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## BEYOND TRUTH-TELLING: EMBODYING AND DWELLING IN TRUTH AND HOPE\*

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### ABSTRACT

This paper seeks to argue that truth is not something that relates to telling/speaking only. Its main aim is to show that in their quest for communion with God, other human beings – and one should add – the entire creation, humans need to go beyond truth-telling toward the ways of embodying and dwelling in truth and hope. To introduce its argument, the paper proceeds in the following steps. First, it expounds a Christian perspective on truth, employing notions such as sacrament, desire, and relationality. Through the image of communion with God, a link between truth-telling and hope is outlined. Second, it tries to show that truth-telling is not only an affective but also an existential category. As such, it involves the whole of human being. Therefore, it makes sense to turn to the concept of body and embodiment when reflecting on the human pursuits of truth. The paper then, third, examines various constellations of this central claim by exploring a specific case from popular culture, namely, ‘Crocodile’, an episode from the Netflix series, *Black Mirror*. In particular, a proposal is made for the significance of embodying and dwelling in truth for Christian theology and practice. Finally, in the last step, this embodying and dwelling is given more concrete contours with respect to hope by probing into the images of home and feast.

### Keywords

Truth; Truth-Telling; Confession; Embodiment, Hope; Feast; *Black Mirror* (Netflix series); Theological Anthropology

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In this paper, I would like to suggest that truth is not something that relates to telling/speaking only. Writing from a particularly Christian theological perspective, my main aim is to show that in our quest for communion with God, human beings – and one should add – the entire creation, we need to go beyond truth-telling toward the ways of embodying and dwelling in truth and hope. To proceed with my argument, I will take the following steps. First, I will expound a Christian perspective on truth, employing notions such as sacrament, desire, and relationality. Through the image of communion with God, a link between truth-telling and hope will be outlined. Second, I will try to show that truth-telling is not only an affective but also an existential category. As such, it involves the whole of human being. Therefore, it makes sense to turn to the concept of body and embodiment when reflecting on the human pursuits of truth. I will then, third, examine various constellations of this claim by using a specific example from popular culture, namely, ‘Crocodile’, an episode from the Netflix series, *Black Mirror*. In particular, the significance for Christian theology and practice of embodying truth and dwelling in truth will be proposed. In the last step, this embodying and dwelling will be given more concrete contours with respect to hope by probing into the images of home and feast.

## 1. Truth and Truth-Telling

In the Hebrew Bible, truth (*emet*) has links to faithfulness, stability, and firmness. Importantly, firmness and stability in the biblical imagination do not represent static categories but rather imply reliability and desirability.<sup>1</sup> They are fundamentally rooted in God’s fidelity; the fidelity of a God ‘abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness’ (Exod 34:6). As scriptural witnesses attest (see, for example, Wis 11:24–26), this ‘fidelity is not just to Israel, not just to humanity but to the whole creation’.<sup>2</sup> The universal dimension, however, does not preclude the attention to the personal. When we read in the gospel about Jesus telling his Jewish followers that ‘the truth will make them free’ (John 8:32), the original

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<sup>1</sup> See Pavol Bargár, ‘And Beauty Will Make You Free: On the Transformative Power of Beauty,’ *AUC Theologica* 12, no. 2 (2022): 41–56, 42, doi: 10.14712/25365398.2025.4.

<sup>2</sup> Margaret Daly-Denton, *John: An Earth Bible Commentary: Supposing Him To Be the Gardener* (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2017), 185.

context to which these words are addressed is that of a small community that feels isolated from an antagonistic world. The gospel provides this community with the reassurance of God's presence and loving care; it gives them a sense of identity and purpose.<sup>5</sup> However, this is not to be understood in a negative sense, as a way to escape reality or to deal with uncomfortable rivals. For the Johannine community, instead, (the word of) truth becomes a source of hope and a driver for change. Thus, in biblical understanding, truth ultimately refers to visions of how 'things ought to be', both presently and eschatologically.<sup>4</sup>

While this understanding of truth has never been lost in Christian theology,<sup>5</sup> more 'verbalist' approaches have often seemed to gain the upper hand. My objective of this paper is not to explicitly argue against the latter. Rather, I will seek to further elaborate on the relational understanding of truth in conversation with various interlocutors, most importantly Aristotle Papanikolaou. With much theological acumen, Papanikolaou discusses truth and truth-telling in the context of sacramentality, and, particularly, the sacrament of confession. He intends to recover what he believes to be a lost understanding of this sacrament, namely, one rooted in the 'transformative power of the spoken word of truth'.<sup>6</sup> Papanikolaou writes from the Orthodox Christian tradition for which it is essential to maintain that an object or an event is sacramental when it serves as a vehicle through which one can experience the presence of God. The sacramentality of confession, then, consists in the very act of telling one's story honestly, truth-fully: 'In this act of being honest to God one experiences God's love and forgiveness, and by so doing, grows closer to God and progresses in *theosis*, which means to participate in the life of God.'<sup>7</sup> When speaking honestly, truth-fully, about oneself, one's deeds and experiences, the spoken word of truth is charged with an immense power – and this applies not only to the sacrament of confession but also interpersonal relationships in general.

<sup>5</sup> See Robert E. Goss, 'John,' in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, ed. Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, and Thomas Bohache (London: SCM Press, 2006), 548–565, 550.

<sup>4</sup> See Bargár, 'And Beauty Will Make You Free,' 45 and 42.

<sup>5</sup> For various examples, see Ivana Noble, *Essays in Ecumenical Theology I: Aims, Methods, Themes, and Contexts* (Boston: Brill, 2019), passim.

<sup>6</sup> Aristotle Papanikolaou, 'Honest to God: Confession and Desire,' in *Thinking Through Faith: New Perspectives from Orthodox Christian Scholars*, ed. Aristotle Papanikolaou and Elizabeth H. Prodromou (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 2008), 219–245, 219.

<sup>7</sup> Papanikolaou, 'Honest to God,' 220.

It is the power to ‘reconfigure irrevocably’ the dynamic of the relationship between one and the other: ‘for the worse, if used to denigrate and humiliate, but for the better, if received in the spirit of trust and love.’<sup>8</sup>

Papanikolaou highlights yet another important link – one between truth-telling and desire. When one speaks honestly, truth-fully, about oneself, one’s desires can potentially be liberated from destructive undertones and overtones and steered toward being fulfilled through loving and nurturing relationships.<sup>9</sup> Willie James Jennings provides us with a view of desire from a different, albeit complementary, angle. In a sermon on the story of Peter explaining his actions of eating in the houses of the uncircumcised (Acts 11:1–3), Jennings suggests that the apostle was ‘compelled by the Spirit to follow the Spirit’s desire, divine desire’.<sup>10</sup> It was a transformation of desire that gave birth to something new, authentic, and, ultimately, lasting. ‘God is about desire before God is about demand. God is about aesthetics before God is about ethics.’<sup>11</sup> These, admittedly, provocative words succinctly express two theologically salient points: first, the primacy of God’s grace; and, second, the centrality of our desires, our very selves, for our relationship to God – and others. Human desire needs to be harnessed to turn toward God. In Christian liturgical practice, the means of such harnessing include, as Papanikolaou reminds us, confession, prayer, and fasting. Their purpose is to incite a ‘deeper, more inflamed desire for [the] living, personal God’.<sup>12</sup> However, the transformation of one’s desire by and for God transcends the area of mere individual piety. This transformation has implications for the Christian understanding of the relation between the love of God, love of neighbor, and love of self. As such, confession is a kind of truth-telling that is oriented toward refining one’s desire for God and, by implication, for the other.<sup>13</sup>

The discussion so far leads me to maintain that a Christian understanding of truth cannot be divorced from relationality. It seems to me that, for Papanikolaou, as for Jennings, relationality is of crucial

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<sup>8</sup> Papanikolaou, ‘Honest to God,’ 225.

<sup>9</sup> See Papanikolaou, ‘Honest to God,’ 235 and 238.

<sup>10</sup> Willie James Jennings, ‘A Revolutionary Intimacy,’ a sermon preached at Hope College, 2014, <https://divinity.duke.edu/sites/divinity.duke.edu/files/documents/faculty/A-Revolutionary-Intimacy.pdf>.

<sup>11</sup> Jennings, ‘A Revolutionary Intimacy.’

<sup>12</sup> Aristotle Papanikolaou, ‘Liberating Eros: Confession and Desire,’ *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics* 26, no. 1 (2006): 115–136, 134.

<sup>13</sup> See Papanikolaou, ‘Liberating Eros,’ 134.

importance. Little wonder, the image of the human being in the Christian imagination is profoundly relational. First of all, each person is at each phase of their life involved in a rich and multidimensional ‘web of relationships’ with other people and the world they live in.<sup>14</sup> The study document by the Faith and Order commission entitled *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology* asserts that these relationships are established and maintained through ‘provisional, embodied, contingent, meaning-producing interactions with significant others’.<sup>15</sup> Contextualized in a particular historical setting, one’s identity, story, and place within a tradition are necessarily formed in relation to the identity, story, and tradition of the other.<sup>16</sup>

However, there is more to human relationality in Christian tradition than the categories of contextuality and contingency can encompass. There is also a significant theological aspect to be considered in this regard. Such relational image is rooted in the understanding of the triune God as ‘the perfect fellowship of love, acceptance, inclusion, and creativity’.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, this divine fellowship is like a fountain of meaning and potentiality that springs forth onto God’s creation inviting it ‘to join a fellowship of souls and bodies on a journey toward joyful consummation’.<sup>18</sup> The triune God is fundamentally relational, and so people as bearers of the image of this God too are relational beings. And yet, one must go deeper still. The already cited Faith and Order document points out that human existence bearing the image of God takes place within the twofold dynamic of both ‘dignity, potentiality, and creativity’ and ‘creatureliness, finitude, and vulnerability’.<sup>19</sup> Being human, a bearer of the image of God (*imago Dei*), therefore, means pursuing life in fullness through authentic interpersonal relationships, despite the losses, wounds, and traumas that continue to be real and present in

<sup>14</sup> See Pavol Bargár, *Embodied Existence: Our Common Life in God* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2023), 107.

<sup>15</sup> Faith and Order Commission, *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology: A Faith and Order Study Document*, Faith and Order paper no. 199 (Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2005), art. 70.

<sup>16</sup> See also Jan-Olav Henriksen, *Religious Pluralism and Pragmatist Theology: Openness and Resistance* (Leiden: Brill Rodopi, 2019), 36–37.

<sup>17</sup> Bargár, *Embodied Existence*, 108.

<sup>18</sup> Pavol Bargár, ‘Toward Comm/unity amidst Brokenness: Christian Mission as (a Pursuit of) Theological Anthropology,’ *International Review of Mission* 110, no. 2 (2021): 231–245, 236.

<sup>19</sup> Faith and Order Commission, *Christian Perspectives*, art. 81.

the context of the world we live in. Daniela Augustine formulates this idea very powerfully:

Each human being stands in the face of the other, imprinted with the same ontological origin and telos – Christ himself – the beginning and the end of creation (Rev 21:16). In this sanctified/deified perspective, the face of the other meets us as the future of the world – as the full potentiality of the fullness of life more abundant in, with, and through God. Therefore, there is no future, no salvation, no world without the other.<sup>20</sup>

Coming back to our question of truth and truth-telling, if truth is to be told, established or recovered (or, as I will seek to show, embodied), a relationship between the teller and the listener needs to be at the center. Such a relationship always involves a human being and his or her other. There is, therefore, a relational, we could even say, a communal, aspect to truth-telling. To put it negatively, without truth-telling there can be no communion with God or other people since one remains incurvated in one's own delusion of self-sufficiency. Indeed, the ideal of the 'white self-sufficient man' has taken deep roots in our imagination and everyday life, both within and beyond the church. Essentially, this ideal is about seeking to master knowledge in order to control the world and become independent from others.<sup>21</sup> In contrast to the ideal of the 'white self-sufficient man', we are called to pursue relational formation as 'the art of cultivating belonging'.<sup>22</sup> Being fundamentally theological, Jennings's argument is founded on the dream of a God who comes to the world (through the people of Israel and through Jesus) to offer people a share in divine life.<sup>23</sup> Papanikolaou expresses the same point from the Orthodox Christian perspective through the notion of *theosis* which, as he underlines, means 'to participate in the life of God'.<sup>24</sup> It is from this position that he can argue that heaven is not a place but 'God-union with God's very life'; God does not want to put us in a place but wants to be in fellowship with us.<sup>25</sup> I take Papanikolaou and Jennings

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<sup>20</sup> Daniela Augustine, *The Spirit and the Common Good: Shared Flourishing in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2019), 138.

<sup>21</sup> See Willie James Jennings, *After Whiteness: An Education in Belonging* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020), 6.

<sup>22</sup> See Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 10.

<sup>23</sup> See Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 152.

<sup>24</sup> Papanikolaou, 'Honest to God,' 220.

<sup>25</sup> See Papanikolaou, 'Honest to God,' 222.

as saying that our hope lies in the belief that we are created to be in communion with God and this presupposes a truth-telling. That is the link between truth-telling and hope which is also vital for this paper as will become evident especially toward its end.

## 2. Beyond Telling, toward Embodying

I declared that my aim in this paper is to go beyond truth-telling toward the ways of embodying truth and hope. In a sense, Aristotle Papanikolaou points in this direction himself when he says that his interest is in ‘affective forms of truth-telling’, namely those surrounded by the emotion of fear and the feelings of anxiety.<sup>26</sup> Why is that? For Papanikolaou, feelings and emotions make confession real. ‘Only in experiencing emotions and feelings of anxiety, nervousness, and fear can we experience real forgiveness.’<sup>27</sup> Extending this claim to a more general level, this is actually the presupposition on which rests not only the Christian sacrament of confession but really the foundations of any interpersonal relationship: one opens oneself to the other and tells them the truth about oneself, despite and amidst one’s fears and anxieties. A risky endeavor indeed, but one that is necessary, as Papanikolaou maintains, if the hope for an authentic relationship and communion is to emerge.<sup>28</sup>

I concur with this emphasis. However, I believe we should expand our theological radars to explore additional emotions to those of fear and anxiety. Rather than fear and anxiety, intimacy appears to be a more helpful category here as it refers to something that is at the core of one’s being. In feminist theological discourse, this intimacy is apprehended through the image of *eros*. In *eros*, emotions are tied together with relationships since ‘erotic power is the power of our primal interrelatedness’.<sup>29</sup> Rita Nakashima Brock characterizes the power that exists within *eros* as follows:

<sup>26</sup> See Aristotle Papanikolaou, ‘Truth-Telling and Hope,’ *AUC Theologica* 13, no. 2 (2023): 11–19, 12. See also Papanikolaou, ‘Liberating Eros,’ 116.

<sup>27</sup> Papanikolaou, ‘Honest to God,’ 226.

<sup>28</sup> See Papanikolaou, ‘Honest to God,’ 224.

<sup>29</sup> Rita Nakashima Brock, *Journeys by Heart: A Christology of Erotic Power* (New York: Crossroad, 1992), 26.

Erotic power, as it creates and connects hearts, involves the whole person in relationships of self-awareness, vulnerability, openness, and caring. Erotic power as an ontic category, as a fundamentally ultimate reality in human existence, is a more inclusive and accurate understanding of the dynamics of power within which dominance and willful assertion can be explained. (...) Hence all other forms of power emerge from the reality of erotic power.<sup>50</sup>

Now, admittedly, this power needs to be navigated in order to work toward transformation. One way of such navigation that we find in the biblical witness is the work toward peace and justice (*shalom*).<sup>51</sup> Alternatively, the harnessing of this power of primal interrelatedness can be rendered via the symbol of God's dream for God's creation, as we have already suggested above. It is the dream of the God who aims for 'ecstasy in the body of the creature', striving, ultimately, for communion of all God's creation.<sup>52</sup>

Furthermore, the notions of intimacy and/or eros help us avoid the negative connotations that fear and anxiety imply, and open venues for a more constructive understanding of one's inner world (self). To be true, I suggest that we should include more than mere emotions and feelings, whether negative or positive. Rather than speaking of *affective* forms of truth-telling, I therefore prefer speaking of *existential* forms. And, actually, I invite us to go beyond truth-telling for the very reason that it might happen that one is not only afraid but also unable to express a truth about oneself/others/the world in words. To put it differently, the deepest level of human existence can be (or, should we say, is) inexpressible verbally. Ivana Noble's observations on the subtle, yet important difference between the *via negativa* and the apophatic way in theology are helpful in this respect. While the *via negativa* has its origins in speculative thinking and is primarily interested in what cannot be expressed through words, especially with regard to the divine, the apophatic way comes from the contemplative tradition and accentuates the importance of the pursuit of such a conversion that enables us to 'move from living in a lie to living in truth, from forgetting our roots to rediscovering them in our memory, from being separated

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<sup>50</sup> Brock, *Journeys by Heart*, 25 and 26.

<sup>51</sup> See also Grace Ji-Sun Kim, *Embracing the Other: The Transformative Spirit of Love* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 142.

<sup>52</sup> See Jennings, *After Whiteness*, 143 and 152.



from communion with God and with other people to being included'.<sup>55</sup> The negative – that which cannot be put in words, or which can only be rendered in symbols and images, and thus calls for permanent reinterpretation – has liberating aspects as it subverts our established schemes and ways of looking at the world and God.<sup>54</sup>

For such an approach to truth in theological discourse, the notions of embodiment and corporeality are of utmost significance. The body plays an irreplaceable and ultimate role for human existence in the world, including the pursuit of knowledge, and truth, about the world, oneself, others, and God. In twentieth-century thinking, this recognition came to be elaborated in what has become known as the 'corporeal turn', becoming of increased importance in Western philosophical thought from the 1940s onward.<sup>55</sup> In this line of thought, one should highlight especially Maurice Merleau-Ponty who asserted that the human body is 'our anchorage in the world'.<sup>56</sup> As far as Christian theology is concerned, the accent on the importance of the body has surfaced throughout the history of Christianity, though intensity and intentionality have varied. For instance, while Augustine of Hippo regarded the human existence in/of a body as a 'race toward death', he also appreciated the unique place that the body takes. Despite different frailties and, ultimately, its mortality, the human body represented, for Augustine, a way of bearing testimony to the divine providence, thanks to the body's functionality and beauty.<sup>57</sup> Much more recently, it was James Nelson who made an important contribution to Christian theological thinking on the body by developing the project of body theology. Bringing forth a robust case against any dichotomy between the body and the spirit, he suggests that Christian theology must undeniably start by seriously exploring 'the fleshly experience of life – with our hungers and our passions, our bodily aliveness and deadness'.<sup>58</sup>

<sup>55</sup> Ivana Noble, 'Apophatic Aspects of Theological Conversation,' in *Essays in Ecumenical Theology I*, 36–52, at 36–37.

<sup>54</sup> See Noble, 'Apophatic Aspects,' 37.

<sup>55</sup> See Jacob Meiring, 'Theology in the Flesh: A Model for Theological Anthropology as Embodied Sensing,' *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 71, no. 3 (2015): art. 2858, doi:10.4102/hts.v71i3.2858.

<sup>56</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, trans. Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2002), 128.

<sup>57</sup> See Augustine of Hippo, *The City of God*, trans. Marcus Dods (New York: Modern Library, 1999), XXII: 24.

<sup>58</sup> James B. Nelson, *Body Theology* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 43.

In Nelson's understanding, then, one's pursuit of truth and knowledge (about oneself, the world, God) is inextricably linked to a commitment to praxis. Moreover, the body stands at the center as a locus of both reflection and action.<sup>39</sup>

The Faith and Order study document *Christian Perspectives on Theological Anthropology* also acknowledges the epistemological significance of the human body as it argues that 'the body is the source of our knowledge not only of ourselves but also of the world and everything in it'.<sup>40</sup> Furthermore, the document also underlines the importance of the role of the senses in the process of producing knowledge and establishing truth. It gives an example of a blind person for whom the world is very much different from the way it is experienced by sighted people. That difference is so significant that one can even speak of a plurality of 'constructed' worlds: 'Blindness is not just something that happens to one's eyes; it is something that happens to one's world.'<sup>41</sup> The insights, such as these from James Nelson or the Faith and Order document, lead me to maintain that the notions of the body and truth are inextricably linked in theological discourse.

### **3. Embodiment, the Pursuit of Truth, and Popular Culture: A Case of 'Crocodile'**

As we have seen in the previous section, the body and senses play a central role in the pursuit of truth. To further support my case, I am going to turn to popular culture.<sup>42</sup> I will explore 'Crocodile', the third episode from the fourth season of *Black Mirror*. *Black Mirror* is a British anthology TV series available on Netflix.<sup>43</sup> Using a variety of genres,

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<sup>39</sup> See Bargár, *Embodied Existence*, 26.

<sup>40</sup> Faith and Order Commission, *Christian Perspectives*, art. 47.

<sup>41</sup> Faith and Order Commission, *Christian Perspectives*, art. 48.

<sup>42</sup> I assert that 'cultural products', including popular culture, are important for theological reflection, even if they do not explicitly address religion or themes traditionally associated with religion, such as God or salvation. It is vital to explore whether and in which ways these products present issues, such as guilt, evil, fear, repentance, remorse, justice, forgiveness, mercy, or reconciliation. Meaning then emerges from an interaction between the cultural product (and its broader context, including the history of its interpretation) and the interpreter (including the hermeneutic tradition in which this interpreter is situated). On the method in theologies of culture, see Clive Marsh, *A Cultural Theology of Salvation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 36–45.

<sup>43</sup> Until now six seasons have been produced between 2011 and 2023, with the total of twenty-seven episodes. For further information on the series, see 'Black Mirror,' IMDb, accessed August 21, 2023, [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2085059/?ref\\_=ttep\\_ep\\_tt](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt2085059/?ref_=ttep_ep_tt).

the individual episodes are usually set in future dystopias decisively shaped by advanced technology. The series explores this scenario, driven by existential themes, to reflect not only on contemporary social issues but also, more broadly, on what it means to be human.<sup>44</sup> ‘Crocodile’ opens with two young people, Rob and Mia, driving through a deserted Scottish countryside after a night of partying and drugs.<sup>45</sup> Still intoxicated, Rob hits and kills a cyclist. They both agree on hiding the truth, burying the dead body in the nearby lake. The plot continues fifteen years later when Rob, driven by guilt, comes to visit Mia, who is now a wife, a mother, and a famous architect. Rob tells Mia that he has decided to write an anonymous letter to the widow of the victim, after having seen a news article about her case. Not knowing the truth about her husband, the poor woman never was able to move on with her life. And, actually, neither was Rob whose whole life has been negatively impacted by the hidden truth. For him, therefore, guilt has become both a consequence and a mode of living in un-truth. To put it positively, one can say that truth is an important, and necessary, presupposition for living a full life.

Rob hopes that by revealing the truth about the incident (though not necessarily revealing his identity as the perpetrator), he will engender liberation not only for the cyclist’s widow but also for himself. However, the now successful Mia is afraid that Rob’s revealing of the truth might potentially have a negative influence on her life and career. An argument breaks between them and Mia kills Rob. By being his confessor, ironically, she does not foster Rob’s absolution and liberation but deprives him of his life. Papanikolaou speaks about the ‘iconic role of the listener’,<sup>46</sup> or confessor, in the process of enabling truth to become a constructive and healing factor shaping not only the relationship between two people but also one’s inner self. Through her response, Mia iconizes the *demonic*, rather than the *theotic*, to Rob.<sup>47</sup> Indeed, she is Rob’s ‘anti-confessor’. Thus, the truth that would set them free (cf. John 8:32) cannot prevail.

<sup>44</sup> For explorations on the series from the critical media theory perspective, see Angela M. Cirucci and Barry Vacker (eds.), *Black Mirror and Critical Media Theory* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2018).

<sup>45</sup> For further information on the episode, see ‘Crocodile,’ IMDb, accessed August 21, 2023, [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5710976/?ref\\_=ttep\\_ep5](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt5710976/?ref_=ttep_ep5).

<sup>46</sup> Papanikolaou, ‘Liberating Eros,’ 115.

<sup>47</sup> See Papanikolaou, ‘Truth-Telling and Hope,’ 15.

An additional plotline spins off in the story when Shazia, an insurance investigator, follows the case of a pedestrian, a young musician, hit over by a self-driving pizza delivery van. The incident is witnessed by Mia out of her hotel room shortly after she murders Rob. Eventually, therefore, Shazia in her investigation also interrogates Mia, which costs her life and, subsequently, also the life of her husband and baby son. It is worth going back to the point on the importance of the role of the listener, or confessor, here. After Mia holds her captive, Shazia is begging Mia to let her go, promising she will never tell anyone about what she has learnt and experienced. Shazia reassures Mia that there is even a law specifying how insurance investigators must proceed when interviewing their respondents, saying ‘it is like a Catholic confession’. Shazia effectively becomes an involuntary confessor for Mia. However, this kind of confession, like in Rob’s case, does not lead to absolution and the hope for liberation and a new beginning. There is a negative potentiality in this act of truth-telling. Tragically, Mia does not want to be liberated.

My main objective for narrating the story of ‘Crocodile’ here, however, is that it features an important element for understanding the link between corporeality and the quest for truth. In her investigation, Shazia employs the technology called ‘Recaller’ to establish the truth. The ‘Recaller’ enables visualizing one’s memories, as best as one can picture them, on a screen. In this process, senses help awaken memories so that truth can be established. That is the reason why Shazia gives her respondents, including Mia, an opened bottle with beer from the nearby brewery to have a sniff and plays them the music that they heard during the time of the incident. While this example illustrates the importance of the senses of smell and hearing, respectively, for the recovery of truth, yet another sense, the sense of vision, is explored in a different scene. As I have already indicated, after having murdered Shazia, Mia also kills her husband and infant son because she is afraid of the possibility that someone could perhaps have seen her commit the crimes. Ironically, it turns out that the baby was blind. Again, corporeality plays an instrumental role in the quest for truth – or, else in the attempts to hide the truth.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Another ironic point is that it is not even a human being that helps the police to eventually arrest Mia. There is a hamster as a pet in Shazia’s house that witnessed how Mia murdered the baby. The police plug the animal on to the ‘Recaller’, that they, like Shazia, use, and thus come to know the truth.

Shifting our focus from the senses onto the deeper dimension of human existence, it is of relevance that, when interviewed by Shazia, Mia is trying to ‘trick’ her own self by modifying her memories in order to adjust the truth.<sup>49</sup> Truth-telling is here subjected to the whole self, including one’s will, intellect, and imagination. Yet, Mia’s memories refuse to cooperate with her. Even as she is trying to reinvent the truth about what happened on the night of the incident, her memories work against her. We can see that Mia is not being true to herself. The question then arises, of what happens to oneself if one is trying to modify the truth about oneself. In his paper, Papanikolaou points out some negative possibilities of this tendency, such as lingering feelings of resentment and anger, or rejection and the end of a friendship.<sup>50</sup>

Drawing from these insights, I would therefore like to make an observation based on my discussion so far that a helpful way to understand truth is in terms of the space that one inhabits. Truth represents the space in which one can relate to human and non-human others and, theologically speaking, also relate to God. If one seeks to live a meaningful existence, one is called to abide in truth. In secular discourse, this can be interpreted as a call to be truth-ful, or authentic, to oneself. In other words, one is summoned to live a life that would not lead to alienation from oneself but rather enable a fulfilling existence. From a Christian perspective, and with reference to John 14:6, one can recognize in this call Jesus’s invitation addressed to his disciples to abide in him who is the *truth*, and the way and the life. In her commentary on the Gospel of John, Margaret Daly-Denton affirms that Jesus as ‘the truth’ represents ‘the embodiment of God’s faithfulness to the whole creation’ so that ‘everything entrusted to him by his Father’ can ‘flourish in abundant liveliness’.<sup>51</sup> The disciples of Jesus, in biblical times as today, are called to follow the example of their Master by also embodying the truth that they have come to see as the compass for their lives. Furthermore, in the imagery and imagination of the gospel,

<sup>49</sup> Some critics have commented on the title of the episode and a possible link with the idiom ‘crying crocodile tears’. Though Mia first appears as a sensitive and emotional person, much more than Rob, and she is shown crying at one point, she eventually becomes a ‘completely ruthless and cold killer’. Her tears of remorse and sorrow are therefore seen as insincere. See Rosie Fletcher, ‘What Does the Title of *Black Mirror* Episode “Crocodile” Mean?’, *Digital Spy*, January 2, 2018, <https://www.digitalspy.com/tv/ustv/a846495/black-mirror-crocodile-episode-title-explained/>.

<sup>50</sup> See Papanikolaou, ‘Truth-Telling and Hope’, 13–14.

<sup>51</sup> Daly-Denton, *John*, 183.

then, the dwelling in truth is rooted in a dynamic of being close to God, similar to the closeness experienced by Jesus. Abiding in truth implies a sense of belonging, ‘at-home-ness’ with and in God.<sup>52</sup>

Importantly, Ivana Noble interprets the abiding in and embodying of truth in terms of a call to permanent conversion that is addressed to each individual:

As in the New Testament, also here the conversion – *metanoia* – is more than a single movement or single action. It is a part of the whole of our communication with God as well as with people and with the whole of creation. Such communication includes all human activities, their glory, as well as their subjection to a falling away from what they could be, their subjection in short to *hamartia*, sin, a failure to hit their target, to achieve their objectives.<sup>53</sup>

We can therefore see, I suggest, a two-fold dynamic here. First, one is called to *embody* truth, that is, truth should become part of one’s own existence. At the same time, however, one is summoned to  *dwell in*  truth, that is, truth ought to become one’s environment; indeed, the space in which one lives and moves and has one’s being (cf. Acts 17:28).

#### 4. Invited to a Feast in the Home of God: Truth Giving Rise to Hope

In the final section of this paper, I would like to explore the claim that I just made by turning our attention to the biblical book of Revelation. In a sense, and very broadly speaking, Revelation is about truth. The truth disclosed to the Seer by the Lamb (Rev 1:13.17–18) is offered as two images representing two alternative visions for the ultimate destiny of humankind and creation. The first image is that of ‘Babylon’ that stands for injustice, oppression, exploitation, and various types of tyrannies. The Babylonian way of life is in the biblical imagery envisioned as one of a ‘great whore’ who engages in ‘fornication’ (Rev 17:1–2). Rather than sexual implications, this imagery is concerned with economic, political, and spiritual issues.<sup>54</sup> In their book, *The Home of God*,

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<sup>52</sup> See Daly-Denton, *John*, 181 and 182.

<sup>53</sup> Noble, ‘Aphatic Aspects,’ 51.

<sup>54</sup> See Miroslav Volf and Ryan McAnnally-Linz, *The Home of God: A Brief Story of Everything* (Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2022), 195.

Miroslav Volf and Ryan McAnnally-Linz describe Babylon as a paradigmatic *dysoikos*, that is, a ‘non-home’, an uninhabitable place, a space of no hope.<sup>55</sup>

The other, contrasting, image is that of the ‘New Jerusalem’. Revelation provides an account of this symbolism in chapter 21. For our purposes, Rev 21:3–4 is of particular relevance:

And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, ‘See, the home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them and be their God; he will wipe every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.’ (NRSV)

In line with the biblical understanding of truth as discussed in the first part of the present paper, these words bear a robust witness to that which is lasting, meaningful, and – ultimately – truthful. With its emphasis on restoration and transformation, the image of the New Jerusalem, the ‘home of God’, gives rise to hope. Truth and hope are brought together here. Together, they refer to a new reality (‘a new heaven and a new earth’) in which people participate together with God. Moreover, people dwell in there together with God (cf. Rev 21:3). Volf and McAnnally-Linz assert that the New Jerusalem is a perpetual gift, ‘a joyfully given and joyfully shared social and material space of resonance, attachment, and belonging’.<sup>56</sup> The legitimacy and relevance of the ‘home of God’ metaphor is also argued by Jürgen Moltmann who maintains that ‘if the creative God himself dwells in his creation, then he is making his own home’.<sup>57</sup> Interpreting Moltmann, Ivana Noble draws upon his eschatological perspective when explaining the dwelling of God in creation: ‘It is a vision inbreaking as purpose to the whole creation – to become and to be the home of God, in which creatures live in symbiosis, are at home with each other and also with nature.’<sup>58</sup>

One possible point of criticism addressed to the metaphor of ‘home’ can be made on the grounds of it being a domesticated image, one that

<sup>55</sup> See Volf and McAnnally-Linz, *The Home of God*, 194.

<sup>56</sup> Volf and McAnnally-Linz, *The Home of God*, 209.

<sup>57</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *God in Creation: Ecological Doctrine of Creation* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985), 5.

<sup>58</sup> Ivana Noble, ‘The Common Home,’ in *Essays in Ecumenical Theology II: Conversations with Orthodoxy* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2022), 272–300, 273.

seeks to make sense of the whole reality and to put things in order. With its push toward tamedness, the metaphor leaves little room open for all the fragmentation, unruliness, messiness, and wild beauty that can be found in both human life and creation.<sup>59</sup> Human beings and creation are surprises to themselves, and, indeed, we are called to be open to such surprise.<sup>60</sup> And being open to the possibility of surprise within oneself also implies, I would suggest, being open to a surprise within the other, both human, non-human, and divine; it means leaving space for a 'strange God'.<sup>61</sup>

To respond to this objection, I would like to consider the biblical image of a feast to bring some unchained beauty to the all-too-tame symbol of home. A polysemantic notion, feast unambiguously accentuates God's inclusive approach to various kinds of people, including those who one would not normally like to invite to one's home. Interpreting the gospel narrative in the parable of the great dinner (Luke 14:15–24), Robert Goss convincingly shows that 'these meals metaphorically express God's promiscuous invitation of grace, compassion for all, and inversion of hierarchy'.<sup>62</sup> There is a clear intention to invite those who are unwelcome, expandable, and unfitting, forced to live at the margins of society, outside of decent people's homes.<sup>63</sup> The usefulness of feast as an image thus consists in its potential to relate to different dimensions of life, connecting the human with the non-human, the physical with the spiritual, the personal with the communal, the decent with the indecent, the tame with the wild, all across time and space.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, feast as an image recalls three particular issues that also are of theological and anthropological importance. First, feast is inseparable from human experiences, both positive and negative, celebrating and lamenting. In this sense, it touches upon truth and authenticity. If a feast is to turn out well, those participating in it must speak and act truthfully. Only then it can provide space for the genuine sharing of

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<sup>59</sup> See also Linn Marie Tonstad, *Queer Theology* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2018), 87 and Marcella Althaus-Reid, *Queer God* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), 110.

<sup>60</sup> See Tonstad, *Queer Theology*, 91.

<sup>61</sup> See Marcella Althaus-Reid, 'Queer I Stand: Lifting the Skirts of God,' in *The Sexual Theologian: Essays on Sex, God and Politics*, ed. Marcella Althaus-Reid and Linda Isherwood (London and New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 99–109, 104–105.

<sup>62</sup> Robert E. Goss, 'Luke,' in *The Queer Bible Commentary*, ed. Deryn Guest, Robert E. Goss, Mona West, and Thomas Bohache (London: SCM Press, 2006), 526–547, 533.

<sup>63</sup> See also Goss, 'Luke,' 532.

<sup>64</sup> See also Bargár, *Embodied Existence*, 152.



stories and seeking transformation. Next, a feast has an eschatological thrust and potentiality. It does not shy away from ‘dreaming of’ and ‘struggling toward’ relationships and realities that are not yet part of creation today, no matter how strange they might seem. Finally, feast fosters and sustains a certain kind of utopianism, going in the footsteps of the praxis of Jesus Christ in order to subvert the relations and structures in service of the empire. The dynamic between these three factors nourishes hope – a hope that transformation is possible and that the whole creation can have a common superabundant life in God.<sup>65</sup>

In this perspective, the New Jerusalem, understood in the framework of both home and feast, does not stand for a human project but represents a product of hope, rooted in a cosmic web of relationships. The epitome of truth is something to be received, embodied, and dwelt in. It anticipates a full realization of the intimate communion between God, people, and creation. It involves the ‘radical intimacy’ of all creatures, a dream that is profoundly shaped by and shapes the Christian imagination.<sup>66</sup> In this paper, I have tried to show that the notion of truth exceeds the strictly linguistic level to include the whole of human being. From a Christian perspective, truth is something to be both embodied and dwelt in. Relationship is key here. In this understanding, truth also is of utmost relevance for theological anthropology as it mediates the core of what it means to be human, namely, to be in an intimate relationship with oneself, other people, creation, and God. And that is our hope.

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<sup>65</sup> See Bargár, *Embodied Existence*, 152.

<sup>66</sup> The notion of ‘radical intimacy’ is borrowed from Willie James Jennings, *Acts* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017), 29.