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Editorial

Dear Colleagues.

We are pleased to present the latest issue of our journal. In the individual studies the authors present their findings in the fields of history, theology, exegesis and patrology. First study analyses the Christological hermeneutics of the image in the Horos of the Synod of Hiereia in light of patristic sources and Byzantine-Slavic reception. It examines how the iconoclastic rejection of the image arose from apophatic Christology and how the Second Council of Nicaea reinterpreted these principles into a positive theology of representation.. The author of second article answers on question of how a person can regain their original state is answered unequivocally in the Orthodox spiritual tradition: return is only possible through repentance. Author of next study looks at modern archaeology as a scientific discipline that confirmed the Bible is not only a mythological literature of antiquity, but also a historical source that also helped to uncover the cities of antiquity. Biblical cities. The authors of fourth article seeks to examine and describe the manner and system of catechizing catechumens in the Church during the period from the second to the fifth century. Numerous inconsistencies, as well as the frequent establishment of independent catechetical schools, led to a decline in catechesis, especially in the fourth and fifth centuries. The next study discusses contemporary life in society through the lens of the biblical verse Exodus 20:14, "Thou shalt not commit adultery (fornication)." Contemporary society has undergone significant liberalization. Extramarital relationships and unions are tolerated, and in some cases even behavior that was previously considered pathological and undesirable. Author of following article explores Saint Basil the Great's exegesis of the opening verses of the Gospel according to John, with particular attention to the concept of the Beginning (ἀρχῆ) of the Divine Word (Logos). The study highlights Basil's use of the John's phrase πρὸς τὸν Θεόν (pros ton Theon) to articulate the relational and personal orientation of the Son toward the Father, thereby affirming the Son's distinct hypostasis while maintaining consubstantiality with the Father. The last study brings together the spiritual experience of the Church as well as the author's personal experience with understanding the revealed love of God. The content is an expression of the essence and principle of the active love of the Holy Trinity.

We believe that the studies in this issue will enrich your intellectual perspectives with new knowledge and use in your creative scientific and academic work.

Pavol Kochan (editor)

THE CHRISTOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS OF THE IMAGE IN THE HOROS OF THE SYNOD OF HIEREIA (754) AND ITS PATRISTIC SOURCES

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INTRODUCTION

Christological hermeneutics of images is one of the key, yet most problematic topics of 8th-century Byzantine dogmatics. The Synod of Hieria (754), convened by Emperor Constantine V, represents a unique attempt at a systematic reinterpretation of Chalcedonian Christology in the context of the prohibition of sacred images. Its Horos, as a programmatic theological document, does not reject the Incarnation, but seeks to protect it from ontological division that could arise through visual mediation. In this horizon, the image is understood not as a neutral medium, but as a potential risk to the hypostatic unity of the Incarnate Word.

The aim of this study is to analyse the Christological structure and hermeneutical logic of Horos Hierieia, paying particular attention to its patristic sources (Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, Leo the Great) and their reinterpretation in the iconoclastic context. The study aims to show that Hieroeia is not just an administrative synod, but a theologically coherent system that uses the concepts of *communicatio idiomatum*, *ἕνωσις καθ' ὑπόστασιν*, and *ἀπαθὴς θεότης* to defend "spiritual worship". [Jn 4:23–24] At its core is a dogmatic exegesis of Chalcedon applied to the problem of images.

Methodologically, the work is based on three pillars:

- A historical-critical analysis of the text of Horos [2] and its linguistic structure;
- Patristic-comparative hermeneutics, which traces the continuity between the theology of Cyril of Alexandria and the later iconoclastic reading of the Incarnation;
- Systematic-theological synthesis, which compares the Christological understanding of images in Hierotheos with the iconodule arguments of John of Damascus and Theodore Studites.

The state of research shows that Hiereia has so far been perceived mainly as a negative counterpart to the Second Council of Nicaea (787). Classical literature [30], [29], [28] reduced iconoclasm to the political dimension of imperial theology. However, more recent research [9], [12], [19] shows that Horos contains a systematic Christology that follows Cyril of Alexandria, Leo the Great, and the theology of invisibility. Claudia Sode [2] has described it as a "theology of absence," while Carile [17] and Kerezova [23], [24] interpret it as a hermeneutics of apophatic presence.

Despite these shifts, there is still no comprehensive patristic-hermeneutic analysis showing how Hieroe's iconoclastic theology draws on its patristic precursors and how it reflects the Chalcedonian logic of unity and mediation.

The contribution of this study lies in linking philological and dogmatic analysis with the hermeneutics of the patristic tradition. The result is a new reading of Hiero's Horos as a Christological commentary on Chalcedon — a document that redefines the concept of image not as a visual representation but as a Christological category of presence and absence.

In a broader sense, the study contributes to current discussions on how Christian theology connects the invisibility of God with his revelation in the flesh — a question that transcends the boundaries of the Byzantine period and remains relevant in today's theology of symbols and media.

STATUS QUAESTIONIS

The study of Christological hermeneutics of images in iconoclastic texts has been one of the most dynamically developing fields of Byzantine research in the last two decades. While older literature [30], [29], [28] interpreted the synod in Hiereia (754) as a political-ecclesiastical initiative of Emperor Constantine V, more recent studies show that the Horos of the synod is a philosophically and theologically coherent text, which stands on deep patristic foundations and represents its own Christological hermeneutics of images (Brubaker & Haldon 2011; Humphreys 2021). [9], [12], [13]

A fundamental shift in research came with the publication of the critical edition *Die ikonoklastische Synode von Hiereia 754*, [2] which stabilized the Greek text and made it possible to identify explicit and implicit references to Chalcedon (451) and the patristic tradition of Cyril of Alexandria, Gregory of Nyssa, and Leo the Great. Krannich and Sode showed that Horos' terminology –

especially the terms εικόν, ὑπόστασις, φύσις, and ἔνωσις – is not a rhetorical figure but refers to the internal structure of Chalcedonian thought.

On this textual basis, a new generation of research has emerged that understands Hieria as a systematic theological document, not just a political statement. L. Brubaker and J. Haldon [9] point out in their synthesis Byzantium in the Iconoclast Era that iconoclastic argumentation is based on the exegesis of Chalcedon and has a consistent dogmatic framework. M. Humphreys [12], [13] develops this line of thought in his compendium *A Companion to Byzantine Iconoclasm* and interprets the Hieremias as a "hermeneutical defense of hypostatic unity through the negation of images."

A key contribution is the work of K. Georgiadis, [19] who compares the interpretation of biblical texts in Hierotheos (754) and Nicaea II (787). Georgiadis shows that in iconoclastic exegesis, truth (ἀλήθεια) acquires a Christological meaning: the "true image" (ἀληθινὴ εἰκόν) is not visual but Eucharistic. This creates a model in Hieria in which physical representation is understood as a threat to *communicatio idiomatum*, and thus to the ontological integrity of the person of Christ.

This interpretation is supplemented by P. Metaxas, [25] who emphasizes the eschatological dimension of iconoclastic Christology. According to him, Hieria shifts the emphasis from visible representation to the expectation of future revelation—the image as an "absent symbol of presence," that is, an apophatic form of revelation theology.

Theology of mediation has also brought new impulses. K. Giakoumis [11], [20] in the *Palgrave Handbook of Image Studies* interprets Byzantine iconoclasm as a "theology of mediation," in which the question of the image is closely related to the question of the medium. Hierotheos rejects the visual mediation of Christ precisely because the only perfect mediation is already taking place in his person – ἔνωσις καθ' ὑπόστασιν.

In the same vein, C. Hovorun [21] defines iconoclasm in his monograph *Political Orthodoxies* as a crisis of mediation in Eastern Christianity: the tension between the theology of the invisible God and the sacramental mediation of his presence. Hovorun shows that Hieria represents a "negative theology of the image," whose goal is not to deny the senses, but to protect the mystery of hypostatic unity from ontological fragmentation.

From a patristic perspective, recent research [23], [24], [15] clarifies that iconoclastic hermeneutics draws directly from the tradition of Cyril of Alexandria. Kerezova analyzes Damascene's work *De imaginibus* in comparison with Hierotheus and points out that both camps were based on the same Christological foundation: one person in two natures, but with a different understanding of the mode of representation. Anatolios [15] adds that Byzantine Christology in the 8th century understood representation not as a substitute, but as a participatory presence (*μετουσία κατ' ὑπόστασιν*) – a concept that would later be canonized in iconodule theology.

M. C. Carile [17] in his study *Holy Icon or Sacred Body?* expands the understanding of iconoclastic hermeneutics to include a political-theological aspect: in the 8th century, the image of the emperor became a theological mirror of the image of Christ. This introduces a dimension of power and representation into the iconoclastic debate, which reinforces its Christological and ecclesiological function.

A fundamental contribution to the current debate was made by S. Coakley, [18] who in her article *Apophatic Mediation and the Iconoclastic Crisis* interprets iconoclasm as an apophatic hermeneutics of mediation. According to her, Hieria formulates a "spiritual epistemology of invisibility" – knowledge of God that is achieved precisely through the rejection of images.

L. Brubaker [16] in the *Oxford Handbook of Byzantine Theology* complements this approach by understanding iconoclasm as a "hermeneutics of dogma" – an attempt to preserve the purity of faith through the controlled absence of images. Brubaker points out that Hieria takes up the patristic logic of Cyril of Alexandria and Leo the Great but applies it to a new problem: the visibility of the Incarnation.

Finally, A. Anagnostou-Laoutides [14] develops the dimension of religious aesthetics, showing that iconoclasm is a form of "negative beauty" – the aesthetics of invisibility as spiritual purity.

METHODOLOGY AND SOURCES

The methodological framework of this study is based on the conviction that the hermeneutics of images in the Synod of Hieria (754) cannot be understood without linking three levels: biblical exegesis, dogmatic theology, and patristic reception.

The analysis therefore combines historical-critical, patristic-comparative, and systematic-theological approaches, which make it possible to reconstruct the internal logic of iconoclastic Christology as a theological language of invisibility.

The basis of the study is the critical edition *Die ikonoklastische Synode von Hieria 754*, [2] which contains the Greek text, German translation, and detailed commentary.

This edition allows us to trace lexical and syntactic parallels between Horos and the dogmatic formulations of Chalcedon (451), with particular emphasis on the terms *ὑπόστασις*, *φύσις*, *εἰκὼν*, and *ἀλήθεια*.

The analysis examines how Hieroe's text uses the terminology of "unmixedness" (*ἀσυγχύτως*) and "indivisibility" (*ἀδιαίρετως*) to formulate the prohibition of visual representation of Christ.

To verify the historical context, the sources *Acta Conciliorum Oecumenicorum* [6] and *Sacrorum Conciliorum Collectio* [3] are also used, which allow for a comparison of the official formulations with their later reception at Nicaea II (787).

From a hermeneutical point of view, the model of text as a dogmatic argument [12], [13] is applied, according to which Horos is not only a normative decree but also a theological exegesis that interprets Scripture through Christological categories.

At this level, the biblical references [Jn 4:23–24; Heb 9:11–14] used by Hieria to justify spiritual worship are analyzed.

The second phase of the research focuses on patristic sources and theological parallels.

The aim is to identify the authors from whom Hieronymus draws his Christological concepts and how he reinterprets them.

The following lines are compared in particular:

- Cyril of Alexandria (*In Joannis Evangelium, De recta fide*) – the unity of the Word and the flesh (*μία φύσις τοῦ θεοῦ λόγου σεσαρκωμένη*);
- Leo the Great (*Tomus ad Flavianum*) – the concept of *communicatio idiomatum* and its significance for understanding the person of Christ;
- Gregory of Nyssa (*Contra Eunomium*) – the theology of the invisible image and the relationship between the prototype and the image;

- John of Damascus (*De imaginibus*) – iconodule hermeneutics, which reverses the logic of Hieroe through the concept of ὁμοίωσις κατ' οὐσίαν.

The analysis tracks how iconoclastic exegesis deals with these sources – often quoting them indirectly, adopting their language but changing their theological orientation.

For example, μία φύσις in Cyril is understood in Hierieia not as a reason for representation, but as a reason for its impossibility – "for he who became visible through incarnation remains invisible according to his divinity" (ὁ σαρκωθεὶς ὁρᾶται, ὁ δὲ κατὰ θεότητα ἀόρατός ἐστιν).

In this way, Hierieia creates an apophatic reinterpretation of the Christology of Cyril and Leo, giving rise to a new type of negative theology of the image.

The third level of research focuses on the categories of mediation and presence.

Based on the works of Coakley, [18] Hovorun, [21] and Anatolia, [15] a model is developed according to which the image is not understood as representation but as a theological problem of mediation.

In Hieria, the concept of εἰκῶν is not rejected for aesthetic reasons, but for ontological reasons: the image as a material entity cannot mediate hypostatic unity because it is not mediable.

From this point of view, iconoclasm is a dogmatic protection of sacramental realism, not its negation.

The analysis also uses the methodology of intertextual theology (Humphreys 2021; Giakoumis 2021), [12], [13], [11], [20] which shows how Hierieia takes up and transforms biblical texts through dogmatic argumentation.

The synthesis combines patristic theology with the newer ontology of the image, [16], [17], [30] thereby reconstructing a hermeneutical model in which the question of representation becomes a question of presence.

The conclusion of the methodological section can be expressed in three theses:

- Hieria interprets Christ as the "living image" (ζῶσα εἰκῶν) of the Father, whose visibility in the body is the only legitimate theophany;
- The rejection of the image is an expression of the protection of *communicatio idiomatum*, not a negation of the Incarnation;

- Patristic sources show that iconoclasm follows a deep tradition of apophatic Christology, which can be understood as a spiritual exegesis of Chalcedon.

HIEREIA 754 AND THE PATRISTIC ROOTS OF THE HERMENEUTICS OF THE IMAGE

The Council of Hieria (754) represents a turning point in the development of Byzantine theology, in which the Christological definition of Chalcedon (451) was reinterpreted as a normative framework for understanding image and revelation. Although Horos Hierieie arose in the context of Constantine V's imperial reformism, its theological core cannot be reduced to political ideology. As the edition *Die ikonoklastische Synode von Hierieia 754* [2] shows, the text exhibits a high degree of dogmatic precision and can be read as a systematic treatise on the invisibility of God in the Incarnation.

The introductory sections of Horos formulate the central thesis: "Ὁ Χριστὸς ὧν εἰκὼν τοῦ Πατρὸς ἀκαταλήπτου καὶ ἀοράτου, οὐκ ἔστιν ἀπεικονίσει ὡς ἄνθρωπον" – "Christ, who is the image of the incomprehensible and invisible Father, cannot be depicted as a human being". [2] This statement reveals an internal tension between two levels: between the ontological icon (Christ as the eternal image of the Father) and the visual icon (the artistic representation of Christ). Fundamentally, therefore, it is not a question of negating the image as such, but of a dogmatic distinction between two types of representation: εἰκὼν κατ' οὐσίαν and εἰκὼν κατ' ὕλην.

According to Georgiadis, [19] Hierieia applies the Chalcedonian paradigm of two natures in one person to the question of representation: an image as a material entity cannot convey hypostatic unity because it is not reproducible. This argument reveals the basic theological logic of Hierieia – apophatic protection of the Incarnation. God became man, but his person is not an object of visual mediation; his Incarnation is a unique and unrepeatable act that can be worshipped, not imitated.

As Humphreys [12], [13] has shown, Horos' language directly follows the patristic formulas of Cyril of Alexandria and Leo the Great, but with an inverse hermeneutic orientation. In his work *De recta fide*, Cyril emphasizes that "ὁ λόγος σαρξ ἐγένετο οὐχὶ μεταβολῆ, ἀλλὰ κοινωνία" ("The Word became flesh not by transformation, but by communion" – PG 75, 1293). Hierotheus accepts

this formulation but shifts its emphasis: if the unity of the Word and the flesh is inviolable, then any attempt at visual mediation undermines the very principle of *communicatio idiomatum*.

A similar logic can be found in Leo the Great's text (*Tomus ad Flavianum*), which states that "*invisibilis divinitas Verbi per carnem visibiliter declarata est*" (PL 54, 761). Leo understands Christ's visibility as a consequence of the Incarnation; *Hiereia*, however, reverses the order: the visibility of the body does not imply the representability of the Godhead. This shift represents a negative Christology of revelation, [18] according to which invisibility is an expression of the perfect unity of the incarnate Word.

Particularly striking are the parallels with Gregory of Nyssa, who in *Contra Eunomium* II, 14 says: "*εἰκὼν ἐστὶν ἢ φύσις ἢ ἀοράτου κατὰ τὴν ιδιότητα τοῦ λογισμοῦ*" ("the image of the invisible is in reason, not in matter"). *Hiereia* directly uses this anthropological-theological scheme: an image is legitimate only if it is spiritual. This explains why the synod repeatedly uses the formula "*πνευματικὴ λατρεία*" [spiritual worship, Jn 4:23–24] as key evidence—the visual representation of Christ is understood as a regression to material worship, while true worship is to be performed "in Spirit and truth."

According to recent research, [16], [23], [24], [21] *Hieroe* can be understood as a text that develops an apophatic hermeneutics of presence. This is a theological paradox: by rejecting visual presence, ontological presence is protected. *Hiereia* does not deny that Christ is present but claims that he is present in a way that transcends sensory perception.

This principle can be expressed by Cyril's formula: "*ἡ θεία φύσις ἀπερίγραπτος ἐστίν, ἀλλ' ἐν τῇ σαρκὶ ὁράται*" ("divine nature is indescribable, but it is seen in the flesh" – PG 76, 1089). *Hierotheos* implicitly adopts this formula, but emphasizes its first part: *ἀπερίγραπτος ἐστίν* – incomprehensible. In doing so, he creates a theology that stands on the border between revelation and mystery, between the visible and the invisible.

According to Coakley [18] and Giakoumis, [11], [20] this hermeneutics is also a form of "mediological discipline": visual absence becomes a spiritual medium. The image is replaced by the word, prayer, and the Eucharistic gesture. Hovorun [21] speaks in this context of a "crisis of mediation"—a crisis that *Hiereia* resolves not by prohibiting communication, but by transcending it: *ὁ λόγος σαρκὶ*

ἐφανερώθη, ἀλλ' οὐ γραφῆ ἀπεικονίζεται ("The Word was revealed in the flesh, but cannot be captured in an image").

From a philological point of view, [2] it is noteworthy that Hierieia never uses the verb προσκυνέω ("to worship") in connection with an image, but exclusively in connection with Christ. This detail confirms that the aim is not to deny worship, but to determine its legitimate object. Hierieia distinguishes between λατρεία (cult) and τιμὴ (reverence), rejecting the idea that an image could be the bearer of divine presence.

From a dogmatic point of view, this means that iconoclastic theology shifts the emphasis from material representation to sacramental presence. As Anatolios [15] notes, Hierieia gives rise to the concept of the "Eucharistic image" – Christ is the only visible image because he himself is present in the mystery of the Eucharist. This shifts the issue of the image from the realm of aesthetics to that of soteriology.

Horos Hierieia's Christological hermeneutics rests on a threefold foundation:

- The Chalcedonian definition of the unity of natures, applied to the question of visual representation;
- The patristic tradition of Cyril, Leo the Great, and Gregory of Nyssa, reinterpreted in an apophatic horizon;
- On a mediological shift in which the cult of the image is replaced by the cult of presence.

Hierotheos thus creates a theological model that can be characterized as apophatic iconology – the teaching that the true image of Christ is not painted but eucharistically present.

THE RECEPTION OF HIEREIA IN NICAEA II (787) AND THE TRIUMPH OF ORTHODOXY (843): THE THEOLOGICAL REHABILITATION OF IMAGES

The reaction of the Second Council of Nicaea (787) to the Synod of Hierieia represents a fundamental hermeneutical shift in the history of Byzantine theology.

While Hierieia (754) builds on the apophatic logic of invisibility, Nicaea II derives a positive theology of representation from the same Christological basis. In both cases, it is an interpretation of Chalcedon, but with a different understanding of how hypostatic unity manifests itself in the material world.

As Richard Price [5] points out in his critical edition of The Acts of the Second Council of Nicaea (787), the fathers of Nicaea II did not deny the basic dogmatic principles of Hierotheus. On the contrary, they accepted them but reversed their meaning.

If Hierotheus claims that "ὁ τῆς σαρκός χαρακτήρ οὐκ ἔχει κοινωνίαν τῆ θεότητι" ("the image of the body does not participate in divinity" – Krannich et al., 2002, p. 38), Nicaea II responds with the formula: "ἡ τῆς σαρκώσεως εἰκὼν κοινωνεῖ τοῦ ὑποκειμένου" ("the image of the incarnation participates in the prototype" – [3, 269C]).

The key difference lies not in ontology but in hermeneutics: Hieria understands the image as a substitute representation, while Nicaea II understands it as a participatory representation.

This difference is analyzed in detail by Anna Kerezova, [23], [24] according to whom Nicaea II develops a soteriological model of the image.

The image has value not because it depicts the material form of Christ, but because it mediates his salvific presence.

Kerezova points out that both texts share a common basis – *communicatio idiomatum* – but in Hierotheus it is understood as a theological boundary, while in Nicaea it is understood as a sacramental bridge between the invisible and the visible.

Metaxas [25] speaks in this context of "eschatological realism":

Hieria tends towards transcendental tension ("Christ is present but invisible"), while Nicaea II tends towards sacramental realism ("Christ is present because he was incarnated").

Thus, the image becomes part of the theology of incarnation, and its worship becomes a consequence of dogma, not a violation of it.

Unlike Hierotheus, who argued from a position of negation ("ἡ ὕλη ἀνάξιός ἐστι τῆς θεότητος" – "matter is not worthy of divinity"), Nicaea II interprets matter in the spirit of incarnation.

John of Damascus, in his Three Treatises on Divine Icons (*De imaginibus*), declares: "Τολμῶ γράφειν τὸν ὀραθὲντα σαρκί, οὐχ ὡς ἀπεριγράπτου, ἀλλ' ὡς δι' ἡμᾶς περιγραφέντα" ("I dare to depict Him who was seen in the flesh, not as indescribable, but as describable for us" – *De imag.* I, 16).

This statement became the hermeneutical pillar of Nicaea II.

The fathers of the council cited it as proof that the Incarnation itself makes Christ “describable” (περιγραπτός), not according to his divinity, but according to his humanity. This dogmatically determines the boundary between worship (λατρεία) and veneration (προσκύνησις τιμητική). The image is worthy of veneration because it points to the prototype that is revealed in it.

Humphreys [13], [12] calls this shift “the iconodule rehabilitation of apophatism”: Nicaea II does not deny God's invisibility, but extends it to include the possibility of visible testimony.

In other words, Hierotheus' apophatic “no” is transformed in Nicaea into a cataphatic “yes” – the image is possible if it is understood as a sacramental sign of God's presence. The fundamental hermeneutical concept becomes πρότυπον (prototype). As the council says: “Ἡ τιμὴ τῆς εἰκόνοσ ἐπὶ τὸ πρότυπον διαβαίνει” (“The honor given to the image passes to its prototype” – [3, 377D]).

This statement forms the basis of the visual theology of presence, which after 843 (the Triumph of Orthodoxy) became the norm throughout Eastern Christianity. According to Brubaker, [16] this is the canonization of the theology of the image: from this moment on, the image is understood as an integral part of the soteriological order.

The Triumph of Orthodoxy (843) – celebrated on the first Sunday of Lent – represents the liturgical unification of two previously opposing theologies.

Liturgical texts from this period (Synodikon Ortodoxie) no longer cite Hierotheus as heresy, but as a “false understanding of unity,” thereby implicitly acknowledging that its dogmatic foundations were not unorthodox, but merely one-sided.

According to A. Kerezová, [23], [24] this is a “liturgical reconciliation of Chalcedon with Hierotheus.” Where Hierotheus protected God's transcendence, the Triumph of Orthodoxy reopened it through an image that became “the visible sacrament of the invisible.”

This process can be understood as a hermeneutic synthesis: Hierieia = theology of invisibility → Nicaea II = theology of visibility → Triumph of Orthodoxy = theology of presence. As Brubaker [16] and Pentcheva [30] point out, Byzantine art after 843 no longer functions as a “didactic illustration” but as a visual anamnesis – the image as a monument that makes past salvific events ontologically present.

This development had a fundamental influence on the formation of liturgical space. The iconostasis, which evolved from the *templon* in the 10th–11th centuries, is a direct architectural consequence of this theological development: visual mediation becomes a liturgical medium between the invisible and the visible. As Carile [17] emphasizes, this is a “visual ecclesiology” in which the icon does not separate God from the world but unites the heavenly and the earthly in a single image.

From the perspective of systematic theology, [15], [18], [21] Nicaea II can be understood as the first formal attempt to formulate a theology of mediation. The image is understood as a “participatory form of presence” (*μετουσία της παρουσίας*), which unites ontology and aesthetics in a single principle.

While the *Hiereia* defended the unity of the hypostasis by excluding duplication, Nicaea II protects it by distinguishing between the presence and its iconic reflection. This hermeneutical transition has lasting consequences for all of Byzantine thought. Giakoumis [20], [11] speaks of a “mediological turn” – images became the theological language of the presence. In this perspective, iconoclasm and iconodulism do not appear as opposites, but as two phases of the same dogmatic reflection: one emphasizes transcendence (*Hiereia*), the other immanence (Nicaea II). Their synthesis in the *Triumph of Orthodoxy* forms the basis of the Eastern understanding of manifestation: the visible as the sacramental sign of the invisible.

The reception of the *Hiereia* in Nicaea II and subsequently in the *Triumph of Orthodoxy* represents the transformation of an apophatic Christology into a sacramental theology of the image. *Hierachia* protected the mystery of the Incarnation by negating the image, Nicaea II celebrates it through the image. However, both share the same Christological basis: the notion of hypostatic unity. This confirms that iconoclastic theology was not a heretical deviation, but an extreme orthodoxy – an attempt to maintain dogma in its pure transcendent form. Nicaea II transformed this transcendence into an immanent presence: the image became the sacramental vehicle of God’s revelation.

BYZANTINE-SLAVIC RECEPTION (9TH–13TH CENTURY): TRANSFORMATION OF THE THEOLOGY OF IMAGE INTO AN ICONOGRAPHIC NORM

The rehabilitation of the image at Nicaea II (787) and its liturgical consolidation in the Triumph of Orthodoxy (843) created the theological basis for the flourishing of Byzantine and subsequently Slavic iconography.

In the 9th–13th centuries, the dogmatic theology of the image was transformed into a visual norm, which became part not only of the liturgy, but also of the spiritual and cultural self-expression of Eastern Christianity.

This process can be described as the inculturation of the theology of the incarnation into the image, where concepts such as hypostatic unity, prototype, or presence were transformed into iconographic practice.

According to Avenarius [1] and Brubaker, [9] Byzantine iconography after 843 had the character of a systematic theology in the image.

Already in the 9th century, in works such as the Menologion of Basil II. or the Chludovsky Psalter (around 850–870) shows an effort to visually express theological polemics: the iconodule argumentation here becomes a pictorial canon.

The depictions of Christ Pantocrator, Deesis, the Mother of God of the type Hodegetria or Oranta are not only artistic, but also dogmatic formulations – visual transcripts of Chalcedon.

As Giakoumis [11], [20] points out, the iconographic form follows the same hermeneutical principles as the dogmatic text.

The principle of ἀδιαίρετως καὶ ἀσυγχύτως (“undivided and unmixed”) is applied in the image: the two natures of Christ – divine and human – are present but not mixed.

This principle can be visually identified, for example, in the composition of the Pantocrator, where Christ blesses with his right hand (a symbol of divine power) and holds the Gospel with his left (a symbol of the incarnate Word).

The icon thus embodies theology, not illustrates it. The catechetical function of the image also played a fundamental role here. In the missionary context of Great Moravia and Bulgaria, the image conveyed not only aesthetic but also didactic value. Avenarius [1] emphasizes that iconography became a “visual homily”, the theological content of which was understandable even to an illiterate believer. It is about the connection *lex orandi – lex credendi – lex videndi*: what is prayed and believed is seen.

The transmission of theological principles to the Slavic environment begins with the mission of Constantine-Cyril and Methodius (863–885), who transferred

the Byzantine dogmatic tradition to the language and liturgy of the newly baptized peoples.

As new studies show, [12], [13], [17] Cyril's translation activity was not only linguistic, but also theological – it consisted in the iconization of the Word. Slavic writing was understood as the equivalent of an image: writing as a theophany of the logos. This concept corresponds to the Byzantine idea of λόγος εἰκονικός – word as image.

In the environment of Kievan Rus', Bulgaria and Serbia, the Byzantine model of the theology of the image was adapted in specific cultural forms. Temple decoration was guided by the so-called iconographic program – a visual structure that was based on the dogmatic hierarchy. The central domes depicted the Pantocrator, the apses depicted the Mother of God as the “temple of the Word,” and the walls depicted prophets and saints—creating a theological space in which heaven and earth were united through image.

In the 12th–13th centuries, Byzantine-Slavic iconography stabilized as the normative language of theology. As Pentcheva [30] shows, the image ceased to be understood as a symbol, but as a present event—*θεοφάνεια ἐν ὕλῃ*, a revelation in matter. In the icons of the Kiev School (e.g., Spas Neredica, the Church of the Savior in Novgorod), a deep emphasis on sensual spirituality can be observed: light, a golden fund, open faces—all this expresses the dogma of *communicatio idiomatum* in visual form.

Although Hierieia (754) was officially condemned in history, its dogmatic terminology survived in the iconodule tradition – albeit reinterpreted. As Brubaker [16] shows, many of the concepts of Horus – *εἰκὼν ἀληθινή, πνευματικὴ λατρεία, ἀδιάκριτος ἔνωσις* – appear in later iconodule treatises, but with a changed soteriological orientation. The prohibition of the image was transformed into its exaltation: “true image” (*ἀληθινὴ εἰκὼν*) no longer meant invisible, but visibly participating in the divine presence.

This continuity is most clearly manifested in the works of John of Damascus, who became the theological patron of iconoduleism. His sentence: “For God, being invisible, was manifested in the flesh, that he might be made visible” (*De imag. I, 8*) is a mirror image of Hierieia: “He who became visible through the incarnation is invisible according to his divinity” (*Horos 754*).

The Slavic tradition synthesized these two formulas: God remains transcendent, but in Christ he became permanently present. This principle

became the basis of the so-called theology of light (φωτολογία τῆς χάριτος), which dominated later hesychast iconography. Here the concept of image is associated with the energies of God (Palamas, 14th century), but its roots go directly to the tension between Hieria and Nicea II. As Coakley [18] and Hovorun [21] emphasize, Byzantine-Slavic theology of image develops an ontology of presence in which the visual is understood as a sacramental medium. The Eucharist and the icon become parallel spaces of revelation – one sacramental, the other visual.

This parallelism has deep roots in Hieria, which understood the Eucharist as the only “true image” of Christ (ἀληθινὴ εἰκὼν τοῦ σώματος τοῦ Χριστοῦ). In Slavic reception, this concept expanded: the image became a eucharistic epiphany, a place where the invisible God reveals himself in a material symbol. Giakoumis [11], [20] calls this phenomenon a “theology of mediation” – iconography functions as an ontological bridge between theology and liturgy. Each image is thus interpreted as a place of revelation (τόπος θεοφανεῖας), thus translating the Byzantine dogmatics of the incarnation into cultural practice. The Slavic world adopted this paradigm as an integral part of spiritual identity: iconography is not an ornament of the temple, but its theological core.

The Byzantine-Slavic reception of the theology of the image represents a synthesis of two poles – apophatic invisibility (Hieria) and sacramental presence (Nicea II). In the iconography of the 9th–13th centuries, these principles merged into a visual theology of the incarnation: the image as a place where the invisible becomes present. Thus, dogmatic content was transformed into visual form, and theology became a language of color, light, and space. As Pentcheva [30] concludes, “the icon is not a mirror of the world, but a window to eternity” – and therein lies its enduring patristic legacy.

CONCLUSION AND THEOLOGICAL IMPLICATIONS

Research confirms that the Synod of Hieraea (754) was not just a political-ecclesiastical intervention in matters of worship, but a coherent dogmatic reflection on the limits of God’s visibility. At the heart of its teaching is not the rejection of the image, but the concern for preserving the hypostatic unity of the incarnate Word.

Hieraea therefore formulates an apophatic Christology of the image, which understands visual representation as theologically inadequate because it cannot

convey the ontological fullness of the incarnation. On this basis, Nicea II (787) carried out a hermeneutical conversion: what Hieraea had protected by negation, Nicea preserved by affirmation. The prohibition of images becomes a call to sacramental visibility.

As Price [5] shows, the fathers of Nicea II did not reject the logic of Hieraea, but supplemented it with the category of prototype and participation (κοινωνία τοῦ πρωτύπου). Thus they transformed the dogma of the unity of natures into an ontology of presence – Christ is present not only in the Word and the Eucharist, but also in the image, which is his “visible witness.”

This hermeneutic continuity continues in the Byzantine-Slavic tradition, which unified the patristic heritage into a visual theology of the Incarnation. In the iconography of the 9th–13th centuries, dogmatic principles were transformed into norms of image:

- ἀδιαιρέτως καὶ ἀσυγχύτως – “undivided and unmixed” – became the canon of composition;
- προσκύνησις τιμητική – veneration of the image – became a liturgical gesture;
- and the concept of ἀληθινὴ εἰκὼν – true image – acquired a Eucharistic meaning.

The image became the place where the soteriology of the Incarnation was translated into visual language. From a theological perspective, the development from Hieraea to Byzantine-Slavic iconology can be described by three formulas:

- Apophatic phase (Hieraea 754):

God is invisible - the image can lead to the division of the hypostasis.

"Ὁ Θεὸς ἀπερίγραπτος, οὐ ἀπαράειται."

- Sacramental phase (Nicaea II, 787):

God has become visible – the image participates in the prototype.

"Ἡ τιμὴ τῆς εἰκόνης ἐπὶ τὸ προτόπιον διαβαίνει."

- Eucharistic phase (9th–13th centuries):

God is present - the image is an epiphany of the invisible.

"Ἡ εἰκὼν γειτός τόπος θεοφανείας."

This three-stage development shows that iconoclasm and iconodulism do not constitute oppositions, but dialectical poles of the same dogmatic dynamic: the effort to preserve the uniqueness of the incarnation within the boundaries of the sensory world.

In the contemporary theology of the image, [18], [21], [15] this Byzantine synthesis becomes the starting point for the reflection on the mediology and ontology of revelation. The prohibition of Hieraea acquires a new meaning: it warns against the reduction of the incarnation to an aesthetic phenomenon. Nicea II, on the other hand, opens the way for a sacramental aesthetics in which the visual is not a decoration, but a participatory form of theology. The Byzantine-Slavic tradition united these directions into one principle – iconic soteriology: salvation is accomplished through the image, because God became the image of man.

From this perspective, the research confirms itself as topical also for today's patristics: it opens a dialogue between dogmatic theology, aesthetics and mediology, while showing that the Byzantine tradition did not recognize the contradiction between faith and image, but their mutual connection in the mystery of presence.

Based on these findings, three prospective lines for the continuation of research are opened:

- Comparative theology of mediation:
comparison of iconoclastic apophaticism with Latin scholastic theology of representation (e.g. in Thomas Aquinas and Bonaventure);
- Liturgical phenomenology of visual presence:
analysis of the parallelism between the Eucharist and the icon as forms of anamnesis – the making present of salvation;
- Modern mediology of revelation:
investigation of how Byzantine theology of image can be applied in contemporary media theory, aesthetics, and theology of culture. [11], [20], [17]

SUMMARY

The Synod of Hieraea, the Second Council of Nicaea, and their reception in Eastern iconography present a unified theological story about the image of God – about the tension between invisibility and visibility, transcendence and presence. The apophatic rejection of Hieraea became the positive confession of Nicea II and, finally, the visual spirituality of Slavic Orthodoxy. As the tradition, confirmed by the Fathers from Cyril of Alexandria to John of Damascus, shows, the true image is not what it depicts, but what it reveals.

The Byzantine-Slavic tradition thus shows that dogma can be expressed not only in words, but also in color, light, and silence – and that the theology of the image remains today a challenge to understanding the mystery of God, who is “ἀόρατος καὶ ὄρατός, ἀκατάληπτος καὶ ἐμφανής” – invisible and yet revealed.

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THE CHRISTOLOGICAL HERMENEUTICS OF THE IMAGE IN THE HOROS OF THE SYNOD OF HIEREIA (754) AND ITS PATRISTIC SOURCES

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Abstract

Aim: The study aims to analyze the Christological hermeneutics of the image in the Horos of the Synod of Hiereia (754) in light of patristic sources and Byzantine-Slavic reception. It examines how the iconoclastic rejection of the image arose from apophatic Christology and how the Second Council of Nicaea (787) reinterpreted these principles into a positive theology of representation.

Method: The research employs an interdisciplinary approach combining historical-critical examination of sources (Krannich – Schubert – Sode, 2002), philological exegesis of Greek texts (Horos Hierieiae, Acta Nicaena II), and patristic-dogmatic comparison (John of Damascus, Cyril of Alexandria, Theodore the Studite). The results are interpreted within the framework of systematic image theology and mediology (Brubaker 2022; Coakley 2022; Hovorun 2022).

Results: The findings demonstrate that Hiereia does not deny the Incarnation but interprets it as a transcendent revelation beyond visible mediation. Nicaea II transformed this apophatic framework into a sacramental theology of the image, where the icon becomes a mode of presence, not substitution. In Byzantine-Slavic tradition, these principles developed into canonical iconographic norms — the image as theology of presence.

Conclusion: Hiereia and Nicaea II represent two hermeneutical poles of the same Christological dogma: the former protects hypostatic unity through negation, the latter through affirmation. Their synthesis in the Triumph of Orthodoxy (843) produced an ontology of manifestation, where the image embodies the invisible.

Originality: This article offers a novel reading of iconoclasm as an apophatic form of orthodoxy rather than heresy, highlighting the continuity between Hiereia, Nicaea II, and Byzantine-Slavic theology as a unified evolution of the theology of presence.

Keywords

Hiereia 754; Second Council of Nicaea; icon; Byzantine theology; apophaticism; hypostatic unity; Eucharistic ontology; patristic hermeneutics

THE HOLY MYSTERY OF REPENTANCE AND HOLY CONFESSION

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INTRODUCTION

In the theological tradition of the Orthodox Church, it is generally accepted that all sacraments – holy mysteries – have a fundamental and direct relationship to human salvation. The Holy Mystery of Baptism introduces man into the Eucharistic community of the Church, frees him from the original sin of our ancestors, and grants him a new spiritual existence through rebirth in Christ.

However, since man is subject to weakness and repeatedly falls into sin during his earthly life, God, who in his providence knows human frailty, has granted man the gift of repentance so that he can return to God and regain full spiritual integrity.

The holy sacrament of repentance thus represents God's economy of mercy, through which man receives forgiveness for his countless sins and, most importantly, restores communion with God and the Church.

In this way, through the holy mystery of repentance and holy confession, forgiveness and the removal of sins are achieved, and at the same time, the disturbed relationship between man and God is restored. According to Nicholas Matsoukas, it is a unified sacrament in which believers can personally turn away from deeds that contradict God's will and from a life contrary to nature. As the ecclesial body, the Church, "as a Eucharistic community through the charismatic bearer, who is the bishop, and after him the other presbyters, grants forgiveness of sins after their confession." [6]

THE HOLY MYSTERY OF REPENTANCE

Repentance means a change of mind, a change of attitude, and a whole new way of life. In essence, it expresses the bringing of one's life and deeds into harmony with God's will. If there is no concrete repentance manifested in deeds, then one cannot speak of true confession; conversely, internal repentance alone,

without sacramental confession of sins, is not sufficient for salvation. The Apostle Paul testifies: "for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." [Rim 3:23]

In order for a proper and spiritually effective confession to take place, adequate preparation and an appropriate attitude of contrition of heart and concentration of mind are required. Baptism is a sacrament that is not repeated, while the sacrament of penance can be received by the faithful as many times as they feel the spiritual need for it.

This sacrament was instituted by our Lord Jesus Christ himself when, after his resurrection, he appeared to his disciples and gave them the power to forgive sins, saying: "He breathed on them and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.' [Jn 20:22-23] From Christ's disciples, this power to 'bind and loose' was passed on to the bishops and, through them, to the priests of the Church.

The New Testament of the Holy Scriptures states that Saint John the Baptist "went into the wilderness, where he baptised and preached baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins." [Mk 1:4] Even the Lord Jesus Christ himself, though sinless, received baptism from St. John the Prophet, the Forerunner, [Mk 1:9] to emphasise the necessity and seriousness of this mystery. During Pentecost, the Apostle Peter called out to the gathered people, saying, "Repent, and let each one of you be baptised in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." [Sk 2:38]

St. Ignatius of Antioch (early 2nd century) emphasises that for the true reconciliation of a sinful person with God, the intervention of the bishop is necessary and irreplaceable. He expresses this in the following words: "The Lord forgives all who repent and unite themselves with God and with the community of the bishop." [4]

From the earliest times, there has been a close connection between the holy mystery of repentance and the Holy Eucharist, which is the centre and culmination of all the sacraments. The Didache of the Twelve Apostles states: "Confess your sins in the Church, and do not approach prayer with a bad conscience. This is the way of life." [2]

St. John Chrysostom urges believers to confess their sins to priests who have been appointed for this purpose, since "neither men nor angels have the power to forgive sins." [5]

In the early days, the confession of believers took place publicly, in a gathering of believers, so that they could prepare themselves to receive Holy Communion and thus participate in the celebration of the Holy Eucharist. [3]

HOLY CONFESSION

In the 3rd century, an order of penitents was established, [1] which led to the appointment of special "presbyters for penance" [3] who were entrusted with the ministry of hearing the confessions of the faithful. However, this institution was abolished in the 4th century by Nectarius, Archbishop of Constantinople. However, this did not in any way weaken or abolish the power to forgive sins, which, according to apostolic tradition, continues to belong to priests and bishops. [1]

During this period, secret (private) confession became established, which remains in force to this day. The main reason for introducing this practice was that public confession was often impossible, as many of the transgressions that people confessed were subject to severe state penalties, which were often very harsh.

The practice of St. Basil the Great, who encouraged frequent and secret confession of sins in monasteries, as well as its connection with lesser transgressions, also contributed significantly to the spread of private confession. This practice also influenced believers outside the monastic environment: since they were free to seek out their spiritual fathers, they even came to their ascetic dwellings to make their holy confession. [1]

The practice of holy confession has existed since apostolic times and continues uninterrupted to this day. For Christians, it is a powerful therapeutic means of healing the illnesses of the soul, and therefore it is essential and binding for the spiritual life of a believer.

St. Simeon the New Theologian, in his 5th catechesis, where he addresses the topic of repentance, emphasises that Christ "through the holy mystery of baptism and through the reception of His immaculate mysteries, His most holy Body and His precious Blood, purifies, revives, and renews us as holy and sinless". [10] However, as he says, "we were baptised as children who were unaware of anything, and since we were not spiritually mature, we received grace only imperfectly," [11] and therefore repentance is given to us as a "second purification." [11]

Forgiveness of sins is granted by bishops and priests who have received special authority from them. In 1887, the Ecumenical Patriarchate issued a circular letter emphasising that the dignity of spiritual fatherhood is granted only to those "who have lived blamelessly in all respects, have shown themselves worthy of the holy priesthood, and are capable of saving and bringing back souls straying from the right path." [9]

One of the greatest blessings a person receives when repenting is forgiveness for their transgressions from a merciful God. However, this is not the only blessing. Repentance and sincere confession of our sins and thoughts lead to our reconciliation with God and our neighbour. The result is peace and inner spiritual balance that comes with freedom from the burden of sin. St. Simeon says that repentance is the "gate" that leads us out of darkness and into the light of Christ. [10] In this way, we can once again "put on Christ," whom we have taken off through our sin. [8]

However, if all this—preparation, repentance, confession, and reconciliation—does not lead to the reception of God's Body and Blood, it is of no benefit to us. St. Simeon characteristically reminds us of this in his prayer before Holy Communion: after humility and asceticism and the subsequent forgiveness of sins, the Body and Blood of the Lord work to deify and sanctify man.

Therefore, like other mysteries, this one also has a strong connection with the Eucharist, as it prepares us for our approach to it and subsequent reception. In the Eucharist, the union of all believers with the Body and Blood of Christ is mysteriously accomplished; all become related to Him [8] and contemplate the glory of His Divinity, thus becoming participants in deification. [8]

Neither presbyters nor deacons can perform any liturgical act without receiving the blessing of the bishop. [7] St. Nicodemus emphasises that both married and unmarried presbyters must receive authorisation and blessing from the bishop in order to "bind and loose" sins. For this reason, many bishops appoint some presbyters as priests not only through a letter of authorisation, but also through a special chirothesia. [7]

Chirothesia is not the same as cheirotonia. When the bishop lays his hand on the presbyter's head, he imparts to him the gift of the Holy Spirit so that he may perform the ministry of sacramental reconciliation with power and through the action of God's grace. [7]

Similarly, chirothesia is also performed by spiritual fathers towards those who repent of their sins. St. Nicodemus again emphasises that clergy should accustom themselves to laying their hands on the head of the penitent while reading the prayer of absolution over him. [7]

SUMMARY

In the liturgical life of the Orthodox Church, repentance is understood not only as a private moral act, but as a process of renewal of the whole person in relation to God and the church community. The sacrament of repentance is a place where human frailty meets God's mercy and where personal conversion becomes at the same time an ecclesial act of return to the full life of the community. From the pastoral perspective of the Orthodox Church, it is essential to emphasize that repentance is not merely an awareness of sin, but a path to healing and return. The spiritual father, the confessor, is not a judge but a healer and guide who helps the believer to recognize the truth about himself and at the same time to experience the power of God's love. Humility is not a loss of dignity but its deepest affirmation; asking for forgiveness is not a weakness but a step towards inner liberation.

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THE HOLY MYSTERY OF REPENTANCE AND HOLY CONFESSION

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Abstract

The question of how a person can regain their original state is answered unequivocally in the Orthodox spiritual tradition: return is only possible through repentance. However, repentance is not understood merely as emotional regret for wrongdoing, but as a radical transformation of the mind, heart, and direction of life. It is an existence turned back to God, which renews a person from within and brings them to a state of spiritual renewal. According to patristic tradition, true repentance, established and given by God, has the power to heal human nature, purify the mind from spiritual darkness, free the heart from passions, and restore a person's spiritual vision. In this way, a person gradually returns to the state in which they were before the fall.

Keywords:

Spirituality, freedom, return, repentance, confession, love

IS THE BIBLE MYTHOLOGICAL LITERATURE OR A HISTORICAL SOURCE?

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INTRODUCTION

The general scientific discourse in the context of the Bible, or rather biblical themes or events, expresses both criticism and agreement towards the biblical narrative or the Bible itself. Rejection and acceptance. Science itself views the Bible from two perspectives. The views of humanities scholars, historians, and philosophers sometimes converge and at other times diverge in their approach to this best-selling book in the world—the Book of books. From the perspective of literary genre, it is also perceived as a description of various mythological events that never occurred and are merely the fantasy and fiction of the authors, as they contradict the physical, biological, or other scientific dogmas of the exact sciences (concerning the creation of the world, man, the Great Flood, etc.). They classify the Bible among the literary works of antiquity that originated in the Semitic-Jewish environment. On the other hand, the Bible is accepted in the world of historical science in many descriptions of historical events, the existence of places and figures mentioned in the Bible, as well as descriptions of historical facts that have been proven and substantiated by archaeological or historical evidence. Generally speaking, the scientific view on the source biblical texts is that the Bible is respected as a historical source in many of its descriptions, as various biblical texts have been supported archaeologically and historically. [7]

However, the metaphysical and mythological aspects of the Bible are rejected. It is true that the historical events themselves (historical, not mythological) described by the biblical narrative are also mildly confronted in certain scientific circles, but we will mention that later. From several theological perspectives, the Bible itself is perceived and defined as a description of biblical-historical events, human prehistory, and spiritual, moral, or ethical teachings. Theologians would say that its authors were inspired by the Holy Spirit and its texts are God's revelation to man. They ascribe an unreserved, often literal or figurative interpretation to the texts. However, according to theology, everything

is true; therefore, everything described in the Bible is a historical and spiritual reality for theology. [3]

THE UNDERSTANDING AND EXPLANATION OF BIBLICAL TEXTS CAN THUS BE DIVIDED INTO TWO GROUPS: LITERAL AND ALLEGORICAL INTERPRETATION

Naturally, the Bible is not the only historical source. Many biblical events are also described in other Mesopotamian works of antiquity, which we will discuss later. The works in which the reader can learn about many ancient biblical events are almost identical to the biblical-historical narrative. [16]

We now know what the scientific and theological perspective is. Whether the reader leans towards the theological explanation and understanding, or the scientific interpretation of biblical texts, we leave that up to them. We are merely describing and presenting two different perspectives on the Bible and the significance of its textual content.

In this article, we will focus on mentioning events in a historical, or rather, a historical-archaeological context, since the article is dedicated to the comparison of biblical events, figures, and places based on the primary biblical texts. We will also compare these source texts with other texts from ancient Mesopotamian works that speak of the same events, figures, or cities as the biblical source. When examining the Bible and ancient literature, we also take the historical-archaeological context into account. We will supplement the article with our own theological, historical, and other commentaries. We are aware of the broad scope of these topics, as they could undoubtedly be elaborated into a monograph; however, we will only marginally touch upon the main points of these historical-theological questions.

MASSIVE CRITICISM OF THE BIBLICAL-HISTORICAL NARRATIVE BEGAN TO EMERGE IN THE 19th CENTURY

In this century, calls and appeals for archaeological expeditions began to appear (in addition to the very desire to know whether the Bible was based on facts). The call for expeditions was also connected with the fact that in the 19th century, a new science – archaeology – began to form and gradually and systematically develop. Countries such as Germany, France, the United States, and Great Britain gradually began to finance archaeological expeditions for

passionate adventurers, many of whom became famous and renowned archaeologists of the entire scientific discipline. Archaeological expeditions in the Near East began to bear fruit, leading to enormous archaeological discoveries of Old Testament biblical sites. These archaeological adventures brought about the discovery of ancient cities, monuments, statues, and clay tablets with ancient literary works, i.e., with historical sources of antiquity that were previously unknown. The deciphering of ancient languages occurred, which enabled these findings to be read, explored in greater depth, and better understood. This century was a century of hard logic and facts, at least in the world of archaeology, history, and theology. The Bible as such had to face a rather sharp confrontation based on facts. Why was this so? Why was the Bible specifically confronted? Because the discoveries that the world of archaeology began to uncover came mainly from the Sumerian environment. They brought not only confirmation of the existence of biblical places (which supported the biblical source tradition), but the ancient literature that began to be translated recorded similar mentions of historical events that are also written in the Bible. The first suspicions, initial insights, and opinions arose that the Bible was no longer the only book speaking of these events, and it seemed that it was probably not even the primary source recording ancient events. The fact that the Bible was not the only source was not such a fundamental problem for the biblical tradition, but the fact that it was not the first source of information about the mentioned matters was a stumbling block for historical science. This was the point that fundamentally changed the view of historical science on biblical texts, and its narrative began to be examined more critically. It also brought a sharp confrontation to other church denominations, which we will mention later. Historical research further pointed out that the Bible was not only not the single, first mention of the things in question, but that the significant biblical themes it discusses were adopted from the written tradition of other ancient nations. [2]

„This episode shook the Christian world because it shook the belief in the divine origin of the Bible. It was clear that the story of the Great Flood was not revealed to the authors of the Bible by God, but that they adopted it from the Assyrians, or rather, the Babylonians.“ [16] From our perspective, nor from the perspective of theologians, it is not that clear, as the literary works, as well as their content, differ greatly from the biblical account in many respects. However, Zamarovský did not point this out. The research in Jemdet Nasr itself confirmed

that another culture, whose origin eludes us, existed before the Sumerians, who are considered the first nation of humanity. The extent of the oral tradition of biblical Israel is a mystery to us, as is the culture that existed before the Sumerian one. It is precisely from this earlier culture that the Sumerians probably adopted knowledge and understanding. Since historians claim that the Israelites adopted mythology from the Sumerians, why could the Sumerians not have adopted from the Israelites or another culture in Jemdet Nasr? We note that the oldest generally recognized written references to the biblical Hebrews among historians are dated to around 1208 BCE on the so-called Merenptah Stele. A stone slab with an inscription where the biblical Israelites are mentioned. [9] „ Ramesses II is generally considered the oppressor of the Israelites in Egypt, so the Pharaoh of the Exodus would be his successor, Merneptah, according to the Pentateuch. Alternatively, given the length of his reign, Ramesses II himself may have been the Pharaoh of the Exodus.“ [9]

Archaeology thus strongly shook the Christian world, the world of faith, and in the eyes of the people, it cast doubt on the infallibility of the primacy, the sole narrative, and the truthfulness of the Holy Scripture. From a theological point of view, we add that the Church world did not perceive historical science as an attack on the biblical tradition; science did not refute the credibility of the Bible by presenting evidence of biblical events from other literary works with biblical descriptions. Biblical Israel did not prohibit other cultures from recording their history as well. The fact that the Bible is not the first to mention, say, the Great Flood, was also not such a problem for theological thought, as the world of faith teaches an oral spiritual tradition, passed down through centuries. Who writes about it first is not such an attack. However, the main confrontation for the Bible was the question of its truthfulness. Until then, it was believed that the biblical descriptions were unique and belonged only to the biblical tradition of ancient Israel. Why did people lose confidence in the truthfulness? Because if historical research interpreted the findings to mean that the Bible adopted various mythological figures or events from other traditions, then those events probably did not happen in the biblical history of Israel either. These were events that were merely fiction and imagination of the authors, as they occurred in other ancient nations from which the biblical authors drew inspiration.

So, what in the Holy Scripture is true and what is not? What belongs to it and what did it only adopt? These were the reflections in academic discussions

in Europe, but also the questions of ordinary believers concerning the eternal sacredness of the biblical texts. This was the point that theological disciplines struggled with more. It is true that this was also a turning point that led people to practical atheism. Subsequently, we will more deeply analyze and mention certain biblical-historical events that mostly coincide with historical and archaeological evidence, which are strongly confronted with each other. We will also mention the theological stance defending the truthfulness of the holy biblical narrative.

Sir Austen Henry Layard was one of the most famous archaeologists of all time, who became famous for discovering the biblical city of Nineveh. "He excavated Kalhu, the biblical Calah, the capital of the Assyrian king Ashurnasirpal II, to which he moved his seat from Ashur. A city from the ninth century BC, a hundred years older than Sargon's Dūr-Šarrukīn!" [17] Later, an even greater success for Austen Layard occurred: the uncovering of the biblical city of Nineveh. [17] The city itself is located in the territory of modern-day Iraq. Its existence was questioned by many historians until the 19th century. The city of Nineveh is mentioned for the first time in the biblical texts in Genesis: "From that land he went forth into Assyria and built Nineveh, Rehoboth-Ir, and Calah" (Gen 10:11). The best-known book of the Bible that speaks of Nineveh is the Book of the Prophet Jonah. The reason for this is that the biblical city of Nineveh is famous for the frequently mentioned event among theologians and in church denominations, where the prophet Jonah was sent by the Lord to urge the inhabitants of Nineveh to repent. „Then the word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time: „Go to the great city of Nineveh and proclaim to it the message I give you.“ Jonah obeyed the word of the Lord and went to Nineveh. Now Nineveh was a very large city; it took three days to go through it. Jonah began by going a day's journey into the city, proclaiming, "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overthrown." The Ninevites believed God. A fast was proclaimed, and all of them, from the greatest to the least, put on sackcloth. When Jonah's warning reached the king of Nineveh, he rose from his throne, took off his royal robes, covered himself with sackcloth and sat down in the dust. This is the proclamation he issued in Nineveh: By the decree of the king and his nobles: Do not let people or animals, herds or flocks, taste anything; do not let them eat or drink. But let people and animals be covered with sackcloth. Let everyone call urgently on God. Let them give up their evil ways and their

violence. Who knows? God may yet relent and with compassion turn from his fierce anger so that we will not perish“ (Jon 3: 2-9).

As we have already mentioned, the biblical source texts were long generally considered to be the only ones that mentioned certain figures, events, or even cities of the ancient world. However, it was almost unquestionable in the faith of the people and in the understanding of the professional public (until the 19th century) that if the given facts really happened, the figures existed, and the ancient cities truly exist, then the Biblical record is the first and only source that spoke of these events. Only a certain segment of the professional community did not consider the biblical tradition to be so unique. As Vojtech Zamarovský says: „Deeply, Mesopotamia was one of the most mysterious countries in the world for the people of Europe. Columbus discovered America and Amerigo Vespucci described it, Marco Polo brought news from China, Vasco da Gama acquainted the world with the Bushmen and Khoekhoe people. However, the most current information that Europe had about Mesopotamia came from the ancient Greeks and the biblical prophets.“ [17]

It is not entirely true that the biblical source text was the only one mentioning the existence of Old Testament cities. Rather, for centuries it was the main cited and authoritative source for the aforementioned Mesopotamian and Egyptian antiquity. Many sources that offered testimony were lost over time, stopped being quoted, and thus, essentially, fell into obscurity. On the other hand, however, the biblical account, in the context of ancient mythological or certain specific historical events, was until then perceived as the first and only one to report on these events. We add that biblical information was first in some respects, but not in others. Unique in some ways, but not in others. It cannot be stated unequivocally.

Other sources that were less frequently cited and forgotten, and which confirmed that the Bible is not the only source, included the accounts of ancient historians and writers. These accounts were known and used by selected historians, and they also mentioned and cited the Old Testament cities. This is why we also substantiate that, in this context, the Bible was not the only source that spoke of the biblical city of Nineveh. For instance, Zamarovský mentions famous historians and their references to Nineveh: „Two hundred years after its destruction, Herodotus was in Mesopotamia, but all he learned about the city — where the merchants were as numerous as the stars of heaven and the infants

who did not know the difference between their right hand and their left numbered one hundred and twenty thousand—was that it lay on the right bank of the Tigris. Diodorus, in the lost work of Ctesias of Cnidus from the 4th century B.C., found out that it supposedly lay on the Euphrates River. And Strabo, who was in Mesopotamia about 1165 years before Benjamin of Tudela, learned nothing about Nineveh, except that it was once the capital of Assyria and soon after its conquest vanished forever from the face of the Earth.“ [17]

Because when we talk about the 19th century, we must distinguish between the professional community, the general public, and the less-involved historians and scientists who had access to education to such an extent that they knew about the existence of Nineveh even without the Bible. This needs to be emphasized. For centuries, the Bible was the main educational source, not only for the educated but also for simpler people. Zamarovský, again, speaks about medieval people and their knowledge of Biblical places: „Throughout the Middle Ages, people in Europe knew about it only from a few mentions in the Bible. For the common folk, it was the land of the 'Jewish Captivity,' where Moses, with his magic, demonstrated the superiority of the Lord over the Pharaoh's gods: He turned the water of the Nile into blood and then restored it to its former state, conjured frogs from the river and canals that covered the whole land and then banished them, and turned the sand of the Egyptian desert into lice, and the lice back into sand. [16]

The aforementioned 19th century and its archaeological discoveries affected theological disciplines to such an extent that they led them into the process of demythologization. [12] The very concept of demythologization means an interpretation of the Bible that seeks to separate the mythological elements (miracles) from the theological message. The process of demythologization unequivocally belongs to the study of modern history, to the study of Biblical sources by comparing them with other historical sources. It also belongs to the study of the history of philosophy. And it is not just some theological dispute. Ultimately, demythologization was a process for which Enlightenment thinking prepared the ground. That is, the philosophical thinking of the Enlightenment, which was based on rigorous logic and the search for objectivity, at least in the study of history.

In the context of theological disciplines, it is necessary to specify that this attack on theological biblical descriptions most significantly affected and almost

did not survive the Protestant currents in Europe. These currents determined the future direction of global Protestantism, given that Europe itself is the center of the Christian world from which Christianity began to spread considerably throughout the world. Understandably, Protestant theological currents are tangibly rooted in the European area, alongside the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches as the other two major Christian denominations that historically were one of the driving forces of major civilizational circles. Therefore, we mention all three denominations strongly operating in the European space and clearly specify which one suffered the greatest damage, to prevent the misunderstanding that demythologization would concern the entire, or at least the main, Christian world.

Let's return to the 'truthfulness of the Bible,' the defense of which troubled theologians. In the context of theological views, we intentionally do not want to specify which theological school of the church or religion is concerned. When speaking of the theological view, we know from our studies that many Christian theological currents agree on these issues. In any case, it is about theological-Christian thinking.

For example, the Russian theologian, an expert on Old Testament history, Benjamin Puskar, says: „Among many nations of the world, legends about God's creation of the world and man have been preserved, but all are distorted by false pagan notions of gods and infinitely different from the sublime monotheistic history of the creation of the world, which is presented in the Bible.“ [10] The theological perspective can essentially be understood as follows: that the other Mesopotamian literary works which were found and translated and which told of similar descriptions of events as those in the Bible, rather confirm the Biblical account. Theology views these Mesopotamian literary works more as humanity's universal memory of Biblical history, of the history of people since the beginning of the world. According to them, these works therefore further support the theological conceptions about creation, destruction, and the truthfulness of God's interventions in the world of people. Theology operates with the question of faith. Believers rely on the fact that, through oral tradition from the first man, Adam, information about the creation of the world was passed down and transmitted to subsequent generations. From Moses and his biblical times to further descendants, from Noah to his sons and the other people who existed after the global flood, and so on. Later, this tradition was also recorded in

writing, and the first five books of Moses began to be written, thereby recording biblical events, as oral tradition was no longer sufficient due to the decline of people's faith in the one God and their tendency to doubt the pure biblical tradition. This is a brief theological explanation at a philosophical level.

Thus, the presence of mentions in other works like the Enuma Elish or the Epic of Gilgamesh, according to theologians, rather confirms the truthfulness of the texts, and it is not at all an issue that from a historical perspective, these are older works than the biblical books. As we mentioned, this is humanity's universal memory of events that concerned biblical Israel, but the rest of the ancient world was not isolated from these events. And the deviations from the biblical account are viewed, as we stated, as 'distorted false pagan notions.' Before we mention the historical interpretations, we will first list the biblical and Mesopotamian sources. The fact that historical science in the 19th century concluded from the literary findings in the Near East that even Christianity borrowed mythological teachings from the ancient Sumerians and Hittites is undeniable. „The most interesting thing about Sumerian religion is that we find ideas in it that are very close to Christian religions. Many of its elements, in fact, passed into the religion of the ancient Babylonians and Jews, and from there directly into Christianity.“ [17]

THE GREAT FLOOD

Let us recall how in the Epic of Gilgamesh, Utnapishtim tells Gilgamesh about the Great Flood: „The gods were angry with men for not bringing them sacrifices, and they decided to wipe out the human race with a flood. Only the righteous Utnapishtim was to be saved: so he built, on the advice of the god Ea, a great boat, entirely of wood, and he caulked it with bitumen... and made a window in its top. Then he loaded into it all the seed of life, he brought onto it his family and his relatives, the wild beasts of the steppe, and the small animals of the steppe... Finally, he sealed the door. And it came to pass that a black cloud rose from the foundations of heaven, and for six days and seven nights the wind raged, and the flood with the storm covered the earth... And the mountains were covered by the waters, and the gods, like dogs, huddled crouched on the rampart of heaven... And all humanity was turned into mud, and spread over the earth like an even swamp. Then the flood ceased, the waters receded, and Utnapishtim landed with his ship on dry ground – on Mount Nisir.“ [17]

Again the Epic of Gilgamesh, the text that follows the Great Flood – Tablet XI.: „The city of Šuruppak, which you know, lies by the Euphrates. That city was already ancient when the gods still lived there. The great gods decided to bring about a flood. But Ea, the lord of wisdom, spoke to me: “Man of Šuruppak, son of Ubara-Tutu, tear down your house and build a boat. Abandon your possessions and save your life. Build the boat according to the exact plan... Take onto the boat all living creatures.”

When the time came, the clouds brought a black storm, thunder roared, and all light turned to darkness. For six days and seven nights the storm raged, the waters flooded the land, and wind and flood battered the earth. On the seventh day the storm grew still, the flood subsided, the sea grew calm, and the waters retreated. I looked: all humankind had turned to clay. I opened a window, and light fell upon my face. The boat came to rest upon Mount Nisir. When I went out, I offered the gods the scent of a sacrifice. The gods gathered like flies over the offering.” [1].

The LORD then said to Noah, “Go into the ark, you and your whole family, because I have found you righteous in this generation. 2 Take with you seven pairs of every kind of clean animal, a male and its mate, and one pair of every kind of unclean animal, a male and its mate, 3 and also seven pairs of every kind of bird, male and female, to keep their various kinds alive throughout the earth. 4 Seven days from now I will send rain on the earth for forty days and forty nights, and I will wipe from the face of the earth every living creature I have made.” 5 And Noah did all that the LORD commanded him. 6 Noah was six hundred years old when the floodwaters came on the earth. 7 And Noah and his sons and his wife and his sons’ wives entered the ark to escape the waters of the flood. 8 Pairs of clean and unclean animals, of birds and of all creatures that move along the ground, 9 male and female, came to Noah and entered the ark, as God had commanded Noah. 10 And after the seven days the floodwaters came on the earth. 11 In the six hundredth year of Noah’s life, on the seventeenth day of the second month—on that day all the springs of the great deep burst forth, and the floodgates of the heavens were opened. 12 And rain fell on the earth forty days and forty nights. 13 On that very day Noah and his sons, Shem, Ham and Japheth, together with his wife and the wives of his three sons, entered the ark. 14 They had with them every wild animal according to its kind, all livestock according to their kinds, every creature that moves along the ground according

to its kind and every bird according to its kind, everything with wings. 15 Pairs of all creatures that have the breath of life in them came to Noah and entered the ark. 16 The animals going in were male and female of every living thing, as God had commanded Noah. Then the LORD shut him in. 17 For forty days the flood kept coming on the earth, and as the waters increased they lifted the ark high above the earth. 18 The waters rose and increased greatly on the earth, and the ark floated on the surface of the water. 19 They rose greatly on the earth, and all the high mountains under the entire heavens were covered. 20 The waters rose and covered the mountains to a depth of more than fifteen cubits. 21 Every living thing that moved on land perished—birds, livestock, wild animals, all the creatures that swarm over the earth, and all man-kind. 22 Everything on dry land that had the breath of life in its nostrils died. 23 Every living thing on the face of the earth was wiped out; people and animals and the creatures that move along the ground and the birds were wiped from the earth. Only Noah was left, and those with him in the ark. 24 The waters flooded the earth for a hundred and fifty days (Genesis 7: 1-24).

THE GREAT FLOOD – BIBLICAL REFERENCE AND EPIC OF GILGAMESH

The Epic of Gilgamesh was probably written in the second half of the third millennium BCE. Since its content is of a legendary nature, it is likely that this epic represents a written version of an oral tradition retold by many generations before it took on its literary form.“ [6] A good observation made by theologians is that the Epic of Gilgamesh itself is a retold legend. In the debate over who first recorded these events, Sumerian culture is the clear winner; however, it cannot be definitively ruled out that the legend in the form of the biblical account also belongs to biblical Israel. The Jews belong to the Semitic ethnic group, and the Semites were among the peoples with whom the Sumerians had contact. In the Epic of Gilgamesh, Šuruppak is a figure who reminds us of the biblical Noah. Nisir in the epic corresponds to the biblical Ararat, and so on. It is clear that there are very strong similarities between the epic and the biblical tradition. However, the Epic of Gilgamesh is a piece of Sumerian-Akkadian literature. Among peoples of all races, there exist many legends about a great catastrophic flood. „From the reports of archaeologists and geologists, we may infer that a catastrophic flood once occurred in southern Mesopotamia, and its memory has been preserved in the literary monuments of the entire Near East.“ [16] All of

them speak of a tragedy that occurred in the history of the human race, but they present this event in a distorted form. Although the original tradition changed beyond recognition over the centuries, in these distorted traditions we still find remarkable correspondences with the biblical story of the flood. Mentions of the flood also appear in other historical traditions, and almost all of them share common features. These features include various pagan gods commanding their chosen ones to build a great boat. Another common element is that among those warned and saved from destruction, there are always two people: a man and a woman (sometimes accompanied by children). There is also a warning of an impending catastrophe—the warned ones take with them various animals. When the floodwaters begin to recede, the survivors settle on the top of the first mountain to emerge from the waters. The biblical Noah, in order to determine whether the flood had ended, periodically released birds from his ark. Traditions from different continents report that the people saved from the flood did exactly the same as the biblical Noah. Another shared detail in all these traditions is the rainbow, which appeared in the sky as a sign marking the end of the flood. All of these similar details, as well as the widespread presence of flood accounts, confirm to theologians that they are based on a real event that occurred in the world, as described in the Book of Books—the Bible. [10] So far, we have discussed the Great Flood from multiple perspectives because it belongs to the scientific historical discourse in the context of demythologization, archaeological discoveries, and theology, whose stance on the flood we have mentioned. To this day, based on archaeological excavations in the mentioned regions, and even among geologists, the possibility of a more extensive local flood is not denied. However, a global-scale flood is excluded by science.

CREATION OF THE WORLD – THE BIBLE AND ENUMA ELISH

The work *Enuma Elish* is an Old Babylonian creation myth and is one of the most important literary and religious texts of ancient Mesopotamia. The title of the epic comes from Akkadian and means “When on High.” It is one of the sources that describes the creation of the world in a manner similar to the Bible.

Description of the creation of the world from *Enuma Elish* – Tablet I: “When on high the heavens had not yet been named, and the earth below had not yet received a name, when Apsu, the primordial father, and Tiamat, who bore them

all, mingled their waters together, then the gods had not yet been created, none of them had a name, and their destinies had not been determined.” [5]

The text continues further, corresponding to Tablet IV: “Marduk split Tiamat into two parts; he lifted one half and made it the heavens, and set the other half as a foundation beneath the earth. He established the courses of the stars, appointed the moon, and set the days and years. He gathered the waters, created rivers and the sea, and determined the boundaries for the earth and the sky.” [5]

We do not wish to focus too much on works whose content is more cosmological or philosophical rather than recording political history, but Enuma Elish and the Epic of Gilgamesh themselves clearly belong among historical facts in the process of uncovering, revealing, researching, and reinterpreting archaeological literary discoveries. “New research, however, has shown that even the oldest version of the Epic of Gilgamesh, originating from a period before the composition of the Book of Genesis or the Bible itself, was not original. Its core is at least half a millennium older and was formed by the Sumerian Epic of Ziusudra.” [17] One could speak of archaeological discoveries that have revealed additional Sumerian works whose content resembles other biblical events or figures. What is significant is that historical science uses their content as evidence that the Bible incorporated mythological stories—and this, in turn, helps determine the age of the ancient biblical books. The content thus assists historical science in placing other events related to the Bible within specific periods (since not all biblical stories and events are purely metaphysical, but also political-historical). We are not referring specifically to the creation of the world, humanity, or the Great Flood; those were just examples of the content of these works. Creation of the world, the flood, and creation of man are only some of many examples—mythological for science, yet real for theology.

A FEW WORDS ABOUT SUMERIANS

Mesopotamia itself was made up of several nations: the Sumerians, Akkadians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, and Babylonians. The Sumerians were the first to arrive in Mesopotamia. The oldest written records about the Sumerians date to around the third millennium BCE. Sumer began to be inhabited by the Sumerians around the middle of the fourth millennium BCE. Experts estimate that the Sumerians came from regions such as the South Caucasus or India. They built temples called “ziggurats.” It is said that they were fair-skinned and black-

haired. The original homeland of the Sumerians has not been determined. However, it is known that they were not classified as Semites. The initial cultural layers created by the Sumerians were called the Chalaf, El-Obeid, and Jemdet Nasr cultural layers. Among the most famous Sumerian cities were Ur, Kish, Lagash, Mari, Adab, and Shuruppak. [17] They mastered and used cuneiform writing. Before cuneiform, there were pictographic and symbolic scripts. The Sumerians do not denote a nation or a state, but an ethnic group. The most recent discovery is the archaeological finding of a Sumerian city located about 33 kilometers from Eridu. It belongs to the Ur dynasty and was discovered by the Iraqi archaeologist Abdulmir Hamdani. [6]

Briefly on archaeological discoveries of biblical sites, figures, and other events considered historical facts:

Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. 2 As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. 3 They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar. 4 Then they said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves; otherwise we will be scattered over the face of the whole earth." 5 But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower the people were building. 6 The Lord said, "If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. 7 Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." 8 So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. 9 That is why it was called Babel—because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world. From there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth (Genezis 11: 1-9).

A FEW WORDS ABOUT BABYLON

Babylon was one of the most important centers of ancient Mesopotamia, located between the Euphrates and Tigris rivers in what is now Iraq. Its history dates back to approximately the second millennium BCE, when the city became the capital of the Babylonian Kingdom. Babylon reached its greatest fame during the reign of King Hammurabi, best known for his law code—the Code of Hammurabi—one of the oldest surviving legal collections in human history. The inhabitants of Babylon, known as Babylonians, were originally primarily an

Akkadian-speaking population, whose culture and city administration were shaped by the Akkadians. Over time, other ethnic groups, including Sumerians, Arameans, and Kassites, also settled in the city, significantly contributing to Babylon's development not only in governance and law but also in writing, science, and technology. Babylon is renowned for its impressive architectural and cultural monuments. [17]

Another city described in the Bible is Babylon, famous for its Tower of Babel. Unlike Nineveh, whose existence was once questioned, no one ever doubted Babylon's existence, as it was already known from Greek historians. "By the time of Herodotus, Babylon was no longer the center of the world, but merely a provincial city. [16] Babylon is a city mentioned in the Bible also as a symbol of evil, pride, and rebellion against God. The peak of this evil was represented by the Tower of Babel. The city was rediscovered in the 19th century by the famous archaeologist, German professor Robert Koldewey. "It is difficult to give even a brief overview of his discoveries. He excavated all the Babylonian wonders of the world, including the remains of the massive walls of Nebuchadnezzar and the foundations of the legendary Tower of Babel." [16]

CRITICAL RESPONSES TODAY

Just as in the 19th century, at the beginning of the 20th century there were still critical reactions to archaeological excavations. Historians were not satisfied that Koldewey had discovered the foundations of Babylon and the Tower of Babel; they continued to criticize the findings subjectively and put forward unfounded arguments. The stories in Genesis, including that of the Tower of Babel, are considered more mythological than historical in nature. [8] Historian Moye strongly suggests that the story of the Tower of Babel is a literary creation reflecting the cultural and religious ideas of its time. John Van Seters points to the lack of convincing evidence supporting the historical existence of the biblical patriarchs and their origins in Mesopotamia. He argues that the stories in Genesis, including the account of the Tower of Babel, may be later literary creations that emerged during the Babylonian exile. [11]

„First of all, findings from excavations confirm that the building methods described in Scripture were indeed used. Research has shown that builders in Mesopotamia used only baked bricks coated with bitumen. Presumably, construction regulations required this to ensure the stability of the structure.

Since this enormous building (i.e., the Tower of Babel) was located near the Euphrates River, it was necessary to consider the usual water levels at different times of the year and the constant humidity during construction. Bitumen or resin was used to prepare the foundations and masonry walls to make them waterproof and durable.” [13]

If we draw conclusions from many other archaeological findings and claims, ruins of multi-story tower temples have been found in numerous ancient Mesopotamian cities. Thousands of clay tablets discovered by archaeologists in Mesopotamia mention that these towers were called ziggurats. According to research, these towers were part of pagan temple complexes, with an altar usually placed at the very top of the ziggurat. Researchers believe that these towers were later imitations or modifications of the original Tower of Babel. One of them was the Babylonian ziggurat. After the death of Babylonian King Hammurabi, the Hittites attempted to level the ruins of this large structure, which they destroyed around 1600 BCE. Some time later, King Nebuchadnezzar II (6th century BCE) ordered it to be rebuilt. The ruins of the large ziggurat are near the ruins of ancient Babylon. This tower, called Birs Nimrud by the Arabs, was over 210 meters tall. [13]

To avoid overwhelming the reader with a multitude of historical sources—since the biblical texts themselves clearly serve as such—we will mention only the historians’ perspectives on other historical events recorded in the Bible, without including biblical citations.

KING DAVID AND HIS REALM

The Bible is the primary source for the existence of King David and his kingdom. The discovery of the Tel Dan Stele, dating from the 9th century BCE, contains a reference to the “House of David,” which confirms the historical existence of David.

Some scholars, such as Philip R. Davies, argue that archaeological research does not support the biblical description of a centralized and extensive kingdom under King David. According to him, extensive fortified cities and administrative centers would need to be found to confirm the biblical claims about the political power of David and his son Solomon. However, he does not deny the existence of King David. He emphasizes that the biblical text is not a historically objective record but rather an ideological narrative.

THE EXODUS OF THE ISRAELITES FROM EGYPT

Kristie Welsh argues that the biblical Exodus may have a historical basis, especially if it involved a smaller group of Israelites. She points to archaeological and textual findings from the Ramesside period (13th century BCE) that could be related to the migration of small Semitic groups from Egypt. She does not confirm a mass exodus of millions of people but argues that some of the stories could be based on real events. 15

Richard Hess analyzes Egyptian archaeological findings and records and argues that there is no direct evidence of a large group of Israelites leaving Egypt. [4]

THE BABYLONIAN EXILE

Brayen Windl argues that archaeological findings confirm historical details about the life of King Jehoiakim as recorded in the biblical texts. Babylonian inscriptions provide insight into the life of the royal family during their captivity in Babylon. This research demonstrates that the history of Judah is firmly grounded in chronological foundations, with the biblical Books of Chronicles gaining new significance thanks to the details provided by the Old Testament. He points out that the Babylonian inscriptions offer valuable information about administrative matters during the period of exile. These inscriptions help reconstruct the historical context and the lives of the exiles in Babylon. [14]

In the article, we attempted to concisely capture the issue of myths and the Bible, the ancient world and biblical Israel, the perspective of historical scholarship, and the adoption of myths from pagan nations in antiquity by the biblical Israelites. We also aimed to present theological arguments from selected authors. Additionally, we referenced sources that sparked these discussions. We believe that our overview of the topic will help readers form an accurate historical perspective.

SUMMARY

The Bible is not just a book with mythological spiritual content. It is a summary of human prehistory. God's history, God's interventions in people's lives. Interventions that were predicted by biblical prophets. Interventions that were recorded by historians. To this day, biblical texts are confronted or

confirmed by archaeological and historical descriptions. Because these biblical texts simply have their own enormous weight.

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IS THE BIBLE MYTHOLOGICAL LITERATURE OR A HISTORICAL SOURCE?

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Abstract

The Bible is one of the most important ancient historical sources, which for centuries served to complete the picture of ancient thinking, ethics, morality, spirituality, or political history of biblical Israel or other surrounding nations. Nations with which biblical Israel came into contact. Nations that influenced it and it influenced them. Ancient nations are an inseparable part of biblical history. Their mythology, cosmology, or general philosophy of being are authentic in many elements. The common path is very strongly noticeable. For centuries, the history of biblical Israel ceased to be studied, as the history of the ancient world gradually began to be forgotten. The ancient world was better known to ancient historians than to the culture of the Middle Ages. Thanks to the newly emerging scientific discipline of the modern age, archaeology, antiquity began to awaken from the sand under which it had been shrouded for centuries. This scientific discipline confirmed that the Bible is not only a mythological literature of antiquity, but also a historical source that also helped to uncover the cities of antiquity. Biblical cities.

Keywords:

Bible, demythologizing, history, Biblical Israel, theology, historical sources, archaeology

THE SYSTEM OF CATECHESIS OF CATECHUMENS IN THE EARLY CENTURIES OF CHRISTIANITY

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INTRODUCTION

Let us recall that those called “hearers,” or catechumens, were people who had undergone the initial interview but had not yet been definitively chosen for the reception of baptism. We do not know whether, in the 2nd century, admission to the rank of “hearers” was accompanied by a special rite. The preparation of the “hearers” in the Roman Church lasted three years, as it did in the Eastern Churches of Jerusalem and Antioch. Hippolytus, however, adds that what matters is not so much the length of time as the desire to change one’s way of life. [8]

The instruction of “catechumens” took place under the guidance of both clergy and lay people. It should be noted that such teachers, regardless of their ecclesiastical status, enjoyed great respect among their pupils. It is therefore not surprising that the author of the Epistle of Barnabas twice renounced the title of “teacher” and asked to be regarded as one of the brethren. The author of the Didache exhorts that bishops and deacons should be held in the same respect as is due to teachers and prophets.

CATECHESIS IN THE EARLY CENTURIES

In the 2nd century, some well-known catechists from among the laity in certain churches even enjoyed greater authority than bishops. One may mention Justin the Philosopher, who was a layman and yet was regarded in the mid-2nd century as the most prominent teacher in Rome. Even the father of Latin theology, Tertullian, was most likely a layman. While the bishop was elected by the entire church community, teachers and prophets were not appointed through the laying on of hands but were considered—according to the Church’s understanding—to be called directly by God. In the 2nd century, there were no specific rites in the Church for the ordination of catechists. [4]

In the apocryphal “Letter of Clement to the Apostle James,” catechists (teachers) are understood as a distinct ecclesiastical order, separate from bishops and deacons. The author places the following exhortation on the lips of the Apostle Peter, addressed to the catechists: “Let catechists teach only after they themselves have first been instructed, for their work is bound up with human souls. The teacher of the word must be prepared for all the views of those whom he instructs. Therefore, catechists must be well taught, blameless, highly experienced, and steadfast, like Clement, who after me [Peter] will be your teacher.” [7]

In the 2nd century, the structure of ecclesiastical authority was such that many teachers operated outside the control of the episcopate and founded their own schools, which in some cases developed into heretical sects. In Rome, by the end of the 2nd century, there were numerous such schismatic groups. [4]

For example, in the school of Marcion, where a distinction was likewise made between catechumens and believers [9], the Old Testament was not recognized, and only the Gospel according to Luke and certain epistles of the Apostle Paul—edited in accordance with Marcion’s theology—were used as Sacred Scripture. In the school of Valentinus, a distorted interpretation of the Christian teaching on creation, the fall, and redemption was offered within the framework of Gnostic dualism.

Moreover, in many sects the Sacraments of Baptism and the Eucharist were either not recognized at all or their meaning was distorted beyond recognition. Thus, for example, Tertullian wrote the first systematic explanation of the Sacrament of Baptism in the history of the Church as a response to the fervent homilies of a female missionary from the Gnostic sect of the Cainites, who came to Carthage and taught that baptism was not necessary at all, because nothing miraculous happens when one is immersed in water and a person emerges from it exactly the same as before immersion. Tertullian challenged this view and insisted that in baptism a real transformation takes place in the human person, a transformation that can be fully understood only by one who has undergone thorough catechesis. [1]

Among the heretics, however, complete chaos prevailed in the area of catechesis. Tertullian indignantly complained that among them women were allowed “to teach, to cast out demons, to heal, and perhaps even to baptize!” [4] Tertullian not only absolutized Paul’s injunction, “Let your women keep silence

in the churches!" [1 Cor 14:34–3], but extended it to all areas of ecclesial life, forbidding women to perform any ecclesiastical functions whatsoever.

It should be said that Tertullian's view was by no means shared by everyone in the East. Thus, for example, the Teaching of the Apostles (*Didascalia Apostolorum*), a liturgical and disciplinary church manual that enjoyed wide circulation in the 3rd century in Syria and Palestine, as well as beyond them, not only mentions deaconesses but also assigns this order a specific ecclesiastical ministry. The reason is that in the early Church people were most often baptized by being immersed in water while naked. In this context, it was far more appropriate that the anointing with oil of women—which, according to the custom established in Syria, took place immediately before immersion—should be performed by deaconesses rather than by male ministers [2]. Deaconesses were also entrusted with the instruction in the faith of newly baptized women: "And when a woman who comes up from baptism comes out of the water, let the deaconess receive her and teach and admonish her how to keep the seal of baptism undefiled, pure, and holy." [4]

Deaconesses are necessary in many matters. They can visit believing women who live in the houses of pagans (for the purpose of instruction), as well as serve the sick in everything that is needed and wash those who are beginning to recover. [2]

It must be assumed that deaconesses enjoyed considerable respect among the faithful. Developing the typology of ecclesiastical ministries, the editor of the Teaching of the Apostles prescribes: "Let the deacon be for you an image of Christ—love him. And let the deaconess be honored among you as an image of the Holy Spirit." "Let every woman approach the bishop or the deacon through the deaconess." [2]

The office of deaconess was abolished in the West in the mid-5th century and in the East in the 11th century.

As we can see, the ministry of deaconesses in Syria and beyond its borders was an integral part of ecclesial life until the end of the 4th century. Tertullian's protests against the ordination of deaconesses, as well as against the use of women as teachers of catechumens, were probably motivated by his personal aversion toward the numerous sectarians who caused him many difficulties. According to one of the apocryphal acts from the 2nd century, the Apostle Paul once sent his companion, the Christian woman Thecla, to Iconium to "teach the

word of God” to the local pagans. Tertullian reports that the author of this apocryphon was a presbyter from Asia Minor who was deprived of his clerical rank for this forgery. Although the author’s view is most likely not based on historical evidence, the idea that a woman could teach and preach was acceptable to many Asia Minor Christians of the 2nd century. Paradoxically, Tertullian himself later abandoned his categorical prohibitions against women when he joined the Montanist sect, in which two prophetesses Prisca and Maximilla—were held in extraordinary esteem. [4]

In view of the existence of a great number of different currents that had broken away from ecclesial obedience, the future of the entire Church depended on how carefully the apostolic tradition would be handed down from generation to generation. The unhealthy rivalry between the authority of the bishop and that of the catechist–teacher was overcome in itself when the bishop fulfilled his own direct responsibilities namely, when he was a teacher and a prophet, and not merely an administrator.

Particular attention deserves the example of the fatherly love of Saint Polycarp of Smyrna, the self-sacrificing deed of Saint Ignatius of Antioch, the tireless struggle against heresies of Saint Irenaeus of Lyons, and the homilies breathing a prophetic spirit of Saint Melito of Sardis († c. 190).

We learn about the content of catechesis in the 2nd century from *The Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* by Saint Irenaeus. Hippolytus of Rome, who was a disciple of Irenaeus, most likely used this catechism in his own school. As the very title of Irenaeus’s work suggests, his catechism was an exposition of the fundamental themes of apostolic teaching.

The central place in the apostolic homily was occupied by the account of God’s great deeds in the history of Israel. It was precisely the history of salvation that served as the “milk of the word” with which the Church nourished the catechumens. Those who entered the Church became participants in this narrative, experiencing the drama of salvation history as their own. In Scripture, as in a mirror, their own journey toward God was reflected. The theological task of subsequent generations was to develop the overall plan of biblical salvation history and to understand it in the light of the Incarnation and the emergence of the Church.

According to Irenaeus, the main milestones of this history were as follows. God created the human being in His image and likeness. Yet through

disobedience, humanity violated God's will and fell away from its Creator. After being expelled from paradise, human beings became ever more deeply rooted in evil and idolatry. God sent the flood upon the earth, from which only the righteous Noah and his family were saved. After the flood, God made a covenant with him, promising that He would never again destroy the human race.

After some time, people determined to reach heaven set about building the Tower of Babel, but God frustrated their plans. In order to bring humanity back to Himself, God chose the people of Israel. He made a covenant with Abraham, led Israel out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage, and gave the Israelites the Law through His prophet Moses. Yet the Jews continued not to keep His commandments and frequently fell into idolatry. Consequently, God sent prophets to lead the disobedient people back to His ways, but the Jews continued not to listen to the prophets; on the contrary, they constantly persecuted and killed them.

All the events of Old Testament history were understood by the Fathers of the 2nd century in the light of the future coming of the Son of God into the world. For them, history was filled with expectation and with prefigurations of the future revelation of the Savior. When the fullness of time had come, God sent His only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, to turn humanity back to Himself.

The Son of God, the eternal Word of God through whom the world was created, was born of the Virgin and of the Holy Spirit and lived among human beings, bearing the burdens of human existence. The world, however, rejected the Son of God, even though many prophecies bore witness to His coming. The world delivered Christ to a shameful death, but God made that death a means of liberation from sin and from bondage to the demon. God raised Jesus from the dead and seated Him at His right hand.

After the coming of Christ into this world, His death, and His resurrection, life with God could no longer be the same as before. Life with God acquires an entirely new dimension, because it becomes life in Christ, an imitation of Christ. The most important element of catechesis continued to be Holy Scripture, that is, a Christocentric interpretation of the books of the Old Testament.

In order to assist catechists, attempts were also made to collect and harmonize the testimonies of the Gospels into a single coherent narrative. For this purpose, Tatian wrote his Diatessaron—the first harmony of the four Gospels—which was read in the Syrian Church during the liturgy until the

beginning of the 5th century, when it was gradually replaced by the canonical Gospels. [12]

Apologetic literature addressed to pagans could also indirectly serve catechetical purposes. The task of the apologist is in fact very similar to that of the catechist: both seek to bring the unbeliever closer to an understanding of the Gospel. A constant theme of apologetic writings is the question of how the God of the Christians differs from the gods of the pagans. "Above all," testifies one Roman catechism from the mid-2nd century, "believe that God is one, that He created and ordered all things, and that He brought everything into being out of nothing." [6]

Christians worship the Creator of the entire world—unseen and incomprehensible—whereas pagans worship either the works of their own hands or, what is even worse, demons. Christians believe that the world is governed by a good Creator, not by blind chance or belief in some impersonal fate. The God of the Christians cares for His creation and actively enters into what takes place in the world. He not only governs the forces of nature but also shows concern for human beings. The God of the Christians intervenes in human affairs, but not in the manner of pagan gods, who are filled with human passions, weaknesses, and selfish aims. The God of the Christians has the salvation of humanity as the primary goal of His revelation in the world. [4]

In the second century, certain elements of the apostolic tradition that in the first century had been known only in individual churches spread to all local churches. Among such elements we may also include the conception of the Son of God as the creative Logos (Word). Through the teaching about the Logos as the Son of God, the apologists sought to make intelligible to Hellenistic thought the idea that the Son of God is the living, personal embodiment of reason and meaning for the whole of human existence. [3]

The idea of the Son of God as the Logos (Word) was developed by Saint Ignatius the God-bearer (35–107), Athenagoras of Athens († late 2nd century), Theophilus of Antioch († late 2nd century), and many other theologians of the second century. Teaching about the Logos, in one form or another, was part of the catechism in the school of Justin the Martyr (the philosopher). Let us recall that, according to Justin, the highest achievements of pagan culture participate in the Logos, even though they do not possess the fullness of truth, which was fully revealed in Christ. [5]

In the second century, the idea of the participation of the Son of God in the creation of the world and therefore also of His existence prior to the Incarnation gained wider acceptance and more developed theological articulation. Gradually, the tradition of the immaculate conception and of the earthly birth of Christ from the Virgin Mary spread everywhere. In the mid-2nd century, among many other apocryphal writings, the so-called Protoevangelium of James began to circulate; it describes in detail the birth and life of Mary and emphasizes her obedience, virginal purity, and immaculateness.

In addition, the motif of the descent into the underworld, to which the First Epistle of Peter also alludes, became a more prominent element in several theological works of the second century. [1 Pet 3:18–19]

Catechumens also acquired basic knowledge about the activity of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Particular emphasis was placed on the role of the Spirit of prophecy in the history of salvation, since it was under the influence of the Holy Spirit that the prophets of the Old Testament proclaimed Christ. At the conclusion of instruction, the teacher laid hands on the students in order to mediate to them the help of the Holy Spirit in the struggle against demons. It should be emphasized that in the school of Hippolytus all teachers whether clerics or lay people had the right to lay on hands.[4]

CONCLUSION

In the catechesis of the second century, there was no separate, systematic teaching about the Church. The quickest path to knowledge was practical participation in the life of the Christian community. The three-year period in the catechetical school represented a time of probation, during which the pagan was required to renounce evil habits, repent of former sins, and resolve to live according to the teaching of Christ.

The catechetical school was a place where a person primarily came to know the love of God and at the same time learned to love others. According to apostolic teaching, one who does not live with his or her neighbours in peace and love does not know God. Tertullian says that many pagans were astonished by the example of Christian love: “See,” they say [the pagans], “how they [the Christians] love one another!” for they themselves [the pagans] hate one another. “And how ready they are to die for one another!” for they themselves [the pagans] are rather ready to kill one another. [10]

The Church was a school of love, compassion, repentance, and forgiveness. In the practice of the early Church, knowledge of God and life with God were inseparable. It is natural that, with the spread of Christianity, a distinction arose between literature devoted to questions of doctrine and works concerned with the Christian way of life. This did not mean, however, that in catechetical practice the foundations of faith were separated from Christian morality.

SUMMARY

Catechesis in the first centuries of Christianity was by no means simple. Bishops as well as catechists—teachers had to contend with various pitfalls and dangers characteristic of the period. The Church encountered diverse heretical movements; various sects arose that often did not recognize the Mysteries, such as Baptism and the Eucharist. During this time, numerous apocryphal gospels and letters attributed to the holy apostles also emerged. In addition, Christians had to face persecution from many directions.

Despite all this, we see that the Church was always able to respond effectively to the situations that arose, in order not to lose control over those who were coming forward as candidates for entry into the Church. Thanks to catechetical schools, the Church was able, in this turbulent period, not only to grow and develop, but also to give rise to a vast body of writings by Christian teachers and the holy Fathers. These schools were an immense source of knowledge of Church teaching not only for catechumens. Apologetic literature directed against pagans during times of persecution also played an important role in catechizing precisely this category of catechumens, who, despite persecution, were coming into the Church in large numbers.

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THE SYSTEM OF CATECHESIS OF CATECHUMENS IN THE EARLY CENTURIES OF CHRISTIANITY

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Abstract

The present paper seeks to examine and describe the manner and system of catechizing catechumens in the Church during the period from the second to the fifth century. Numerous inconsistencies, as well as the frequent establishment of independent catechetical schools, led to a decline in catechesis, especially in the fourth and fifth centuries. The causes included various sects and heresies that undermined the teaching of the Church. There was also an ambiguous understanding of the position of women within the ecclesial community, which likewise resulted in many misunderstandings.

Keywords

Catechesis, deaconess, bishop, Church, Tertullian, God, Irenaeus of Lyons

EXODUS 20:14 AND THE PRESENT

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The Decalogue is often displayed on the walls of synagogues and churches to remind believers of the moral law to which they have committed themselves.

[1]

The Sixth Commandment, according to the Evangelical a. v. frees the biblical scholar J. Bándy from sexual passions. We are freed to true love. The problems associated with this commandment range from pornography to premarital sex to divorce. [2]

Adultery is a disruption of life; a possibility, a thought, with which we must not toy. The commandment, on the other hand, protects against frivolous impatience with one's own marriage, against premature capitulation and stubborn abandonment of one's partner. [14]

As Orthodox biblical scholar A. Cap says, only in the context of true and genuine love, defined by the Apostle Paul in the hymn of love in 1 Corinthians, can we properly understand the debasement of love that man caused after the fall and expulsion from paradise, when he selfishly focused on himself and satisfied his lust. [4] Egoism and lust persist to this day and have taken on new forms.

The Decalogue, according to the document *The Bible and Morality*, contains all the elements that are necessary as a basis for balanced moral reflection, appropriate to our time. [18] The prohibition in the Decalogue can encourage a morality of the "safety brake" type (for example, a person avoids adultery if he avoids courting his neighbor's wife). [18]

J. Leščinský states that the commandments of the first table concern the relationship with God, the following ones, in a horizontal direction, concern the relationship with people. The commandment on the prohibition of adultery saves the unique relationship between man and woman, and this commandment does not only put at stake the mutual life of the spouses, but certainly also applies

to their children and their protection. The 6th commandment protects the dignity and truth of another (you shall not commit adultery) [13].

The Bible and Morals document places certain values on the individual commandments, and so the commandments of the Decalogue point to three vertical values, which concern man's relationship with God, and seven horizontal values, which concern relationships between people. The sixth value is "to protect the union of a man and a woman in marriage." The ten values that underlie the Decalogue provide a clear basis for a charter of rights and freedoms valid for all humanity. The sixth right is "the right of the individual to freely choose his or her spouse, the right of the married couple to respect and support from the state and society in general, the right of children to stability (emotional, affective, financial) from their parents." [18]

According to Jozef Leščinský, an update of the original commandment of the Decalogue could look like this today: Maintain the unity of the marital union between a man and a woman and recognize the right of spouses to respect and support from the state. [13]

The importance of marriage and family is also expressed in the Constitution of the Slovak Republic, in Art. 41, para. 1: "Marriage is a unique union between a man and a woman. The Slovak Republic protects marriage in all respects and promotes its well-being. Marriage, parenthood and the family are under the protection of the law. Special protection of children and adolescents is guaranteed." [23]

While in the past the family was based on marriage and children were born into a registered marriage, for several years now it has been possible to observe in Slovakia that children are increasingly being born to single mothers or unmarried partners. According to moral theologian Helena Hrehová [9], people "have stopped being ashamed of sin, arguing that all people are sinners. In the 21st century, we even pretend as if sin does not exist. In such indifference, everything is permitted. And so the marriage bond sounds like a superfluous institution and unnecessary paperwork. Infidelity, adultery and fornication are no longer considered offenses, because we often hear that it can happen to anyone." According to our mini-survey, 9 out of 15 university students (women) stated that marriage is not necessary to start a family, it is enough for people to love each other. No one expressed the opinion that sexual intercourse before marriage is wrong. In a research conducted in 1976–1977, 76% of respondents

considered intimate intercourse between those who intend to marry to be correct. [19]

According to a survey of the sexual behavior of young people, conducted in Slovakia in 2009 on a sample of 1,051 young people aged 13 to 30, the vast majority of respondents (94%) declared some sexual experience. They had their first sexual intercourse between the ages of 15 and 18. Almost a quarter of women (24%) declared one sexual partner, 19% two, 12% three, 9% four, and 6% five. [6]

In fulfilling the commandments of the Decalogue, it is worth mentioning the sociological research of religiosity by O. Štefaňák [21], who found that in general the most frequently accepted are the “moral” commandments (especially IV., V., VII. and VIII.), the “sexual” norms (VI. and IX.) somewhat more rarely, and the “religious” commandments (especially II. and III.) the rarest.

As J. M. Lochman states, in most countries civil law, as far as marriage and divorce law are concerned, has been liberalized to a great extent. Adultery is considered mostly a salon “cavalier offense” and there are even numerous salons where a person is sufficiently “salon” only if he commits adultery from time to time. [14]

In the current situation, we often witness the “celebration” of sin. Promiscuity in the public sphere, in political life, in show business and the so-called The cream of the crop became fashionable. Sin became an object of praise.

Moral theologian Ivan Kúttny pointed out, among other things, the theatricality and exhibitionism of not only the chosen, but also the chosen. [8] A very striking example from Slovakia is the former speaker of parliament, who was never married and had many children with many partners. Those who have many partners are often considered successful, women undergo plastic surgery to appear “sexy” – lips, faces, breast augmentation. For several years, the world has been dominated by the cult of the body.

Because the view of the human body has changed and in the last 1920s nothing of the human body remained covered, today we can practically not consider anything as immodest, immoral. According to E. Mistrík and E. Sejščová, nudity is no longer immodest, indecent, it is natural and healthy. Contemporary Europe “definitely throws off the Judaic and Christian stigma on the body and sexuality”. [17]

However, following the ideal of beauty can have a negative impact on human sexuality, in addition to health problems. Culture prescribes a sexual

script through which we learn what should excite us, when and where we should have sex, how and why we should have it, and last but not least, with whom we should have it. According to M. Marchyn, the main cause of this harmful manipulation of female and male sexuality is primarily advertising and film images with pornographic themes. [15]

People often play sports and their motivation is not health, but physical appearance. Crum [5] distinguishes between elite sport, competitive sport or club sport, recreational sport, fitness sport, risky and adventure sport, cosmetic sport, the aim of which is an optimal, modeling visage (it is a commercially organized narcissism consisting of gaining fitness (shaping), body forming, modification of appearance and appearance (styling), also associated with sunbathing outdoors or in a solarium) and lust sport, the main and essentially hedonistic goal of which is to find some exclusive pleasure, it is commercially associated with tourism and is also referred to as 6S – sport according to sun, sand, snow, speed, sex, satisfaction. In cosmetic sport and lust sport, appearance comes to the fore, which is related to the cult of the body. Lust sport (6S – sport) is also directly oriented towards the sexual side of a person.

An oversexualized society is manifested in the press, television, the Internet, billboards, and in people's communication. L. Wade draws attention to the "pollution" of our environment by people who use sexually stimulating images on billboards, in the press, on television, in theaters, everywhere. [24] This situation has prevailed especially since the so-called sexual revolution in the 1960s.

Proponents of the sexual revolution use the term "safe sex," which is based on the idea that condoms can prevent disease. This has led millions of people to believe that there is something safe about a sexually promiscuous lifestyle. But protection only reduces the risk, not eliminates it. Living together before marriage seems like a risk-free way to test your compatibility, and is often described as "trying out a car before you buy it." Statistics show the opposite. Couples who lived together before marriage are almost twice as likely to divorce within the first 10 years of marriage as all other first marriages. Unmarried couples report three times the incidence of physical violence. Once married, they are more likely to cheat on one or both partners. Women in unmarried relationships report much higher rates of depression and much lower rates of sexual satisfaction than married women. [24]

Before the “sexual revolution,” the main sexually transmitted diseases were syphilis and gonorrhea, and they were believed to be disappearing with the development of antibiotics. Today, medicine has identified more than 20 common sexually transmitted diseases, with more than 15 million new cases each year in the United States alone. Two-thirds of all cases occur in people under the age of 25. Overall, at least one-quarter of sexually active teenagers are infected. The most common viral sexually transmitted disease is HPV (human papillomavirus), with 5.5 million new cases each year. Another deadly scourge is Chlamydia trachomatis, which scars the fallopian tubes and is the fastest-growing cause of infertility. And that’s not to mention viral diseases such as herpes or HIV, which causes AIDS. [24]

An even sadder result of the sexual revolution is the fivefold increase in the number of children growing up with only one parent. In 2002, 33 percent of all children in the United States were born out of wedlock, up from 7 percent in 1960. And this is despite the fact that more than 1.3 million abortions are performed in the United States each year. According to L. Wade, “the number of people who die each year as a result of the sexual revolution far exceeds the number of deaths caused by smoking each year.” [24]

Satanists still practice sexual orgies to attract young people to their ranks and have their “priestesses consecrated for this purpose.” [3]

God’s commandments in the Hebrew Bible were also intended to be a bulwark for the chosen people against the influence of the deification of sexual expressions and cultic sexual orgies that were common in the pagan surrounding nations. Only intimate life within the marriage bond was considered natural. Expressions outside of marriage were considered “demonic” in a way. [4]

Some cults use what is called Flirty Fishing to recruit new members, which can range from compliments from the opposite sex to sexual intercourse.

During sex, the body releases powerful chemicals that strengthen the couple’s bond. The hormone oxytocin acts directly on the brain to strengthen our connection and identification, and its flow increases during sexual intercourse. This means that God designed the physical aspect of the sexual act to be part of the complete intimacy of heart and mind, that is, marriage. The bonding function of sex also works when people do not have such an intention, as the apostle Paul already spoke about. It is not possible to have sex and then simply walk away, assuming that nothing happened. “Do you not know that whoever joins himself

to a prostitute is one body with her?" asked the apostle Paul. [24] According to L. Wade, Jesus also said that sexual intercourse is a means designed by God to ensure that the union of two lives is strong and lasting.

We are witnesses to sin. According to M. Župina, the evil that afflicts people and causes social and various other problems does not originate in things, but in persons. Persons in relation to evil do not necessarily have to be active, they do not have to create evil, but they can help evil with their passivity and lack of interest in good. [27] Therefore, we should not remain silent.

There are opinions that we should avoid talking about sexual sins, transgressions, and offenses, preferring to remain tactfully silent, perhaps also so as not to arouse unnecessary curiosity or incite and provoke these sins. But if we want to fight against them, we cannot be silent. Christian psychologist and therapist Mark Laaser said that "the greatest enemy of healthy sexuality is silence." [4]

Sexuality is a good gift from God, and therefore it should be enjoyed and celebrated. It is an excellent servant, but there is still a danger that it will become a powerful and destructive master. The center and norm for judging sexual behavior still remains marriage. [16]

However, we encounter various sexual deviations that can be relatively harmless, but can also lead to sexual crimes committed against other people. [16]

A sexual crime is understood as "the conduct of an individual that exceeds the norms of sexual morality set by society, which are at least codified by law; it is sexual behavior that exceeds the legally defined limit, which harms a person and his interests". [25] A sexual crime is therefore "a criminal act that is somehow related to the sexual arousal of the perpetrator and the object". [25]

In the Slovak Republic, Act No. 300/2005 Coll. Criminal Code, as amended, lists among crimes against human dignity § 199 Rape, § 200 Sexual violence, § 201 Sexual abuse, § 203 Sexual intercourse between relatives. Among crimes against the family and youth, § 204 Bigamy and § 211 Threatening the moral education of youth are listed. Crimes against freedom and human dignity under § 179 Trafficking in human beings also include if someone "lures, transports, harbors, transfers or receives another person, even with their consent, for the purpose of prostitution or other forms of sexual exploitation, including pornography." Criminal offences against other rights and freedoms include § 367 Procuring, § 368 Production of child pornography, § 369 Dissemination of child

pornography, § 370 Possession of child pornography and participation in a child pornography performance, § 371, § 372 Endangering morality, § 372a Support and promotion of sexually pathological practices. [26]

The issue of sexual ethics is also related to homosexuality, masturbation, contraception, abortion, artificial insemination. We have already dealt with this issue elsewhere. [11] The Catholic view of sexual ethics is presented, for example, by A. Spesz [20] in *Katolická mravouka*, F. Tondra [22] in *Moral theology*, and others. The Evangelical a. v. author I. Kišš [12] expressed his opinion on some issues of sexual ethics and the ethics of marriage and family, and J. Henžel [7] only briefly outlined this issue from an Evangelical perspective.

Artificial insemination, if donated sperm is to be used, raises the moral problem of whether this artificial insemination does not fall into the category of adultery, although not in the way it is commonly understood. [16]

As for sexual desires, a person is happy if he satisfies them in the right way in a loving marriage. (1 Cor. 7:2-5; Heb. 13:4). The purpose of pornography is to arouse sexual arousal, so it is very unwise for a single person to arouse desires that he cannot satisfy. But pornography is also dangerous for a married person. It appeals to selfish desires, demanding the satisfaction of personal desires, while love focuses on satisfying the needs of the spouse. Pornography leads to reckless, selfish sexual behavior that is degrading and unloving even within marriage. It can also lead to sexual perversions. [10]

In addition to pornography (erotic videos, films, pictures, or texts intended to arouse sexual arousal), the so-called cybersex, which is “sexually oriented communication over the Internet aimed at achieving sexual arousal”, phone sex “erotic conversations or listening to erotic conversations over the telephone” and sexting “sending sexually suggestive images or messages via mobile phone”. [30]

According to another definition, the word sexting is a combination of the words sex and texting and means sending text, photo, audio and video content with sexual overtones via information and communication technologies. [29] Interestingly, women use sexting to a much greater extent than men. The problem arises when people choose to use this method outside of their current relationship, which happens very often. A survey by an American online dating site shows that sexting is mainly the domain of flirtatious men and unfaithful women. Those interested should also be aware that even a privately sent intimate photo can easily become public. Not to mention the situation where the person

in question archives the spicy content and later publishes it without consent. [28] Such content, which is sent mainly within the framework of a romantic relationship, is misused to harm the other party, especially after its end, by publishing it or threatening to publish it. Sexting involving minors and adolescents can also be legally classified as a crime. Sexting often becomes a means of blackmailing children in the context of so-called cybergrooming. [29]

The document *The Bible and Morality* emphasizes the role of the church, which has always exalted the greatness of the couple of man and woman, both in their fundamental dignity as “the image of God” (creation) and in their bond of mutual commitment before and with God (covenant). By constantly and unwaveringly pointing out the importance and sanctity of marriage, the church not only denounces moral laxity, but also tirelessly and zealously defends the full meaning of the reality of marriage, acting in accordance with God’s plan. [18]

CONCLUSION

The original meaning of the Hebrew word in Ex 20:14 was “thou shalt not commit adultery.” However, the Hebrew Bible also condemned other impure sexual practices, to which the term “fornication” corresponded. The word “adultery,” like “fornication,” also meant “serving (worshipping) pagan gods.” The New Testament tightened the concept we know from the Hebrew Bible, and so today several Christian churches replace the 6th (according to the Catholic and Lutheran counting) and 7th (according to the Reformed counting) commandments with “thou shalt not commit adultery.”

In contemporary society, there has been a significant liberalization. Extramarital relationships and unions are tolerated, and in some cases even behavior that was previously understood as pathological and undesirable.

SUMMARY

We examine contemporary life in society through the lens of the biblical verse Exodus 20:14, “Thou shalt not commit adultery.” The original meaning of the Hebrew word in Exodus 20:14 was “you shall not commit adultery.” However, the Hebrew Bible also condemned other impure sexual practices, which corresponded to the term “fornication.” The word “adultery,” like “fornication,” also had the meaning of serving (worshipping) pagan gods. The New Testament tightened the concept we know from the Hebrew Bible, and so

today several Christian churches list "Thou shalt not commit fornication" as the 6th commandment (according to Catholic and Lutheran counting) and the 7th (according to Reformed counting) instead of "Thou shalt not commit adultery." Contemporary society has undergone significant liberalization. Extramarital relationships and unions are tolerated, and in some cases even behavior that was previously considered pathological and undesirable.

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EXODUS 20:14 AND THE PRESENT

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Abstract

The article discusses contemporary life in society through the lens of the biblical verse Exodus 20:14, "Thou shalt not commit adultery (fornication)." Contemporary society has undergone significant liberalization. Extramarital relationships and unions are tolerated, and in some cases even behavior that was previously considered pathological and undesirable.

Keywords

Hebrew Bible, Old Testament, Exodus 20:14, biblical commandment "Thou shalt not commit adultery (fornication)," present

A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF BASIL THE GREAT'S THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON THE BEGINNING OF THE WORD OF GOD ACCORDING TO HOMILY XVI: AT THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD

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INTRODUCTION

Eastern Trinitarian theology takes its point of departure from one of the most profound and theologically weighty affirmations of Sacred Scripture, namely the opening verses of the Gospel according to Saint John. Among the many ecclesiastical writers and Fathers of the Church who devoted themselves to the theological exegesis of this John's prologue, a prominent place belongs to Saint Basil the Great. Of his extant writings, one homily in particular stands out, as it effectively synthesizes the core of Basil's theological reflection on the consubstantiality (*homoousios*) of the Son with the Father within the divine life. The doctrine of the unity of the divine Persons constitutes the foundational principle upon which the two-millennia-long teaching of the New Testament Church is constructed, serving as both the hermeneutical key to Trinitarian revelation and the doctrinal bulwark against all forms of subordinationism.

UNIQUENESS OF THE BEGINNING OF THE WORD

In developing his understanding of the origin (*ἀρχή*) of the Divine Word, Basil begins his homily by drawing attention to the ordinary usage of the term "beginning." He observes that there exist multiple kinds of beginnings. Referring to the biblical text, he cites the Book of Proverbs: "The way of the good is a beginning" (Prov 16:6), noting that the beginning of a journey consists in the first movement by which one sets out upon a path. [4] When quoting the Psalm, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (Ps 110:10), Basil emphasizes that this beginning presupposes something prior to it, since the fear of the Lord constitutes the primary foundation of wisdom. Yet there is something even more

fundamental than this beginning, namely the condition of the human soul before it has attained wisdom and before it has embraced the fear of God.

Through this line of reasoning, Basil seeks to guide the listener toward the idea that an authentic understanding of the Trinity begins with blessed wisdom, whose initial impulse is discovered by the human person in the fear of God. Basil further introduces other kinds of beginnings that are commonly encountered in human experience but differ in nature from the evangelical beginning. These include secular and civic authorities, such as supreme offices or ranks, which are regarded as beginnings of a society, a nation, or a political entity. Such forms of “primacy” (for example, the head of state) function as beginnings only in a limited sense: each constitutes a beginning only in relation to a particular domain and only for certain individuals. [2], [1]

Basil continues by illustrating this notion through examples drawn from geometry and grammar. The beginning of a line is a point, the beginning of a surface is a line, and the beginning of a body is a surface. Similarly, the beginning of a compound word is a letter, and the parts of speech serve as the beginning of grammatical expression.

The beginning of the Divine Word is distinct and unique. It is not connected to anything else, nor is it subordinated to anything, and it cannot be conceived in relation to any external referent. The beginning of the Word is free and independent, separated from any relational dependency whatsoever. Its intelligibility cannot be surpassed, nor can anything be posited beyond it. Should one attempt to transcend this Beginning by means of conceptual imagination, one arrives at the realization that it always precedes us and anticipates our very thoughts. The Beginning invariably extends beyond what can be conceived and exceeds every attempt to move beyond it.

Basil underscores that even if the human intellect were allowed to range as far as it is capable of reasoning, after countless wanderings and futile efforts it would inevitably return to itself, since it is unable to place the Beginning beneath itself or leave it behind. [5], [3]

This understanding of the Beginning of the Divine Word necessarily leads Basil toward the question of the non-temporal generation of the Logos. If the Beginning is neither conditioned by anything prior nor conceived in relation to any external reference, it cannot be situated within temporal succession. Time itself presupposes a sequence of before and after, whereas the Beginning of the

Word admits no such ordering. Consequently, the generation of the Word cannot be understood as an event occurring at a specific moment, nor as a transition from non-being to being, but rather as an eternal mode of existence proper to the divine life.

For Basil, any attempt to interpret the origin of the Logos in temporal categories inevitably results in conceptual distortion. Temporal beginnings imply change, movement, and dependency, all of which are incompatible with the divine nature. The eternal generation of the Son must therefore be affirmed as a reality that transcends temporal causality, remaining inaccessible to discursive reasoning while nevertheless forming an essential element of orthodox Trinitarian doctrine.

THE LOGICAL CONTINUITY AND RELATIONSHIP OF THE WORDS "IN THE BEGINNING WAS"

In comparison with all the beginnings that can be conceived, the beginning articulated in the text of the Gospel is incommensurable with them. The statement "In the beginning was the Word" appears to Saint Basil as a linguistically and theologically masterful formulation, for each word of this clause, taken together, bears equal weight in terms of meaning and doctrinal content. Basil therefore calls upon those who, through their heretical interpretations (for example, Arius), stand in opposition to the Johannine Prologue, and demands that they explain the meaning of "beginning" in this statement, since the phrase "in the beginning" possesses the same semantic force as the verb "was." [4], [6]

Employing logical reasoning, Basil seeks to clarify where the Logos was if He supposedly "was not," or, if He was "in the beginning," when He was not. In theology, unlike philosophy or other sciences, the concept of "beginning" is not understood as a temporal marker. [1] For this reason, it is impossible to speak of a time "before the beginning" in the sense of generation. God, as the Creator and Lord of time, is not constrained by time; consequently, the generation of the Son does not fall within a temporal "before" preceding the beginning. The terms "before" and "beginning," when used theologically, do not imply succession. Thus, if the Logos was "in the beginning," this does not entail that He did not exist prior to it. How, indeed, can one limit and subject God, the Creator of all

things—including time itself—to the conditions of time? Accordingly, the expression “was in the beginning” does not mean that He was not before.

Having established the uniqueness and inviolability of the Beginning of the Logos, Basil proceeds with a logical exposition of the phrase: “In the beginning was the Word.” The verb “was,” he argues, is equivalent in meaning to the expression “in the beginning.” On this basis, he challenges the blasphemous claim that “there was a time when He was not.” The Gospel proclaims: “In the beginning was.” And if He was in the beginning, when was He not? Likewise, the assertion “before He was begotten, He was not” presupposes knowledge of a “when” of His generation, such that this “before” could be attributed to time. Yet “before” is a temporal category, indicating the distance of one thing in relation to another. Is it fitting, Basil asks, that the Creator of time should have a generation subject to temporal designations? (Ἐν ἀρχῇ τοίνυν ἦν ὁ Λόγος. Ὡ τοῦ θαύματος! Πῶς πᾶσαι ἀλλήλαις ὁμοτίμως αἰ φωναὶ συν ἐξεύχθησαν! Τὸ, Ἦν, ἴσον δύναται τοῦ, Ἐν ἀρχῇ. Ποῦ ὁ βλάσφημος; ποῦ ἡ χριστομάχος γλῶττα; ἡ λέγουσα, Ἦν ποτε, ὅτε οὐκ ἦν; Ἄκουε τοῦ Εὐαγγελίου, Ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν. Εἰ δὲ ἐν ἀρχῇ ἦν, πότε οὐκ ἦν; Τὴν ἀσέβειαν αὐτῶν στενάξω, ἢ τὴν ἀμαθίαν βδελύξομαι; Ἀλλὰ πρὸ τοῦ γεννηθῆναι, οὐκ ἦν. Οἶδας γὰρ πότε ἐγεννήθη, ἵνα τὸ πρὶν δυνηθῆς ἐπ ἐνεγκεῖν τῷ χρόνῳ; Τὸ γὰρ, Πρὸ τοῦ, χρονικὴ ἐστὶ φωνή, ἕτερον ἑτέρου προτιθεῖσα εἰς παλαιότητα. Τὸν δὲ τοῦ χρόνου ποιητὴν πῶς εὐλογον ταῖς χρονικαῖς προσηγορίαις ὑποκειμένην ἔχειν τὴν γέννησιν;) [1]

After clarifying the relationship and semantic force of the expressions “in the beginning” (Ἐν ἀρχῇ) and “was” (ἦν), Basil directs his attention to the substance of the statement itself, namely to the one who was in the Beginning. With notable logical precision, he seeks to identify who this Word is, or more exactly, in what sense it is distinct and unique. He first raises the question of what kind of “word” is intended—whether human, angelic, or perhaps the interior word of the human heart. None of these, however, could have existed in the Beginning, [4], [6] for all such words belong to created reality. Humanity itself was preceded by numerous created beings: living creatures on land, in the waters, and in the air; plants; celestial bodies; and even the angelic powers. Each of these entities received the beginning of its existence from the Creator at a point subsequent to the ages.

The Evangelist later designates the Word as light, life, and resurrection. Yet these terms exceed the limits of ordinary human comprehension, for “light” is not to be understood as sensory illumination, nor “life” as the biological life experienced in the present world. The Son of God is named Logos precisely in order to prevent any confinement of His reality within the boundaries of human imagination and discursive thought. The Logos proceeds from the divine mind and is begotten without passion or division. As the Son is the image of the Only-Begotten, He fully reveals the Father, being separated from Him by nothing and remaining perfect in Himself, just as a spoken word fully expresses the concept present in the intellect. [5], [4]

Basil completes this theological argument by appealing to the following clause of the verse: “and the Word was with God” (Καὶ ὁ Λόγος ἦν πρὸς τὸν Θεόν). The preposition πρὸς does not merely indicate spatial proximity but expresses a dynamic orientation and personal relation. In situating the Logos πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, the Evangelist affirms both the distinction and the communion between the Father and the Son within the divine life. The Logos is not said to be “in” a place, but to be toward God, that is, in eternal relation to the Father, who Himself is unrestricted by space and time.

CONCLUSION

This precise formulation also carries a significant christological dimension. By emphasizing the personal relationality implied in πρὸς τὸν Θεόν, the text safeguards the full personal subsistence of the Son: He does not dissolve into the divine essence but exists as a distinct hypostasis, fully and eternally oriented toward the Father. At the same time, the phrase excludes any notion of subordination or temporal derivation, since the relation it expresses is not conditioned by time or causality. Thus, the John’s expression πρὸς τὸν Θεόν provides a foundational linguistic and theological framework for affirming both the consubstantiality of the Son with the Father and the integrity of His personhood, a framework that will later prove decisive for classical Christological and Trinitarian doctrine.

SUMMARY

This study examines Saint Basil the Great’s theological exegesis of the John’s Prologue, focusing on the concept of the Beginning (ἀρχῆ) of the Divine Word

(Logos). Basil begins by clarifying ordinary notions of beginnings in human, angelic, and cosmic contexts, highlighting the uniqueness and incommensurability of the Beginning of the Word with any created reality. He emphasizes that the Word precedes all creation and exists independently, free from temporal and spatial constraints, thus anticipating human thought. The analysis addresses the semantic precision of the expressions “in the beginning” and “was”, showing how Basil uses them to affirm the eternal existence of the Son and to challenge heretical interpretations that impose temporal limitations on the Logos. The study further explores the theological significance of the Johannine phrase πρὸς τὸν Θεόν (pros ton Theon), underlining its implications for the personal relationship between Father and Son, the distinction and consubstantiality of the Son, and the christological affirmation of His hypostatic reality. Finally, the work situates Basil’s reflections within the broader framework of Trinitarian theology, highlighting the importance of non-temporal, eternal generation for understanding the relationship between the Father and the Son.

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A BRIEF ANALYSIS OF BASIL THE GREAT'S THEOLOGICAL REFLECTION ON THE BEGINNING OF THE WORD OF GOD ACCORDING TO HOMILY XVI: AT THE BEGINNING WAS THE WORD

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Abstract

This article explores Saint Basil the Great's exegesis of the opening verses of the Gospel according to John, with particular attention to the concept of the Beginning ($\alpha\rho\chi\eta$) of the Divine Word (Logos). Basil distinguishes the Word from all created beginnings, emphasizing its unique, independent, and eternal existence. Through a precise analysis of the terms "in the beginning" and "was", he demonstrates that the Logos is not subject to temporal sequence, and that any temporal understanding of generation is incompatible with divine reality. The study highlights Basil's use of the John's phrase $\pi\rho\sigma\ \tau\acute{o}\nu\ \Theta\epsilon\acute{o}\nu$ (pros ton Theon) to articulate the relational and personal orientation of the Son toward the Father, thereby affirming the Son's distinct hypostasis while maintaining consubstantiality with the Father. By situating Basil's reflections in the broader context of Trinitarian and Christological theology, the article illustrates how his interpretation of the Prologue provides a critical foundation for understanding eternal generation, the unity and distinction of divine Persons, and the christological identity of the Logos.

Keywords

Holy Trinity, Basil the Great, Gospel, Logos, homoousion

WHAT IS GOD'S LOVE²

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Holy Monastery of the Virgin Mary at Kallipetra, Veria, Hellenic Republic

INTRODUCTION

The topic I am speaking about today is very difficult and difficult for today's man to understand. God's love is revealed to us at the end of Holy Scripture, when the holy apostle John the Theologian reveals to us that God is love. In the previous chapters we learn about the history of the Church, but we learn the result of the creation of the world at the end of the Gospel. It is described in many ways in Holy Scripture, but it is not easy to understand. The difficulty lies in the fact that we cannot understand exactly what love is. The Holy Fathers tell us that the Gospel reading from Sunday about the prodigal son is one of the manifestations of God's love. If all Holy Scripture were lost and only one page of it were preserved, on which this event (parable) was written, it would express the full expression of God's love for man. The whole of Holy Scripture expresses God's love to us through this pericope. If you understand what I just said, it is a great theological error. I told you about the love of God and none of you found it strange. This is precisely the revelation that the apostle John presents to us, that God does not have love, but is love. This is the teaching and theology of who God is.

THE LOVE OF THE HOLY TRINITY

We find in the history of the Church and humanity that the saints did not rush with this revelation because humanity was in a state where it could not comprehend this truth. We can all say that we love a person. We can imagine the love that is created between a parent and a child. However, this is not the love of God. If someone wants to understand this love, they must imagine the love between the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. They are three Persons who do

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not have a different opinion among themselves. None of them wants to express their own and different opinion. They agree on everything before they start doing something. There is complete identity between their thoughts. Can any of us say that they have the experience to be able to understand this state? After all, even with the people we love, we often have various misunderstandings. So, what is the love that is manifested in our world? First, it is creative love. God, by virtue of being Love, is “forced” to create. Just as a loving couple strives to create the fruit of their love. Just as a painter who falls in love with a place wants to paint a picture and reproduce it in this way. So, if there is love between people, they are forced to create something from it. The love of the Holy Trinity leads God to the solution that one of the Persons must become a man. This love for creation is the driving force for the healing and recovery of man. The concept of love is not some imaginary, abstract expression, but the essence of our life. They are not just theological theories but are to be applied in life. If God wants us to perceive him in this way, he leads us to unite with him and become one “fist” with him. God gave us the freedom to choose this love.

CHRISTIAN LOVE

God wants us to love Him voluntarily and not out of compulsion. The salvation of man must also be accomplished through love. In various Christian groups, people are united in the fact that they must love God. For example, the Jews could never imagine that they could get rid of any offense. Therefore, there was no forgiveness among them, but only death and condemnation to hell. Even today, there are such beliefs that a person must be punished at least temporarily in order to satisfy God. However, God is free from this request that we love him. Imagine that atheism and blasphemy were born in a Christian environment. In idolatry, Islam, Eastern polytheism, we do not encounter man's setting himself against God. The freedom to fight with God is found only in Christianity. And this shows to what extent God created us free to contradict and slander him. One moment I can sin against God and the next I can ask Him for something. I am convinced that God does not hold any ill will towards me and can hear me. It may seem difficult to understand at first glance, which is why this topic is difficult. Our everyday life does not allow us to understand that there is a being who works like this. Even the liturgical prayers written by the saints are very demanding in explaining who God is. Saint Paisios of Mount Athos said that

even the saints who wrote these prayers were unable to describe God fully. The Holy Prophet Isaiah, in one word that we read on the feast of Theophany, to describe this to us precisely, places God who says: "My thoughts are not like your human thoughts. As heaven is far from earth, so are my thoughts from yours." The place where we could understand this love, the place where this love can be practically seen, is the moment when someone comes to confession. Then the priest sees that no matter how great and heinous the sins of the confessor may be, God, seeing true repentance, forgives these sins. As a confessor with twenty years of experience, often when I read the prayer over the confessor, the long-suffering of God came to mind. This constant patience of God is what breaks the hearts of angels. God waits for man to repent, to give him his reward. He comes to this world, allows himself to be crucified, allows his resurrection to be questioned, so that man himself may decide to believe. Who then will be saved? The one who makes many prostrations, who fasts much, who goes to church often, who always receives the Eucharist, or the one who goes to confess the faith and is martyred? Saint Apostle Paul raises his hand and stops such thoughts. He says that even if we were to be burned as martyrs, we are nothing if we do not have love within us, i.e., if we are not identified with God.

THE BOUNDLESSNESS OF LOVE FOR MAN

To help you understand, let me give you an example: Imagine a moment in the life of Christ that moves us. Imagine that before they come to arrest Christ, he is praying in the garden. The incarnate Second Person of the Holy Trinity is in this place, praying to his Father. Can we say that the most powerful prayer in the world has been heard? Can any other prayer compare to this most fervent prayer, when God gives time to his Son. The intensity of this prayer resulted in sweat turning into blood. The Holy Trinity's answer to this request is: "No! I will not hear your request. I will not let you go!" Imagine that it is the most powerful prayer in the world, and the Holy Trinity answers negatively. Why does it answer "no"? Because it loves man. The motivation in our struggle to become better people is not to not tell lies or to fast more, but to have a good intention. To think: "Is it possible that he loves me so much? And I keep turning my back on him..." Imagine that we have a group of worms and they are all dying. The only way they will not die is for one of us to become a worm and try to save them. Who among us would want to become an ugly worm? However, Christ

wanted it and became such a pleasant worm. In theology we say that God and man are inseparably together, because of the freedom of both, and inseparably together.

LOVE IN ETERNITY

The last example of love that I present to you is the idea of who God actually is. First, I present it so that the good intention to love God is born in us. God loves the devil and the Most Holy Theotokos equally strongly. Can you even imagine that? God is not the sun that says: "You are very sinful, I will not give you my rays." However, He sends His warm rays and light to the devil as well. We know that the devil does not receive this love in the same way as the Most Holy Theotokos, but regardless of what the devil and the Most Holy Theotokos do, God, as love, sends only love to everyone. Imagine that you are being chased by a person who loves you and we turn our backs on them and want something dirty for them. So let us turn in the direction where love is. And when our eyes see the face that truly loves us, then no one will have to tell us that we should not steal. We won't have to read a book to understand that we shouldn't lie. If two people love each other, do they need rules on how to love each other? The Holy Apostle Paul says that the law was given to those who did not know, did not know. We have no need for the law today. This wonderful love will continue even after we close our eyes. There are beliefs that there are cauldrons and fires in the other world. Who created them? God created everything good. Did he create cauldrons and spears that stab people? No. This love will also be in the next life, which the Most Holy Theotokos will perceive and enjoy. And when the devil sees this love, it will be something that will disgust him. This is an image of hell. Just like a thief, he is afraid when he sees a policeman, but not because the policeman is bad, but because he himself will feel guilty. This is how the devil and all those condemned with him will feel, because they were unable to take advantage of this immense love that comes to embrace us and lead us to salvation.

As we were passing through Bratislava, a woman stopped us and asked me to pray for her because she was alone. I asked her: "Are you alone? After all, there is a wonderful God, this wonderful love that is interested in you." This love did not allow many ascetics to come out of their caves, and today we choose everything other than this wonderful love. There is no need to do forced

asceticism in our lives, but it is necessary to love the One who is very necessary for man, and the heart will be led to do everything that will not grieve God.

SUMMARY

In the history of the Church and humanity, we find that the saints did not rush into this revelation because humanity was in a state where it could not grasp this truth. If someone wants to understand this love, he must imagine the love between the three Persons of the Holy Trinity. They are three Persons who do not have a different opinion among themselves. None of them wants to express their own and different opinion. They agree on everything before they start doing something. There is complete identity between their thoughts. The love of the Holy Trinity leads God to the solution that one of the Persons must become a man. This love for creation is the driving force for the healing and recovery of man. The concept of love is not some imaginary, abstract expression, but the essence of our life. God wants us to love him voluntarily and not out of compulsion. Even the salvation of man must be accomplished through love. The freedom to fight with God is found only in Christianity. And this shows how free God created us to contradict and slander Him. One moment I can sin against God and the next I can ask Him for something. God loves the devil and the Most Holy Theotokos equally strongly. There will be love in the next life, which the Most Holy Theotokos will perceive and enjoy. And when the devil sees this love, it will be something that he will abhor. This is a picture of hell.

WHAT IS GOD'S LOVE

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Abstract

The article brings together the spiritual experience of the Church as well as the author's personal experience with understanding the revealed love of God. The content is an expression of the essence and principle of the active love of the Holy Trinity. It explains why God created everything and why He became man and died on the cross. The author also points out the factor of full freedom, which is essential for the salvation of man. Only by a free decision to accept the love of God and unite with Him does theosis become possible. Man's freedom determines whether he will accept and will later be able to accept the boundless love of the Triune God. Even after the physical death of man, this love, as the only essential thing, continues and includes man, as long as he himself allowed it during his life.

Keywords

Love, Holy Trinity, therapy, theosis, freedom