (Wien: Springer, 2013); Jeffrey T. Checkel and Peter J. Katzenstein (eds.), *European Identity* (Cambridge & New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009). doi: 10.1017/CBO9780511806247; Ines Maria Gomez-Chacon (ed.), *European Identity: Individual, Group and Society* (Bilbao: University of Deusto, 2003); and Neil Fligstein, *Euro-Clash: The EU, European Identity and the Future of Europe* (Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press, 2008).

²⁹ Awad, 'Deciphering the *Genome* of "Crisis",' 169. See also Jaco Kruger, 'Christian Identification in an Age of Difference,' in *Christian Identity*, ed. Eduardus Van der Borgh (Leiden & Boston: Brill, 2008), 119–132, 119. doi: 10.1163/ej.9789004158061.i-514.58.

The Syrian refugees were requested to abandon their cultural, religious, and non-religious identities and to integrate into the European ones of their hosting societies, so that they demonstrate that their presence in the hosting context is not going to result in backlash and turn into a potential source of crisis and disturbance to public peace and stability. However, the hosting publics seem to have forgotten, or maybe ignored, that ‘since the 1990s, questions like “who is the European?”, or “what does it mean to be European?” can no longer be answered clearly or collectively’.⁵⁰ This, as I diagnosed back between 2015 and 2018, is not just the case on the macrocosmic level, but also on the level of the microcosmic strife for finding ‘coherent and unifying national identities: What is French? What is German? What is Italian? What is Dutch? And so on.’⁵¹ The need for re-apprehending oneself and re-forming one’s identity is as challenging and tormenting for the refugees’ relation to their religio-cultural imagination as it is for the hosting European populations.

It is my reckoning that the crux of the ambiguity of the ‘European identities’ and the ‘Syrian identities’ concepts is grounded in the fact that both sides construct their understandings of identity and self-perception upon historical, artificial collectivist memory that is either overtly presumptive or false, and it has no anchor in present realities and conditions. Both sides seem to be tailoring the costume of their allegedly definitive cultural biography by means of either *anamnesis* (remembrance) or *amnesia* (forgetfulness); by either imposing something or by erasing another. The hosts cling to ‘European’ identities that are shaped after a recollection of a selectively invoked Judeo-Christian past, and they hardly reminisce about the genuinely *Muslim* niche of that history (There are indigenous Muslim Europeans since at least the 15th century). They lean, instead, towards erasing this Islam, and they prefer to forget it.

On the other hand, the Syrian refugees defend a ‘Syrian’ identity that is shaped after one of two tendencies related to memory. The first tendency emphasizes remembering the Syrian near past’s histories of suffering, torture, death, displacement, deracination, and persecution, which coerced millions of them since 2012 to abandon their homeland and to end up either congregated in refugees’ camps on the borderlines

⁵⁰ Awad, ‘Deciphering the *Genome* of “Crisis”,’ 169.

⁵¹ Awad, ‘Deciphering the *Genome* of “Crisis”,’ 170.

with neighboring countries, or escaping to, and sheltering in, foreign lands overseas. For these people, their religio-cultural self-perception and other-awareness alike are shaped by a profound sense of introverted and desolated self-pity; of utter distrust in any other; of dire victimhood; of pathological self-alienation, of protectionist isolationism and of xenophobia. The remembrance of their crisis becomes constitutive of their appraisal of what they can *do* and what they can, or they are allowed to, *be* or *become*.

The second tendency related to remembrance drifts Syrian refugees into a deliberate state of denial that is driven by forgetfulness: They consciously and psychologically determine to erase (in the sense of oblivious denial) the memory of the latest Syrian catastrophe along with their personal dehumanization and suffering in it. They root their self-perception and relatedness to reality, instead, in an *overleaping* memory grounded in a passionate, euphoric longing for a historical, remote past, which goes way back before the Syrian crisis that started in 2011. These Syrians stretch their emotions, minds, and *psyches* backwards and retrospectively, toward a fantasized, glorious, almost fabricated, and self-elevating old cultural and religious 'golden era', when, as they remorsefully eulogize, a superior, glorious, idealist 'Syria' once existed, and they lived in it in idealized peace, harmony, prosperity, security, stability, plenitude, fraternity, and flourishing. Here, we have a case of forgetfulness that lies in an alternative perception shaped after a false memory, since the Syria of the past half-century (the Syria of the dictatorial, tyrannical al-Asad regimes' era), to which the predominant majority of the Syrian refugees belong (and I personally grew up in), has never been at any time that 'Paradise Eden' which they tend to remember it to be, and it has never existed in reality.

What such a self-perception and self-identification strategy rooted in manipulation and falsification of memory generates is a stance of aloofness, self-otherizing, and excessive resistance to integration, and defensive-apologetic tension towards the hosting societies. This otherness in terms of contrariety becomes these refugees' desperate means for protecting and defending what they preconceive as superior, far more perfect, and valuable religio-cultural heritage. They try to remain remote from what such a false, superior memory drives them to treat and deem as inferior, less valuable, lowly cultural alternative, which they now over-project on the hosting societies. When they gather together to exchange life's stories and testimonies in their new societies,

these refugees might entertain very common, cliché-like catchwords, like ‘I long for my life in Syria’; ‘I used to have a life better than here in Syria’, ‘our society was more relationally and socially amalgamated and cohesive than the fragmented, dispersed societies here’, ‘people in these societies are morally degenerate, opposite to how society was in Syria’, ‘people here despise faith and religious values. I wish I could enjoy the Syrian religious sensibility here’, etc., etc.

In the abovementioned twofold orientation towards relating to memory, the Syrian refugees rely on remembrance in their involvement in self-perception and identity-formation processes. In either manifested tendency, they pursue this identity-formation process in the heart of a life-setting, which includes host populations that are equally drowned in similar processes of self-perception and identity-formation that are rooted in the very same abovementioned two tendencies towards memory’s dual nature: Remembrance (*anamnesis*), and calculated forgetfulness or erasure (*amnesia*).

My present extended investigation of the Syrian refugees’ adaptability to their hosting European contexts from the angle of ‘identity’ within religious/theological imagination brings me back with confidence to the diagnosis I developed in my 2015–2018 research:

European communities, on one side, and Syrian refugees, on another, are both facing existential crises and both are striving to develop new, more relevant and contextually coherent identities... both... meet with similar confusing struggles that they must deal with and attend to... both sides need to review their understanding of ‘identity’ and transform it into a realization of the fact that identity [religious and cultural ones included] is multi-faceted and fluid in nature, never static or monolithic.⁵²

Some concluding remarks

In this article, I tried to demonstrate that the question of the Syrian refugees’ presence in Europe must not primarily be determined by exploring whether they can prove their adaptability, or reveal their lack of adaptability, to its religio-cultural contexts and values. It must

⁵² ‘Deciphering the *Genome* of “Crisis”,’ 172. See also Gilles Deleuze, *Kleine Schriften*, trans. K. D. Schacht (Berlin: Minerva, 1980); and G. Deleuze and Claire Parnet, *Dialogues II*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (New York: Columbia University, 2002).

be approached by exploring tenable answers to the questions: 'Adaptability to what exactly?' and 'adaptability to this "whatness" as whom precisely?' It is essentially an inquiry about identity, and when it comes to identity, the chronometric constituents of the identity-formation process are certainly memory and remembrance.

In the field of ethnomethodology, scholars construct a myriad of categorizing labels to describe people and define them. Some of these categories are useful; others are not always relevant, especially to the theological and religious reasoning on identity formation. In any case, this triggers the general question: 'Which categories become relevant in an ongoing course of action, why they are made relevant, and why at this very moment?' This can also reveal that 'the analyses of categories, of relations between categories, and of conclusions people draw from these categories, elucidate a significant part of mundane sense-making and reasoning.'⁵⁵

I point to this 'categorization' strategy here because European publics also define the Syrian refugees by means of various religious and cultural categories, some of which might be relevant, yet others might just be impositions, aiming at confining these refugees to premeditated, stereotypical imagination about their cultural and religious identities. The danger in such categories-centered ethnomethodological identification is that it may treat such categories as 'fixed identities', or static identifying qualifications or nature. Here, the religio-cultural identifying constituents transform into instruments of racial and ideological otherizing that are as confining to the hosting society as they will be to the refugees. The call for adaptability, in this case, boxes the hosting public in a static self-otherizing *habitus* that lies in imposing ontological contrariety with, and antagonistic segregation from, the alien other. This will not just manifest in defensive, hostile, and ideologized identity. It will also make adaptability expressive of a self-perception state that is rooted in falsehood and delusion.

The understanding of remembrance in relation to self-perception, other-perception, and identity-formation processes teaches us that

⁵⁵ Daniel H. Rellstab, 'Refugee? No Refugee? Categorizations of Migrants in the Wake of the Arab Spring in Swiss Online News and Comments,' in *Representations of War, Migration and Refugeehood: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, eds. Danile H. Rellstab and Christine Schlote (New York & London: Routledge, 2015), 109–139, 114. doi: 10.4324/9781315884370. See also Carly W. Butler, *Talk and Social Interaction in the Playground* (Hampshire: Ashgate, 2008).

remembrance, or forgetfulness for that matter, can sometimes lead the person to either fanatically cling to a preconceived and imagined superior cultural or religious identity, or to extravagantly demonize and degrade the other's religio-cultural identifying bearers. In this case, self-perception not only loses its fluxive, processive, and open-ended scope. It also turns identity-formation and re-creation attempts into affairs that are grounded in 'dangerous memory', to borrow a term once conjured by Johann Baptist Metz (yet here, this memory is dangerous in a destructive sense).⁵⁴

The Syrian refugees in Europe either manifest various forms of desperate resort to remembrance of their, still fresh, suffering and trauma in Syria's war, or, they express an escapism from that trauma by sheltering in a memory of an imagined pre-war, metahistorical, and utopian Syria. On the other hand, their hosting European societies are overwhelmingly haunted by their judgmental and prejudiced clinging to a remembered, referential, equally supra-historical and almost mythological European, Judeo-Christian identity and 'origin narrative.' It is my belief that both sides need to avoid the impasse of such 'dangerous memory' by emancipating their self-perceptions from conformism, glorification, or essentialization. They both need to beware of the dangerous memory that seems 'deprived of all future', as Johann Baptist Metz once related. Such memory, Metz argues, 'can easily become a "false consciousness" of our past and an opiate for our present.'⁵⁵ Within the abyss of such meta-historical memorization, designated identities turn into mere rigidly defined nomenclatures with nebulous content.

Would the Syrian refugees one day adapt to the new cultural and societal sphere of existence they try to belong to? This article suggests that the complexity of the question of self-perceptivity and memory invites us to realize that any integration-expectation shaped after fixed forms of cultural and religious/theological premeditated self-perception and supra-historical identities would be doomed to failure on the practical and behavioural levels of existence alike. Human beings'

⁵⁴ See Johann Baptist Metz, 'Communicating Dangerous Memory,' in *Communicating Dangerous memory: Studies in Political Theology*, ed. Fred Lawrence (Atlanta, GA: Scholars Press, 1987), 37-54. doi: 10.5840/lw19876Supplement4. See also J. B. Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury Press, 1980), 88-118.

⁵⁵ Metz, *Faith in History and Society*, 109.

capacity for independence enables them to always be other than who they are, provided that this capacity is not predetermined and dictated, but lived and practiced in genuine independence.⁵⁶

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⁵⁶ Siegel, *The Idea of the Self*, 25. See also Clifford Geertz, 'The Growth of Culture and the Evolution of Mind,' in *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books/Perseus Books Group, 1973), 55–86.

RITUALS REFLECTING VARIOUS FORMS OF HUMAN SOCIALITY AS MEANS OF COPING WITH THE COVID CRISIS

PAVEL KOLÁŘ

ABSTRACT

The emergence and rapid global spread of the virus SARS-CoV-2 in 2019 triggered the severe COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic affected almost every dimension of human life to such an extent that it can be viewed as a disaster. A defining feature of this period was the disruption of established forms of human sociality resulting from anti-pandemic measures. Drawing on Afifi's model of coping and Carrithers' concept of human sociality, this article examines the diversity of ritual repertoires through which individuals and institutions responded to the pandemic's impact on social life. It primarily addresses the dynamic transformations of aspects of the ritual environment during the COVID-19 pandemic, particularly shifts in the relationships between public and private, bodily and virtual, continuity and disruption, mimesis and fidelity, and breach and reintegration. It argues that the distinctiveness of Christian sociality lies in its anamnestic, epicletic, koinonic, and oikodomic dimensions, which provide key criteria for assessing the adequacy of adaptations of Christian rituals in times of crisis. The article advances a tentative hypothesis that communities with more internally diverse repertoires of lived ritual practices may exhibit greater resilience, as such diversity enhances the natural and cultural resources of human sociality.

Keywords

Ritual; Performance; COVID-19 pandemic; Human sociality; Christian sociality; Sign-practices; The eucharist; Coping model; Social distancing; Online ritual; Social drama

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The emergence and rapid global spread of the virus SARS-CoV-2 in 2019 caused the severe COVID-19 pandemic, which has affected almost every dimension of human life: personal, social, political,

health, economic, cultural, and religious. Individuals, groups, communities, organisations, states, and international institutions developed various strategies to cope with the complex threat that the pandemic posed to societies and states internationally.

During the pandemic, various attempts appeared to reflect the rituals' role in those coping strategies.¹ The primary goal of this contribution is to map the main dimensions of ritual coping with the COVID crisis that researchers have observed. The map cannot be exhaustive, as ethnographic, anthropological, ritual, and theological research on the COVID-19 pandemic is still in progress. Moreover, I will focus mainly on the European situation and experiences. I will also propose an interdisciplinary framework for interpreting the variability in ritual coping that emerged during the pandemic. Finally, I will briefly outline directions for further research and practice that theologians and ecclesiastical representatives might follow to enhance Christian communities' resilience in dealing with severe stressors arising from events such as the COVID-19 pandemic.

The design of this contribution is as follows: First, I will identify the COVID-19 pandemic as a form of disaster, with social distancing as one of its characteristic features. Then, I will briefly sketch a coping model that integrates individual and communal dimensions of strategies developed and employed to cope with stressors, such as the impacts of a pandemic on human life. Third, I will briefly present relevant observations from cultural anthropology on human sociality, noting that human distancing represented a general and severe breach of ordinary and festive relations between humans, caused by anti-pandemic measures. Next, I will outline a map of the significant features of the repertoire of rituals used, transformed or invented to cope with the Covid crisis. Then, I will shortly discuss distinctive theological dimensions of Christian sociality and theological criteria for assessing ritual strategies for coping with the pandemic. In conclusion, I will mention some practical suggestions for churches as a contribution to enhancing Christian communities' resilience in times similar to the Corona time.

¹ Martin J. M. Hoondert, Paul Post, Mirella Klomp, and Marcel Barnard, eds., *Handbook of disaster ritual* (Leuven: Peeters, 2021); Barry Stephenson, *Ritualizing in the Time of Coronavirus*, in *Ritualinmotion.org* 30. 3. 2020, <https://www.ritualinmotion.org/ritualizing-in-the-time-of-coronavirus> (accessed 14 March 2025); George Washington University, *Rituals in the Making*, in *Ritualsinthemaking.com*, accessed: <https://ritualsinthemaking.com> (accessed 14 March 2025).

1. Disaster in the form of pandemic and behavioural immunity

The spread of the virus Sars-CoV-2 and the ensuing zoonotic coronavirus disease caused the most complex and severe global crisis. This crisis affected almost every aspect of human life, including its individual, social, political, cultural, and economic dimensions. This manifold dynamic phenomenon is generally referred to as the COVID-19 crisis and is usually classified as a disaster in the form of a pandemic.²

The socially focused tradition of disaster studies views disasters as ‘sudden-onset occasions, which seriously disrupt routines or collective units, cause the adoption of unplanned courses or actions to adjust disruption, have unexpected life histories in social space and time, and pose a danger to valued social objects.’³

The international medical community called upon state officials and representatives globally to take adequate measures to counteract the transmission of the virus Sars-CoV-2 and address disease-related global health risks. Suggested defence strategies included behavioural immunity, namely sanitation, the selection/regulation of habitats, wearing health-protective equipment, quarantine, and active spatial social distancing.⁴ The widespread introduction of behavioural immunity rules disrupted many elementary social institutions and relations in which humans lived and shared their individual, communal, and professional lives. Moreover, the social and personal consequences of the introduced behavioural immunity practices became a part of the COVID-19 crisis. Restrictions were imposed on human social activities, including religious ones, that involved close bodily contact among participants.⁵ This resulted in the severe disruption of event-based relations, groups, and institutions – wider families, schools with their classrooms, workplaces, sports clubs with their teams, restaurants and cafés, cinemas and theatres, churches and so on. While the essential features of our complex Western societies (government, police, army,

² Paul Post, ‘Introduction: Some conceptual and historiographical explorations on ritual, disaster and disaster ritual,’ in *Handbook of disaster ritual*, 1–48.

³ Post, ‘Introduction,’ 8.

⁴ Mark J. Butler and Donald C. Behringer, ‘Behavioral Immunity and Social Distancing in the Wild: The Same as in Humans?’, *BioScience* 71, no. 6 (2021): 571–580. doi: 10.1095/biosci/biaa176.

⁵ Monica Cornejo-Valle and Borja Martin-Andino, ‘Elastic Rituals: A Multi-Religious Analysis of Adaptations to the COVID-19 Crisis,’ *Religions* 14, no. 6 (2023). doi: 10.3390/rel14060773.

health care, social care) functioned more or less effectively, the miniature scenes of human relationships and mutual exchange in which people experience the meaningfulness of life were seriously damaged. Social distancing negatively impacted social cohesion and the value of social capital of many traditional institutions and communities, including churches. It led to a loss of the fundamental preconditions for effectively coping with the COVID-19 crisis.⁶ On the other hand, it prompted various creative initiatives to mitigate, or even overcome, the negative consequences of social distancing.⁷

2. Individual and communal coping strategies with stressors

In an interpretative research study conducted among U.S. adults in the first months of the COVID-19 pandemic, researchers identified three main stressors related to the pandemic: isolation – a loss of physical and social connection due to restricted mobility and government-issued shelter-in-place mandates; uncertainty – the unpredictability of future events and a reduced sense of control over financial, social, and physical wellbeing; conflict – increased conflict in interpersonal relationships as a result of intensified interactions in closed spaces, as well as reduced autonomy and personal space.⁸ Although many respondents shared these general stressors, they appraised them differently and acted diversely upon their assessments to cope with the crisis stressors.

Generally, coping is a response to a stressor. Communication scholars have proposed a coping model that focuses on the formal aspects

⁶ Adebola Adegboyega, Stephanie Boddie, Hope Dorvie, Bolanle Bolaji, Christson Adeyoyin, and Sharon E. Moore, 'Social Distance Impact on Church Gatherings: Socio-Behavioral Implications,' *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 31, no. 1–4 (2021): 221–254. doi: 10.1080/10911359.2020.1793869.

⁷ Thomas Schlag, 'Digitalization of ecclesiastical practice in the pandemic,' (February 2022). doi: 10.5167/UZH-217091; Sylvia E. Badon, Lisa A. Croen, Assiamira Ferrara, Jennifer L. Ames, Monique M. Hedderson, Kelly C. Young-Wolff, Yeyi Zhu, and Lyndsay A. Avalos, 'Coping Strategies for COVID-19 Pandemic-Related Stress and Mental Health during Pregnancy,' *Journal of Affective Disorders* 309 (July 2022): 309–313. doi: 10.1016/j.jad.2022.04.146; Craig P. Polizzi, Charlie W. McDonald, Fiona G. Sleight, and Steven Jay Lynn, 'Resilience, Coping, and the COVID-19 Pandemic across the Globe – an Update: What Have We Learned?,' *Clinical Neuropsychiatry* 20, no. 4 (2023): 316–326. doi: 10.56131/cnforitieditore20230411.

⁸ Alaina C. Zanin, Brianna L. Avalos, Sophia Town, Sarah J. Tracy, and B. Liahna Stanley, 'Discursive, Communal, and Individual Coping Strategies: How U.S. Adults Co-Constructed Coping During Preliminary COVID-19 Stressors,' *Health Communication* 38, no. 7 (2023): 1373–1387. doi: 10.1080/10410236.2021.2010347.

of dealing with a stressor, differentiates between individual and communal coping strategies and is based on three correlated dimensions: cognitive appraisal, action, and discourse. The cognitive appraisal of a stressor consists in the interpretation and determination of its 'ownership', i.e. to what extent the stressor is perceived as 'my/your problem' or 'our shared problem'. The action dimension involves variations in responsibility and behavioural efforts in relation to the degree to which coping is enacted alone or jointly with other people: 'my/your responsibility' or 'our shared responsibility'.⁹ Finally, the discursive dimension encompasses cultural and personal variations in narratives and norms people employ to negotiate effective coping strategies.¹⁰

The qualitative research study identified three individual and two communal strategies that respondents used to cope with the stressors of the COVID-19 crisis.¹¹ As I am particularly interested in the ritual aspects of coping with this crisis, we will focus only on the two most relevant coping strategies. One of the identified individual coping strategies was 'seeking embodied comfort.' The respondents regularly engaged in increased bodily activities such as running, cycling, walking, or yoga. Some of them turned ordinary hands-on activities, such as cooking or baking, into activities for personal enjoyment. These activities of embodied comfort are examples of ritualisation, i.e., the process by which ordinary activities acquire ritual qualities. 'Bounded creativity' was a strategy chosen by those who preferred to cope with the COVID-19 crisis communally. It involved diverse performances of sociality within the constraints of behavioural immunity rules: planning drive-by birthday parades, organising family barbecues in front of houses (instead of in privacy behind them), or video-conference celebrations. Employing this bounded creativity, the study's communication partners faced a precarity of sociality emerging from the severe disruption of traditional forms and institutions of their communal and social lives. They tried to respond to this COVID-19 crisis by creating and performing alternative forms of sociality when the existing ones had disappeared or been severely damaged. To understand the indicated

⁹ Tamara D. Afifi, Erin D. Basinger, and Jennifer A. Kam, 'The Extended Theoretical Model of Communal Coping: Understanding the Properties and Functionality of Communal Coping,' *Journal of Communication* 70, no. 3 (2020): 424–446. doi: 10.1093/joc/jqaa006.

¹⁰ Zanin, 'Discursive'.

¹¹ Zanin, 'Discursive'.

relationship between creativity in coping with stressors and human sociality, we may turn to a concept of sociality recently developed by scholars in ethnographical and anthropological studies.

3. Human sociality

This ethnographical concept of human sociality was developed as a tool for exploring and interpreting societies with low social differentiation. It has also been successfully employed in the study of small-scale social scenes within highly differentiated and institutionalised societies. These social scenes are usually strictly limited and relatively egalitarian, consisting, for example, of people sharing a common interest via electronic interactions at a distance (*Second Life*) or townspeople gathering for a shared aesthetic experience during a happening.¹² Researchers employing this concept put aside ‘such standard sociological categories as “society”, “kinship”, or “social structure”, or standard oppositions such as individual vs. society, politics vs. domesticity, or female vs. male as biological or natural kinds, and looks instead to whatever happens between people to create their distinctive life and forms of personhood.’¹³ They conceive human sociality as ‘the relational matrix which constitutes the life of persons’, who are apprehended as ‘simultaneously containing the potential for relationships and being always embedded in a matrix of relationships with others’.¹⁴ They also focus on human interactions as ‘a site of constant fecund motility which routinely produces both the new and the routine in social life’.¹⁵ This dynamic relational matrix is significantly shaped by ‘humans’ ‘ethical imaginations’, the contextually specific (but not contextually determined) ‘forms and means ... through which individuals imagine relationships to themselves and others’. Yet, such ethical imaginations are not limited to conscious thought and reflection but incorporate affect, performance, use of the body, unknowing, and incomprehensibility’.¹⁶

¹² Michael Carrithers, ‘Sociality, Socialities and Sociality as a Causal Force,’ in *Human Nature and Social Life*, eds. Jon Henrik Ziegler Remme and Kenneth Sillander (Cambridge University Press, 2017): 124–140. doi: 10.1017/9781316831908.009; Nicholas J. Long and Henrietta L. Moore, eds., *Sociality: New Directions* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013).

¹³ Carrithers, ‘Sociality,’ 127.

¹⁴ Long and Moore, *Sociality*, 4.

¹⁵ Carrithers, ‘Sociality,’ 127.

¹⁶ Long and Moore, *Sociality*, 114.

Moreover, this concept of human sociality as the dynamic relational matrix includes human relations with the material environment, plants and animals, dead ancestors, and imagined celestial or under-terrestrial beings.

The ethical imagination distinguishes human sociality from that of other social primates, which is conceived as ‘a general inherited propensity of living beings to engage responsively and intensely with one another.’ Due to the ethical imagination, humans continually create new social and cultural forms. Human sociality is not limited to or determined by one or a couple of specifiable forms of social arrangements, as is common among other social primates, but rather consists in the prolific potential for a wide range of social organisations and institutions. I may conclude with Carrithers that people ‘may invent and cultivate new forms of organisation and new styles of relationship ... or conduct ourselves within novel styles of behaviour, all so different from our natal styles and persons that we in effect move into a different world.’¹⁷

4. Mapping dimensions of ritual coping with the global disaster in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic

The activities of bounded creativity mentioned above, in which people engaged while communally coping with the COVID-19 pandemic, exemplify the creative character of human sociality and point to the role that rituals and cultural activities with a ritual dimension play in coping strategies emerging from human sociality. Post paid particular attention to the roles of these ritual or ritual-like activities in dealing with disaster and proposed collecting such rituals and cultural activities under the common designation disaster ritual repertoire.¹⁸ To underline this vital place of rituality in coping with disasters, he offered a modified working definition of disaster, which I am slightly rephrasing as follows: A disaster in the form of a pandemic is an event, situation or longitudinal condition that causes a severe health risk and significant disruption of society, and that evokes various forms of individual and communal coping strategies originating in human sociality,

¹⁷ Carrithers, ‘Sociality,’ 125.

¹⁸ Post, ‘Introduction,’ 4. For a distinction between ritual and ritual-like activity see Paul Post, ‘Ritual Studies,’ in *International Handbook of Practical Theology*, eds. Birgit Weyel, Wilhelm Gräb, Emmanuel Lartey, and Cas Wepener (De Gruyter, 2022), 745–746. doi: 10.1515/9783110618150.

which includes a repertoire of rituals and cultural practices with ritual dimension, such as mourning, compassion, healing, indignation, protest, call for justice, recovery, reconciliation, and consolation.¹⁹ His understanding of rituality, which also includes cultural performances with ritual qualities, enabled Post to observe the varieties of human ritual activity with particular scholarly sensitivity.²⁰

Many natural (storm, tornado, deluge, volcanic eruption) or human-caused (war, public shooting, police violence) disasters elicited such ritual and cultural activities. Through them, people mourned disaster victims, protested against exhibited violence, expressed solidarity with the unjustly imprisoned, or shared compassion with the afflicted. During the COVID-19 pandemic, human sociality itself became a particular ritual topic. People frequently embodied their longing for human connectivity and the renewal of communal life through rituals and ritual-like activities, which they integrated into individual and communal strategies for coping with the pandemic. In his review of discernible tendencies in ritual coping with the pandemic, Post emphasises the ritual creativity of people, who reshaped traditional rituals and invented new kinds of practices with a ritual dimension.²¹

Given the importance of rituals in coping with disasters, it might not be surprising that the absence of traditional rituals significantly affected people's lives during the pandemic. Due to a series of lockdowns and health measures, many traditional religious rituals, public festivities or commemorations had to be cancelled, postponed or considerably reduced in scale and attendance. Churches and other religious buildings were closed for regular feasts and weekday gatherings and opened by appointment only for a few people.²² Regular or special cultural performances (concerts, cinema, theatre, museum), sports events, festivals, carnivals, open-air festive markets (Christmas, New Year or Easter markets), national commemorations, school and

¹⁹ Post, 'Introduction,' 10.

²⁰ Post, 'Ritual,' 757–758.

²¹ Post, 'Ritual,' 757–758; Paul Post, 'E-rituals in the coronavirus context,' in *Handbook of disaster ritual*, 605–620.

²² Tabita Landová, 'Bohoslužby a svátosti v čase pandemie: Ztráty, obohacení a výzvy do budoucna,' in *Církev v době pandemie*, eds. Michal Opatrný and Karel Šimr (Brno: Centrum pro studium demokracie a kultury, 2022), 153–181. For the South African context, see Hilton R. Scott, 'Worship in a Post-Lockdown Context: A Ritual-Liturgical Perspective,' *HTS Theologiese Studies / Theological Studies* 76, no. 1 (2020). doi: 10.4102/hts.v76i1.6112.

classmate celebrations, and other public festivities with ritual dimensions were cancelled or prevented.²⁵ Similarly, many traditional ritual-like forms of relaxation, such as wellness programmes and vacation tourism, were included in the anti-pandemic measures. Couples with their families were often postponing planned wedding ceremonies, and bereaved families were struggling with the strict rules set for organising funeral farewells. As these culturally diverse rituals and ritual-like public festivities shape a sense of society's as well as specific groups' belonging and identity, their lockdowns, postponements, or reductions during the pandemic substantially affected people's sense of individual and communal well-being.

4.1 Public and private places

The rules of behavioural immunity, above all, regulated active spatial social distancing and the body sensorium in face-to-face communication. They notably contributed to transforming diverse living places into a single sanitised space.²⁴ People attempted to cope with such a unified space by creatively adapting the established distinction between public and private spaces. They intuitively rediscovered rituals practised in Renaissance or Baroque European cities.²⁵ Windows, balconies and doors of private houses and apartments became porous *limmes* connecting public and private places in human life. Children and their parents posted homemade signs of hope, compassion, kindness, and gratefulness in windows, accompanying them with the hopeful image of a rainbow or a red heart. At the door, sick and elderly people living alone regularly met volunteers who brought them food, medicine or other living necessities, exchanging modified gestures of greeting with them. Standing on balconies or in windows, people applauded together to express support for caring professionals and appreciation for their service; a few even played instruments or banged pots and pans.²⁶ Some

²⁵ Sandro Cattacin, Fiorenza Gamba, and Nerea Viana Alzola, 'A Momentary Lack of Rituals: Urban Festivities Cancellations in Geneva, Turin, and Zurich during the COVID-19 Lockdowns,' *International Journal of Anthropology and Ethnology* 7, no. 16 (2023): 1–25. doi: 10.1186/s41257-023-00095-y.

²⁴ Carola E. Lorea, Neena Mahadev, Natalie Lang, and Ningning Chen, 'Religion and the COVID-19 Pandemic: Mediating Presence and Distance,' *Religion* 52, no. 2 (2022): 178. doi: 10.1080/0048721X.2022.2061701.

²⁵ Marco Faini, Maya Corry, and Alessia Meneghin, *Domestic Devotions in Early Modern Italy* (Leiden: Brill, 2018).

²⁶ David Clarke, 'Viral rituals in the United Kingdom: public responses to the covid-19 pandemic,' in *Handbook of disaster ritual*, 514–518.

Christian communities invited their members and the broader public to celebrate the Paschal mystery by singing antiphonally or solitarily the Easter hymns and songs, standing with lit candles at the doors and in the windows of their houses (Czechoslovak Hussite Church in the Czech Republic).

Similarly, city and village streets and roads, regularly used for transport from one place to another, were turned into communal paths, inviting people to pray, reflect, and express their feelings. Adopted funeral rites became an example of this change. As people could not gather in one place to say their farewell to the departed and console the bereaved family, they slowly walked (or drove cars) in a kind of street procession past a place sheltering the body of the deceased. Alternatively, they created a human tree line along a road to greet a passing hearse with flowers and farewell gestures.²⁷

Cities' inhabitants also appropriated parks and city landscapes as scenes suitable for reflective and relaxing physical activities with emerging ritual dimension, namely walking and running. People similarly socialised natural landscapes through ritual activities. Landscape's various roads, paths, and tracks often led pandemic pilgrims to natural monuments or solitary cultural objects that provoked their re-enchantment with the world. Some of these cultural objects had a religious character: field crosses, chapels, stations of the cross, marked springs, and small memorials. As churches were practically closed and regular gatherings cancelled, some believers transferred their religious lives from indoor to outdoor, open-air religious practices. On the other hand, constraints put on religious and spiritual practices in shared public spaces, such as churches, synagogues, mosques, crematories, cemeteries or yoga centres, resulted in creating religious or spiritual niches within private houses or apartments in which their inhabitants started to realise the substantial part of their religious duties or spiritual practices until then practised publicly outside their private dwellings. The COVID-19 pandemic shaped the infra-secular environments where people dynamically blend and separate the sacred and the ordinary.²⁸

²⁷ Post, 'E-rituals,' 609.

²⁸ Veronica Della Dora, 'Infrasecular Geographies: Making, Unmaking and Remaking Sacred Space,' *Progress in Human Geography* 42, no. 1 (2018): 44–71. doi: 10.1177/03091325166666190.

4.2 Phygital forms of ritual participation

The widespread transfer of many rituals and ritual-like practices into the virtual world of online platforms during the pandemic accelerated changes in the infra-secular environments. Online rituality became the most rapidly expanding and developing religious and spiritual activity during the Corona pandemic. Although purely online rituals were performed on various social media and online platforms (ZOOM), most of the ritual activities were phygital.²⁹ Many ritual actors regularly blended a physical performance of a ritual with online streaming or shared a digital recording of the performance. Again, funeral rites were eloquent examples of this innovative phygital nature of the coronavirus ritual repertoire: a particular time and place are set for a funeral, with a minimal number of physically present participants. A few days before the funeral, the family creates an online memorial page featuring their beloved's photos, letters, or videos, which will also play a few weeks after the funeral. People who knew the deceased may add photos and memories, or leave a comment. At the appointed moment, the funeral takes place with the close family present and is simultaneously streamed on social media. Its recording will be published later on the memorial pages. People attending the streamed funeral via their smartphones or computers leave comments, emoji reactions, and photos of the deceased. Some will later return to the funeral recording as part of their bereavement process and will share that recording and personal reflections with their social media followers, creating and expressing one of their digital identities, an avatar. A few minutes after the online funeral streaming, some of them will participate in other online ritual activities, such as meditation, evening prayer or cooking, via the same digital devices, and maybe with a new avatar identity.⁵⁰

For others, it was essential to participate in the online ritual activities of their religious or social groups while maintaining their incommutable phygital identity. Women, LGBTQ+ people and other persons who had been discriminated against in their religious and social communities found in the online world the opportunity to freely and openly

²⁹ Lorea et al., 'Religion'. Cf. Lalitha Vasudevan, 'Education remix: New media, literacies, and the emerging digital geographies,' *Digital Culture & Education* 2, no. 1 (2010): 62–82, for a concept of digital geographies.

⁵⁰ Post, 'E-rituals'; Martin Hoondert and Suzanne Van Der Beek, ed., *Ritual in a Digital Society* (Groningen: Institute for Ritual and Liturgical Studies, Institute for Centre for Religion and Heritage, 2019).

express their right to equal belonging through virtual participation in their communities' online ritual activities.

As we have seen, various forms of digitalising ritual activities during the COVID-19 pandemic imbued rituals with some of the essential features of online behaviour.⁵¹ The rituals became, above all, viral and memetic.⁵² The virality of online performances means that rituals are spread throughout populations and across different cultural, religious, and individual contexts through their instant digital sharing. The memetic character resides in internet-based memes that enable online ritual participants to modify ritual performances to express their personalities' individuality and uniqueness. For example, I have already mentioned the roles that personal comments, reflections, emoji reactions, and photo sharing played in the phygital funeral. During the coronavirus pandemic, people also creatively modified the rainbow artworks that had already been shared virtually. Some of them even hosted rituals they performed themselves, using methods of bricolage to assemble diverse parts, original, copied, pasted, and remixed.⁵³ We may evoke the virtual choirs as a good example of this kind of bricolage. Audio-visual tracks with singers' performances, recorded separately in improvised home studios, were afterwards reconstituted and remixed into an evocative form of a church choir. Many memetic online ritual activities served to express people's identity and the collective significance of their coping endeavors. In these ritual performances, human sociality created varied fluid forms of networked individualism⁵⁴ that contributed to transforming communities with stable membership and stable identity into places of affinity with porous leadership and many different forms and routes to participation, in which people temporarily

⁵¹ Tommaso Trillò, Blake Hallinan, and Limor Shifman, 'A Typology of Social Media Rituals,' *Journal of Computer-Mediated Communication* 27, no. 4 (2022). doi: 10.1093/jcmc/zmac011.

⁵² Clarke, 'Viral rituals,' 516–518.

⁵³ Marcel Barnard, 'Bricolage/Particularity,' in *Worship in the network culture: liturgical ritual studies: fields and methods, concepts and metaphors*, ed. Marcel Barnard, Johan Cilliers, and Cas Wepener (Leuven: Peeters, 2014), 117–130.

⁵⁴ Lee Rainie and Barry Wellman, *Networked: The New Social Operating System* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2012). doi: 10.7551/mitpress/8358.001.0001; Kyle Matthew Oliver, 'Networked Religion Meets Digital Geographies: Pedagogical Principles for Exploring New Spaces and Roles in the Seminary Classroom,' *Teaching Theology & Religion* 22, no. 1 (2019): 3–15. doi: 10.1111/teth.12465; Deborah Ann Wong, 'Liturgy in Lockdown: Restricted Movement, Expanded Worship,' *Religions* 13, no. 1 (2021): 25. doi: 10.3390/rel13010025.

meet for one or more shared interests.⁵⁵ Similarly, in some cultural contexts, for example, in the Netherlands, the anti-pandemic restrictions also strengthened the process of dissolving traditional collective ceremonies into smaller ritual moments, in the case of funeral rites into more private and individual acts of saying goodbye and mourning at home, in the street, in the place loved by the deceased, or in the cemetery.⁵⁶

4.5 Mimesis and fidelity

The phygital nature of most ritual practices performed during the COVID-19 pandemic pointed to a shared need to maintain embodied continuity in communal, as well as individual, religious and spiritual life. The anti-pandemic lockdowns and behavioural immunity rules revealed the extent to which many rituals are fused with and embodied in particular physical and social contexts, such as a particular church with its community, a street with close neighbours, a favourite theatre with beloved actors. Moreover, these particular ritual environments, integral to ‘a dynamic relational matrix of human relations’, significantly contribute to the internalisation of ritual patterns and their sedimentation into somatic memories. Whenever a particular ritual is performed, the associated somatic memories and internal spiritual resources tied to it are elicited to support actual ritual participation. Arguably, many emerging forms of human sociality at the time of the coronavirus incorporated mimesis and fidelity to the previous tradition of ritual bodily engagements. In various forms of phygital rituals, people remembered, replicated, and re-materialised traditional ritual bodily frameworks in new surroundings. These adjustments to new contexts preserved a sense of continuing practice but, at the same time, induced and intensified a sense of loss. We may remember empty churches with a few serving ministers and many scattered portraits of congregants lying on pews, which were meant to evoke in those watching a service the presence of the congregation; nevertheless, those photos also resembled an event commemorating those who had passed.

⁵⁵ James Paul Gee, *Situated Language and Learning: A Critique of Traditional Schooling. Literacies* (Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012), 70–81.

⁵⁶ Post, ‘E-rituals,’ 611.

Scholars have compared this complex experience to that of people living in the diaspora, who long for church gatherings as a lost homeland and feel estranged in their own homes. Interestingly, many global religious communities employed online strategies during the pandemic that had already been developed by their diasporic groups coping with embodied experiences of loss and a desire for reconnection.

Remarkably, many of the ritual designs employed as part of individual and communal coping strategies during the COVID-19 crisis were not entirely new. Their designers primarily drew on, recast, or adjusted ritual practices that had previously been created and developed by groups living at the edges of the mainline religious and social institutions, or by those dissenting from religious or cultural practices in which they had been only partially included or from which they had even been expelled. This alternative repertoire of ritual practices has already found its place within the archive of disaster rituals, which religious communities and other social institutions continuously create, store, reactivate, recast, and pass on in response to crises.⁵⁷

4.4 Cultural performances of conflict

The traditional rituals, which were absent, postponed, transferred, replaced, evoked, and adapted, together with the new emerging rituals and ritual-like activities, constituted the ritual repertoire that individuals, groups, and communities affected by the consequences of social distancing employed to cope creatively with the disaster in the form of the COVID-19 pandemic.⁵⁸ This crisis also provoked another kind of public response to the measures taken by governments and municipalities – protest. Many protests remained private, expressed mainly through individual infringements of the anti-pandemic rules, such as social media lamenting, meeting secretly with other people, wearing a respirator half pulled down or burying relatives in a traditional way.⁵⁹ However, a lot of erupting protests became public. Studies refer to the widespread verbal and even physical collective violence against medical staff, namely nurses and other frontline health workers during the Covid crisis, who were viewed as representatives of the restrictive

⁵⁷ Post, 'E-rituals,' 606–610.

⁵⁸ Post, 'Introduction,' 48.

⁵⁹ Inayat Ali, 'Rituals of Containment: Many Pandemics, Body Politics, and Social Dramas During COVID-19 in Pakistan,' *Frontiers in Sociology* 6 (April 2021). doi: 10.3389/fsoc.2021.648149.

anti-pandemic measures and vaccination rules.⁴⁰ Similarly, the health workers publicly demonstrated their worries about the impacts of health care on workplace safety and about inequalities and racism, which made it difficult to access vaccination.⁴¹ Most of these public protest events consisted of street blockades, property-damaging acts (such as throwing stones and setting fires), and street protest marches with various signs.⁴² Protests were also expressed in marking public spaces with temporary signs, such as the white crosses painted on the cobbles of the Old Town Square in Prague, blaming the government for the excessive number of victims of the pandemic.⁴³

These public protest events can be interpreted as cultural performances of social drama. Victor Turner developed and applied the concept of social drama to describe, analyse, and interpret the process of social change in various groups, tribes, communities, and even societies. He proposed four constitutive phases of social change: breach, crisis, redress, and either reintegration or recognition of schism.⁴⁴ While infractions of the social order, as represented in social rules and laws, manifest a breach, a crisis reveals opposing and contesting sides of social conflict, which develop framing narratives about the nature of conflict, its causes and its anticipated resolution. The narratives become a critical aspect of the redress phase, in which each side of the conflict implements adjustive and corrective mechanisms and seeks to convince the other side to accept them. Successful bargaining leads to a reintegration of the breached social order. In contrast, failed negotiation ends in persistent tension, even a schism. Moreover, Turner considered rituals an integral part of social drama. He claimed that rituals significantly contribute to the processes of social change, facilitating

⁴⁰ Davina Jacobi and Tobias Ide, 'Collective Violence against Health Workers in the Context of the COVID-19 Pandemic,' *Nursing Reports* 13, no. 2 (2023): 902–912. doi: 10.3390/nursrep13020079.

⁴¹ Davina Jacobi and Tobias Ide, 'Nurses' Protests during the COVID-19 Pandemic: A Comparative International Analysis,' *Nursing Reports* 14, no. 3 (2024): 1961–1972. doi: 10.3390/nursrep14030146.

⁴² Maia Booker, "'Everyone Was Screaming at Them.'" The Story Behind Those Photos of the Counter-Protesting Health Care Workers,' online, in Time.com, accessed April 20, 2020, <https://time.com/5824465/healthcare-workers-protest>.

⁴³ Pavel Kolář, 'Iconic Reconciliations in a Secular Setting: Recent Bohemian Examples,' *Religions* 13, no. 8 (2022): 723. doi: 10.3390/rel13080723.

⁴⁴ Victor W. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York City: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 64–87; Victor Turner, 'Social Dramas and Stories about Them,' *Critical Inquiry* 7, no. 7 (1980): 141–168.

them and bringing both personal and social transformation. Additionally, McFarland subsumed various rituals constituting the breach and crisis under a ceremonial deconstruction phase of social drama, and those forming the redress and reintegration/schism under the ceremonial reconstruction phase of social drama.⁴⁵

Undoubtedly, the COVID-19 pandemic caused and provoked various social breaches and crises, expressed in diverse forms of interpersonal performances of conflict. These cultural performances of conflict,⁴⁶ coupled with the corresponding narratives in the form of signs, social media commentaries, and public statements, belong to the ritual repertoire of symbolic acts and performances used by individuals and groups to cope with the pandemic and its impact at the micro, mezzo, and macro levels of society.

5. Theological reflections

The anti-pandemic restrictions significantly affected the religious life of many Christian churches, particularly their ritual practices. So far, my selective and interpretive overview of strategies employed by various communities to respond to these restrictions has largely drawn on ritual studies, anthropology, and sociology. While these approaches are valuable for identifying and interpreting the adaptive strategies developed by Christian communities in order to sustain their communal religious life, the social realities of these communities and their ritual practices cannot be exhaustively captured or adequately understood by the methods of the social sciences alone. Only theological reflection does full justice to Christian ecclesiastical self-understanding, as well as to Christian identity and sociality. Only theological reflection is capable of articulating criteria for evaluating the extent to which both the adaptation of existing Christian ritual practices and the creation of alternative ones correspond to Christian communities' self-understanding as the *ekklesia tou Theou*. I do not intend to propose

⁴⁵ Daniel A. McFarland, 'Resistance as a Social Drama: A Study of Change-Oriented Encounters,' *American Journal of Sociology* 109, no. 6 (2004): 1249–1318.

⁴⁶ For cultural anthropology concept of performance, which includes ritual as the performance related to the ultimate concerns of human beings, see John Lowell Lewis, *The Anthropology of Cultural Performance* (New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 1–20.

these criteria in this part of the article, but only to outline a theological context in which they might be articulated.

Williams argues that the distinctive trait of human beings is their living through diverse symbolic forms, which are continually innovated.⁴⁷ In these symbolic forms, particularly in language and ritual practices, humans are looking for and creating meaning, patterns of order, and communication, through which they express, order, share, reorder, imagine and transform their human relations to the world they live in.⁴⁸ Apart from this rather general character of any genuine human sociality, there are ‘particular “signs” in which the identity of the specific group is stated, reflected on and communicated, tacitly or explicitly.’⁴⁹ Christian identity and sociality are intrinsically connected with sign-practices traditionally called sacraments, namely the baptism and the eucharist. Although emerging from a particular religious history, these signs cannot be reduced to ritual practices devised by a group seeking to inaugurate a new religious movement. Rather, they are fundamentally rooted in Jesus Christ, whose life, acts and words are ‘signs of a form of human life yet to be realized’, ‘the form of a new people of God,’ the signs of the new creation, the signs of the kingdom of God.⁵⁰ In this sense, sacramental practices are Jesus’ gift to the growing apostolic community, which builds it continuously as the body of Christ (1 Cor 12:27).⁵¹ The uniqueness of these sacramental signs does not lie in any special qualities of ritual acts or of the things used in rituals, but is grounded in Jesus’ radical self-gift, in his paschal dying and rising, of which the sacramental practices are *anamnesis*.⁵²

Christian community as the living body of Christ crucified, resurrected, and coming in glory is an *epicletic* community.⁵³ In its prayers, it constantly turns to Jesus Christ as the living, sovereign, and free Lord, invoking his presence. The epicletic nature of Christian ritual practices confirms that the sacramental signs are not inventions of the community, which has them at its disposal. They are creative, effective and transformative signs of the active presence of the living Christ in

⁴⁷ Rowan Williams, *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2000), 201.

⁴⁸ Williams, *On Christian*, 198n.

⁴⁹ Williams, *On Christian*, 201.

⁵⁰ Williams, *On Christian*, 203–205.

⁵¹ Williams, *On Christian*, 204.

⁵² Williams, *On Christian*, 197 and 204.

⁵³ J.-J. von Allmen, *Worship: Its Theology and Practice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1965), 29.

the corporate life of the church as *ekklesia tou Theou*.⁵⁴ They are not passed along in the Christian community as a kind of farewell memorial to Jesus or as social signs of a particular form of religious life. They are handed over as epicletic mediations of Christ's ever-new presence to and in his 'social body' living and witnessing in the unpredictably changing world.

The sacramental signs, being Christ's effective and transforming signs, form the Christian community as a *koinonia*. The *koinonia* points to the one spiritual reality that interrelates the trinitarian communion, the communion of the Spirit sanctifying human beings, and the communion between Christ and those who believe in him. It is the Spirit who is creating the Christian community as communion with God and between those who believe. This *koinonia* is primarily manifested and at the same time renewed in the eucharistic celebration that is grounded in the paschal event of Christ's dying, rising from the dead, and bestowing the Spirit (John 20:19-22). The faith in which the Christian community celebrates the eucharist is characterised by a tension between doctrinal continuity guarded by authority and the personal experience of the Spirit's inward presence.⁵⁵

The sanctifying presence of the Spirit in the Christian community is *oikodomic*. It builds up the community as the body of Christ through various charismata, spiritual gifts or rather practices empowered by the Spirit.⁵⁶ Through these spiritual practices, the Spirit (re)connects the Christian community with the grounding paschal event in ever new and changing environments and life circumstances in which Christians are called to live faithfully, responding to their needs and drawing the community through its sanctification into the life of the kingdom of God (1Cor 14:3-5.26; Eph 4:11-12.16.29). In this sense, *oikodomé* is closely related to *oikonomia*, which designates God's plan of salvation (Eph 1:9-10) as well as a pastoral practice of imitating God's love for people through careful spiritual discernment of the uniqueness of human beings' personal situations.⁵⁷

We have so far indicated that a distinctive Christian sociality consists – but not exclusively – in its anamnetic, epicletic, koinonic, and

⁵⁴ Williams, *On Christian*, 205n.

⁵⁵ John Meyendorff, *Byzantine Theology: Historical Trends and Doctrinal Themes* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1987), 170–175.

⁵⁶ Oscar Cullmann, *Early Christian Worship* (SCM Press 1996).

⁵⁷ Meyendorff, *Byzantine*, 88–90.

oikodomic character. These qualities are also significant for the Christian community's sign-practices, of which the most significant are sacramental practices. While these practices are traditionally identified with baptism and the eucharist, and additionally with confirmation, reconciliation, anointing of the sick, marriage, and ordination, Leo the Great and Augustine testify to a broader concept of sacramental practices employed in the early Christian churches.⁵⁸ In his letter to Ianuarius, Augustin considers not only baptism and the eucharist to be sacramental practices, but also qualifies other practices established by church authorities and observed by Christians (allegedly) universally, namely the solemn celebration of Christ's passion, resurrection, ascension, and his bestowal of the Spirit, as sacramental practices. Moreover, even practices of local Christian communities, unless they are contrary to faith and good morals, are to be observed as a visible sign of the bonds that keep the local community united.⁵⁹ Such observances evidently have a significant oikodomic function. The common ground of these practices and observances lies primarily in the paschal event of Christ and in its effective presence in them through the power of the Spirit, and additionally in their ability to bind together the society of the new people of God.⁶⁰ In this broader sense, the term 'sacramental practices' denotes practices that manifest, mediate and renew the communion of the new people of God with God and among themselves - the *koinonia* in the power of the Spirit.

The sacramental character of the celebration of Christian feasts might be a fruitful point of departure for theological reflection on the rules for adapting, inventing, and reinventing Christian rituals in times of crisis, taking into account the distinctive 'nature' of the Christian sociality we have so far outlined. Celebrations of feasts regularly include diverse sign practices and gatherings, large or small, in different environments and settings, from personal prayer to family celebrations to local festive ritual performances. Though the eucharistic (and baptismal) liturgies tend to be at the centre of the feasts' celebrations,

⁵⁸ Bernard Green, *The soteriology of Leo the Great* (Oxford: Oxford University Press 2008): 145; Anne-Isabelle Bouton-Touboullic, 'Pouvoir des signes et liturgie dans l'Épistola 55 de saint Augustin,' in *Saint Augustin*, ed. Serge Lancel, Stéphanie Guédon, and Louis, Maurin Ausonius Éditions. doi: 10.4000/books.ausonius.8115.

⁵⁹ Aurelius Augustinus, 'Letter 54,' in *The Works of Saint Augustin*, Part II - Letters, Vol. I: Letters 1-99, ed. John E. Rotelle, trans. Roland Teske (New York: New York Press, 2001), 210.

⁶⁰ Aurelius Augustinus, 'Letter 54,' in *The Works of Saint Augustin*, 216.

other rituals likewise contribute to the overall sacramental character of the festive celebrations insofar as they mediate participation in the foundational salvific paschal event and render it present in the power of the Spirit. This ritual spectrum is complemented by varied modes of *participatio actuosa*, which can be meaningfully transferred from the eucharistic context to the wider context of sacramental practices. In times of such a crisis as the Covid-19 pandemic, when regular public, communal religious practices are abandoned, significantly restricted, or entirely prohibited, a concept of the feast's compound sacramentality might become a useful instrument for a temporary reordering of the Christian communities' traditional ritual praxis in a way that would do justice to the anamnetic, epicletic, koinonic, and oikodomic character of the distinctive Christian sociality rooted in the sanctifying and vivifying Spirit.⁶¹

From this point of view, a pastor's decision temporarily to delegate his eucharistic presidency to the fathers of individual families,⁶² or the common singing of the Easter hymn with lit candles at an appointed time from windows,⁶³ may be more appropriate than broadcasting of an empty church with one minister or a few people celebrating the eucharist; suggesting four or more ways of delivering bread and wine to the mouths of a few communicants present without violating strict anti-pandemic measures; or replacing singing with silent recitation of song lyrics in a restricted gathering.⁶⁴ It may be argued that when the celebration of the Eucharist comes to dominate Christian ritual praxis rather than functioning as its centre – as appears to be the case, *inter alia*, in the Czechoslovak Hussite Church – the Christian community becomes inclined to adapt the form of the eucharistic celebration in ways that may even contradict the banquet character intrinsic to the eucharist. The practice of placing the Eucharistic bread into a believer's mouth with tweezers in an almost empty church during the period of the strictest anti-pandemic measures lacked a genuine anamnetic, koinonic, or oikodomic dimension. By contrast, the celebration of the

⁶¹ Korinna Zamfir, 'Ritual Reinvention and the Celebration of the Eucharist in Times of Crises,' in *Religious Responses to Pandemics and Crises*, eds. Sravana Borkatoky-Varma, Christian A. Eberhart, and Marianne Bjelland Kartzow (London: Routledge, 2025). doi: 10.4324/b22930-9.

⁶² Církev bratrská, personal communication.

⁶³ Církev československá husitská, author's initiative, author's personal archive.

⁶⁴ Církev československá husitská, internal official guidelines, author's personal archive.

Eucharist within a small gathering, followed by the distribution of the Eucharistic gifts – together with other necessary provisions – to those who were absent, does constitute an anamnestic, koinonic, epicletic, and oikodomic practice, one that is also rooted in the ancient tradition, as attested by Justin Martyr. Similarly, the ancient tradition that conceives the Christian family and other intimate social relationships as *mikrobasileia tou Theou*⁶⁵ points to a theological, rather than merely devotional, significance of small-group religious life, a significance that may be particularly emphasised during periods of strict anti-pandemic measures prohibiting public interpersonal contact. On this basis, it may be argued that, in situations where ordinary forms of public liturgical assembly are severely restricted, priority should be given to the eucharistic and communal practices that preserve and manifest the anamnestic, koinonic, epicletic, and oikodomic dimensions intrinsic to the eucharist and to Christian sign-practices more broadly, rather than to minimal ritual substitutes that risk obscuring these constitutive dimensions.

6. Conclusion

French neuropsychiatrist Cyrulnik claims that humans share with many animal species the basic symbolic activities in which a present object represents another real object that is not sensorily present. On the other hand, people differ from their animal relatives in spirituality. To be a spiritual being means relating through complex symbolic units, such as mythic narratives or political ideologies, to non-sensorial imaginative realities.⁶⁶ The ethno-anthropological concept of human sociality also identifies joint attention, interpretation, and narrative imagination as the distinctive traits of humans, in which the human ability to invent and cultivate new social institutions and social practices is grounded.⁶⁷ Moreover, the new social worlds emerging from this creative ground of human sociality constitute a causal force that reshapes and further develops the natural grounds of distinctively human sociality.⁶⁸ We may

⁶⁵ Václav Ventura, 'Teologie kněžského manželství,' *Getsemany* 57, no. 12 (1995), <https://www.getsemany.cz/node/1958>.

⁶⁶ Boris Cyrulnik, *Psychothérapie de Dieu* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2017); Boris Cyrulnik, *La nuit, j'écrirai des soleils* (Paris: Odile Jacob, 2019).

⁶⁷ Carrithers, 'Sociality,' 135.

⁶⁸ Michael Carrithers, 'Why Humans Have Cultures,' *Man* 25, no. 2 (1990): 189. doi: 10.2307/2804560.

extend this view to include ritual and other cultural performances as distinct human media, sensational forms that materialise human sociality in various contextualised symbolic practices.⁶⁹

The absent, cancelled, postponed, transferred, replaced, evoked, provoked, adapted, and invented rituals and ritual-like activities⁷⁰ were experienced as stressors during the emerging COVID-19 pandemic, especially by those who regularly participated in their traditional forms. On the other hand, many constrained, transformed or innovated rituals were integrated into the various coping strategies people employed to manage the pandemic's impacts on their lives. In these cases, human sociality's potential for variability produced a variety of rituals and ritual-like activities congruent with particular personal, social, cultural, religious, and political contexts. This process of adapting and modifying ritual heritage, provoked by social distancing and other anti-pandemic measures, was part of the more extensive transformative process in which the traditional ritual environment was changed. Individuals, groups, and religious communities created new forms of infra-secular geographies, connected their diverse physical dwellings with online networks and merged in-person communication with online communication to continue practising ritual activities during the period significantly influenced by the pandemic. These new communication practices contributed to the dynamically changing distribution of responsibility for spiritual and religious life and to its continuity between individuals, groups and institutions. In addition, diverse cultural performances of protest and resistance accompanied these efforts to cope with the pandemic stressors.

It seems that individuals and communities that used to practice their spiritual and religious lives through a networked, internally diversified ritual practice were better equipped to creatively cope with the COVID-19 pandemic crisis than those stuck on one or a few fundamental rituals and with a strict idea of what ritual changes are permissible. Thus, building religious communities that cope well with various crises and disasters should primarily focus on cultivating a shared network of

⁶⁹ Birgit Meyer, *Religious sensations: Why media, aesthetics and power matter in the study of contemporary religion* (Amsterdam: Vrije Universiteit, 2006), 9; Birgit Meyer, 'Mediation and Immediacy: Sensational Forms, Semiotic Ideologies and the Question of the Medium,' *Social Anthropology* 19, no. 1 (2011): 23–39. doi: 10.1111/j.1469-8676.2010.00137.x.

⁷⁰ Post, 'Introduction,' 48.

diverse ritual practices that mediates the fullness of God's presence and experience of communal life, creating ritual plasticity analogous to the human brain's neuroplasticity.

Theologians should carefully discern and reflect on the process of growing differentiation and deinstitutionalisation of ritual practices during the COVID-19 pandemic. It is their task to prudently accompany Christians as they negotiate the effectiveness of various traditional and new ritual practices, as well as the role of rituals in mediating God's encounter with humans within the complexity of the contemporary world.

They may also pay closer attention to ritual practices developed by Christians desiring to sustain their religious and spiritual lives in diaspora, as well as by those who, despite marginalisation and discrimination within their churches and Christian communities, have sought to participate in shared religious practices. How have these Christians transferred, modified, altered or supplemented inherited Christian rituals, and what rituals have they invented to cope with their challenging situation?

The COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated that human sociality empowers people to cope creatively with unexpected events, even with a disaster of global scope, in ways that may be both constructive and detrimental. Carrithers relates this human sociality to evolutionary processes. From a theological point of view, human sociality may be understood from the perspective of God's creative act, conceived as the establishment of dynamic and open ontological foundations of existence and life. How might a concept of human evolution, one that incorporates diverse historical experiences of various disasters into the evolutionary process, be integrated into the theological understanding of the creation of humans in God's likeness and image? Moreover, can the Holy Spirit be conceived as continually addressing human sociality – our 'being created in God's image' – in order to co-create with humans rituals as authentic media of God's presence in human life, above all in times of crises? Noble's interpretation of this 'being created in God's image' as a creative yet inherently risky realisation of the humanity bestowed in God's *arché* and called to fulfil itself in God's *telos* may offer a theological perspective from which such a synthesis could be pursued.⁷¹

⁷¹ Ivana Noble, 'Obraz a podoba Boží,' in *Kdo Je člověk? Teologická Antropologie Eku-
menicky*, eds. Ivana Noble et al. (Prague: Karolinum Press, 2021), 127–143.

However, Christian sociality and Christian rituals are not grounded exclusively in humanity ‘created in God’s image’. Both emerge from Christ’s paschal self-giving, dying, rising from the dead, and bestowing of the Spirit. The paschal event constitutes a distinctive form of Christian sociality and shapes the sacramental character of the Christian community’s sign-practices as anamnestic, apikletic, koinonic, and oikodomic. Therefore, this theological characterisation of the Christian community and its sign-practices may provide a fundamental point of reference for assessing the adequacy of diverse adaptations and innovations of traditional Christian rituals, as well as of newly created practices, in response to the pandemic and other crises.

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VARIA

LA MISÉRICORDE, MÈRE DES AFFECTS DIVINS ET HUMAINS : UNE LECTURE THÉOLOGIQUE ET PHÉNOMÉNOLOGIQUE

J E A N R E A I D Y

ABSTRACT

Mercy, Mother of Divine and Human Affections: A Theological and Phenomenological Reading

Our study aims to open up a privileged space to further deepen the original phenomenon of mercy, condition of every being-with and of all effective intersubjective experience. That the human being is already structured by the compassion that constantly exposes him to the suffering of others, that he is capable of experiencing the other in the immediacy of a life that unites to oneself in God, behold an originary truth that no one can avert.

In spite of the inner tears that violently pierce the heart of our humanity, we are all invited to launch a lively call capable of reestablishing everything on a *culture of the heart* which exclusively can provide meaning to all forms of culture and of knowledge.

Keywords

Mercy; Divine fatherhood; Filiation; Compassion; Suffering community; Intersubjectivity

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*« Voici, mon fils, un commandement que je te donne :
que la miséricorde l'emporte toujours dans ta balance,
jusqu'au moment où tu sentiras en toi-même la grande miséricorde
que Dieu éprouve envers le monde »¹.*

¹ Isaac le Syrien, « Première série : Discours n° 81 », in *Discours ascétiques*, trad. Jacques Touraille (Paris : Éditions Desclée de Brouwer, 1981), 395.

La miséricorde n'est pas un phénomène comme tous les phénomènes ; elle est la manifestation d'un sentir originaire excessif qui tire son essence de l'intériorité de Dieu, et fait naître l'homme dans l'unité de l'affectivité divine. Loin d'être assimilée à un apparaître que nous pouvons approcher par un regard intentionnel extérieur à notre vivre, elle est une révélation intérieure qui s'affecte sentante d'elle-même hors toute possibilité de la viser conceptuellement. Son connaître est *le connaître d'un affect primordial* qui se connaît et se souffre lui-même comme sens dans la vie la plus immanente. Ne provenant pas d'une source humaine, la miséricorde jaillit dans le jaillir en soi de la source divine qui n'arrête pas de verser en chacun de nous sa vérité relationnelle dans son essence même. Nous ne pouvons donc connaître son sens radical que là où nous le souffrons *en* Dieu, dans l'immédiation d'une révélation qui s'effectue dans son Fond² le plus immanent. Disant cela, nous savons que seule une lecture théologique et phénoménologique³ qui tire sa substance de la source auto-affective divine et de son pouvoir de révélation propre est capable de percer, par son voir intérieur, le mystère enveloppant cette phénoménalité immanente primordiale qui ne se manifeste que dans un dire essentiel plus fort que tout dit.

Nous tâcherons, dans ce qui suit, de saisir par la force d'un vivre intérieur, le sentir miséricordieux qui nous plonge dans le fond invisible de Dieu et nous donne de nous saisir vivants dans ce fond et comme ce fond, et donne à la pensée phénoménologique vivante la

² Le Fond de la vie divine, c'est son *Grund* ou son *Abgrund*, la profondeur insondable de son intériorité auto-affective la plus abyssale.

³ Nous nous sommes basés, pour élaborer notre lecture phénoménologique du phénomène-limite de la miséricorde chrétienne, sur la phénoménologie de la vie de Michel Henry et sur la phénoménologie de la communauté telle qu'elle est développée par Emmanuel Housset dans son ouvrage *L'intelligence de la pitié. Phénoménologie de la communauté*. Mentionnons tout d'abord que, pour Michel Henry, la communauté est « par essence affective et, du même coup, pulsionnelle » (Michel Henry, « Pour une phénoménologie de la communauté », in *Phénoménologie matérielle* (Paris : Presses universitaires de France, 1990), 175), et que l'épreuve de la miséricorde est nécessairement l'épreuve d'une communauté vivante dont la matérialité immanente et invisible est le souffrir avec ou le *pathos-avec*. Et pour comprendre de près le sens excessif de la miséricorde et de la pitié, nous avons trouvé nécessaire de nous référer à ce qui est affirmé par Emmanuel Housset dans son ouvrage *L'intelligence de la pitié* qui parle longuement de la dimension pathique et de la dimension christique de la pitié et de la miséricorde ainsi que de la communauté de souffrance faite de compassion et d'amour.

possibilité de « penser d'une façon nouvelle la communauté originelle de l'homme en donnant à comprendre l'amour comme étant sans condition et comme étant en lui-même une connaissance »⁴.

1. Dieu, « Père des miséricordes » (2 Co 1, 3)

Loin d'être réduite à un sentiment irrationnel ou à un affect confus, la miséricorde est la tonalité affective fondamentale qui révèle la vie absolue dans son fond relationnel invisible et dans sa phénoménalité la plus nue. Elle a la profondeur de l'affectivité de Dieu qui ne cesse de nous souffrir maternellement dans son fond auto-impressionnel⁵. Constituant l'étoffe invisible du vivre divin et de tout co-vivre qui s'effectue dans l'unité de sa vérité pathique⁶, la miséricorde chrétienne est ce qui révèle Dieu dans « sa sainteté et sa grandeur »⁷. Loin d'être une vérité qui s'impose rationnellement à nous, elle est une vérité qui *se donne relationnellement en nous*⁸, puisque toute la vérité du divin ne peut être éprouvée dans l'humain qu'au sein d'une dynamique relationnelle qui lie la passion de Dieu à la passion de l'homme selon une compassion originaire.

Dieu, nous enseignent les Écritures Saintes, est essentiellement « Père des miséricordes » (2 Co 1, 3)⁹. Son cœur est tissé de tendresse

⁴ Emmanuel Housset, *L'intelligence de la pitié. Phénoménologie de la communauté*, 9–10. Parler, à ce niveau, du connaître de l'amour, c'est parler nécessairement de « l'intelligence du sentir qui est plus essentielle et plus originaire que tout calcul » (Emmanuel Housset, *L'intelligence de la pitié. Phénoménologie de la communauté*, 135).

⁵ Compris dans son intériorité la plus immanente, le fond divin, nous dit Michel Henry, est ce qui s'étreint lui-même en chaque point de son être de telle sorte que, dans cette auto-étreinte, *il s'impressionne lui-même et ne cesse de s'auto-impressionner*. Et qui dit auto-impressionnalité, dit aussi auto-affectionnalité dont l'essence est « de se donner à sentir en elle-même, d'elle-même et par elle-même » (Michel Henry, *Incarnation. Une philosophie de la chair* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 2000), 75).

⁶ Le pâtir est en lui-même un subir, le « se subir soi-même » d'un sentir qui souffre son sens dans l'intériorité d'un vivre qui demeure inobjectivable.

⁷ Cf. Walter Kasper, *La Miséricorde : notion fondamentale de l'Évangile. Clé de la vie chrétienne* (Clermont-Ferrand : Éditions des Béatitudes, 2015), 59.

⁸ Dépassant infiniment tout concept forgé sur elle, la miséricorde est « une réalité concrète à travers laquelle Il (Dieu) révèle son amour comme celui d'un père et d'une mère qui se laissent émouvoir au plus profond d'eux-mêmes par leur fils. Il est juste de parler d'un amour “viscéral”. Il vient du cœur comme un sentiment profond, naturel, fait de tendresse et de compassion, d'indulgence et de pardon » (Pape François, *Le visage de la Miséricorde* (Montréal : Éditions Médiaspaul, 2016), § 6).

⁹ La Bible foisonne de passages et de versets qui parlent tout précisément de la miséricorde de Dieu. Pour saisir de près l'importance de cette vérité biblique fondamentale, il suffit de lire *Ex 34:6, Ne 9:17 ; 9:31 ; Dt 4:31, 2 Ch 30:9, Si 2:7 ; 2:18 ; 17:29 ; 18:5 ;*

et de clémence et ses entrailles (*rahamim*) sont source de bonté compatissante. Le terme hébreu *rahamim* (רחמים)¹⁰ désigne les entrailles maternelles. Il s'agit d'une « forme absolue plurielle » du mot *rehem* (רחם) « sein maternel », lieu vivant de toute naissance possible. C'est dans ce *rehem* divin que Dieu se sent lui-même et nous sent dans son sentir, et c'est dans ce même *rehem* que l'homme est capable de sentir sa vérité et la vérité de l'autre dans le souffrir divin. En recevant le contenu affectif de sa vérité du *rehem* divin, l'homme est capable de pâtir son rapport à l'autre dans les entrailles spirituelles de Dieu, dans ce Fond d'où jaillit la possibilité de tout rapport cousu d'une révélation co-pulsionnelle pratique. Enfanté déjà comme fils et frère dans les entrailles spirituelles de Dieu, l'homme reçoit le pouvoir de sentir l'autre dans ces mêmes entrailles¹¹.

18:11, Ps 25:10 ; 50 (51): 3-4 ; 78:38 ; 86:15 ; 103:8 ; 118:1, Lc 1:50 ; 6:36, Rm 12:1, Ep 2:4-5 ; 4:32, 1P 1:3, Jc 5:11, 2 Jn 1:3, Jd 1:21.

¹⁰ Pour célébrer la miséricordieuse tendresse de Dieu, « la Bible hébraïque disposait d'une gamme de termes dont chacun est lui-même riche de multiples harmoniques. [...] Le terme *rahamim* confère à la bienveillance un caractère de tendresse quasi charnelle. Le mot dérive de *rehem* qui désigne le sein maternel : 'Une femme oublie-t-elle son nourrisson, oublie-t-elle de montrer sa tendresse à l'enfant de sa chair. Même si celles-là oubliaient, moi je ne l'oublierai pas !' (Is 49, 15). 'Mes entrailles frémissent (pour Éphraïm). Oui, je l'aime, je l'aime' (Jr 31, 20). On pourrait traduire : 'Pour lui ma tendresse déborde', ou bien 'J'en ai pitié, oui grande pitié'. Car Dieu est Père, l'explication est là : 'Éphraïm est-il donc pour moi un fils si cher, un enfant qui fait mes délices ? (Jr 31, 20)' » (François-Xavier Durrwell, *Le Père. Dieu en son mystère* (Paris : Éditions du Cerf, Coll. Théologies, 1999), 172). Ce même mot est traduit en latin par *Misericordia* qui vient de *miseria* (misère) et *cor* (cœur) : être sensible, au niveau du cœur, siège de toutes les affections les plus radicales en l'homme intérieur, à la souffrance de l'autre et à sa misère. Cette vérité qui supporte en elle une révélation excessive, parce qu'intérieure, Saint Augustin l'a définie ainsi : « Qu'est-ce que la miséricorde ? Ce n'est rien d'autre que quelque partie du cœur qui se contracte du fait de la misère. C'est à propos d'une douleur ressentie devant un misérable qu'on parle de miséricorde ; là retentissent l'un et l'autre : la misère et le cœur. Lors donc que la misère d'autrui touche et frappe ton cœur, on parle de miséricorde » (Saint Augustin, « Sermon Morin », no 6, trad. Luc Brésard, in A.-G. Hamman, éd., *Cyprien, Augustin. Partage avec le pauvre* (Paris : Éditions Migne, Coll. Les Pères dans la foi, no 72, 1998), 130).

¹¹ L'Apôtre Paul s'exprime, dans son Épître aux Philippiens 1, 8, sur le sentir tendre qu'il éprouve envers tous ceux qu'il aime dans les entrailles maternelles du Christ en ces mots : « C'est avec tendresse que je vous aime tous dans *les entrailles* de Jésus-Christ ». Et dans Galates 4, 19, il déclare : « Mes enfants, pour qui j'éprouve de nouveau les douleurs de l'enfantement, jusqu'à ce que Christ soit formé en vous ». Ajoutons à tout cela que ce même Apôtre, en évoquant son rôle de père spirituel combinant les aspects de l'amour paternel et maternel auprès des Thessaloniens, se compare à une nourrice qui allaite ses enfants avec douceur dans sa Première Épître aux Thessaloniens chapitre 2, verset 7 : « Mais nous avons été pleins de douceur au milieu de vous. De même qu'une nourrice prend un tendre soin de ses enfants ».

En se rapportant à nous comme un père qui nous supporte maternellement, Dieu nous sent et nous souffre dans le lieu immanent où il nous engendre dans son vivre paternel. Il nous donne, en nous engendrant en lui, de vivre dans son sentir et d'être liés à nous-mêmes et à tout autre dans son affect miséricordieux. Et comme sa paternité ne s'effectue que dans l'agir miséricordieux, nous ne pouvons pas être ses fils et ses filles sans agir dans son pathos miséricordieux. Le tout nous est donné dans l'intériorité miséricordieuse et compatissante d'un Père¹² qui fonde notre être filial au cœur de notre naissance communautaire dans sa tendresse incommensurable et dans son amour infini.

Cette vérité paternelle fondatrice, nous l'avons contemplée sur le visage du vrai Fils Jésus-Christ qui nous a manifesté la miséricorde du Père dans son pàtir, son dire et son agir. Le Pape François nous enseigne en ce sens : « Jésus-Christ est le visage de la miséricorde du Père. [...] À travers sa parole, ses gestes, et toute sa personne, Jésus de Nazareth révèle la miséricorde de Dieu »¹⁵. Souffrant sa vérité filiale dans le co-pàtir de son Père, le « Christ, nous dit Søren Kierkegaard, est une *compassion* qui traverse la vie dans la pauvreté, les mains vides, elle ne possède ni or, ni argent, mais un unique trésor terrestre, un linge précieux qui sert à essuyer les larmes ; Elle ne possède qu'une richesse – les larmes »¹⁴.

Dans les évangiles, nous lisons que Jésus est « ému de compassion » pour les gens ou pour la foule ; le mot employé en grec (σπλαγχνίζομαι) signifie qu'il est tout remué au dedans, que ses entrailles de mère sont touchées. Quant à son agir pour l'homme, il est l'effectuation immédiate de ce qu'il éprouve dans son pàtir-avec. Le terme (σπλαγχνίζομαι), utilisé dans douze versets évangéliques, manifeste avec force le sentir miséricordieux du Père s'effectuant, dans l'unité, dans le sentir immanent de son Fils incarné Jésus-Christ.

¹² « La compassion humaine présuppose, écrit Emmanuel Housset, la miséricorde du Père qui me désarme le cœur et me révèle ma propre non-substance. La conscience que la pitié de Dieu me précède est ce qui me rend capable d'écouter chaque être comme enfant du Père. Ainsi, le plus précieux de notre être, à savoir la disposition à entendre l'appel d'autrui, ne peut être gardé que par le Père de miséricorde. Lui seul, en souffrance avec nous, fait que la souffrance d'autrui peut être reçue sans être abolie par sa réduction à l'un des aspects du sujet absolu » (Emmanuel Housset, *L'intelligence de la pitié. Phénoménologie de la communauté*, 156).

¹⁵ Pape François, *Le visage de la Miséricorde*, § 1.

¹⁴ Søren Kierkegaard, *Œuvres complètes*, t. I, trad. par Paul-Henri Tisseau et Else-Marie Jacquet-Tisseau (Paris : Éditions de l'Orante, 1990), 148.

C'est dans le Christ Jésus et dans l'Esprit Saint que nous sommes enfantés fils et filles de la miséricorde paternelle, et que nous pouvons éprouver la miséricorde du Père pour chacun. Naître fils et filles dans la paternité miséricordieuse de Dieu, c'est naître nécessairement dans le Christ et dans l'Esprit Saint qui n'arrête pas de tisser et de souffrir en nous notre vérité miséricordieuse. « L'Esprit, souligne avec force Durrwell, est communion, il n'abolit pas mais réalise l'être-avec, la com-passion avec l'humanité. La béatitude pascale est communion, elle consacre la compassion, elle l'intègre dans son bonheur. Il en est de même du Père : sa compassion universelle fait partie de son éternel bonheur d'aimer »¹⁵.

2. L'homme, fils de la Miséricorde

Si l'homme peut être appelé fils de la Miséricorde¹⁶, c'est parce qu'il est le fruit d'une naissance pathique qui s'effectue originellement dans la miséricorde divine. Donné à lui-même dans une naissance invisible et immanente, l'homme reçoit ce qu'il est dans son vivre, son pâtir, son connaître et son agir dans le fond miséricordieux qui l'enfante. Il ne vit comme fils que dans la mesure où il s'affecte vivant dans le vivre divin et dans son sentir intérieur le plus radical.

Avant que l'homme ne puisse s'affirmer lui-même par lui-même comme un ego absolu qui se constitue lui-même en se rapportant intentionnellement et rationnellement à lui-même, il est précédé par l'infini de la Miséricorde¹⁷ qui le révèle à lui-même en Dieu. « Antérieurement à l'identité issue de ses actes libres, l'individu peut découvrir en lui une ipsité par grâce liée à l'infini de la miséricorde en lui. [...] Cet infini de la miséricorde en nous marque que cette miséricorde ne vient pas de nous, mais que c'est Dieu qui l'initie en nous. En cela, sans que je puisse me prendre pour Dieu, c'est Dieu qui en

¹⁵ François-Xavier Durrwell, *Le Père. Dieu en son mystère*, 170.

¹⁶ Fait à l'image de la miséricorde et de la tendresse divines, l'homme est fils de cette miséricorde et ne peut se sentir et se connaître lui-même hors de cette miséricorde.

¹⁷ C'est précisément grâce à la révélation qu'il reçoit comme don de Dieu et de sa Miséricorde que l'homme peut comprendre « que ce qui lui est le plus propre est de pouvoir se tourner vers cet inappropriable qui lui est encore plus propre que lui-même. En s'ouvrant ainsi à Dieu, l'homme s'ouvre au prochain puisqu'il apprend à s'approcher de l'autre comme image insaisissable de Dieu » (Emmanuel Housset, *L'intelligence de la pitié. Phénoménologie de la communauté*, 134).

moi prend pitié »¹⁸. Cette expérience de la passibilité que l'homme fait en se recevant lui-même dans l'infini de la miséricorde est une expérience fondamentale puisqu'elle montre que l'homme, au lieu d'être la source de ce qu'il reçoit en lui-même, est supporté intérieurement dans la source divine, racine de toute vérité relationnelle intropathique. Son sentir comme son agir miséricordieux ne découlent pas de son pouvoir affectif égoïque propre¹⁹, mais du pouvoir que creusent en lui le sentir et l'agir divins. Donné à lui-même dans l'immédiation du rapport pathique enfanté en Dieu, le Soi humain ne cesse pas de recevoir sa vérité auto-affectionnelle dans l'auto-affection paternelle divine. En se recevant lui-même dans l'auto-donation de la Vie, il se trouve constamment auto-affecté, sans qu'il soit lui-même la source d'une telle auto-affection. Dans son ouvrage intitulé *C'est Moi la Vérité*, Michel Henry écrit sur ce point : « *Le Soi ne s'auto-affecte que pour autant que s'auto-affecte en lui la Vie absolue. C'est elle, dans son auto-donation, qui le donne à lui-même. C'est elle, dans son auto-révélation, qui le révèle à lui-même. C'est elle, dans son étreinte pathétique, qui lui donne de s'étreindre pathétiquement et d'être un Soi* »²⁰.

Recevant son être miséricordieux dans l'être miséricordieux du Père céleste, l'homme est fondamentalement passible au vivre divin qui révèle en lui ce qu'il a à être dans sa vérité intérieure. Le tout lui est donné dans l'unité du sentir paternel divin, source de tout affect vivant possible. Fils du Père dans le Fils unique Jésus et dans l'Esprit Saint, il est enfanté dans le Rapport qu'est Dieu lui-même et frère d'une communauté de fils qui souffrent leur être-ensemble dans le pathos divin.

5. L'épreuve communautaire de la miséricorde

Avant que je me rapporte à l'autre compris comme membre d'une société réglée par des lois morales de type rationnel et universel, je

¹⁸ Emmanuel Housset, *L'intelligence de la pitié. Phénoménologie de la communauté*, 174.

¹⁹ En ne donnant à l'homme que de vivre son rapport à l'autre dans la grande passibilité, la miséricorde « est ce qui arrache l'ego à l'abri de sa transcendance pour le rendre à sa tâche de répondre de la totalité du monde, non pour le porter seul, mais pour transmettre une force qui lui a été donnée. En consentant à cette blessure d'amour, le sujet laisse autrui s'individuer devant lui ; il le reçoit dans son unicité insubstituable de personne » (Emmanuel Housset, *L'intelligence de la pitié. Phénoménologie de la communauté*, 173).

²⁰ Michel Henry, *C'est Moi la Vérité* (Paris : Éditions du Seuil, 1996), 136 ; souligné par l'auteur.

le sens déjà comme *membre d'une chair communautaire souffrante* et comme *frère* qui m'est donné immédiatement dans l'unique Vie absolue. « Avant de reconnaître autrui comme mon semblable en tant qu'animal rationnel, je suis proche de lui dans une commune exposition à la misère »²¹ et ce, parce que nous appartenons tous deux à une communauté de souffrance irréductible à une Totalité abstraite capable d'absorber par son pouvoir impersonnel la singularité de chaque corps souffrant en le réduisant à presque rien. « Dans la miséricorde, autrui ne se donne pas à moi comme un *alter ego*, mais comme un être qui, comme moi, peut souffrir, et cette égalité devant la souffrance n'abolit pas la distance entre les sujets puisque cette proximité non réflexive est une coexistence originaire qui permet de devenir soi »²².

Avant que je me rapporte rationnellement et intentionnellement à autrui, il m'est déjà donné dans l'immédiation d'un rapport pathique que je souffre avec lui dans la Vie et dans son Fond miséricordieux. De là vient que *toute représentation de l'autre par ma conscience intentionnelle et éveillée est nécessairement précédée par sa connaissance immédiate que je souffre, là où la Vie absolue me donne d'être souffrir dans son auto-souffrir hors toute médiation extérieure.*

Avant de réduire l'autre à un objet de connaissance en constituant son sens par ma conscience subjective, il m'affecte immédiatement dans l'unité de mon vivre qui se subit lui-même dans le pathos divin. Il s'agit là d'une immédiation pathique qui précède de loin toute perception d'autrui par voie analogique appréhensive²³. Rencontrer l'autre

²¹ Emmanuel Husset, *L'intelligence de la pitié. Phénoménologie de la communauté*, 107.

²² Emmanuel Husset, *L'intelligence de la pitié. Phénoménologie de la communauté*, 108.

²³ Toute constitution transcendantale de l'expérience de l'autre est liée, nous dit Edmund Husserl dans la cinquième des *Méditations cartésiennes*, au fait de se rapporter *intentionnellement* à autrui par appréhension analogique et par présentification imageante. L'autre n'est saisi, selon le père de la phénoménologie, qu'à partir de sa transposition en image dans ma conscience d'image qui le fait être cet *alter ego* pour moi. Cet autre tel que Husserl le comprend, commente Michel Henry, « n'est plus en moi cette blessure que je suis ou l'ivresse d'une modification réelle de ma vie transcendante elle-même, il n'est précisément qu'une irréalité, le corrélat d'une visée intentionnelle » (Michel Henry, « Pathos-avec », in *Phénoménologie matérielle* (Paris : Presses universitaires de France, 1990), 156). Compris au sein d'une phénoménologie radicale de la vie, l'autre ne peut pas être réduit, nous dit Henry, à un autre *moi-même*, mais il est la révélation saturée d'un Soi singulier s'éprouvant lui-même dans une chair vivante indéchirable incapable de se distancier elle-même d'elle-même. Autrui ne nous est donné que dans l'immédiation d'un rapport pathique qui se fait dans la vie. Il ne peut être connu que d'une manière immédiate, invisible et immanente. Cela dit, il y a une impossibilité de parler d'une connaissance réflexive d'autrui qui s'opère grâce à un raisonnement analogique, mais d'une connaissance originaire

dans la proximité immédiate d'un co-souffrir pré-originaire, c'est le rencontrer comme *prochain*²⁴ *au cœur d'une communauté*²⁵ *de souffrance primordiale*.

Nous ne venons donc en nous-mêmes que dans le corps invisible et immanent d'une *communauté intropathique* faite de compassion²⁶ et de sympathie. Et plus nous sommes enracinés dans cette communauté, plus nous sommes *un* dans son souffrir le plus profond. Le tout jaillit de cette *compassion originaire* qui structure radicalement notre être relationnel et fait que nous sommes capables de recevoir singulièrement le mystère de l'autre dans l'immédiation d'une vérité qui nous fonde déjà.

Affecté singulièrement par la même misère éprouvée par autrui, je suis *un* avec lui dans le même sentir miséricordieux. En l'étreignant dans mon souffrir singulier et en m'étreignant dans son souffrir singulier, je suis *ma* vérité pour lui et il est *sa* vérité pour moi. Je ne fais donc que vivre avec lui notre enracinement dans la « communion dans laquelle l'être nu, dans sa misère, reçoit l'autre en sa misère. Or, si

d'autrui. Loin d'être saisi à partir d'une transposition apperceptive, autrui demeure non-perceptible au cœur de son auto-épreuve intérieure. Avant que je le pense ou que je l'approprie idéologiquement, il est déjà rapport à moi dans la vie. Dans ses analyses tardives portant sur l'expérience de l'autre et figurant surtout dans *C'est Moi la Vérité* et *Incarnation*, Michel Henry se réfère à la conception chrétienne de la communauté qui sert, à ses yeux, de soubassement nécessaire pour toute radicalisation de la phénoménologie de la communauté. Selon lui, tous ceux qui viennent singulièrement à eux-mêmes dans la vie sont déjà donnés relationnellement à eux-mêmes au sein d'une communauté invisible et immanente, lieu d'un co-naître incessant dans la vie de Dieu. Nous ne sommes donc que *des fils et des filles* qui éprouvent la relation dans le lieu de leur naissance en Dieu. Cela dit, je ne peux connaître l'autre que là où il se reçoit lui-même en Dieu et là où notre rencontre se situe nécessairement au cœur de notre co-engendrement filial dans le fond immanent d'une unique Source.

²⁴ « Qui est mon prochain ? » (Lc 10, 29) Il n'est sûrement pas un autre *moi-même*, mais celui que Dieu engendre avec moi dans le fond d'un unique rapport filial. Il est celui que je sens dans l'unité du vivre de Dieu et de son affect miséricordieux.

²⁵ Ce qui rend possible mon expérience d'autrui est loin d'être ma perception que j'ai de lui, mais notre co-appartenance primordiale au « Fond de la vie », ce Fond inconstituable par des techniques intentionnelles et qui est l'insuppressible même, le Fond sans fond de la vie qui s'auto-donne en tant que communauté. « La communauté, écrit Henry, est une nappe affective souterraine et chacun y boit la même eau à cette source et à ce puits qu'il est lui-même – mais sans le savoir, sans se distinguer de lui-même, de l'autre ni du Fond » (Michel Henry, 'Pathos-avec', in *Phénoménologie matérielle*, 178).

²⁶ « La compassion est l'accomplissement du sentir parce qu'en elle la sensibilité devient ce qu'elle reçoit. Ainsi, en se donnant, l'homme apprend à sentir et s'accomplit en cherchant à dire ce qui le touche » (Emmanuel Housset, *L'intelligence de la pitié. Phénoménologie de la communauté*, 164).

seule la misère peut écouter la misère, cette écoute ne fonde pas pour autant un partage de misère, mais elle fonde une *communio* dans la misère : quand un membre de cette communauté souffre, tous les autres membres souffrent également »²⁷. C'est seulement dans cette étreinte communautaire pathique que je suis le prochain de l'autre et qu'il est mon prochain, que je le connais dans mon sentir intérieur et qu'il me connaît dans son sentir intérieur. Cette communion vécue pathiquement dans la proximité immédiate n'implique aucune dissolution de la singularité des êtres souffrants, mais affirme leur vérité irremplaçable et imprenable dans l'unité du Fond de la Vie.

Dans la même blessure qui est le souffrir même de ma vie, je souffre la vérité de l'autre selon une auto-épreuve singulière. Dans la demeure de mon souffrir, là où la vie absolue m'engendre et ne cesse de m'engendrer dans son « se souffrir soi-même » comme elle s'auto-engendre, je subis le poids d'un souffrir communautaire vivant.

Donc, si je suis capable de me rapporter à l'autre dans ma passion subjective posée en moi dans le pathos de la vie absolue, c'est parce qu'à moi est donnée la possibilité d'éprouver le rapport à l'autre en ce lieu même où la vie absolue ne cesse de nous engendrer ensemble dans l'*Abgrund* de sa vérité une. Il y a là une unité fondamentale qui me lie à moi-même et à tout autre en Dieu et fait que la profondeur de la blessure vivante que creuse en moi la présence souffrante de l'autre ne m'est donnée que dans le souffrir de la vie absolue et de son fond affectif invisible. De là vient que nous ne pouvons être immédiatement affectés par autrui que là où nous nous trouvons constamment auto-affectés et donnés à nous-mêmes dans l'auto-affection de la vie divine. C'est dans l'unité pathique et praxique de la vie divine, source de toute communion archi-affective radicale, que chacun de nous est donné relationnellement à lui-même selon une co-donation originale qui s'effectue dans chaque co-souffrir et chaque co-jouir vécus communautairement dans nos corps vivants.

* * *

Si je ne peux pas saisir le sens intérieur de la miséricorde par pur concept, c'est parce qu'il est une révélation excessive qui m'est donnée

²⁷ Emmanuel Housset, *L'intelligence de la pitié. Phénoménologie de la communauté*, 111 ; c'est nous qui soulignons.

immédiatement dans le sentir de Dieu. La miséricorde est ce qu’il y a de plus divin en Dieu et de plus humain en l’homme. Si en l’homme comme en Dieu, la miséricorde est première, c’est parce qu’elle est la source matricielle de tout pâtir, de tout agir et de tout connaître²⁸ effectifs. C’est elle qui constitue le sens intérieur de notre vivre communautaire et relationnel et qui conditionne notre agir moral et notre être éthique²⁹ et nous donne d’être justes dans la source de la justice. Vivre la miséricorde dans la pureté de sa donation primordiale, c’est la vivre là où elle nous constitue *fils et filles de la Vie et frères et sœurs qui co-naissent intérieurement dans le co-souffrir d’une communauté christique habitée par l’Esprit*.

En dépit des déchirures intérieures qui transpercent violemment le cœur de notre humanité, nous sommes tous appelés « à faire grandir une *culture de la miséricorde*, fondée sur la redécouverte de la rencontre des autres : une culture dans laquelle personne ne regarde l’autre avec indifférence ni ne détourne le regard quand il voit la souffrance des frères »³⁰ et des sœurs. L’appel est déjà lancé pour refonder tout sur cette *culture du cœur* qui seule peut donner sens à toutes les formes de cultures et de savoirs.

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²⁸ Loin d’être la résultante d’une ob-jection qui s’opère par ma conscience subjective constituante, la connaissance de l’autre, je la souffre, là où la vie absolue me donne de m’affecter connaissant en elle. Co(n)naître l’autre n’est et ne peut être que le fruit immédiat d’une *co-naissance pathique dans la vie faite de co-pathos* et de communion.

²⁹ « L’existence éthique n’advient, écrit Emmanuel Housset, qu’à celui pour lequel autrui surgit telle une grâce avant que d’être possible » (Emmanuel Housset, *L’intelligence de la pitié. Phénoménologie de la communauté*, 171).

³⁰ Pape François, *Lettre apostolique Misericordia et misera. En conclusion du Jubilé extraordinaire de la miséricorde*, § 20.

GREGORY OF NYSSA'S USE OF THE EXPRESSION ΑΠΑΥΓΑΣΜΑ

MAGDALENA MARUNOVÁ

ABSTRACT

This study examines the use of the term *ἀπαύγασμα* in the writings of Gregory of Nyssa, with particular attention to its semantic flexibility and theological function across different doctrinal contexts. Focusing on Gregory's exegetical, ascetical, Trinitarian, and Christological texts, the article aims to show how the imagery of radiance and reflection serves to articulate the relation between divine transcendence and manifestation while safeguarding the incomprehensibility of the divine essence. Special emphasis is placed on Gregory's polemical use of *ἀπαύγασμα* in his anti-Eunomian and anti-Apollinarian writings, where the term becomes a precise conceptual tool for defending the co-eternity and consubstantiality of the Son with the Father, as well as the integrity of Christ's two natures. The study argues that Gregory's disciplined interpretation of this biblical metaphor exemplifies the pro-Nicene integration of scriptural exegesis and systematic theological reasoning.

Keywords

Gregory of Nyssa; *ἀπαύγασμα*; radiance and reflection; Trinitarian theology; pro-Nicene theology; divine causality; incomprehensibility of God; Christology

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In the Christological-Trinitarian controversies of the fourth century, the Cappadocian theologian Gregory of Nyssa (c. 335–395 A.D.) defended the same essence of the three divine hypostases against the Neo-Arian claims and also opposed the docetic views of Apollinarianism. To this are devoted his works *Contra Eunomium* I–III, *Refutatio confessionis Eunomii*, *De deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti*, and *Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium*. Gregory also provided a kind of guide to

how human beings can know God, who is unknowable, and how they can testify of God, who is ineffable. The patristic texts often speak of the image of God and the mirror. I will focus on the radiance or reflection of God that Gregory of Nyssa mentions in connection with the relationship of the Son and the Father. Although the Father remains transcendent and unknowable in his essence, He is made known through the radiance of the Son and the action of the Holy Spirit. The Son makes the divine presence known to creation, He is the visible radiance of the Father, mediating God's presence and revealing God's glory to the world. Then Gregory gives terms, based primarily on biblical texts, that people use to speak of God and to somehow know God with the help of these terms. In the world He created, God can be observed and known also from his creation. He is also 'visible' within the souls of people, if they are purified and illuminated by Him.

This will be seen in one of the many expressions, one of the many names which, with reference to the biblical texts Heb. 1:3 and Wis. 7:26,¹ Gregory uses in the above context, namely, the expression ἀπαύγασμα, which means 'radiance,' 'brightness,' 'reflection,' 'effulgence' or 'emanation.'²

Before turning to Gregory's use of the term ἀπαύγασμα in his various writings, a brief clarification of its semantic scope is in order. The term, drawn from the Wisdom tradition (Wis. 7:26) and taken up in Heb. 1:3, is inherently ambivalent in Greek usage. It can denote either the radiant light proceeding from a luminous source,³ or the brightness of the illuminated medium⁴ – that is, light as a manifested state of space. This ambivalence is grounded in the broader semantics of ἀγλή, which may signify both emission and brightness, and is already attested in ancient philosophical and lexicographical sources.⁵

¹ Heb. 1:3: ὃς ὢν ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης καὶ χαρακτῆρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ, φέρων τε τὰ πάντα τῷ ῥήματι τῆς δυνάμεως αὐτοῦ, καθαρισμόν τῶν ἁμαρτιῶν ποιησάμενος ἐκάθισεν ἐν δεξιᾷ τῆς μεγαλωσύνης ἐν ὑψηλοῖς. Wis. 7:25–26: ἀτιμὶς γὰρ ἐστὶν τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ δυνάμεως καὶ ἀπόρροια τῆς τοῦ παντοκράτορος δόξης εἰλικρινῆς· διὰ τοῦτο οὐδὲν μεμαμμένον εἰς αὐτὴν παρεμπίπτει. ἀπαύγασμα γὰρ ἐστὶν φωτὸς ἀίδιου καὶ ἔσοπτρον ἀκηλίδωτον τῆς τοῦ θεοῦ ἐνεργείας καὶ εἰκὼν τῆς ἀγαθότητος αὐτοῦ.

² Cf. *Lexicon Gregorianum*, s. v. ἀπαύγασμα, ed. Friedhelm Mann (Leiden: Brill, 1999).

³ Cf. e.g. Plato, *Phdr.* 250c4 (*Platonis opera*, II, ed. Ioannes Burnet, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1901, reprinted 1964).

⁴ Cf. e.g. Aristotle, *Sens.* 439B2 (*Parva naturalia*, ed. William David Ross, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1955, reprinted 1970).

⁵ Cf. Hesychius, *Lexicon*, 192–3 (*Hesychii Alexandrini Lexicon*, ed. Kurt Latte, Copenhagen: Munksgaard, 1953).

From a physical point of view, both meanings describe the same reality, namely the activity of light within the medium. From the perspective of metaphysical causality, however, they represent two different modes of predication: radiant light describes the causal process from source to effect, while ambient brightness describes the same process from effect to source. As will become clear, Gregory's use of the term *ἀπαύγασμα* is not uniform across contexts but is carefully adapted to the theological purpose at hand, a fact of particular importance in his Trinitarian polemics against Eunomius.⁶

Let us first break down the types of texts in which the term *ἀπαύγασμα* occurs, then briefly introduce these writings of Gregory, and look at the context in which the term is used.

1. When describing God who is indescribable

1.1 In *Canticum canticorum*⁷

In Canticum canticorum, addressed to the young widow and deaconess Olympias, is perhaps the most accomplished of Gregory of Nyssa's works (together with *The Life of Moses*) on the mystical life. It is usually dated to the final period of his life, approximately to the years 391–394, and is often regarded as his last extant work. The text takes the form of fifteen homilies in which Gregory offers a detailed, verse-by-verse exposition of the Old Testament book *The Song of Songs*, employing a consistently allegorical method in continuity with the earlier Alexandrian tradition, especially that of Origen, yet marked distinctly by his own theological profile. The love dialogue between the bridegroom and the bride is interpreted as a symbolic image of the relationship between Christ and the human soul (or the Church), and as a description of the dynamic path of spiritual growth, in which the soul, through desire, purification, and an ever-deepening love, draws nearer to God without ever fully comprehending Him. A characteristic feature of the interpretation is his emphasis on endless progress in the knowledge and love of God.⁸

⁶ Cf. Isidoros C. Katsos, *The Metaphysics of Light in the Hexaemeral Literature. From Philo of Alexandria to Gregory of Nyssa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 192f.

⁷ Gregory of Nyssa, *In Canticum canticorum*, ed. Hermann Langerbeck (*GNO VI*, Leiden: Brill, 1986).

⁸ Cf. Lenka Karfíková, *Řehoř z Nyssy: Boží a lidská nekonečnost* (Praha: OIKOYMENH, 1999), 217 ff.; Richard A. Norris Jr., 'The Homilies on the Song,' in *Gregory of Nyssa:*

In the passage where the term ἀπαύγασμα occurs, Gregory is concerned (as in many other places) with the unknowability and indescribability of God:

Every teaching concerning the ineffable nature of God, even if it seems to reveal the best and highest possible understanding, is the likeness of gold, not gold itself, for the good transcending the human mind cannot be accurately presented. Even if someone like St. Paul was initiated into the ineffable mysteries of paradise and heard words not to be spoken (2Cor 12:4), any understanding of God remains unutterable. Paul himself says that such conceptions are ineffable. Those persons, therefore, who offer us any good thoughts about these mysteries, are unable to state anything regarding the divine nature. Rather, they speak of the splendor of God's glory, the stamp of his nature (Heb. 1:3), the form of God, the Word in the beginning, the Word being God (1 John 1:1).⁹

This passage articulates a fundamental principle of Gregory of Nyssa's theology: the radical disproportion between the divine nature and human cognitive capacities. The existence of God, as Gregory emphasizes, differs fundamentally from the existence of anything created. God is uncreated and unlimited in nature and therefore lies wholly beyond human cognitive powers – not only beyond sense perception, but also beyond thought.¹⁰ Even Moses, despite the many theophanies he experienced, did not attain a vision of the divine essence;¹¹ on the contrary, he learned precisely that it cannot be grasped. The vision of God's 'back'¹² signifies not comprehension, but following – an unending movement along the spiritual path.¹⁵

The same holds true of Paul the Apostle. Although he was elevated 'to the third heaven' and initiated into the inexpressible mysteries of

Homilies on the Song of Songs, eds. Brian E. Daley and John T. Fitzgerald, Translated with an Introduction and Notes by Richard A. Norris Jr. (Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2012), xx ff.

⁹ *In Cant.* 5 (GNO VI,85,16–86,6); translated by R. McCambly.

¹⁰ Cf. *In Cant.* 5 (GNO VI,157,15–21); cf. Lenka Karfíková, *Duše zrcadlo* (Praha: Triáda, 2016), 31; Markéta Dudzиковá, 'Šalomounova fysika,' in *Řehoř z Nyssy, Homilie na knihu Kazatel* (Praha: OIKOYMENH, 2022), 37.

¹¹ Cf. *Ex* 3; *De vita Moys.* I,20 f. (GNO VII/1,9,7–24); II,19–26 (GNO VII/1,38,25–41,12); *Ex* 19–31; 33–34:28; *De vita Moys.* I,60 (GNO VII/1,27,6–12); *De vita Moys.* II,219–255 (GNO VII/1,110,6–122,3).

¹² Cf. *Ex* 33:23.

¹⁵ Cf. *In Cant.* 12 (GNO VI, 355,14–356,16); cf. Karfíková, *Duše*, 29.

paradise, he himself insists that what he encountered cannot be rendered in human speech. Having explored, as far as humanly possible, 'the depth of the riches, wisdom and knowledge of God,'¹⁴ and having been enlightened concerning what is 'inscrutable and untraceable,'¹⁵ Paul nevertheless affirms that the divine essence remains unattainable and incomprehensible to human understanding.¹⁶

According to Gregory, therefore, the unlimited divinity can never be definitively grasped by human words or concepts; these are merely 'the likeness of gold, not gold itself,' as the passage above makes clear. Since we cannot perceive the divine reality itself, but only its manifestation, for this reason, human discourse about God can express no more than intimations, and Scripture itself prefers a plurality of images rather than the formulation of a single concept.¹⁷

1.2 De perfectione¹⁸

In *De perfectione* (which may be one of Gregory's early writings – the date is disputed¹⁹) Gregory deals with the meanings of the names used in relation to Christ, some of which can be imitated and others can only be worshipped (*ἀπαύασμα δόξης* is one of these names),²⁰ drawing mainly on the Pauline epistles. It shows the perfection towards which Christians must aspire. It is the name of Christ by which one is to be led to the Christian way of life. One is a Christian by participation in Christ, and perfection in Christian life means to participate in soul, in words, and in all that one does in life in the terms that mark the name of Christ.²¹

Gregory also emphasizes here that the nature of God is completely incomprehensible and indescribable. We learn that when Paul the Apostle speaks of what can be thought of in connection with the nature of God, he refers to peace, power, life, righteousness, light and

¹⁴ Cf. *Rom* 11:33.

¹⁵ Cf. *Rom* 11:33.

¹⁶ Cf. *De perf.* (*GNO* VIII/1,187,15–188,4).

¹⁷ Cf. *In Cant.* 5 (*GNO* VI, 139,1 ff.); Karfíková, *Duše*, 26.

¹⁸ *De perfectione*, ed. Werner Jaeger (*GNO* VIII/1, Leiden: Brill, 1986).

¹⁹ Cf. Gerhard May, 'Die Chronologie des Lebens und der Werke des Gregor von Nyssa,' in *Écriture et culture philosophique dans la pensée de Grégoire de Nyse. Actes du Colloque de Chevetogne (22–26 septembre 1969)*, ed. Marguerite Harl (Leiden: Brill, 1971), 56; Jean Daniélou, 'La chronologie des œuvres de Grégoire de Nyse,' *Studia patristica* 7 (1966): 168.

²⁰ Cf. *De perf.* (*GNO* VIII/1,178,11–14).

²¹ Cf. *De perf.* (*GNO* VIII/1,212,17–20).

truth – but when he looks for names for that which cannot be grasped by thought, he finds no apt name. Therefore that which transcends every good, which can neither be properly thought of nor spoken of, he calls ‘glory’ (δόξα) and ‘being’ (ὑπόστασις). On the one hand, then, he leaves the being which transcends all that exists unnamed; however, when he interprets the indissoluble (τὸ συναφές) relation of the Son to the Father, he calls the Son ‘the reflection of glory’ (ἀπαύγασμα δόξης) and ‘the exact imprint of being’ (χαρακτήρ ὑποστάσεως). By the word ‘reflection’ he denotes the equal nature (τὸ συμφύες), and by the word ‘exact imprint’ the equal status of both (τὸ ἰσοστάσιον).²²

For neither is any difference conceived between the ray and the nature that shares its radiance, nor is there any diminishment of the exact imprint with the hypostasis imprinting it. Moreover, whoever has understood the nature that sheds brilliance has certainly by this also understood the reflection (ἀπαύγασμα); and whoever has received in his mind the greatness of the hypostasis will certainly also measure the hypostasis by the exact imprint that has appeared.²⁵

There is a synthesis of the terms ἀπαύγασμα and χαρακτήρ in μορφή (form), a term used by Gregory on the basis of Paul’s words in Phil 2:6. Christ is here called ‘the form of God’ (μορφή θεοῦ). The term ‘form’ suggests the greatness of God; it is contemplated as ‘the Father’s majesty, which in no way surpasses its own form (μορφή) nor is found outside the exact imprint (χαρακτήρ) which points to it.’²⁴ Which, according to Gregory, is also evident in the words of the Gospel, ‘Whoever has seen me has seen the Father.’²⁵ Thus, according to Gregory, it is expressed that there is nothing extra, nor is anything lacking.²⁶

In *De perfectione*, Gregory uses the term ἀπαύγασμα to convey the meaning of Christ’s name and to express the inseparable relationship

²² Cf. *De perf.* (GNO VIII/1,188,6–189,1).

²³ *De perf.* (GNO VIII/1,189,1–7): οὔτε γὰρ ἀγῆς πρὸς τὴν ἀπανάγουσαν φύσιν ἐπινοεῖται τι μέσον οὔτε τις τοῦ χαρακτήρος ἐλάττωσις πρὸς τὴν ὑπ’ αὐτοῦ χαρακτηριζομένην ὑπόστασιν, ἀλλὰ καὶ ὁ τὴν ἀπανάγουσαν φύσιν νοήσας καὶ τὸ ἀπαύγασμα ταύτη πάντως συγκατενόησε καὶ ὁ τὸ μέγεθος τῆς ὑποστάσεως ἐν νῷ λαβὼν τῷ ἐπιφαινομένῳ χαρακτήρι πάντως ἐμμετρῆ καὶ τὴν ὑπόστασιν (translated by Rowan A. Greer, in: *One Path for All: Gregory of Nyssa on the Christian Life and Human Destiny*, Eugene, OR: Cascade Books 2015, 32).

²⁴ *De perf.* (GNO VIII/1,189,10–12; transl. by R. A. Greer).

²⁵ *John* 14:9.

²⁶ Cf. *De perf.* (GNO VIII/1,189,14–16).

of the Son with the Father and to emphasize the equal essence of the Father and the Son.

1.3 In sanctum Stephanum²⁷

This speech was given on Christmas Day, December 26, probably in 386. Gregory first returns to the feast of the previous day and speaks of Christ, setting beside him his imitator Stephen. Then, based on the Biblical narrative in the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 6–7), he recounts the life and deeds of Stephen, who was full of the Spirit of God and devoted to Christ, which is also reflected in his speech (in Acts 7), crowned by Stephen's martyrdom. This is preceded by the vision of the glory of God and the Son as described in Acts.²⁸ Gregory explains that Stephen ascended from his nature, and before he left the body he gazed with clear eyes on the glory of God (θεϊαν δόξαν) and on the reflection or brightness of glory (τὸ τῆς δόξης ἀπαύγασμα).²⁹ Here Gregory warns that this biblical verse must not be interpreted in the sense of subordination, that is, it emphasizes the equal nature of the Father and the Son and the Spirit.³⁰

2. On the radiance of God's nature – the reflection on people

*De beatitudinibus*⁵¹

In *On the Beatitudes*, one of the early works,⁵² Gregory presents a spiritual ascent similar to the sermons on the Lord's Prayer, using a New Testament parallel to Moses' ascent of Mount Sinai (Moses is then the subject of Gregory's masterpiece, *The Life of Moses*).⁵³

²⁷ *In sanctum Stephanum* I, ed. Otto Lendle (*GNO* X/1, Leiden: Brill, 1990).

²⁸ *Acts* 7:55–56: ὑπάρχων δὲ πλήρης πνεύματος ἁγίου ἀτενίσας εἰς τὸν οὐρανὸν εἶδεν δόξαν θεοῦ καὶ Ἰησοῦν ἐστῶτα ἐκ δεξιῶν τοῦ θεοῦ καὶ εἶπεν· ἰδοὺ θεωρῶ τοὺς οὐρανοὺς διηνοημένους καὶ τὸν υἱὸν τοῦ ἀνθρώπου ἐκ δεξιῶν ἐστῶτα τοῦ θεοῦ.

²⁹ *In Steph.* I (*GNO* 87,4–87,8) ὁ μὲν γὰρ ἐκβάς τὴν φύσιν καὶ πρὶν ἐκβῆναι τοῦ σώματος βλέπει τοὺς καθαροὺς ὀφθαλμοῖς ... τὸ ἐντὸς τῶν αὐτῶν διαφανόμενον, αὐτὴν τε τὴν θεϊαν δόξαν καὶ τὸ τῆς δόξης ἀπαύγασμα· καὶ τῆς μὲν πατρικῆς δόξης οὐδεὶς ὑπογράφεται χαρακτηρὴ διὰ τοῦ λόγου, τὸ δὲ ἀπαύγασμα ἐν τῷ ὀφθέντι τοῖς ἀνθρώποις εἶδει τῷ ἀθλητῇ καθορᾶται, ὡς ἦν χωρητὸν τῇ ἀνθρωπίνῃ φύσει, οὕτω φαινόμενον.

³⁰ Cf. Johan Leemans, s. v. *In sanctum Stephanum* I, in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, eds. Lucas Francisco Mateo-Seco and Giulio Maspero (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2010), 709 f.

⁵¹ Gregory of Nyssa, *De beatitudinibus*, ed. John F. Callahan (*GNO* VII/2, Leiden: Brill, 1992).

⁵² Cf. Daniélou, *La chronologie*, 159–162; May, 'Die Chronologie,' 56; Karfiková, *Řehoř z Nýssy*, 68.

⁵³ Cf. *De oratione dominica*, ed. John F. Callahan (*GNO* VII/2, Leiden: Brill, 1992); *De vita Moysis*, ed. Herbert Musurillo (*GNO* VII/1, Leiden: Brill, 1991).

In the sixth sermon, dedicated to the verse ‘Blessed are the clean of heart, for they shall see God,’⁵⁴ Gregory focuses on the incomprehensibility of God and tries to reveal how it is possible for humans to see God, who ‘no one has seen or can see.’⁵⁵ And yet, to see God means eternal life. Moreover, as Gregory points out, to see, according to Scripture, means ‘to have.’ It seems, then, that something is promised in Scripture that is unattainable for humans.⁵⁶ But God cannot ask people to do something that goes beyond their nature. God, whose nature transcends all nature, and who is invisible and incomprehensible, can be known by human beings in another way – from what God has created, from his action. As from a work of art, humans can perceive the artist who has imprinted his skill on the work. It is not the nature of the artist that is visible, but the skill he has imprinted on the work. Looking at the created universe, we can get an idea not of the essence (οὐσία) but of the wisdom of the one who created it all. And if one reflects on the cause of one’s life, one can understand not the essence of God, but the goodness of God.⁵⁷ People can even have God in themselves, they can see Him – but they must have their hearts purified from all created things and from the passions or affections. People who have their hearts thus purified see the image of the divine nature in their own beauty.⁵⁸ When a person hears of God’s incomprehensibility, ineffability and inaccessibility, they should not despair of never attaining their desire for God. When God created humans, He endowed them at the same time by impressing upon their nature the imitation of the goodness of His own nature.⁵⁹ But this likeness to God is hidden beneath a coating of sin – so if a human being cleanses their heart (heart meaning the inner human)⁴⁰ from filth, the divine beauty can shine forth again⁴¹ and the person will be restored to the likeness of God and become good again.⁴²

⁵⁴ *Matt 5:8*; Gregory of Nyssa, *De beat.* 6 (*GNO VII/2,136,25–148,22*).

⁵⁵ *1Tim 6:16*: ὃν εἶδεν οὐδεὶς ἀνθρώπων οὐδὲ ἰδεῖν δύνάται; *John 1,18*: Θεὸν οὐδεὶς ἑώρακεν πρόποτε· μονογενὴς Θεὸς ὁ ὢν εἰς τὸν κόλπον τοῦ πατρὸς ἐκεῖνος ἐξηγήσατο. *Ex 33:20*: καὶ εἶπεν Οὐ δυνήσῃ ἰδεῖν μου τὸ πρόσωπον· οὐ γὰρ μὴ ἴδῃ ἄνθρωπος τὸ πρόσωπόν μου καὶ ζήσεται.

⁵⁶ Cf. *De beat.* 6 (*GNO VII/2,137–139*).

⁵⁷ Cf. *De beat.* 6 (*GNO VII/2,141,6–15*).

⁵⁸ Cf. *De beat.* 6 (*GNO VII/2,142,12–22*).

⁵⁹ Cf. *De beat.* 6 (*GNO VII/2,143,6–8*).

⁴⁰ Cf. *De beat.* 6 (*GNO VII/2,143,16*).

⁴¹ Cf. *De beat.* 6 (*GNO VII/2,143,13*).

⁴² Cf. *De beat.* 6 (*GNO VII/2,142,23–143,20*).

For what is like to the Good is certainly itself good. Hence, if a man who is pure of heart sees himself, he sees in himself what he desires; and thus he becomes blessed, because when he looks at his own purity, he sees the archetype in the image ... Though men who see the sun in a mirror do not gaze at the sky itself, yet they see the sun in the reflection of the mirror no less than those who look at its very orb. So, He says, it is also with you. Even though you are too weak to perceive the Light itself, yet, if you but return to the grace of the Image with which you were informed from the beginning, you will have all you seek in yourselves. For the Godhead is purity, freedom from passion, and separation from all evil. If therefore these things be in you, God is indeed in you. Hence, if your thought is without any alloy of evil, free from passion, and alien from all stain, you are blessed because you are clear of sight. You are able to perceive what is invisible to those who are not purified, because you have been cleansed; the darkness caused by material entanglements has been removed from the eyes of your soul, and so you see the blessed vision radiant in the pure heaven of your heart. But what is this vision? It is purity, sanctity, simplicity, and other such luminous reflections (ἀπανγάζσματα) of the Divine Nature, in which God is contemplated.⁴⁵

In the sixth homily *On the Beatitudes*, Gregory resolves the paradox of the promised vision of God by distinguishing between the unknowability of the divine essence and the possibility of participation in God through likeness. The 'luminous reflections' (ἀπανγάζσματα) of the divine nature do not denote any direct apprehension of God's essence, which remains inaccessible, but rather the radiance of divine goodness as it is communicated and reflected in the purified human soul. Purity, sanctity, simplicity, and freedom from passion are not attributes of the divine nature as such, but participable manifestations of God's goodness, which become visible where the image of God in humanity is cleansed and restored. To see God, therefore, is not an epistemological act but an existential state: the contemplation of God in and through the renewed likeness, where the divine light shines forth not as its source, but as its reflected radiance.

⁴⁵ *De beat.* 6 (GNO VII/2,143,20–144,15), transl. by Hilda C. Graef; cf. Athanasios, *Contra gentes* 34,15–31 (ed. Robert W. Thomson, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1971). Cf. also Gregory of Nyssa, *In Cant.* 3 (GNO VI,90,10–16).

3. In the Trinitarian texts

3.1 *Contra Eunomium*⁴⁴ and *Refutatio confessionis Eunomii*⁴⁵

Gregory of Nyssa took up the Christological and Trinitarian controversy with the Neo-Arian bishop Eunomius of Cyzicus after the death of his elder brother Basil. Eunomius advocated a hierarchical conception of the Trinity, influenced by Neoplatonic patterns of causality, according to which the three divine hypostases are ordered in a descending sequence, with the Son ontologically and temporally posterior to the Father. In response, Gregory composed three books *Against Eunomius* (*Contra Eunomium*) as well as the *Refutation of the Confession of Eunomius* (*Refutatio confessionis Eunomii*), in which he defended – following Basil’s theological line – the full divinity and consubstantiality of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The first two books of *Contra Eunomium* were written between 380 and the spring of 381, that is, prior to the Council of Constantinople (May–July 381); the third book likely dates from 381–383, while the *Refutatio confessionis Eunomii* was probably composed around 383.⁴⁶

Within these anti-Eunomian writings, the semantic potential of the term ἀπαύγασμα acquires a sharply defined polemical function. Against Eunomius’ claim that the Son came into being and therefore stands in a temporal and ontological sequence after the Father, Gregory consistently interprets ἀπαύγασμα in an active sense, as radiant light proceeding from its source. The image presupposes the simultaneity and inseparability of glory and its radiance: light is never prior to its radiance, nor can radiance exist apart from the light from which it proceeds.

By applying the analogy of light and radiance to the relation between cause and effect, Gregory excludes any temporal priority of the Father over the Son. The Son, as the radiance of divine glory, is co-eternal with the Father in the same way that the shining of light is coexistent with its luminous source. In this context, ἀπαύγασμα does not denote a second-

⁴⁴ *Contra Eunomium libri I et II (vulgo I et XII B)*, ed. Werner Jaeger (*GNO I*, Leiden: Brill, 1960); *Contra Eunomium liber III (vulgo III–XII)*, ed. Werner Jaeger (*GNO II*, Leiden: Brill, 1960).

⁴⁵ *Refutatio confessionis Eunomii (vulgo C. Eun. liber II)*, ed. Werner Jaeger (*GNO II*, Leiden: Brill, 1960).

⁴⁶ Cf. Johannes Zachhuber, *Human Nature in Gregory of Nyssa. Philosophical Background and Theological Significance* (Leiden – Boston – Köln: Brill, 2000), 206f.; Karfíková, *Řehoř z Nyssy*, 169, 172f.; 40.

ary brightness or a reflected quality, but rather the very manifestation of the source's power and glory. The polemical force of the image lies precisely in this top-down predication, which renders Eunomius' assertion that 'the Son once was not' conceptually incoherent.⁴⁷

Referring explicitly to Wisdom 7:26, Gregory emphasizes that the Son is eternal with the Father and that the Father cannot be described as 'elder.' He rejects Eunomius' claim that there could ever have been a time when the Son did not exist. The radiance (ἀπαύγασμα) is perceived simultaneously with the light from which it proceeds; the cause of the radiance cannot be temporally prior to it, since both are eternal together.⁴⁸ The Son is the Word who is 'in the beginning,'⁴⁹ and glory and radiance are so closely bound that neither can exist without the other. To deny the existence of one is necessarily to deny the existence of the other.⁵⁰ If there were no radiance, there could be no glory.⁵¹ Gregory therefore concludes:

So if the Only-begotten God did not exist before he came to be, as Eunomius says, and Christ is Power of God, and Wisdom of God, and Stamp, and Radiance, neither surely did the Father exist, whose Power and Wisdom and Stamp and Radiance the Son is.⁵²

3.2 De deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti et in Abraham⁵³

Gregory makes similar arguments in *De deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti*,⁵⁴ which he wrote in 383 on the occasion of the Synod of Con-

⁴⁷ Cf. Katsos, *The Metaphysics*, 193 f.

⁴⁸ Cf. *Contra Eun.* I (GNO I,132,28–133,4): ἀπαύγασμα γὰρ αἰδίου φωτὸς παρὰ τῆς σοφίας ἀκούσαντες συνεπιθεωροῦμεν τῇ αἰδιότητι τοῦ πρωτοτύπου φωτὸς τὸ ἀπαύγασμα, καὶ τὸ αἶτιον τοῦ ἀπαυγάσματος ἔννοοῦντες καὶ τὸ πρεσβύτερον οὐ δεχόμενοι. Cf. *Contra Eun.* I (GNO I,209,19–26); *Contra Eun.* III (GNO II,8,20–23; 190,21–27); *Contra Eun.* III (GNO II,100,18).

⁴⁹ Cf. *Ref. Eun.* (GNO II, 380, 15–26); cf. *John* 1:1.18.

⁵⁰ Cf. *Contra Eun.* III (GNO II, 202,22–24; 203,23–204,2).

⁵¹ Cf. *Contra Eun.* III (GNO II, 202,10 f.; 203,15–18; 204,2 f.; 204,18–22); *Contra Eun.* I (GNO I, 209,16).

⁵² Cf. *Contra Eun.* III (GNO II, 204,7–12; transl. by Stuart G. Hall, in *Gregory of Nyssa: Contra Eunomium III, An English Translation with Commentary and Supporting Studies*, eds. Johan Leemans and Matthieu Cassin, Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2014).

⁵³ *De deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti et in Abraham*, ed. Ernest Rhein (GNO X/2, Leiden: Brill, 1996).

⁵⁴ *De deit.* (GNO X/2,123,22–124,9): ἀπαύγασμα τῆς δόξης εἶπε τὸν υἱὸν ὁ ἀπόστολος καὶ χαρακτηρὰ τῆς ὑποστάσεως ... ὃν ἕκαστον καθάπερ ἐν συζυγίαις τισὶν ἀναγκαίαις οὐδὲν ἀφ' ἑαυτοῦ καταμόνας νοεῖται, ἀλλὰ συνημμένως ἀμφότερα καὶ μετ' ἀλλήλων καταλαμβάνεται, τὸ γὰρ ἀπαύγασμα πάντως τινὸς ἐστὶν ἀπαύγασμα ... ὡσπερ τοίνυν οὐκ ἂν ἀπαύγασμα εἶη τὸ φῶς

stantinople,⁵⁵ at which he delivered his speech and to which the representatives of Arians, Anhomioians (Neo-Arians, Eunomians) and Pneumatomachians (Macedonians) were invited. He sharply criticizes them for denying the doctrine of the equal nature of the divine persons, and compares them, with reference to Mark 2:22 (parr.), to ‘old wineskins’ into which ‘new wine’ cannot be poured – in consequence of their disbelief, they cannot accept the divine doctrine.⁵⁶ This simile, then, according to Gregory, expresses the relation of the Holy Spirit to the human soul. Gregory describes the disturbing situation in Constantinople, where they hold to a doctrine denying the same nature of divine persons, which reminds him of the situation in Athens at the time of Paul the Apostle’s appearance at the Areopagus, where Paul debated with the Stoics and Epicureans, among others.⁵⁷ The Anhomioians, according to Gregory, are close to the Stoics in claiming that the Only-begotten God is created. The Stoics, after all, hold that the divinity is material. And according to the Epicureans, there is nothing that transcends existing things and their ordering, no providence, but everything happens of itself. Thus their views tend towards atheism, as Gregory summarizes.⁵⁸ The Anhomioians, according to Gregory, are their imitators – they claim to know the Father, yet deny the Son. Those who do not acknowledge the Son do not believe in the Father either, so they deny the Divinity as such, and are therefore in the same position as Epicurus.⁵⁹

And it is in this context that Gregory uses the expression ἀπαύγασμα:

The apostle called the Son ‘the radiance of glory,’ ‘the exact imprint of a person,’ ‘the power of God,’ ‘the wisdom of God,’ and the like. Neither part of these, as it were, inseparable pairs is conceivable in itself, separately, but we understand the two parts as dependent on each other. A radiance is, of course, a radiance of something, and an imprint is, of course, an imprint of something. Just as light would not be a radiance if there were no shining cause, just so the shining nature would not be conceivable in itself if the

μη οὐσης τῆς ἀπαναζούσης αἰτίας, οὕτως ἡ ἀπαναζούσα φύσις οὐκ ἂν καθ’ ἑαυτὴν νοηθεῖ μη συνεπινοουμένου τοῦ ἀπαναζάματος.

⁵⁵ Cf. Tina Dolidze, s. v. *De deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti et in Abraham*, in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, 216.

⁵⁶ Cf. *De deit.* (GNO X/2, 119).

⁵⁷ Cf. *De deit.* (GNO X/2, 120 ff).

⁵⁸ Cf. *De deit.* (GNO X/2, 123).

⁵⁹ Cf. *De deit.* (GNO X/2, 123; 125,4–8).

radiance were not thought at the same time with it. Similarly, the exact imprint shows the person, and the person is recognized by the imprint. Just so God's power cannot be without God, and God in his nature cannot be thought without power. So whoever says of one of the parts that make sense as in this pair that it does not, surely thereby potentially invalidates the remaining part. Of course the advocates of godlessness declare that the Son once was not. If there were no Son, then surely there were no Father. If there were no radiance, then there were not even that which emanates it. If there were no imprint, surely there were no person. If there were no power, if there were no wisdom, without which God does not exist (for it is through these attributes that it is possible to think of God's existence), how could there be a God who is above all?⁶⁰

Later in the text Gregory refutes the objections of these contemporary 'Epicureans,' namely, that the Father is 'greater' and the Son 'lesser;' the Father sends and the Son is sent, by adding words from the Gospel: 'The one who sent me is with me,' (John 8:29), and explains the conflicting statements in the New Testament by saying that one statement refers to human nature ('the Father is greater than I,' John 14:28; 'The one who sent me,' John 8:29) and others to the divine nature ('I am in the Father, and the Father is in me,' John 14:10; 'I and the Father are one,' John 10:30; 'equality with God,' Phlp 2:6).⁶¹

Then, through the story of Abraham and his sacrifice, Gregory shows that the highest form of knowing God is faith.⁶² The last part of the writing is devoted to a defense of the Divinity of the Holy Spirit against the Macedonians who denied that the Holy Spirit was divine.⁶³

3.3 *Ad Simplicium*⁶⁴

In his writing *Ad Simplicium* (the date of which is uncertain) Gregory polemicalises with the Eunomians and gathers, in defence of the faith for a certain tribune Simplicius, arguments from his works *Refutatio confessionis Eunomii* and *Ad Graecos*. Here, too, he points out by means of the image of light and its radiance or brightness, which lasts as long

⁶⁰ *De deit.* (GNO X/2,125,22–125,1).

⁶¹ Cf. *De deit.* (GNO X/2,125–130).

⁶² Cf. *De deit.* (GNO X/2,131–140).

⁶³ Cf. *De deit.* (GNO X/2,141–144); cf. also Dolidze, 217 f.

⁶⁴ *Ad Simplicium De fide*, ed. Friedrich Müller (GNO III/1, Leiden: Brill, 1958).

as light itself, that the divine nature of the Son is eternal.⁶⁵ The only thing that can be created is the body of Jesus – Gregory distinguishes between divine and human nature.⁶⁶ Moreover, as the beginning of John’s Gospel (1:1) indicates, the Word (Λόγος) was in the beginning, not after the beginning.⁶⁷

In this text, Gregory argues against applying attributes of physical generation to the Divine nature. He emphasizes that the Son is the ‘brightness of the Father’s glory,’ illustrating the inseparable relationship between the two – just as light is inseparable from its source. The Apostle Paul’s analogy shows that the Son and Father are co-eternal: it is as impossible for glory to exist without radiance as for the lamp to exist without light. Therefore, the claim that ‘the Son once was not’ is invalid, as it would imply the Father’s glory also ‘once was not.’

Gregory further uses the example of Adam and Abel to refute the idea that being begotten or unbegotten creates a difference in nature. Adam was created directly by God (unbegotten), while Abel was born through natural generation (begotten), yet both shared the same human nature. Similarly, the Father and Son share the same divine nature despite one being unbegotten and the other begotten.

Finally, the text rejects the idea that the Holy Spirit could be a created being and asserts that there is no hierarchy or gradation within the Trinity. All three persons – the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – share the same divine nature.⁶⁸

Gregory’s deployment of the term ἀπαύγασμα in his anti-Eunomian writings reveals a carefully constructed theological strategy aimed at safeguarding the co-eternity and consubstantiality of the Son with the Father. By interpreting radiance not as a derivative or secondary property, but as the necessary and simultaneous manifestation of its source, Gregory articulates a model of divine causality that excludes all forms of temporal succession within the Trinity. The light–radiance analogy

⁶⁵ Cf. *Ad Simpl.* (GNO III/1,63,22–64,15): ὁ Παῦλος ἀπαύγασμα δόξης αὐτὸν ὀνομάζει, ἵνα διδαχθῶμεν ὅτι ... ἐκ τοῦ πατρὸς ὁ υἱὸς καὶ οὐδέποτε χωρὶς τοῦ υἱοῦ ὁ πατήρ· οὐκ ἐγχωρεῖ... ἄνευ ἁ. εἶναι τὸν λόγον... ὥσπερ τὸ εἶναι ἁ. μαρτυρία ἐστὶ τοῦ καὶ τὴν δόξαν εἶναι ... οὕτω τὸ λέγειν μὴ εἶναι ποτε ἁ. ἀπόδειξις ἐστὶ τοῦ μὴδὲ τὴν δόξαν εἶναι, ὅτε οὐκ ἦν τὸ ἁ. τὴν γὰρ δόξαν ἄνευ ἁ. εἶναι ἀμήχανον. ὥσπερ οὖν οὐκ ἔστιν ἐπὶ τοῦ ἁ. λέγειν ὅτι εἰ ἦν, οὐκ ἐγένετο, καὶ εἰ ἐγένετο οὐκ ἦν, οὕτω μάταιόν ἐστι περὶ τοῦ υἱοῦ τὰ ταῦτα λέγειν, διότι ὁ υἱὸς ἐστὶ τὸ ἀπαύγασμα.

⁶⁶ Cf. *Ad Simpl.* (GNO III/1,62–63).

⁶⁷ Cf. *Ad Simpl.* (GNO III/1,64–65).

⁶⁸ Cf. *Ad Simpl.* (GNO III/1,63,22–65,24); translation is taken from NPNF (V2–05); cf. Drecoll, s. v. *Ad Simplicium, de fide*, in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, 678 ff.

thus functions not merely as a rhetorical image, but as a precise conceptual instrument: it renders Eunomius' claim that 'the Son once was not' logically untenable, since the negation of the radiance would imply the negation of the source itself.

Across *Contra Eunomium*, *Refutatio confessionis Eunomii*, *De deitate Filii et Spiritus Sancti*, and *Ad Simplicium*, Gregory consistently integrates this imagery into a broader theological framework in which divine generation does not entail ontological subordination. The Son's status as ἀπαύγασμα secures both his distinction from the Father and his full participation in the one divine nature. In this way, Gregory's exegesis contributes decisively to the pro-Nicene articulation of Trinitarian doctrine, demonstrating how scriptural metaphors, when carefully interpreted, can bear substantial dogmatic weight.

4. In Christological Texts

*Antirreticus adversus Apollinarium*⁶⁹

Among the Christological texts are the writings of the *Antirreticus adversus Apollinarium*, i.e. the answer to Apollinarius' *Proof* (Ἀπόδειξις) of the incarnation of God in human form, against which Gregory argues in a similar way as against Eunomius, quoting passages from Apollinarius' writings and refuting these claims.⁷⁰ The text was written after the polemic with Eunomius, in the 80s of the 4th century.

Apollinaris of Laodicea (in Syria) was one of the bishops who held the Nicene formulation of the Divinity of Christ, and he himself was for many years friends with Athanasius of Alexandria, and in 361–364 with Gregory's brother Basil, who was quite reserved about Apollinaris until 376. Basil distanced himself from his teachings only in 377, when at the same time Apollinaris and his followers distanced themselves

⁶⁹ *Antirreticus adversus Apollinarium*, ed. Friedrich Müller (GNO III/1, Leiden: Brill, 1958). It was probably written in 387; cf. Pierre Maraval, s. v. *Chronology of Works*, in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, 155.

⁷⁰ Cf. Drecoll, s. v. *Antirreticus adversus Apollinarium*, in *The Brill Dictionary of Gregory of Nyssa*, 48; according to Georgios Lekkas, 'Gregory of Nyssa's Refutation of the Pre-Ensoulement of God the Word in His Antirreticus Adversus Apollinarium,' in *Gregory of Nyssa: The Minor Treatises on Trinitarian Theology and Apollinarism*, eds. Volker Henning Drecoll and Margitta Berghaus (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2011), 557, Gregory seems to have rejected the opinions of Apollinarius' disciples rather than his own.

from the bishops of the Nicene Creed and formed their own church, as is clear from Basil's letters.⁷¹

Apollinaris, in his Christological doctrine,⁷² asserted that the only begotten Son of God had a human body and a human soul, in the leading part of which dwelt the divine mind (νοῦς), inseparable from the body, and as such existed before the creation of the world. Christ cannot be regarded as a human, but only as resembling a human.⁷³

In response, Gregory describes the incarnation as the union of God with man, which consists of body and soul. He thus rejects the very formulation of the title, i.e., that the incarnation took place in human form. Assuming that in the human there is a soul taken on by the Word (Logos), it must be a human soul, including the intellect.⁷⁴ Against Apollinarius' assumption that the humanity taken on by Christ had his origin before all time, Gregory notes that this would then have to be true of the Virgin Mary, who would thus be older than Adam.⁷⁵ This is hardly compatible with Christ's growth from infancy to adulthood.⁷⁶ Also, from a soteriological point of view, it is crucial to admit that the soul in man was a soul that belonged to human nature (and did not have a heavenly origin before the world began), because only in this way can the significance of Christ's death for the universal redemption of human nature be expressed.⁷⁷ It must be assumed, therefore, that the divine nature, which is simple, remained simple in Him who became incarnate, because only thus could redemption be efficacious.⁷⁸ The exaltation of humans is conceivable only through the conception of the incarnation as self-humiliation, as taking the form of a servant.⁷⁹

⁷¹ Cf. Silke-Petra Bergjan, 'Anti-arianische Argumente gegen Apollinarios. Gregor von Nyssa in der Auseinandersetzung mit Apollinarios in Antirrheticus adversus Apollinarium,' in *Gregory of Nyssa: The Minor Treatises on Trinitarian Theology and Apollinarism*, eds. Volker Henning Drecoll and Margitta Berghaus (Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2011), 481f.; Karfiková, *Řehoř z Nyssy*, 171.

⁷² His teachings were condemned at the 1st Council of Constantinople in 381.

⁷³ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 186–187; 151; 154); cf. Lekkas, 'Gregory of Nyssa's Refutation,' 557.

⁷⁴ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 140,23–141,6; 144,27).

⁷⁵ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 148,14–22).

⁷⁶ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 149,17–150,6).

⁷⁷ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 153,11–14).

⁷⁸ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 153,26–154,6).

⁷⁹ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 160,13–29; 161,9–13).

Apollinarius' understanding of the incarnate Christ as the divine intellect in the flesh (νοῦς ἔνσαρκος) leads to his being regarded not as a human, but as something like a human (καθάπερ ἄνθρωπος).⁸⁰ This conception of Christ's incarnation, in which they are not two different realities, is also reflected in Apollinarius' conception of the divinity – for Christ is the imprint and reflection of the Father's hypostasis. It follows, according to Gregory, that if he shares the same essence (ὁμοούσιος) with the Father, it would follow that the Father must also be corporeal.⁸¹

Let us now turn our attention to the passages in which the term ἀπαύγασμα occurs, and in which Gregory introduces the Apollinarian supposition that God the Father must be corporeal; it is the understanding of the words of *Hebrews* (1:1–2⁸²):

The words 'In the past God spoke to our ancestors through the prophets at many times and in various ways,'⁸³ are, as stated by Gregory, Apollinarius' proof that the humanity of God, who has revealed Himself to people, existed before the ages (προαιώνιον εἶναι). This is how Apollinarius claims to interpret the Apostle literally, as Gregory informs us:

From this it is evident that the very man who spoke the Father's words to us is God, the Creator of the ages (ποιητὴς τῶν αἰώνων), the reflection of glory (ἀπαύγασμα δόξης), the exact imprint of his person (χαρακτήρ τῆς ὑποστάσεως αὐτοῦ). Since He is God in respect of his own spirit, and has no other God in himself besides, he is the one who through himself, through the flesh, has cleansed the world from sins.

According to Gregory, these are the exact, untwisted words of Apollinarius. If the one who spoke, is a man, he is the Creator of the ages, the body (σάρξ) is said to be the reflection (ἀπαύγασμα), and the form of the servant (ἢ τοῦ δούλου μορφῆ) the characteristic feature of the divine hypostasis.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 187,2–3).

⁸¹ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 157,13–158,5; 200,15–20).

⁸² *Heb.* 1:1–2: Πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως πάσαι ὁ θεὸς λαλήσας τοῖς πατράσιν ἐν τοῖς προφήταις ἐπ' ἐσχάτου τῶν ἡμερῶν τούτων ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ἐν υἱῷ, ὃν ἔθηκεν κληρονόμον πάντων, δι' οὗ καὶ ἐποίησεν τοὺς αἰῶνας.

Gregory: ἐπ' ἐσχάτων τῶν ἡμερῶν ἐν υἱῷ ἐλάλησεν ἡμῖν ὁ θεὸς ὁ πολυμερῶς καὶ πολυτρόπως ἐν τοῖς προφήταις λαλήσας τοῖς πατράσι τὸ πρότερον.

⁸³ *Heb.* 1:1.

⁸⁴ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 155,13–30).

He argues that man is a reflection of God's glory, and that the characteristics of God's hypostasis are reflected in the fleshly God he (Apollinaris) created in his idle speculations and inventions. As the ray is consubstantial with the sun, and the lamp in turn with the light that emanates from it, and the characteristic features of man show the human person, so also if He who has appeared to us is a reflection of the glory of the Father, and if the characteristic feature of His person is flesh, then surely in consequence of this the nature of the Father is understood to be fleshly. Surely he would not say that the incorporeal is characterized by the flesh, and that the visible is a reflection of the invisible. Such as the glory is, such of course is its reflection, and such as the exact imprint is, such surely is the person. If in the one case it is the body, one cannot naturally think that in the other case it is the incorporeal.⁸⁵

Apollinaris also says that if we imagine that the perfect human and the perfect God met in the one who became incarnate, there would be a quartet instead of a trinity, and the incarnate man should be understood as a 'human-god' (ἄνθρωπόθεος).⁸⁶ Gregory answers that in Christ there are both natures, Divine and human, as two aspects, the only-begotten God remaining still Christ, but man only for the time of the Divine economy, when he took upon himself the whole man, with body and soul, including intellect.⁸⁷ On this assumption, that in Christ the whole man is endowed with intellect, the conception of the Trinity of God is in no way disturbed.⁸⁸

Conclusion

The foregoing analysis has shown that Gregory of Nyssa's use of the term ἀπαύγασμα is neither incidental nor semantically uniform, but forms part of a carefully differentiated theological language adapted to distinct doctrinal contexts. Across his exegetical, ascetical, Trinitarian, and Christological writings, Gregory consistently employs the imagery of radiance and reflection to articulate the relation between divine

⁸⁵ *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 157,12–27).

⁸⁶ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 214,19–21).

⁸⁷ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 183; 221–222; 164; 173; 177; 195).

⁸⁸ Cf. *Antirrh.* (GNO III/1, 222); cf. G. Lekkas, 'Gregory of Nyssa's Refutation,' 563; Drecoll, *Antirrheticus*, 48f.

transcendence and manifestation, while rigorously safeguarding the incomprehensibility of the divine essence.

In texts concerned with the unknowability of God (*In Canticum canticorum, De perfectione*), ἀπαύγασμα functions within an apophatic framework. Here, it designates not the divine nature itself, which remains beyond all conceptual grasp, but the manifested splendor of divine glory as it becomes accessible through scriptural images and names. Human discourse about God thus remains indirect and analogical, expressing not what God is in himself, but how he is made known. The radiance does not disclose the source exhaustively; it signals presence without abolishing transcendence.

A further shift occurs in texts addressing the transformation of the human person (*De beatitudinibus*). In this participatory context, ἀπαύγασμα no longer refers to the intra-divine relation, but to the reflection of divine goodness in the purified soul. The luminous 'reflections' of the divine nature denote ethical and spiritual qualities – purity, simplicity, freedom from passion – through which the image of God in humanity is restored. To 'see God' is therefore not an act of intellectual apprehension, but an existential participation in divine likeness, where the divine light shines forth as reflected radiance rather than as its uncreated source.

The polemical sharpness of the term comes most clearly into view in Gregory's Trinitarian writings against Eunomius. Here ἀπαύγασμα is interpreted in an active, causal sense: as radiant light proceeding inseparably and simultaneously from its source. This interpretation is deliberately chosen to counter Eunomius' claim of the Son's temporal and ontological posteriority. By insisting that glory and its radiance are co-eternal and mutually implicative, Gregory articulates a model of divine causality that excludes any temporal succession within the Trinity. The Son's status as ἀπαύγασμα thus secures both his distinction from the Father and his full consubstantiality with him, rendering the assertion that 'the Son once was not' conceptually incoherent.

Finally, in his Christological polemic against Apollinarius, Gregory again mobilizes the semantics of radiance to expose the internal contradictions of a doctrine that collapses the distinction between divine and human natures. By showing that Apollinarius' application of ἀπαύγασμα to the fleshly Christ would entail a corporeal conception of the Father, Gregory demonstrates that the same metaphor, if misapplied, undermines the very doctrine it is meant to support. Here, the

term serves as a critical tool for preserving both the simplicity of the divine nature and the integrity of Christ's full humanity.

Taken together, these analyses reveal that ἀπαύγασμα functions in Gregory of Nyssa's texts as a genuinely theological concept rather than a merely decorative metaphor. Its semantic flexibility allows Gregory to articulate, within a single field of imagery, the paradoxes of Christian doctrine: transcendence and presence; unity and distinction; unknowability and revelation; divine simplicity and historical economy. Gregory's use of ἀπαύγασμα demonstrates how scriptural imagery, when subjected to disciplined theological reflection, can bear significant dogmatic weight without lapsing into either subordinationism or materialization, and offers a paradigmatic example of pro-Nicene theological reasoning at its most conceptually precise and spiritually resonant.

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MARXISM AND CATHOLIC INTELLECTUAL MILIEU IN INTERWAR CZECHOSLOVAKIA

P E T R M A C E K

ABSTRACT

The paper aims to analyse a discussion on Marxism among Czech interwar Catholic authors. For this purpose, it follows two separate yet interacting discourses. Firstly, it examines a critique of Marxism in Christian sociology. Here, it pays attention to the most important authors of this era – Alois Soldát, František Reyl and Bedřich Vašek. Our reading of their sociological syntheses suggests that their aim was not a mere refutation of Marxism but rather an attempt to seriously engage with multifaceted legacy of Marx's thought. While they generally appreciated the depth of Marx's analysis, the Czech Christian sociologists tended to be critical to the common foundations of modern secularized ideologies. In that regard, their critique was not aimed only at Marxism but also on classical liberalism, that was perceived as a natural precursor of Marxism. Second half of the paper is devoted to the commentaries on Marxism published in the Czech Catholic periodical. Here we might find rather less nuanced reading of Marxism with tendency for unequivocal rejection of Marxism, which was predominantly seen as a reductive philosophical system based on a nihilistic presupposition and essentially inimical to the idea of human personal dignity and freedom. The second part of the paper is focused on the work of Jaroslav Durych and Rudolf Ina Malý.

Keywords

Catholicism; Marxism; Czechoslovakia; 1920s–1930s; Christian sociology; Political philosophy and theology

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In 1937, Pope Pius XI issued an encyclical *Divini Redemptoris* refuting the political and social system of Communism. While focusing on current political challenges brought about by revolutions and civil

wars in Soviet Union, Spain and Mexico, it also offered a more systematic analysis of Marxist doctrine.¹ Here, the Marxist and Catholic perspective were depicted as clearly opposing poles in all philosophical and political debates.² The main aim of the paper is to offer more nuanced view on the relations of Catholics authors towards Marxism. Its focus is on the interwar debate in Czech Catholicism, the time which saw on one hand a sincere Catholic intellectual and spiritual renewal and on the other hand an explosion of secular ideological narratives competing with the religious worldview. In the Catholic milieu, this situation provoked complex and dense discussion, analysis of which will be the main subject of the paper. It will follow two main lines of reasoning. Firstly, it will analyse an academic discourse in Christian sociology which strove to offer rather balanced and unbiased view on Marxism. Then it will continue with the depiction of a more ardent and subjective discussion in the Catholic periodicals of the time. The analysis will lead to the description of a multi-layered debate, which suggests how demanding and at times disorienting it was for Catholic intellectuals to cope not only with Marxism but with demands of modern ideologies in general.

The paper follows, in many ways, on previous research on the intellectual history of Czech Catholicism, represented in the field of historical sociology by the work of Zdeněk R. Nešpor³ and in the field of history of literature by the massive synthesis of Martin C. Putna.⁴ Our analysis complements these studies with focus on the theoretical deconstruction of Marxism in Catholic thought, which was mainly missing in previous research. In their probes into the Czech Christian sociology, both Nešpor and Putna focus on the phenomenon of religion and the struggle of Catholicism with modern secularity rather than on economic or social issues connected with Marxism. Other studies on Catholic social teaching were devoted to the more practical aspects of its adoption in the Czechoslovakian Catholicism and its implications

¹ For the analysis of Marxist doctrine, cf. Pius XI, *Divini Redemptoris*, 7–18.

² For the exposition of this argument, see the first part of Philippe Chenaux, *L'Eglise catholique et le communisme en Europe (1917–1989), de Lénine à Jean-Paul II* (Paris: Édition du Cerf, 2009).

³ Zdeněk R. Nešpor, *Ne/náboženské naděje intelektuálů: vývoj české sociologie náboženství v mezinárodním a interdisciplinárním kontextu* (Praha: Scriptorium, 2008)

⁴ Martin C. Putna, *Česká katolická literatura v kontextech: 1918–1945* (Praha: Torst, 2010).

for political life.⁵ The aim of our paper is therefore to fill in the lacuna in the contemporary research.

Methodologically, the paper is based on the analysis of primary texts on Marxism produced by Czech Catholic intellectuals. In the case of Catholic sociologists, it mainly comprises their comprehensive sociological textbooks. The paper analyses the work of the main representatives of Christian sociology in interwar Czechoslovakia, the professors of this discipline on the faculties of theology in Prague and Olomouc. Representative collection of articles and collection of essays was chosen for the treatise of Catholic journalism. It focuses on the most distinctive journalists and authors (Jaroslav Durych, Rudolf Ina Malý), who preoccupied themselves with Marxism not only through political pamphlets but on a more substantial level of theoretical analysis.

1. Sociological perspective

Already in the decades preceding the outbreak of the First world War, the Catholic church in the Czech lands, in that time still under the rule of Habsburgs, saw the birth and rise of the political Catholicism, represented on the right wing of the political spectrum by the National Catholic Party in the Kingdom of Bohemia and on the left wing by emergence of Catholic socialism and the Christian Social Party in Bohemia.⁶ This complex and multifaceted political movement was inspired and influence partly by the rise of modern political ideologies and differentiation of the political spectrum in the Czech lands, partly by the challenges of modernization, industrialization and workers' movement and to a great extent by the formation of Catholic social teaching initiated by Pope Leo XIII's 1891 encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.

All these profound changes in the relations between the Church and modern society required thorough theoretical study, which would manage to offer systematic analysis of the process of modernization, but in the same time would be rooted in the foundational principles

⁵ Pavel Marek, *Čeští křesťanští sociálové: příspěvek k problematice programových a organizačních základů českého politického katolicismu v letech 1894–1938* (Olomouc: Univerzita Palackého, 2011); Jakub Štofanič, *Medzi krížom a kladivom: recepcia sociálneho myslenia v katolíckej cirkvi v prvej polovici 20. storočia* (Praha: Filozofická fakulta Univerzity Karlovy, 2017).

⁶ Pavel Marek, 'Počátky českého politického katolicismu v letech 1848–1918,' in *Český politický katolicismus 1848–2005*, eds. Petr Fiala et al. (Brno: CDK, 2008): 23–126.

of Christian faith. Thus, we can observe the establishment of new academic discipline, in that time referred to as ‘Christian sociology’ aspiring to offer sociological description of the structure and development of modern society seen through the perspective of the Catholic social teaching. Prevailing methodological conviction of the time strove to construct Christian sociology as strictly scientific field of study, which should be able to provide objective, scientific outlook of the society.⁷ Supernatural horizon of the faith was perceived more as an ‘additional’ layer, whose aim was to confirm results reached by natural reason.⁸ However disputable this ostensible objectivity might be, Christian sociology still managed to create an impressive synthesis of the sociological knowledge.

The general history of the Christian sociology in the Czech lands and the profiles of its leading experts have already been the subject of many studies.⁹ Therefore, the main aim of this paper is not to offer yet another general overview of the development of the Catholic social teaching in the Czech land, but rather to focus on narrowly defined question of the reception of Marxism among the Czech Christian sociologists. In the following part of the paper, the Catholic analysis of Marxism will be based on the work of the leading Christian sociologists – Alois Soldát (1862–1952), František Reyl (1865–1935) and Bedřich Vašek (1882–1959).¹⁰ While Soldát and Reyl published their sociological syntheses in the time before the war and it was in the strict sense only Bedřich Vašek, who can be considered as an author of the inter-war period, all of them influenced intellectual milieu of the Czech Catholicism after the creation of independent Czechoslovakia in 1918. Therefore, I will briefly describe main outlines of their critique of Marxism and then I will focus on common threads in their analysis.

⁷ Bedřich Vašek, *Křesťanská sociologie. Díl I, Život sociální* (Praha: Universum, 1933), preface, without page numbers.

⁸ For the discussion on the relation between natural and supernatural in the Catholic social thought, cf. John Milbank, *Theology and Social Theory. Beyond Secular Reason*, 2nd edition (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 206–256.

⁹ Cf. Nešpor, *Ne/náboženské naděje intelektuálů*, Marek, *Čeští křesťanští sociálové*, Libor Ovečka, *‘Člověče, bylo ti oznámeno, co je dobré...’ Česká katolická morální teologie 1884–1948* (Praha: Karolinum, 2011), Štofanič, *Medzi krížom a kladivom*.

¹⁰ Only the life and work of František Reyl was a subject of a monograph, cf. Matěj Havel, *František Reyl, kněz, vědec, politik* (Červený Kostelec: Pavel Mervart, 2016). For short biographies of other authors, cf. Marek, *Čeští křesťanští sociálové* and for the overall assessment of their work cf. Nešpor, *Ne/náboženské naděje*, 100–110.

Alois Soldát, who had been a full professor of Christian sociology at the Theological faculty of Charles University in Prague since 1907, published his *opus magnum*, a thorough overview of Christian sociology titled *Nástin základův a všeobecných zásad společensko hospodářských* [*The Outline of the Socio-Economic Foundations and General Principles*] in 1913.¹¹ As the title suggests, the book follows both economic and sociological study of society. It proceeds from the principles of political economy and after that, it offers explanation of basic social structures (with focus on family, state and private property). Obviously, the emphasis on the political economy leads Soldát to the exposition of Marxism, which is conceptualized precisely as a system of political economy, rather than political ideology or even philosophical system. Soldát opens his critique of Marxism with the dispute over Marx's value theory. Soldát, in accordance with other Christian sociologists of the era, appreciates sophistication of Marx's analysis but points out that the value of commodities cannot be determined only by the average quantity of human labour necessary to produce a commodity, but also by other factors like the value of engines, land, real estate and capital itself. Soldát argues that Marx's theory of value was more an instrumental tool to awaken class consciousness of proletariat, than rigorous analytical framework.¹² In the typical line of argument, he tries to prove that Marx is able to come up with valuable observation about social life, but his conclusions are radically reductive. One of the main aims of the Christian sociology was thus to amend what was perceived as too simplistic character of all modern ideologies and offer a fuller notion of social reality. Soldát therefore concludes, that main weakness of Marx's approach is led by 'immeasurable exaggeration, arbitrary generalizations and by drawing incorrect conclusions'.¹⁵ Marx's writing has more of a rhetorical quality, than an objective scientific value. Consequently, 'socialism does not arise from a scientific view of reality, but from the resentment, the indignation of the working class'.¹⁴

¹¹ Alois Soldát, *Nástin základův a všeobecných zásad společensko-hospodářských, příspěvek katolické mravouky k řešení otázky sociální* (Praha: Dědictví sv. Prokopa, 1913).

¹² Soldát, *Nástin*, 23, 161, similar argument might be found in Vašek, *Křesťanská sociologie*, 126.

¹⁵ Soldát, *Nástin*, 162.

¹⁴ Soldát, *Nástin*, 165.

Only one year after Soldát's synthesis of Christian sociology, František Reyl, at that time professor of sociology at the diocesan seminary in Hradec Králové, published his own treatise *Jádro křesťanské sociologie* [*The Core of Christian Sociology*]. The original publication was revised and reissued in 1924 as *Sociologie v politice* [*Sociology in Politics*].¹⁵ In the following presentation of Reyl's arguments, I will mostly refer to updated version from 1920's as it better reflects on the discussions in the interwar Catholicism. Unlike Soldát, Reyl did not proceed from the exposition of political economy, but firstly paid attention to the historical development of sociological thinking. His main point of reference is the differentiation between evolutionism in sociology and Christian principles of social thought. Also in his other texts, Reyl strove to show that Christianity and specifically the Catholic church were not adversaries of science and scientific development, but contributed to the scientific progress and education, for instance through the foundation of universities and other important centres of learning.¹⁶ Ironically, it is not pure immanentism and positivism of modern sociology, but rather its Christian counterpart, that is better suited to explain the dynamism of modernization and all paradoxical tension in the relations between individual and society. In this context, Reyl exposed Marxism not as a unique and independent theory, but rather as an organic part of the development of modern scientific paradigms. He ranked it, maybe a little bit surprisingly, among 'biological or organic course' in sociology. Presumably he wanted not only to illustrate materialistic background of Marxism, but also point out its closeness to Darwinism – he spoke about Darwin just few pages before Marx – and its adherence to all the limits and potentially poisonous consequences of Darwin's thought, when it is applied to the social thinking.¹⁷

Reyl thus emphasises reductionism of Marx's materialism, that underestimates the importance of individuality for social life. It is important to note, that the significance of personal and individual human being was, for Reyl, one of the foundational principles of all social being. He designates human individuality as the main source of social development and devotes a substantial part of his book to the

¹⁵ František Reyl, *Jádro křesťanské sociologie* (Hradec Králové: Politické družstvo tiskové, 1914), František Reyl, *Sociologie v politice* (Praha: Česká akciová tiskárna, 1924).

¹⁶ František Reyl, 'Církev pronásleduje vědu,' *Časové úvahy* 4, no. 8 (1900): 15, cited in: Havel, *František Reyl*, 139.

¹⁷ Reyl, *Sociologie*, 44–53.

explanation of the role of individuality in social life.¹⁸ For these reasons, when talking about Marxism, he underlines, how its impersonal materialism leads to a mechanical vision of society. In the final parts of the books, Reyl recapitulates history of the First International, whose sixtieth anniversary fell on the year of the book's publication in 1924, and concludes that materialistic socialism is able to provide limited material benefits but deprives workers of any spiritual aspects of life. Ultimately, it means that not only workers, but humanity as such cannot develop spiritual gifts that form the essence of life. Marxism 'did not benefit the individual and severely damaged social solidarity with its hateful class struggle.'¹⁹

The last major contribution to the Christian sociology came from Bedřich Vašek, a professor of the Christian sociology at the Faculty of Theology at the Palacký University in Olomouc.²⁰ Like Soldát and Reyl, Vašek compiled comprehensive sociological synthesis – *Křesťanská sociologie* [*Christian Sociology*] published in three volumes between 1929–1933.²¹ Vašek paid attention to the social problems and challenges of his time not only in his scholarly treatises, but also in his essays on the life of man in modern, industrialized society. For instance, in the collection of short texts from 1919, he defines workers' movement as one of the new political religions that emerged as a result of secularization. He acknowledges dismal conditions of workers' lives – monotony, strains and lack of joy from work along with deep family problems and poor housing situation.²² His interest in social problems thus stemmed from deep concerns about real situation of workers. And from these concerns probably originate certain appreciation of Marx's observation, which might be found in his analysis of Marxism.

In the volume II of his *Christian Sociology*, Vašek notes: 'In his critique of capitalism, Marx was a genius: what he wrote about capitalism was extraordinary.'²³ In his 'perspicacity', Marx was able to accurately

¹⁸ Reyl, *Sociologie*, 79–81.

¹⁹ Reyl, *Sociologie*, 384.

²⁰ Marek, *Čeští křesťanští sociálové*, 321–323; Putna, *Česká katolická literatura 1948–1945*, 812–813.

²¹ Bedřich Vašek, *Křesťanská sociologie* (Praha : Československá akciová tiskárna, Universum, 1929–1933), Vol. I *Život sociální*, [*Social Life*]; Vol. II *Spravedlnost v životě hospodářském*, [*Justice in economic life*]; Vol. III *Sociální práce*, [*Social work*].

²² Bedřich Vašek, *Moderní člověk, studie ethicko-pastorální* (Olomouc: Matice Cyrilo-metodějská, 1919), 103–129.

²³ Vašek, *Křesťanská sociologie* II, 442

diagnose the roots of the crisis of capitalist economy, which lie in the destruction of the dignity of the work.²⁴ But despite all almost prophetic insights in the Marx's analysis of capitalism, Vašek is still clearly aware of its deep flaws. Its 'original sin' lies in the materialistic and economic determinism of Marx's thought. Vašek ascribes them to fascination with modern science and uncritical faith in its power to predict economic and social developments. Marx was fundamentally wrong, when he applied scientific methods of 19th century to solve social problems of modernity. Specifically, his neglect of human free will opened a way to catastrophic results.²⁵

Vašek detects several concrete points in the social and economic development of modern society that should prove fundamental errors in Marxist prognosis. Firstly, Marx predicted increasing pauperism of proletariat along with the rise of 'oppression, slavery and exploitation'. Vašek opposes this conjecture with an observation that in the first decades of industrial revolution the situation of the workers was simply unbearable, but as the modernization proceeded, the social condition improved and especially after World War I we might observe the increase of purchasing power of workers, shortening of working hours and more robust safety regulations.²⁶ Vašek thus concludes that Marx's prophecy about the near end of capitalism did not come true and capitalism rather went the way of gradual transformation which brought deepening of ethical standards and humanization of economic life.

On the one hand, Marx contributed to increased self-confidence of the working class and his major achievement is the analysis of the economic order of capitalism in its 'misery and unsustainability', but on the other hand his gloomy forecast 'threw the proletariat into an enchanted castle' and deprived the workers of the joy of work and the joy of life.²⁷ In Vašek's view, the crisis of the modern man is ultimately a spiritual crisis. He thus exhorts all those who strive for social reform to rediscover spiritual sources of social life, which can lead to the reconciliation of all social classes. In his perspective, the Christian vision of social life is not based on the idea of hateful struggle, but rather on the idea of common interest of all in society. So finally, we can see Marx as a prophet, but a deeply flawed prophet – 'it is his fault, that atheism

²⁴ Vašek, *Křestanská sociologie* II, 123, 185.

²⁵ Vašek, *Křestanská sociologie* II, 443.

²⁶ Vašek, *Křestanská sociologie* II, 285–286, 436.

²⁷ Vašek, *Křestanská sociologie* II, 294, 425.

is unnaturally and almost inseparably linked with the interest of the working class'. Marx combined sober scientific criticism with delusional visions and it is a mistaken spiritual part of his teaching, his fascination with resentment and hate, that represents the core and in the same time the most problematic part of Marxism.²⁸

Are there any common threads in the Soldát's, Reyl's and Vašek's analysis of Marxism? We could point out a structural analysis of Marx's dialectical and historical materialism or an interpretation of his concept of class struggle. Although these themes represent usual points of reference in the critique of Marxism, I would like to focus on two, rather neglected topics that nevertheless took prominent place in the work of the Czech Christian sociologists. Firstly, I would like to add few remarks about the historical origins of Marxism, or more precisely about its birth in the context of other modern ideologies. In this regard, Marxism is taken not only as an isolated feature in the landscape of modern thought, but is rather conceptualized as a logical result of other tendencies in the development of modern society, namely as a consequence of economic liberalism and individualism.

This approach to the origins of Marxism plays important role especially in the work of František Reyl and Bedřich Vašek, but we can find it in several places also in the book by Alois Soldát. Reyl, in accordance with the view typical for the Catholic milieu of the time, searched for the sources of crisis of modern capitalism in the history of early modern era and took the Reformation as the main cause of not only religious but also philosophical confusion, which led to the confusion in social order and ultimately to 'the destructive influence of unlimited economic liberalism'. And it was one of the main credits of socialism and namely Marx and Engels, that they opened eyes of all 'farsighted people', who recognized necessity of the reformation and renewal of the liberal economic and social order.²⁹ Vašek added to this point an assertion that work was robbed of its dignity in the time of economic liberalism, which brought degradation of work and dehumanization of workers who became only means of production and commodity in the labour market.³⁰

²⁸ Vašek, *Křestanská sociologie* II, 444

²⁹ František Reyl, *Úkoly sociální politiky* (Hradec Králové: Politické družstvo tiskové: 1909), 35–38.

³⁰ Vašek, *Křestanská sociologie* II, 124.

All Christian sociologists of that era proposed the thesis of a close relations between capitalism, liberalism and socialism that were all understood as manifestation of deep flaws of secular modernity. Specifically Reyl was a harsh critic of liberal individualism, when he wrote: ‘Individualism is the most powerful and influential enemy of the Christian order, which it has devalued with its perverted principles to the detriment of humanity.’⁵¹ He expressed some understanding for liberalism as a protest against the oppression of absolutism, but he had no positive words for its philosophical foundations. He was especially sensitive to, in his view, weak moral foundations of liberalism and to its neglect of the principles of natural law. He concludes that ‘it can be rightly argued that liberal ideas have corrupted human nature because they have helped the lower instincts to triumph over the better side in man’.⁵² Vašek came to the same conclusion, when he asserted that it would be hopeless to overcome socialism with the old liberal principles.⁵³

These observations are particularly important in the context of the later development of the political thought of Czech Catholicism. Long period of Communist Czechoslovakia led many Catholic intellectuals to the position of fierce and yet justifiable criticism of not only Marxism, but socialism as such.⁵⁴ However, comprehension for the complex relations between socialism and other modern ideologies was rather diminished along with the understanding for the shortcomings of classical liberalism. This is one of the main reasons for the retrieval of the older tradition of the Christian sociology as it developed in the Czech lands before second world war.

Second note is aimed at the religious characteristics of Marxism. All authors were well aware of the fundamentally religious nature of Marx’s teaching. As Bedřich Vašek remarked: ‘For the conscious socialist, socialism has taken hold of the whole person, it has become his faith anchored in the irrational pools of the soul, it has become his religion, the promise and realization of a new life, a vision that dominates his whole being, prophecy, messianism, eschatology, the promised land.’⁵⁵

⁵¹ Reyl, *Sociologie*, 347.

⁵² Reyl, *Sociologie*, 354.

⁵³ Vašek, *Křesťanská sociologie* II, 444.

⁵⁴ Cf. Jiří Hanuš, ed., *Křesťané a socialismus* (Brno: Centrum pro stadium demokracie a kultury, 2012).

⁵⁵ Vašek, *Křesťanská sociologie* II, 421.

Both Soldát and Reyl agreed with Vašek's assessment of religious nature of socialism. And in the same time, they criticize Marx for his transformation of natural religious sentiments to a radically materialistic doctrine. Marx's materialism, which has in itself a characteristic of a political religion, understood all spiritual sentiments merely as consequences of economic situation. This assumption leads to a reductive psychology, limiting all human faculties to the level of material and biological impulses. As Soldát notes, with a reference to a seminal work *Otázka sociální* [*A Social Question*] by Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, religion is the only source of true economic reform and only religion represents a path to full humanity.⁵⁶ Also Reyl, when discussing religious and moral context of Marxism, extensively refers to Masaryk and his treatise on socialism. In his overall assessment of socialism, Reyl emphasised that Marx severely distorted historical development of humankind, undervaluing importance of religion and morals. He considered natural inclination of human person to supernatural truth as one of the leading factors of history. In this regard, Marx's opposing opinions can be dismissed as mere fantasy.

At first sight, it might be surprising that Catholic sociologists relied to such an extent on the work of Masaryk, who was rather critical of Catholic religious doctrine and might be labelled as liberal protestant.⁵⁷ Moreover, at least Reyl was directly involved in the polemic with Masaryk over the role of religion in public life.⁵⁸ I suppose that their interest in Masaryk sociological work was not superficial or that the only reason for it was the fact, that Masaryk was the author of perhaps the most systematic overview of Marxism available in Czech at that time, who furthermore paid considerable attention to religious and ethical aspect of Marx's doctrine.⁵⁹ Although the Catholic authors were rather sceptical to the overall development of modern philosophical and political thought, rejecting its alleged sources in the religious revolution of Reformation, they were still able to discern between different

⁵⁶ Soldát, *Nástin*, 167.

⁵⁷ For discussion on Masaryk's sociology of religion, see Nešpor, *Ne/náboženské naděje*, 58–69, for wider view on Masaryk's relations to religion, cf. Josef Smolík and Jan Štěpán, eds., *T. G. Masaryk ve třech stoletích, Rozhovor generací o Masarykových náboženských názorech* (Brno: L. Marek, 2001).

⁵⁸ Havel, *František Reyl*, 75–86.

⁵⁹ Tomáš Garrigue Masaryk, *Otázka sociální*, II vol, 6th edition (Praha: Čin, 1947), 183–240.

currents of modernity and did not reject unequivocally any attempts for non-Catholic explanation of the processes of modernization. Thus, they were able to find an unexpected ally in Masaryk, with whose concept of Czech history and modern Czech state Catholic intellectuals clashed regularly, especially in 1920s. Therefore, we can come to conclusion, that the Christian sociology, as was elaborated from the Catholic perspective, was not only a partisan exercise, but a serious attempt to connect rigorous sociological methodology with the principles of Catholic theology that was appreciative to other different yet in many aspect similar attempts.

2. Catholic journalism

2.1 Jaroslav Durych

Marxism was not only a subject of scholarly study of Christian sociologists but was also much-discussed topic in a Catholic journalism of the inter-war period. This time was still an era with flourishing scene of a great number of Catholic periodicals, that reflected on the rise of the seriousness, sincerity as well as self-confidence of Czech Catholicism.⁴⁰ In the following paragraphs, it is my aim to introduce main figures of the Catholic debate with Marxism and illustrate different facets of this discussion. It is apt to open this section with Jaroslav Durych (1886–1962), one of the most distinguished Catholic writers of his time and yet a bitter polemical voice opposing prevailing status quo of a new democratic republic.⁴¹

It was his discontent with the new liberal regime, represented by aforementioned Masaryk, that opened Durych to certain and again quite unexpected appreciation for Communism and Marxism. Throughout his texts on this theme, we might find deep sympathy for the plight of the poor and disgust with bourgeoisie. Specifically in his writing from the beginning in 1920s, Durych's predilection for left-wing radicalism is obvious.⁴² Maybe the best example is his essay from 1924 *Proč nejsem*

⁴⁰ So far, the most complete overview of the Catholic milieu of interwar Czechoslovakia might be found in Martin C. Putna, *Česká katolická literatura v kontextech: 1918–1945* (Praha: Torst, 2010). For a representative online database of Catholic periodicals, cf. www.scriptum.cz (accessed 20 June 2025).

⁴¹ Cf. Martin C. Putna, *Jaroslav Durych* (Praha: Torst, 2003).

⁴² Jaroslav Med, *Literární život ve stínu Mnichova (1938–1939)* (Praha: Academia, 2010), 30, 40.

komunistou [*Why I am not a communist*].⁴⁵ Here, Durych wrote: ‘I have deep and compelling sympathies for communism [...], I like it.’ Yet, as the title of his essay suggests, Durych was not plainly another Catholic with inclination to Marxism or a fellow traveller of Communist movement.⁴⁴ His relationship to Communism, its idea and praxis was much more ambiguous and complex. And this complexity helps to uncover several important traits in the matrix of relations between Catholicism and modern ideologies.

Let’s stay for a moment with Durych’s fascination with Communism. He considered it to be a highest achievement of the human spirit and Communism fascinated him even in his ‘destructive power’ and despite all its ‘physical and metaphysical terrors’.⁴⁵ Particularly cataclysm of Bolshevik revolution promised a total transformation of rotten bourgeois order and beginning of a new spiritual revolution, something which was, for Durych, deeply attracting: ‘Bolshevism, however, hopes that the revolution will burst forth at the decisive moment like a huge bright flame, which will disperse the artificial smoke, fog and darkness that have been prepared and maintained around its work; then its absolute truth will itself consume all the occasional, diplomatic, tentative and tactical lies, so that the simple truth will shine with its sublime, destructive and liberating and victorious glow.’⁴⁶ Therefore, it was predominantly rhetorical power and boldness of Communism, its uncompromising settlement with an old order, that inspired Durych.

On the other hand, and now we come near to the core of his true stance towards Marxism, he was able to see through all problematic, and in his own words, ‘diabolical’ elements of Communism and its ideology. Already in one of his first texts on this topic *Čekám na slovo osvobozující* [*I am waiting for the word of liberation*] Durych wrote, that Communism leads to the suppression of human personality. Anchoring of the critique of Marxism and Communism in the personalistic perspective then became a common trope in the Catholic

⁴⁵ Jaroslav Durych, ‘Proč nejsem komunistou,’ unpublished article for the review *Přítomnost* from 1924. Durych’s essay was a part of a wider survey presented in *Přítomnost* in 1924 and 1925 and issued in 1990 as *Proč nejsem komunistou* (Praha: Lidové noviny, 1990).

⁴⁴ François Furet, *Minulost jedné iluze* (Praha : Argo, 2018), 17–55, 266–270.

⁴⁵ Durych, ‘Proč nejsem komunistou.’

⁴⁶ Jaroslav Durych, ‘První máj,’ *Rozmach* 2, no. 9 (May 1924): 121–125.

writing throughout the next decades.⁴⁷ For Durych, a way to liberation does not lie in any form of abstract teaching or ideology, but in a concrete commitment to one's neighbour, that require personal freedom: 'No philosophical or social theory is enough to feed people [...] Only those who have their own freedom within themselves can help others to achieve it.'⁴⁸ Despite all its noble and humanistic rhetoric, we found in Marxism cold contempt for the value of human person. Marxism is essentially trapped in never-ending cycle of its immanent effort to reconstitute human nature, only result of which is its total suppression: '[Marxism] dictates eternal dependence, eternal asceticism, eternal renunciation, eternal suppression of personality and freedom. [...] But just as every philosophical gesture, reaching for the Absolute without Personality, it ends in paralysis and kills its original grandeur by the penalty of grotesqueness; also the gesture of communism, even if not yet accomplished, only indicated and promised, carries within itself the beginning of a convulsion. It forgets that love cannot be destroyed.'⁴⁹

Overall, we can conclude, that for Durych, Marxism and Communism was a useful, maybe even providential tool, which can help to unmask deeply demoralized modern society. Yet, it is not the highest summit of humanity, there is 'even a higher power and in the order of eternity the lower must serve the higher'.⁵⁰ Marxism has in itself a peculiar spiritual root, something that might lead to reconstitution and renewal of human society, but also it has a potentiality for its total annihilation: 'Marxism uses brutal experiments. They are based on the law of the inhuman, supernatural; originating either from some Supernatural power – or from the sheer madness of Lie.'⁵¹

And it is also important to note that Durych perspective on Marxism began to change in the 1930 in the context of the Spanish civil war. Here, Durych took a staunchly anti-communist stance.⁵² He wrote already in 1932 that 'Marxism is becoming obsolete. It is a classic,

⁴⁷ Petr Macek, 'Zápas o člověka. Česká katolická publicistika v letech 1945–1948 mezi marxismem a liberalismem,' *Studia Theologica* 25, no. 2 (2023): 145–147.

⁴⁸ Jaroslav Durych, 'Čekám na slovo osvobozující,' *Nasinec* 59, no. 95 (April 1925): 1–2.

⁴⁹ Durych, 'Čekám na slovo osvobozující,' 1–2.

⁵⁰ Durych, 'Proč nejsem komunistou.'

⁵¹ Durych, 'První máj,' 121–125.

⁵² On Durych's view on the Spanish Civil War, cf. Vít Urban, 'Jaroslav Durych a španělská občanská válka,' *Proglas* 7, no. 3, 34–38, also Jaroslav Durych, 'Ve stínu Španělska,' *Řád* 4, no. 7 (February 1938): 399–401.

outdated doctrine, that poses very little danger to bourgeois ideology.⁵⁵ And in 1937 he followed up with the view that the aim of Communism is in revenge, not in justice. Communism is essentially founded on hate – hate of work and hate of happiness. It is only a simulacrum for sons of capitalists and bourgeois, and its intention has never been to help truly poor people.⁵⁴

2.2 Rudolf Ina Malý and review Tak

Another important contribution to the Catholic discussion with Marxism came from philosopher, journalist and diplomat Rudolf Ina Malý (1889–1965). Malý, in a specific way, followed in Durych's footsteps. Malý adopted Catholic faith at the end of 1920's and he published his main critical work on Marxism in the second half of 1930's. In the time when Durych became fundamentally dismissive towards Marxism, Malý offered similarly unequivocal rejection of the Marxist socialism. In his first major work of political thought – *Kříž nad Evropou* [*The Cross Over Europe*]⁵⁵ published in 1935, Malý presented his views on the modern political ideologies and regimes vis-à-vis a political role of Catholicism. Here, he had not yet offered a theoretical analysis of Marxist theory as in his later texts, but paid considerable attention to the Russian revolution and the phenomenon of Bolshevism.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, his main aim was to depict Catholicism in alliance with Italian fascism as an antidote and counter-balance of modern 'quantitative' and formal democracy, which led, according to his conclusion, to modern totalitarian ideologies of Communism and Nazism.

As this work is not directly focused on the main topic of my paper and was already a subject of several scholarly studies,⁵⁷ I will focus in the following paragraphs on the series of texts devoted exclusively to Marxism published by R. I. Malý in the year 1937 and 1938 in the

⁵⁵ Jaroslav Durych, 'Soumrak komunismu,' *Akord* 5, no. 3 (March 1932): 138–139.

⁵⁴ Jaroslav Durych, 'V hadí slují,' *Obnova* 1, no. 17 (July 1937): 1.

⁵⁵ Rudolf I. Malý, *Kříž nad Evropou, Revoluce dvacátého století* (Praha: A. Neubert, 1935).

⁵⁶ Malý, *Kříž nad Evropou*, 120–137.

⁵⁷ Tomáš Bandžuch, 'Rudolf Ina Malý, filosof nového Československa. Příspěvek ke kulturní politice Druhé republiky,' *Paginae historiae: sborník Národního archivu* 31, no. 1 (2023): 62–75, Nešpor, *Ne/náboženské naděje*, 113–114; Putna, *Česká katolická literatura 1948–1945*, 716–732.

biweekly *Tak* [So] and later reissued in one volume as *Marx a Řím ve světle živé skutečnosti* [*Marx and Rome in the Light of Living Reality*].⁵⁸

Unlike Durych in the first period of his writing on Marxism or Czech Christian sociologists, Malý did not express even the slightest positive appreciation of Marxism. A recurring theme of his texts is a search for a proper formulation of the relations between Marxism and socialism. Malý argues that Marxism is a firm foundation or real essence of any socialistic thought. It is Marxism that forms a distinctive character of modern socialism. Bereft of its Marxist substance, socialism becomes only a general moral idealism – ‘such socialism is either just a helpless return to the tradition of philanthropic “utopianism” and humanitarian idealism, or it becomes – a timid, reluctant, but necessary path to Christianity and sincere democracy.’⁵⁹

On the other hand, Marxism embodies unsentimental realism of combat of working class for its political power. For Malý, real socialism is only the revolutionary one, a form of socialism that cannot be separated from Marxism.⁶⁰ Therefore, he made a significant effort to analyse and explain, what he considered to be a real nature of this political ideology. He found its foundations in the alleged Marx’s moral relativism. Malý claimed that Marx neglected any substantial or metaphysical difference between good and evil and proposed purely instrumental morality of class struggle. In this perspective, what is moral is based on the loyalty to the working class; there is no absolute and permanent ethical system – each class and nation had its own morality. The only difference that marks a morality of working class is its predestination for future victory. Because the meaning of history is revealed in the victorious struggle of proletariat, it is its morality, which will prevail. Thus, the truthfulness of any ethical claims is attested by its ability to gain power and all reality of social and political life is only a reality of incessant struggle: ‘Marxism is a powerful rebellion against all moral and cultural catholicity, recognizing no other laws, norms and values than its own will and power, its own demands, goals and culture.’⁶¹

Malý therefore conceptualizes Marxism as a nihilistic philosophical system that is sceptical to any intrinsic and inherent goodness

⁵⁸ Rudolf I. Malý, *Marx a Řím ve světle živé zkušenosti* (Praha: A. Neubert, 1939)

⁵⁹ Rudolf I. Malý, ‘Marx a socialismus,’ *Tak* 2, no. 10–11 (September 1938): 166–169.

⁶⁰ Rudolf I. Malý, ‘Marxismus není kravata,’ *Tak* 1, no. 1 (January 1937): 15–18.

⁶¹ Rudolf I. Malý, ‘Marxistický imperialismus,’ *Tak* 2, no. 12–13 (November 1938): 183–186.

of human nature and which is based only on ruthless struggle and mechanical conceptions of nature and society.⁶² In accordance with other Catholic authors of his era, Malý equates to certain extent Marxism with liberalism and claims that both systems stem from the same spiritual foundation. The only difference is in the actor of the whole drama – in case of liberalism, it is represented by a lone individual, in case of Marxism, it is a whole working class. Both liberalism and Marxism are based on voluntarism and economic power as basic factors of any political development and change: ‘Marx’s “class struggle” is essentially the same as “free competition” in liberalism; in both cases, the model for them is the natural struggle for life and the victory of the strongest, not the moral law.’⁶⁵

In 1938, review *Tak* published several articles by another interesting commentator on Marxism, Simeon Ghelfand (1895–1963). Ghelfand was a journalist of a Czech-Russian origin, who wrote primarily on philosophical and economic topics. He continuously focused on the analysis of Marxism and after the end of the Second world war published results of his research in several books.⁶⁴ In contrast to Rudolf Ina Malý, Ghelfand sought a more balanced stance on Marxism based on rigorously scientific analysis of Marx’s economic theory. Similarly to earlier Christian sociologists, Ghelfand found a starting point for his critique of Marxism in the discussion on Marx’s theory of surplus value. Ghelfand agrees with Marx that capitalism leads to the exploitation of workers and that it should be a common goal of Christianity and Marxism to fight against any kinds of such abuse of power.

Despite common threads in both doctrines, Ghelfand also sees significant differences. He argues that Marx’s view on a surplus value was fundamentally mistaken. Marx believed that the source of all value was only in the work of workers and thus the exploitation was the source of all profit. Ghelfand cleverly pointed out that in the late-stage capitalism workers were quite easily replaced by automatic machines

⁶² Rudolf I. Malý, ‘Z úvah o podstatě marxismu,’ *Tak* 1, no. 11 (June 1937): 206–208.

⁶⁵ Malý, ‘Z úvah,’ 208, cf. Malý, ‘Marxistický imperialismus,’ 184.

⁶⁴ For the biography of Ghelfand, cf. Michal Pehr, *Cestami křesťanské politiky: biografický slovník k dějinám křesťanských stran v českých zemích* (Praha: Akropolis, 2007), 78–79; Jan Cholínský, ‘Sociální nauka katolické církve jako zbroj ve studené válce,’ in *Výjádření úcty a vděčnosti: sborník o protikomunistickém odboji*, ed. Pavel Žáček (Praha: Ministerstvo obrany, 2015), 204–236. Ghelfand’s after-war books on Marxism: *Dialektický materialismus* (Praha: Universum, 1947) and *Marxismus a křesťanský sociální reformismus* (Praha: ČSL, 1946).

that could work with a minimal human input. In this scenario, value is produced more by capitalist investment, than by the work of proletariat. In Ghelfand's view, the main problem of his time was not exploitation, but rather technological, structural unemployment that led to desperate social situation and opened up a way for modern totalitarianism. In conclusion, he saw the only possible solution in the Catholic social doctrine and its ideas of solidarity, subsidiarity and justice: 'But hatred is not the way to social harmony – and neither is Marxism, with its 'scientific' hatred and its cleverly constructed 'surplus labour' and 'surplus value'. There is only one way, which is the truth and life: Jesus Christ.'⁶⁵

2.3 Other authors and reviews

A limited scope of our paper does not allow us to pay sufficient attention to other important authors within Czech interwar Catholicism, like active politician and theorist of political Catholicism Bohumil Stašek⁶⁶ or historian Karel Schwarzenberg.⁶⁷ I would like to briefly mention one of the most important Catholic review devoted to the political, social and cultural issues – a review *Řád* [*The Order*] published since 1932 by the young generation of Catholic intellectuals led by philosopher Rudolf Voříšek.⁶⁸ Although *Řád* was focused on extensive commentaries of the political situation of its time, it did not publish any systematic analysis of Marxism per se. Rather it offered reflection of the Catholic social doctrine and newest papal encyclical or overview of social aspects of Thomistic philosophy. On Marxism, it was mostly limited to translated articles by important European authors, like Nikolai Berdyaev, Waldemar Gurian of Amintore Fanfani.⁶⁹ From its own, Czech

⁶⁵ Simeon Ghelfand, 'Omyly marxistické vědy,' *Tak 2*, no. 3 (May 1938): 57, also cf. Simeon Ghelfand, 'Krise a krach liberalistické ekonomiky,' *Tak 2*, no. 8–9 (August 1938): 143–146.

⁶⁶ From his commentaries on political situation and modern political ideologies: Bohumil Stašek, *Obnova lidské společnosti* (Praha: Ústřední sekretariát Československé strany lidové, 1920), Bohumil Stašek, *Cesta ze světového labyrintu* (Praha: Ústřední sekretariát Československé strany lidové, 1932).

⁶⁷ For the overview of Schwarzenberg's work, including his texts on Marxism, cf. Karel Schwarzenberg, *Torzo díla* (Praha: Torst, 2007).

⁶⁸ Voříšek wrote only one article focused on the problem of socialism: 'Kapitalismus, socialismus a stavovství,' *Řád 3*, no. 1 (1936): 28–41. It compared liberalism and socialism with an alternative approach of Catholic corporativism. Promotion of corporativism was one of the main goals of the review *Řád*.

⁶⁹ Nikolai Berdyaev, 'O demokracii a socialismu,' *Řád 1*, no. 2 (1932): 76–86, Waldemar Gurian, 'Kritika bolševismu,' *Řád 1*, no. 3 (1932): 147–155, Amintore Fanfani, 'Kapitalistický duch,' *Řád 3*, no. 1 (1936): 41–49.

authors, the most systematic observations were written by Stanislav Berounský, journalist and translator. But he did not pay attention to the systematic and theoretical aspects of Marxism, but rather to its current development in Europe in 1920's and 1930's.⁷⁰

Other important Catholic reviews, like publications of Dominican order *Na hlubinu* and *Filosofická revue* were also engaged in the discussion about political and social questions. *Na hlubinu* and its main authors, theologians Silvestr Braitó and Reginald Dacík, both members of the Dominican orders, published several articles on Marxism in the years 1936 and 1937. They were mostly short notes that avoid a systematic analysis of Marx's thought. Rather they offered spiritual exhortation and like other texts of this period pointed out the problematic spiritual roots of both Marxism and liberalism and capitalism.⁷¹ *Filosofická revue* mostly paid attention to the general and systematic treatises on the social issues inspired by the papal encyclical *Quadragesimo anno* and did not focus on the problem of Marxism as such.

Conclusion

Modern political ideologies born from emancipatory and secularization processes of the 19th and early 20th century brought about immense challenge both for the Catholic social thought and praxis of political Catholicism. While the experience with the oppression under totalitarian regimes of Nazism and Communism led Catholic authors to embracing democracy as the only viable and just political system and resulted in the formation of Christian democratic parties, one of the pillars of the political life of after-war Europe, situation in interwar Europe was much more ambiguous. As I tried to illustrate on the example of the Czech interwar Catholicism, intellectuals of that age opposed not only the extreme ideologies of Marxism and, to a lesser extent, Fascism, but they also strove to cope with the legacy of unregulated liberalism of the previous century.

⁷⁰ Stanislav Berounský, 'Primát hospodářství,' *Řád* 1, no. 2 (1932): 108–110, Stanislav Berounský, 'Moderní socialismus,' *Řád* 1, no. 3 (1932): 135–144

⁷¹ Silvestr Braitó, 'Okřtíme komunismus?,' *Na hlubinu* 11, no. 8 (1936): 561–562; Silvestr Braitó, 'Naše povinnost k sociálním otázkám,' *Na hlubinu* 11, no. 8 (1936): 562–564; Reginald Dacík, 'Katolicismus a komunismus,' *Na hlubinu* 11, no. 9 (1936) 628–631; Silvestr Braitó, 'Boj proti komunismu,' *Na hlubinu* 11, no. 10 (1936): 707–709; Silvestr Braitó, 'Omyly v boji proti komunismu,' *Na hlubinu* 12, no. 3 (1937): 208–209.

Our analysis of the Catholic approach towards Marxism, both in the scientific discourse of Christian sociology and in Catholic journalism showed a diverse spectrum of different perspectives. While the more balanced and somewhat appreciative assessment of Marxism might be found in the scholarly treatises of Alois Soldát, František Reyl and Bedřich Vašek, journalism represented by Jaroslav Durych and Rudolf I. Malý aimed for more spirited critique of Marxism. Although we paid considerable attention to the criticism of Marx's economic thought, again especially in the books by Catholic sociologist, the main aim of our analysis was to show how Catholic intellectuals perceived spiritual and religious foundations of Marxism. The main common trope of almost all analysed texts was their conceptualization of Marxism as both an atheistic ideology destroying all religious principles and in the same time paradoxically as a powerful spiritual movement. In this regard, Marxism was not perceived only as a school of philosophical thought or a political or economic system but rather as a caricature of religion and delusional spiritualism. Even though some authors, like Jaroslav Durych, appreciated in a certain way the spiritual power of the Marxist revolution, their final assessment was negative – in the final analysis Marxism represents nihilistic and destructive force in the modern history of humankind.

Critique of Marxism, which we tried to follow on the preceding pages, was not only a critique of Marx's thought *per se*, but rather a complex attempt to criticize the project of modern immanentistic and secular politics as such. In this regard, liberalism and Marxism represent but two sides of the same coin – a political vision bereft of any metaphysical anchoring and built around a notion of inevitable struggle for power. And the Catholic intellectuals took it as a challenge for themselves to find an alternative solution to this malaise of modernity in a project founded on Christian notion of the ontology of peace. To assess whether they were successful in their endeavour or not is a task for another paper.

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CONTEMPORARY AFRICAN POSTCOLONIAL
THEOLOGY: FOUND BALANCE, INTERRELIGIOUS
AND INTERDENOMINATIONAL DIALOGUE,
REHABILITATION OF RELATIONS
WITH TRADITIONAL RELIGIONS,
AND REFLECTION ON SYNCRETISMS

ONDŘEJ HAVELKA

ABSTRACT

African postcolonial theology is the application of postcolonial critique to African theology, with the main aim of critiquing hegemonic ideological constructions and providing legitimacy to alternative theological views. African theologians developing postcolonial theology argue that the previously dominant Western form of Christianity indiscriminately imposed on Africa in the second phase of Africa's Christianization is in fact determined, shaped and defined by European colonialism, which implies and reinforces notions such as Eurocentrism, colonial exploitation and the superiority of European values and culture over African values. Therefore, there is a need to critically examine the history of the African mission and develop alternative interpretations to colonial-tinged narratives. The aim of this article is to examine the current state of postcolonial theology, which has been shaped by a long and arduous journey to find its own balance after a painful period of colonial dictatorship, violence, and complete cultural and religious intolerance, but also a difficult period of postcolonial epistemic violence, subalternity, and hybridity. We pay special attention to the relationship to interreligious dialogue, traditional African religions, and the syncretisms of Christianity and traditional religions. The outlined issues are elaborated through the method of own long-term field research in the field of African Christianity and its relationship with traditional African religions.

Keywords

Postcolonial theology; African theology; Black theology; African Christianity; Interreligious dialogue

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African postcolonial theology is the application of postcolonial critique to (ecumenically conceived) African theology, with the

main aim of critiquing hegemonic ideological constructions and providing legitimacy to alternative theological views.¹ African theologians developing postcolonial theology argue that the previously dominant Western form of Christianity rather indiscriminately imposed on Africa in the second phase of Africa's Christianization² is in fact determined, shaped and defined by European colonialism, implying and reinforcing notions such as Eurocentrism, colonial exploitation and the superiority of European values and culture over African values.³ Therefore, there is a need to critically examine the history of the African mission and develop alternative interpretations to colonial-tinged narratives. This is particularly served by re-examining the question of how indigenous African cultures with their traditional religions can contribute to contemporary emancipated postcolonial theology and biblical studies.⁴ Influential postcolonial theories emerged in the late 1970s, while a distinctive postcolonial theology emerged in sub-Saharan Africa in the 1990s.⁵

The aim of this article is to examine the current state and self-understanding of postcolonial theology, which has been shaped by a long and painful journey to find its own balance and identity after a painful period of colonial dictatorship, violence, and cultural and religious intolerance, but later also a difficult period of postcolonial epistemic violence, subalternity, hybridity, and other phenomena. We pay special attention to the relationship to interreligious dialogue, which is a key topic across the entire continent in today's Africa, the relationship to traditional African religions, which have experienced a significant new wave of interest among many Africans in the last ten years,⁶ and especially the relationship to the syncretisms of Christianity and

¹ Tinyiko Maluleke, 'Postcolonial Theology in Africa,' in *The Routledge Handbook of African Theology*, ed. Elias Kifon Bongmba (London, New York: Routledge, 2022), 335–343.

² Ondřej Havelka, 'Křesťanství v Africe: tři fáze christianizace a specifika africké teologie a spirituality,' *Theologická revue* 92, no. 3 (2022): 291–309. doi: 10.14712/12117617.92.3.5.

³ R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2006), 7–32.

⁴ Rachel A. Rakotonirina, 'Power and Knowledge in Mission Historiography: A Postcolonial Approach to Martyrological Texts on Madagascar 1837–1937,' *Studies in World Christianity* 5, no. 2 (1999): 156–176. doi: 10.3366/swc.1999.5.2.156.

⁵ Simon Kwan, *Postcolonial Resistance and Asian Theology* (London: Routledge, 2013), 9–10.

⁶ Massimo Introvigne and Rosita Šoryté, *The Revelation Spiritual Home. The Revival of African Indigenous Spirituality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2025), 3–6.

traditional religions, which is an important but, in our opinion, hitherto under-reflected topic. We consider the inclusion of the relationship between contemporary postcolonial theology and syncretisms to be the original scientific contribution of this study. We then propose extending the topic to include attitudes toward multiple religious identities (or multiple religious belonging)⁷ as another possible way of deepening the research. It is precisely the attitude towards widespread syncretism and multiple religious identities that gives postcolonial theology a clear advantage over the mere reactionary paradigm of decolonization and can thus offer an original contribution to contemporary world theology.

The chosen topic is addressed using the method of long-term field research in the area of African Christianity and its relationship to traditional African religions,⁸ which provided the impetus for the study of African theology as written by African thinkers. The author spent a total of three years in Africa between 2001 and 2025 and visited 35 African countries across the continent.⁹ Using the methods of participant observation¹⁰ and structured interviews¹¹ with believers and representatives of the religions in question, he studied in particular the syncretism of Christianity and traditional African religions.¹² This work not only provided new information about unique syncretisms and their religious experience by believers,¹³ but also insight into the self-understanding

⁷ Multiple religious identity refers to a situation in which an individual adheres to more than one religion. This may involve two religions that the individual does not mix, but toward both of which he holds the same respect, attending their services or rituals without syncretizing them. In an individual's life, this may involve two or even more religions. Sub-Saharan Africa is typical in this regard, where a large number of believers practice Christianity or Islam as well as one of the traditional religions of their ancestors. However, multiple religious identities are considered problematic or even doctrinally unacceptable by many Christians outside of sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in Europe and the United States.

⁸ Ondřej Havelka, 'The Syncretism of the Gabonese Bwiti Religion and Catholic Christianity from a Theological and Theological-Ethical Perspective,' *Acta Universitatis Carolinae Theologica* 12, no. 1 (2022): 145–159. doi: 10.14712/25365398.2022.22.

⁹ Ondřej Havelka, 'Odinala Traditional Religion as Part of Igbo Catholic Christian Identity,' *Communio Viatorum* 66, no. 2 (2024): 139–153. doi: 10.14712/30296374.2024.12.

¹⁰ Ondřej Havelka, *Africká náboženství: religionistika, teologie, afrikanistika* (Praha: Dingir, 2024), 17–22.

¹¹ Ondřej Havelka, *Africké náboženské tradice: duchovní bohatství nejhudššího kontinentu* (Praha: Dingir, 2025), 18–19.

¹² Ondřej Havelka, 'The Yoruba Religion and Complex Interreligious Relations in Nigeria,' *Acta Missiologica* 17, no. 2 (2023): 43–52.

¹³ Ondřej Havelka, 'Synkretismus katolického křesťanství a západoafrického vodunu z teologickoetické perspektivy,' *Studia Theologica* 23, no. 3 (2021): 149–174. doi: 10.5507/sth.2021.033.

of contemporary postcolonial theology by a Western researcher, albeit from within Africa. Given the limitations of space, it is not possible to address the ideas of all authors who have studied this topic in depth, or even of most of them. We have therefore selected those authors who, in our view, form the cornerstones of contemporary discourse.¹⁴

1. Postcolonial critique in theological application

Postcolonial critique, or postcolonialism, refers to a set of postmodern theories that brings together literature, political science, philosophy, theology, and many other disciplines to study and critically analyse the multilayered legacy of (very negatively perceived by Africans) colonialism.¹⁵ Postcolonialism is also used as a term to refer to the historical period after the independence of former colonies, in the case of our interest in Africa. Different schools of thought understand African postcolonialism in different ways (and often quite inconsistently in evaluative ethical, political, social, or philosophical terms), but this broadest characterization of the term is sufficient for the purposes of this text, since we are specifically concerned with postcolonial theology and will therefore narrow our interest to it and only it. What we are examining here is also the birth and evolution of a theological phenomenon that is defined by an elusive period of time, since the liberation and emancipation of the various African countries that were colonized by European conquerors and usurpers occurred over a longer period of time, and African theology itself and its splinter disciplines evolved and transformed during this period.¹⁶

Postcolonial critique provides an opportunity for thinkers emerging from oppression, i.e. from African countries where the local culture and traditional religions (including syncretisms of Christianity and traditional religions) were grossly suppressed or outright banned and destroyed by European colonizers. Africans were deprived of their own identity and a new identity was imposed on them, imported from

¹⁴ Due to space limitations, this article does not address the ideas of Pentecostal theologians, who nevertheless deserve their own dedicated discussion. We will therefore leave their ideas for further exploration of the topic. African Christianity is such a broad subject that we simply must narrow our focus, even if this means overlooking other undoubtedly significant topics.

¹⁵ R. S. Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World: Precolonial, Colonial, and Postcolonial Encounters* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 7–9.

¹⁶ Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*, 19–20.

the European environment, which, however, did not suit Africans.¹⁷ In many countries, Africans were explicitly or implicitly enslaved, constrained and Eurocentrically re-educated at the will of a more powerful conqueror who generally despised Africans, viewed them racially as having a mistaken culture and, if any, a decidedly evil religion. The total devastation of the human dignity of the black population during the apartheid period in South Africa can be seen as the culmination of these shameful crimes.¹⁸

In this article, in accordance with global literature, we distinguish between the following phenomena: 1. *African theology*, 2. *Black (South African) theology*, and 3. *Postcolonial theology*. African theology was born out of the substrate of African Christianity, which is extraordinarily diverse. While Western theology speaks of two major phases of the Christianization of Africa, we find it more accurate to speak of three major phases of the Christianization of Africa. The first, which we propose to call the apostolic phase of Christianization, took place in the early centuries of Christianity, first in Egypt and then further west through North Africa, but also south along the Nile through Nubia into present-day Ethiopia and probably parts of Somalia and northern Kenya. The second, which we call the paternalistic phase of Christianization, took place from the turn of the 15th and 16th centuries in sub-Saharan Africa. The third, which we call the partnership phase, can be observed in Africa today and its beginning can be loosely linked to the emergence of African theology in the 1960s.¹⁹

In response to the suffering inflicted during the period of colonization, indigenous Christian churches arose that proclaimed that God would certainly not send white missionaries beholden to the colonialists with a message as important as the gospel, and even that Jesus must have been black or he would not have been the savior of Africans.²⁰ Thus, for example, in 1921 in the Belgian Congo (now the Democratic Republic of Congo), Kimbanguism was founded – a new

¹⁷ James N. Amanze, 'Dialogue Between African Traditional Religion and Christian Theology,' in *The Routledge Handbook of African Theology*, ed. Elias Kifon Bongmba (London, New York: Routledge, 2022), 73–84.

¹⁸ Timothy Aarde, 'The Four Waves of Black Theology in South Africa and Context of Political Struggle,' in *The Routledge Handbook of African Theology*, ed. Elias Kifon Bongmba (London, New York: Routledge, 2022), 105–116.

¹⁹ Havelka, *Africká náboženství*, 21–24.

²⁰ Ali A. Mazrui, 'Religion and Political Culture in Africa,' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 53, no. 4 (1985): 817–839.

Christian community of believers of the Church of Jesus Christ on Earth.²¹ There are hundreds of similar churches of varying numbers speaking out against the crimes committed by whites against Africans during colonialism.²²

Another example of a defining new African Christian church is the Benin-based Celestial Church of Christ. However, the latter defines itself against the Catholic Church in Benin for the opposite reason, because it considers Catholic Christianity in Benin to be a syncretism of Christianity and the traditional religion of the Vodun, and therefore, from that point of view, for the (perhaps implicit) collaboration of Catholics with witchcraft, which it strongly opposes.²³ The Celestial Church of Christ does not recognize Benin Catholic Christianity as true Christianity, but as a heretical syncretism that has adopted elements of the original traditional Benin religion.²⁴ Members of the Celestial Church of Christ, with whom the author conducted structured interviews in Benin, but also in Togo and Ghana, took a sharply critical stance against local Catholic Christianity because of what they saw as its departure from true Christian doctrine.²⁵

In Benin, there is indeed a syncretism of Catholic Christianity and Vodun, to which the author devoted a separate study based on field research.²⁶ For the topic of contemporary postcolonial theology, it is crucial that the Catholic Church authorities in Benin take a much more conciliatory stance towards believers who practice the local syncretism of Catholic Christianity and Vodun, as well as towards believers who have multiple religious identities, than the authorities of the Heavenly Church of Christ. This is clearly evident from the results of the author's structured questioning of Beninese informants.²⁷ Vodun plays a role in shaping the identity of the Beninese people. Catholic missionaries tried to erase this part of their identity between the 16th and 19th centuries, the communist government dictatorship attempted to do so in the 20th century, and today the Celestial Church of Christ and similarly

²¹ Georges Nzongola-Ntalaja, *The Congo from Leopold to Kabila: A People's History* (London: Zed Books, 2013), 48–49.

²² Havelka, 'Synkretismus katolického křesťanství,' 149–174.

²³ Christopher Patridge, *New Religions: A Guide: New Religious Movements, Sects and Alternative Spiritualities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 61–65.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Havelka, *Africká náboženství*, 161–188.

²⁶ Havelka, 'Synkretismus katolického křesťanství,' 149–174.

²⁷ Ibid.

minded smaller local Christian movements demand this of their followers. These attempts have been unsuccessful. The Catholic Church in Benin has undergone a significant transformation in this regard, learning from its own history in Benin and now not only tolerating but actively respecting the Vodun part of Beninese identity. This does not mean that the doctrine derived from Revelation (theistic pole) has changed in any way, but rather that the identity of the recipient of the gospel (andric pole) is respected.²⁸

The author observed a similar attitude during field research conducted among the Nigerian Catholic Church (both among informants from the ranks of superiors and ordinary believers) with regard to the traditional Igbo religion of Odinala, which is based on a different theological conception of the human person than that found in purely Catholic theology, or more precisely, Western Catholic theology. For Igbo Christians, too, Odinala is a fundamental part of their identity, which the Catholic Church there today respects and even accepts its theology of the human person as one of the legitimate African theological approaches to the mystery of man in relation to God and his neighbors.²⁹

For a complete understanding of the issue, however, we should also add that in Benin and Nigeria, even among local Christian thinkers, there are voices saying that the people there should not have accepted the religion of the colonizers at all. This view is promoted by many religious communities across Africa, which are calling for a return to the religions that existed before the arrival of the colonizers and their missionaries.³⁰ On the other hand, there are African Christian theologians who reject traditional religions and syncretism and subject them to harsh criticism.³¹ It should also be noted that some prominent African theologians, such as John S. Mbiti, considered traditional African religions to be a preparation for Africans to accept the Gospel, an important preparation, but still *only* a preparation. However, the same theologian justifies the African theological concept of the human person, which is significantly anchored in society and derived from traditional religions.³² This shows that the contemporary face of postco-

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Havelka, 'Odinala,' 139–153.

³⁰ Introvigne and Šorytė, *The Revelation Spiritual Home*, 4–10.

³¹ Havelka, 'Synkretismus katolického křesťanství,' 149–174.

³² Havelka, *Africká náboženství*, 138–143.

lonial theology is multi-layered and multi-colored. After all, if we were to characterize the religious dimension of African life in one word, it would be *diversity*. This is also reflected in contemporary postcolonial theology. The main line of thought with regard to syncretism and traditional religions is respect, dialogue aimed at understanding the other side and mutual enrichment, but there are also different currents.

2. African and black theology

Contemporary African theology is a purely postcolonial phenomenon.⁵⁵ But when and from what motivations did African theology as a distinct discipline emerge? It was born in the mid-20th century as a reaction by African Christian theologians to the colonial missionary approach to Africans and their indigenous religions,⁵⁴ which Africans retroactively disliked.⁵⁵ This movement effectively marked the majority end of the second major phase of the Christianization of Africa in a paternalistic colonialist manner. Thanks to modern communication possibilities and the significant rise of education in Africa, the initiative has been taken over by the current third phase of Christianization, which we call partnership. Tinyiko Maluleke emphasizes, however, that we must not forget the much deeper roots of African theology that we find in the first phase of Christianization, when Christianity spread not only in Egypt but also far to the west and south of Egypt. Thus, already in the early centuries of Christianity, there were already prominent theologians working in Africa. These apostolic and patristic roots are an integral part of African theology and the very basis of the historical outcome that is today's postcolonial theology.⁵⁶

African theology today is based on the teachings of the first independent African churches of the late 19th and early 20th centuries and shapes Christianity in an African way of thinking and living. The Catholic Faculty of Theology at the University of Lovanium in Kinshasa, Congo, was considered the center of African theology at the beginning of this movement of thought. In 1968, the Colloquium on African

⁵⁵ Maluleke, 'Postcolonial Theology,' 335–343.

⁵⁴ Rosino Gibellini, *Teologické směry 20. století* (Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2011), 478–497.

⁵⁵ Sara J. Fretheim, *Kwame Bediako and African Christian Scholarship: Emerging Religious Discourse in Twentieth-Century Ghana* (Eugene: Cascade Books, 2018), 33–45.

⁵⁶ Maluleke, 'Postcolonial Theology,' 335–343.

Theology was held there.³⁷ The colonial discourse, which destroys languages and cultures, has been sharply criticized, while a truly Christian discourse is to be Pentecostal and express itself in all languages and cultures.³⁸ It is emphasized, for example, that the European interpretation of theological themes using the apparatus of Greek philosophy does not mean that African interpretation, which has the inalienable right to honor the interpretive apparatus of its own, for example, Bantu philosophy, as well as many others, must do so.³⁹

In addition to the African theology spread throughout sub-Saharan Africa, there is also a South African black theology. Black theology in South Africa was born among Christians during the apartheid period (officially 1948–1994, in fact earlier), when the human dignity of black South Africans was not only trampled upon, but, according to many South African writers, literally taken away.⁴⁰ South African black theology is not unlike American black theology or Latin American liberation theology, but it is a distinct movement responding to the problems of black people during the period of unfreedom in South Africa.⁴¹ There are four phases (or waves) of South African black theology. The first phase has been described by Steve Biko as the black awakening, in which the black man – who has become a mere shell, a mere shadow of the real man, totally defeated, subjugated and asleep – awakened to consciousness.⁴² The black awakening initiative gradually restored his lost identity. Black theology began with an awakening of black self-awareness, an actualized self-acceptance, self-affirmation, and a redefinition of the relationship to whites in the context of Christian life. It was about reclaiming the identity and dignity that had been stolen from the black man under apartheid.⁴⁵

The second phase of South African black theology was perhaps best treated in the work of Allen Boesak, who takes the position that while American black theology was built on the explicit opposition of blacks and whites, South African black theology does not primarily fight against the white

³⁷ Gibellini, *Teologické směry*, 480.

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Mazrui, 'Religion,' 817–839.

⁴⁰ Aarde, 'The Four Waves,' 105–116.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Allen Boesak, *Black Theology Black Power* (London: Mowbrays, 1978), 49–79.

⁴⁵ Aarde, 'The Four Waves,' 105–116.

man, but for the return of human dignity and human rights for every human being, that is, the black man, the racially mixed man, and, in the final analysis, does not exclude the white man. It may have been born as a struggle against the enslavement of blacks by whites, but it goes further and seeks to find a theology of coexistence of all races after the reclamation of black identity.⁴⁴

The third phase came in the form of the Black Theology Project, perhaps best captured in Mokgethi Motlhabi's article *Black Theology and Authority*. American black theology, according to the South African thinker, was too narrow, too self-consciously dictating a position to all black people around the world without understanding their situation in an entirely different context. South African black theology aimed not only to liberate the black man from the dictatorship (structural sin) of apartheid, but also, in a further step, to redefine social relations and build a new South Africa. The so-called third phase of South African black theology is already moving beyond the injustice of apartheid, beyond racial issues and the pains of the past: it is furthermore about human fulfilment and the fullness of human dignity in the post-apartheid world. One of the visible faces of the third phase was Itumeleng Mosala.⁴⁵

There is currently talk of a fourth phase of black theology, which is responding to the rapid social, economic and political changes in South Africa. The overarching hermeneutical starting point of South African black theology, according to thinkers there, is a contextual reading of scripture. The Old Testament exodus, where God not only delivers the Hebrews from Egyptian slavery but restores their identity and dignity, and what is more, in this difficult ordeal God reveals himself, makes himself known and even communicates his name to them, is seen as a central message for black theology by theologians there. Black theology sees this as an image of the black man's liberation from the bondage of apartheid, a return of identity and dignity, as well as a non-resentment and acknowledgement of love of neighbor to all, including whites.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ Boesak, *Black Theology*, 49–79.

⁴⁵ A. Kee, *The Rise and Demise of Black Theology: Reclaiming Liberation Theology* (London: SCM Press, 2008), 87.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

3. Postcolonial theology

Postcolonial theology is an interdenominational Christian theological discipline that examines and critiques power structures, dominant social systems, and entrenched ideologies in order to effect social transformation that recognizes and affirms the perspectives of marginalized peoples, cultures, and identities. Secular studies of postcolonial theory have played a significant role in the emergence of this discipline of theological reflection.⁴⁷ The traditional advent of postcolonial studies came in 1978 with the publication of Edward Said's *Orientalism*,⁴⁸ which exposed the Eurocentric assumptions attributed to Eastern life, creating a distorted reality in the imagination of the West that was imposed on the people of the East. Colonized entities were brutally deprived of their ability to speak for themselves, usually being the object of discourse and rarely the subject. Moreover, decolonization in the 20th century was problematic for multiple reasons. Attempts to revitalize state, cultural, and religious identities have often failed due to the lingering influence of colonialism and, later, disguised neo-colonialism.⁴⁹ Interpreters of postcolonial studies simultaneously praised and condemned their cultural heritage, and as a result of this dialectic, new forms of literary, artistic, historical, and cultural production began to embrace the so-called hybridity of postcolonialism, so that postcolonial theory effectively became a conciliatory rather than a critical category.⁵⁰

3.1 Postcolonial hybridity, epistemic violence, and mimicry

In this context, a postcolonial theology has emerged that places the colonized 'other' at the center of theological interpretations in which universalist Western categories are confronted through positive engagement. Postcolonial theology acknowledges difference and admits a multiplicity of responses in the hope of achieving a mutual exchange of perspectives from all voices. Postcolonial theology seeks the emancipation and authenticity of all marginalized or oppressed identities, including identity issues of nationality, culture, race, gender, and sexuality. Pragmatically based theologizing takes place within its

⁴⁷ Maluleke, 'Postcolonial Theology,' 335–343.

⁴⁸ Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1978).

⁴⁹ Maluleke, 'Postcolonial Theology,' 335–343.

⁵⁰ Sophia Chirongoma and Esther Mombo, *Mother Earth, Postcolonial and Liberation Theologies* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2021), 6–11.

own context in order to stimulate awareness, critical dialogue, and integration of ideas. The main goal of postcolonial theology is to critique hegemonic ideological constructions that make absolutist or totalitarian claims and to provide legitimacy to alternative theological views.⁵¹ In our opinion, these alternative theological views and currents should also include various theologies of syncretisms between Christianity (in various denominations) and one of the traditional African religions, as well as the theology of multiple religious identities. These currents were silenced and suppressed during the colonial period, but in our opinion they are not sufficiently reflected in contemporary postcolonial theology either.⁵² African influences in Christianity were eliminated as completely undesirable, as the colonizers' goal was to establish a purely European Christianity in Africa.⁵³ But it is precisely African Christianity, with its specific characteristics and emphases, that can and does have something to offer to Christianity worldwide.

Many Christian theologians in much of the formerly colonized world have turned to postcolonial theory as a theoretical way of dealing with the sinful consequences of colonialism in its various manifestations. In particular, these theologians use the postcolonial concept of hybridity as a way to explain the complex political agency of the subaltern (i.e., oppressed) subject. This concept was developed from the postcolonial experience to describe the ways in which subaltern subjects often adopt and confront the tools of the 'master' in the construction of new postcolonial identities. What might look like support for the oppressor may in fact be a complex process of articulating and activating subaltern agency in relation to colonial and indigenous cultural practices, languages, attitudes and religions. These are forms of intersectional theologizing.⁵⁴

Postcolonial hybridity manifests itself in the intermingling of Western and African approaches, which increasingly become indistinguishable. However, intermingling and accepting foreign influences is a common process in the religious sphere in Africa on a diachronic level, which we can trace far back in history. Traditional African religions have not been and are not characterized by their fixed immutability, but rather by their development, changeability, and acceptance of incoming

⁵¹ Maluleke, 'Postcolonial Theology,' 335–343.

⁵² Havelka, 'Křesťanství v Africe,' 291–309.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*, 17.

influences from other religions, cultures, and traditions. It is difficult – if not impossible – to evaluate postcolonial hybridity unequivocally, as it brings both positive and negative realities.⁵⁵

Related to this topic is the concept of mimicry, which refers to imitation in faith and includes both positive acceptance and negative imitation (for personal gain, status, or relevance rather than genuine devotion). Mimicry is a concept that describes how colonized people imitate the culture of the colonizer (language, clothing, customs, religion), creating a similar (but not identical) copy that serves colonial control while also subtly subverting it. A relatively good example is the South African Herero people, who live mainly in Namibia and Botswana.⁵⁶

Subalternity refers to the condition of marginalized groups excluded from power structures, whose voices have been silenced by dominant colonial narratives, and this continues in postcolonial societies through the persistent power dynamics of class, caste, gender, and race. Postcolonial epistemic violence is the systematic silencing, devaluation, or erasure of non-Western knowledge systems, worldviews, and ways of knowing, which is a lasting legacy of colonialism, where dominant Western frameworks of knowledge are imposed, making other forms appear invalid or inferior, leading to intellectual subordination. Today, it is clearly evident in neocolonial (whether explicit or implicit) tendencies.⁵⁷

3.2 African biblical studies as a pioneer of postcolonial theology

African biblical studies was the first theological discipline to consistently apply postcolonial criticism. From postcolonial critical methods, African biblical studies drew inspiration from questions of expansion, domination, and imperialism in examining existing biblical interpretation. Indigenous African approaches to biblical interpretation, previously neglected or outright banned in colonial contexts in favor of European methodologies, are now being revitalized to make the Bible more intelligible to colonized cultures on their own terms and thought processes.⁵⁸

⁵⁵ Havelka, 'Křesťanství v Africe,' 291–309.

⁵⁶ Havelka, *Africká náboženství*, 153–160.

⁵⁷ Havelka, 'Křesťanství v Africe,' 291–309.

⁵⁸ William A. Dyrness and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Global Dictionary of Theology* (Nottingham: InterVarsity Press, 2008), 683–687.

One of the leading proponents of postcolonial biblical studies, R. S. Sugirtharajah, in his monograph *The Bible and the Third World*, described three key hermeneutical approaches that emerged (not only) in Africa after the colonial period: 1. the native or vernacular approach, 2. the liberation approach, and 3. the postcolonial approach.⁵⁹ The author believes that an original African interpretation of the biblical texts is very important not only for the Africans themselves, who will become much closer and more understandable, but it can also be enriching for Western theology, as it will offer new, original approaches and insights. Postcolonial theology is still a young discipline. R. S. Sugirtharajah argues that its development is further hampered by the West's reluctance to analyse the theological implications of colonial imperialism.⁶⁰

Traditional African religions are, according to many theologians there, the essential source of postcolonial theology.⁶¹ While Mbiti understood traditional religions as a preparation for the gospel, the prevailing view of contemporary African theologians is that African Christianity must instead draw on traditional religions as a legitimate African resource, especially for their redemptive dimension. Based on our long-standing experience and research, this is happening with increasing intensity in Africa. The salvation of man, the salvation of humanity, is something that is crucial to many, if not most, indigenous African religions.⁶² John Pobee even postulates that an honestly conceived African theology must draw not only from traditional African religions, but also from traditional African music, mythology, proverbs, wisdom, prayer traditions, art, and rituals (such as rites of passage).⁶³ In Africa, open and honest interreligious dialogue is a prerequisite for creating an authentic postcolonial theology. Another necessary resource is African philosophies, such as the well-known philosophy of *Ubuntu*. Laureti Mageša reminds us that the inculturation of Christianity should not and even must not mean the destruction of African cultures, but their enrichment with the gospel.⁶⁴

⁵⁹ Sugirtharajah, *The Bible and the Third World*, 7–9.

⁶⁰ Sugirtharajah, *The Postcolonial Biblical Reader*, 19–20.

⁶¹ John Pobee, 'The Sources of African Theology,' in *A Reader in African Christian Theology*, ed. J. Parratt (London: SPCK, 1987), 25–28.

⁶² Robert S. Heaney, *From Historical to Critical Post-Colonial Theology: The Contribution of John S. Mbiti and Jesse N. K. Mugambi* (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co Ltd, 2016), 94–98.

⁶³ Pobee, 'The Sources of African Theology,' 25–28.

⁶⁴ Heaney, *From Historical to Critical Post-Colonial Theology*, 94–98.

The debate on postcoloniality is crucial for contemporary postcolonial theology.⁶⁵ In our opinion, theology has played a pivotal role in the restoration of human rights, human dignity, accountability, cultural renewal and self-concept and self-esteem of the African man after the collapse of the colonial systems.⁶⁶

The colonial linguistic division of Africa into French and English (and marginally Portuguese) did not benefit the dialogue between the Christian communities at all. We repeatedly observed tensions between Anglophone and Francophone Africa during our field research. This then has a negative impact on the dialogue between Christianity and traditional religions.⁶⁷ Authors such as James N. Amanze, for example, even condition the future survival of Christianity in Africa on an active dialogue between traditional religions and Christianity.⁶⁸ But as Tinyiko Maluleke points out, there are also those African theologians who consider traditional African religions a threat to African Christianity and believe that these religions should be relegated to the dustbin of history in favour of the one true faith, namely Christianity.⁶⁹ According to our research, these authors are in a relatively obvious minority. In contrast, writers such as Kwame Bediako emphasize the centrality of traditional African religions to the development of African Christian theology and the role of tolerance, respect and dialogue as crucial to the survival and development of African Christianity.⁷⁰ Clearly, there are differing views in this area and that is legitimate. Postcolonial theology has multiple strands, schools of thought, and points of view; there is also a legitimate plurality of opinion. Increasingly, there is talk in Africa of a postcolonial theology that must benefit from Africa's religious heritage,⁷¹ for Africa is known among theologians there as the most religious continent – religion plays a very key role in the lives of Africans.⁷²

⁶⁵ Bongmba, *The Routledge Handbook of African Theology*, 4–6.

⁶⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷ Benedict Ssettuuma Jr., *Inculturation: Towards an Integral Approach for Ownership, Permanence and Relevance of Christianity for a People* (Kampala: Angel Agencies, 2010), 51–65.

⁶⁸ James N. Amanze, *A History of the Ecumenical Movement in Africa* (Gaborone: Pula Press, 1998), 197.

⁶⁹ Maluleke, 'Postcolonial Theology,' 335–343.

⁷⁰ Bongmba, *The Routledge Handbook of African Theology*, 15.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Maluleke, 'Postcolonial Theology,' 335–343.

3.3 The African contribution to theology freed from reactionary attitudes

Africans place great emphasis on liturgy, as religious festivals, mass-attended ceremonies that are religious-cultural-social events and significantly cement society, were and are very important in traditional religions. As part of his participant observation, the author visited hundreds of traditional ceremonies, religious services, and festivals across the continent, and always observed the extraordinary importance that the entire community attached to these events. This is why African churches are usually completely full and place special emphasis on singing and dancing in the liturgy. Religion in Africa is primarily social in character, only secondarily personal and intimate worship, which in many places in the West is rather the opposite. While in the Western cultural environment it is relatively easy to separate culture from religion and non-believers or non-Christians can live in this culture without any problems, in traditional African cultures it is different: culture and religion are one social unit, they cannot be separated, there is no noticeable boundary between them. Where Christianity has become inculturated in Africa, it forms an integral part of social reality, yet many Christians there do not renounce the traditional religious roots of their identity.⁷³ We are not afraid to claim that syncretism – in a completely neutral tone – is one of the most accurate single-word (and therefore highly simplifying) characteristics of African religious life.

Chammah J. Kaunda lists as the elementary sources of African theology: the Bible, Christian traditions (he consistently uses the plural) and their theological heritage, ecumenical historical experiences, African traditional religions, African cultures and African history, contemporary issues and experiences across Africa and in the diaspora, related scientific disciplines such as anthropology, sociology, philosophy and others, the teachings of indigenous African churches, and all religious and non-religious African worldviews.⁷⁴

We see, therefore, that the dialogue between contemporary African Christianity and traditional African religions is not only desirable and appropriate for African Christianity, but downright necessary and

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Chammah J. Kaunda, 'Sources of African Theology,' in *The Routledge Handbook of African Theology*, ed. Elias Kifon Bongmba (London, New York: Routledge, 2022), 57–70.

structuring. In fact, postcolonial theology itself draws at least in part from this dialogue, and even directly emerges.⁷⁵

While some white missionaries in the second phase of the Christianization of Africa claimed that sub-Saharan Africans had not arrived at any real philosophy or religion, today's African theologians emphasize that the opposite is true. Before the arrival of the white missionaries, Africans had their various philosophies and had diverse religions based on faith and trust in God.⁷⁶ Some religions professed one God (e.g., the religion of the Ethiopian Mursi, the religion of the Namibian Himba, the religion of the Senegalese Serer, and others),⁷⁷ other religions professed a supreme creator God and subordinate lesser deities and spirits (e.g. Benin Vodun, Nigerian Yoruba religion, Nigerian Bori, and others),⁷⁸ other religions acknowledged the existence of a creator God but focused their practice more on man and his self-knowledge (e.g. Gabonese Bwiti, Nigerian Juju, and others).⁷⁹

Nor is it true that, as the white missionaries pointed out, all these religions were so-called evil cults, that is, that they were devilish or outright Satanic cults. Witchcraft did and still does exist in Africa – and it is indeed a pressing social issue –, but most traditional religions emphasized in their teachings the need for moral and ethical growth of man and selfless help to one's fellow man. Certainly, on the other hand, the definition of fellow man varied and sometimes applied only to an ethnic group or clan or just an extended family. It is also necessary to add, in order to illustrate the overall reality perceived by the missionaries, that many of these traditional religions practiced human sacrifice in places until the beginning of the 20th century, when they officially ceased after strong pressure from the Catholic Church in Africa.⁸⁰ The reality of African religiosity is complex and multilayered, and this moment is also a legitimate source of postcolonial theology. In our opinion, it should not shy away from the problematic moments of pre-colonial African history.

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Havelka, *Africká náboženství*, 77–86.

⁷⁷ Ondřej Havelka, 'Náboženství afrických etnik Himbů a Hererů: nejvyšší bůh Mukuru a jeho násilná transformace v Trojjediného,' *Dingir* 25, no. 3 (2022): 86–88.

⁷⁸ Havelka, 'Synkretismus katolického křesťanství,' 149–174.

⁷⁹ Havelka, 'The Syncretism of the Gabonese Bwiti Religion,' 145–159.

⁸⁰ John W. Kinney, 'The Theology of John Mbiti: His Sources, Norms and Method,' *Occasional Bulletin* 3, no. 2 (1979): 65–66.

In recent years, there has been a growing thesis among African theologians that a fruitful and mutually open, respectful and tolerant dialogue between African Christianity and traditional African religions is essential for the future survival of Christianity (of all denominations represented on the continent) in Africa, not merely for its development.⁸¹ Interest in revitalizing traditional religions is currently growing, the momentum of Islamic mission is also high and successful, and it should also be added that the number of non-religious or explicit atheists is increasing in many countries, which was not the case in Africa until recently, and countries like Madagascar now report 21.9% of people without religion.⁸² This should also be a new topic in contemporary postcolonial theology, which, according to our research, has been largely absent thus far.⁸³

To contextualise the need for dialogue, it is essential to bear in mind that multiple religious identities are common in sub-Saharan Africa. J. O. Awolalu documents that many African Muslims and Christians practice some traditional religions at the same time without syncretizing them.⁸⁴ In favour of multiple religious identities in Africa is the fact that Africans understand Christianity as a religion that brings mainly eschatological fruits, i.e. salvation and eternal life after physical death, while traditional religions are oriented towards the present moment, the well-being and good here and now, in this life. In this, according to many Africans, they complement each other perfectly and lead them precisely to a multiple religious identity, without seeing any contradiction in such an attitude.⁸⁵

From the point of view of theological anthropology, it is also significant that in African philosophies man is always viewed holistically, as a unity of soul and body, where matter is not seen as a diminished form of being, as was the case with some currents of ancient Greek philosophy that were adopted by some prominent Western theologians. This dualism of soul and body developed in Greek philosophy is alien

⁸¹ Amanze, 'Dialogue,' 73–84.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Havelka, 'The Yoruba Religion,' 43–52.

⁸⁴ J. O. Awolalu, 'What is African Traditional Religion?,' *Studies in Comparative Religion* 10, no. 2 (1976): 1–10.

⁸⁵ Henry J. Mugabe, 'Salvation from an African Perspective,' *Indian Journal of Theology* 36, no. 1 (1994): 31–42.

to both African philosophies and the biblical message.⁸⁶ Man is understood in both as a unity of soul and body. Soul and body do not stand in some kind of opposition. This is also why the dialogue between African Christianity and traditional religions on anthropological issues is consensual on both sides, with no major points of conflict.⁸⁷

The fact that the supreme God in different traditional religions – having different names in different regions, for example Nyambi for the Botswana Hambukush – is the same God named by Christians as God the Father contributes significantly to the dialogue. A consensus can be traced in Africa that the supreme God is one and the same, only locally called differently.⁸⁸ It is also true that in traditional religions there is a great emphasis on the cult of ancestors, and some theologians therefore develop Christology in the position of Christ as the new Adam – the new ancestor. They thus reconcile the confession of Christ's redemptive reality and the cult of ancestors. It must be added, however, that other African theologians see in this an excessive departure from Christian orthodoxy, even to the point of heresy.⁸⁹ Parallels can also be found between the sacraments of baptism, confirmation, marriage and priesthood with the traditional rites of passage at birth, adolescence, marriage and traditional priestly ordination.⁹⁰

Authors on postcolonial theology emphasize that it is primarily a theology of dignity and identity, as it is a response to a time when conquerors and colonizers have reprehensibly alienated Africans from their human dignity and identity. Human dignity and self-identity becomes a prerequisite for any genuine dialogue, and so African Christians in dialogue with followers of traditional religions must respect the dignity and identity of the other side of the dialogue and also be aware of their own dignity and identity, so that in the future (not only in Africa) the reprehensible white man colonial monologue of destroying human dignity and identity on the basis of skin colour and technological superiority is not repeated.⁹¹ According to Maluleke, the dialogue should not lack love, forgiveness and a commitment to help the poor

⁸⁶ Adewale J. Adhlakun, 'A Theoretical Reflection on Mbiti's Concept of Salvation in African Christianity,' *Nebula* 8, no. 1 (2011): 26–33.

⁸⁷ Amanze, 'Dialogue,' 73–84.

⁸⁸ Amanze, *African Traditional Religions*, 323–325.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ Aarde, 'The Four Waves,' 105–116.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

(which in Africa often means people living in real poverty).⁹² African postcolonial theology wants to speak out against any oppression on account of any otherness.⁹³

The attitude of the white missionaries in the second phase was pro-colonization also because the missionaries were to provide ‘civilization’ for the natives for the colonizing authorities. There was essentially no dialogue with the natives; for the missionaries, the natives were simply subjects of Christianization who had to draw a thick line under their previous lives and learn to live and believe the right way – or Western way – because until the arrival of the missionaries they had lived wrongly and believed wrongly or rather devilishly.⁹⁴ For this reason too, many of the primarily political anti-colonial organizations fighting for independence also advocated the restoration of traditional religions, because they saw colonizers and Christian missionaries as two sides of the same occupation coin.⁹⁵

Given the situation of colonial oppression and the loss of black identity under white supremacy, African theologians have noted two major Old Testament stories. South African liberation theology emphasizes the exodus, when God rescues the Hebrew people and leads them out of slavery and into freedom. Analogously, theologians there see the liberation of the black people from apartheid. African theologians who engage in so-called reconstruction theology in turn emphasize the story of the Babylonian exile and the post-exilic restoration of the cult of Yahweh, the rebuilding of the temple, and the recovery of identity and self-esteem. In the same way, Africans gradually regained their identity, independence and self-confidence after the collapse of colonial rule.⁹⁶

Conclusion: new topics and outlook for the future

In the dialogue between African Christianity and traditional religions, African Christians must constantly remind themselves of the

⁹² Tinyiko S. Maluleke, ‘The Rediscovery of the Agency of Africans: An Emerging Paradigm of Post-Cold War and Post-Apartheid Black and African Theology,’ *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa* 108, no. 1 (2000): 19–37.

⁹³ Aarde, ‘The Four Waves,’ 105–116.

⁹⁴ Jesse N. K. Mugambi, ‘From Reconstruction to Reaffirmation,’ in *The Routledge Handbook of African Theology*, ed. Elias Kifon Bongmba (London, New York: Routledge, 2022), 151–167.

⁹⁵ Maluleke, ‘The Rediscovery of the Agency of Africans,’ 19–37.

⁹⁶ Mugambi, ‘From Reconstruction to Reaffirmation,’ 151–167.

revealed biblical truth that every human being is the image of God, and therefore every human being, regardless of his or her current denomination, must be treated accordingly by the Christian who honours the Bible as the word of God in the word of man.⁹⁷ After all, Jesus approached all people with love and an offer to follow him. According to this simple paradigm, interreligious dialogue should be conducted by African Christians: approaching different believers with love and respect and rather showing their position and possibly inspiring them to follow and deepen their interest. But not to coerce, not to disrespect the alterity, not to diminish its professed religion, for these methodological errors were abundantly committed by white missionaries.⁹⁸

A major current topic in postcolonial theology in Africa is the attitude towards local syncretisms between Christianity and traditional religions, as has been repeatedly mentioned. During his twenty years of work in Africa, the author has observed a growing interest in indigenous African religions among African Christians. One example is the Gabonese religion of Bwiti, based on the consumption of the iboga root,⁹⁹ which has strong psychedelic effects. The complex religious system of Bwiti, with its long tradition, is unique among the indigenous African religions and cults: it is not about worship, it is exclusively about self-knowledge, spiritual insight into the essence of reality, unveiling the spiritual veil, encountering oneself in the innermost sense of the word.¹⁰⁰

While years ago, most Gabonese officially professed Christianity (in several denominations) and also revered and practiced the Bwiti religion, albeit not openly, today the situation is essentially very similar, but openly opposite: millions of people officially profess the Bwiti religion but continue to live their Christianity. It is precisely in Gabon that we can see that the attitude towards syncretisms is key to contemporary postcolonial theology, as most Gabonese did not reject Bwiti twenty

⁹⁷ Kwame Anthony Appiah, *In My Father's House: Africa in the Philosophy of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 198–212.

⁹⁸ Jesse Mugambi, *Christian Theology and Social Reconstruction* (Nairobi: Acton, 2005), 111–128. We are now speaking of a balance that has been achieved on many levels. We are speaking of balance and harmony in interfaith dialogue, which, unfortunately, has not always been a given; we are speaking of interracial balance; and we are also speaking of a balance between, on the one hand, the radical rejection of all Western influence and, on the other hand, the uncritical acceptance of Western traditions.

⁹⁹ Tabernanthe iboga is a tropical shrub belonging to the Apocynaceae family.

¹⁰⁰ J. W. Fernandez, *Bwiti: An Ethnography of the Religious Imagination in Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 470–489.

years ago, just as they do not reject Christianity today. In fact, they live and practice a syncretism of Christianity and Bwiti with various local emphases. In shaping the relationship to African syncretisms, we see further steps in contemporary postcolonial theology. According to our research, the relationship of postcolonial theology to syncretism today is mostly tolerant, respectful, and fruitful in its efforts to find theological intersections and syntheses. However, we also find prominent authors who take a more cautious or even dismissive stance. In any case, the multi-layered relationship to syncretisms is a specific feature of African postcolonial theology and has clear potential to bring new ideas and directions to global theology.

According to contemporary African theologians, African postcolonial theology today must stop looking to the past and look to the future. It must ask itself what original things it can offer the world.¹⁰¹ In our opinion, postcolonial theology should not only study the syncretisms of Christianity and traditional African religions, but also seriously address a topic that has so far been dealt with mainly by religious scholars, namely the widespread phenomenon of multiple religious identities in Africa. Many Africans feel that they are true Christians and at the same time true followers of one of the traditional religions (in exceptional cases, even more than one), without syncretically mixing traditions. Such an attitude raises a number of serious questions for future postcolonial theology, as the growing wave of interest in traditional African religions among African Christians cannot be ignored.

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¹⁰¹ Maluleke, 'Postcolonial Theology,' 335–343.

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