

VIATORUM

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JOYS AND CHALLENGES OF ACADEMIC WRITING

As we continue to celebrate the 50th anniversary of *Communio Viatorum*, it is perhaps a good occasion to reflect on why such an enterprise may still be worth while. Peter Morée's article on the history of our journal shows that a simple continuation of what our predecessors stood for is problematic. The links with the communist government and with the Christian Peace Conference would be unlikely to offer good reasons for the next theological generation to treasure the "family silver." That problematic history we carry with ourselves forces us to rethink how theology can be contextual without selling its soul to temporary ideologies.

Communio Viatorum has been known, however, also for other things. It has been a platform for academic discussion for example in Biblical Studies and the Bohemian Reformation. Here we have a better point of continuation and of a challenge or a demand that should not be ignored: a passion to communicate, when our authors felt they had something new to say, to test it against the opinions of others. In our present academic setting where one has to struggle against the unwritten rule of academic life – publish or perish – such a passion to communicate has a taste of forgotten fruits of life from paradise. Academics here write articles not because they have to justify their existence and fulfil the demands set up in their grants, but because they want to say something. And they have a reasonable expectation that someone else may actually read their articles and maybe even respond to their arguments, not merely because there is a mutual agreement in chasing references for the quotation index.

In our time the genuine exchange of ideas and discoveries has not been lost completely, but in honesty we would have to say that the values that make academic writing worthwhile are to be listed among the endangered species. In situations of overproduction of words and texts, this endangered option seems to be at the same time the most attractive one and most needed one. It may be that the generation that comes after us would weigh our credibility according to succeeding or not succeeding in this particular area: publishing when there was

something to be said, when the words were not just means to utilitarian ends.

There is no doubt that we will be tested in upholding such a standard, one that I believe does not distinguish us from other academic journals, but binds us together with them. So now, what would be the specific qualities of *Communio Viatorum*. Why should this journal remain to have its place among others? This paradoxically leads me back to contextuality, where, as I said, our heritage is at least ambivalent. One of the questions behind our choices for the thematic issues, for example, is: What does it mean to do theology in Central Europe today?

This is a very complex question. It involves themes that emerge as important and flow into our theological reflection: among others, how to deal healthily with our post-war and post-communist memories without being locked in the past; the meaning of the demographic and cultural changes and also new social injustice or a new role ascribed to religion.

Yet alongside the themes we have to ask about our own theological journeys that have influenced both the themes we are sensitive to and how we interpret them. During the past two decades most theologians from the post-communist countries have gratefully received the possibilities of studying or researching in Western European and American faculties of theology or seminaries. Most carried within themselves an awareness of the gaps in theological scholarship in their own countries and a desire to fill these gaps as well and as fast as they could. Absorbing new theological methods, as well as different modern histories of theology within a shortened period of time was sometimes accompanied with alienation from their own contexts, which, with the expanded horizons, looked even more deficient. This process was not made easier by the state of the churches and of many institutions of theological education in our part of the world. Besides the obvious theme of collaboration with the communist authorities another dominant theme, more directly related to the nature of theology, emerged. It was often claimed by the people who opposed the totalitarian regimes that, as their theology did not change under the communist domination, it certainly did not need any change afterwards. Simply said, there was a conservatism that refused to

take on board new developments in theology, remaining deeply convinced that a “true theology” is done according to a timeless scheme. Such views were expressed with a different level of cultivation and of centrifugal force, in some cases resulting in the rejection of theologians coming home from abroad with western theological education. In other cases the synthesis of both of the theological heritages was less painful, and resulted in fruitful transformation of the institutions of theological education. Both types of *viatorum* belong to our theological communities, and contribute to their diversified standpoints.

Thus, like in other places, also in Central Europe there is not one theological voice, and not even a symphony of many. In what I just sketched I wanted to show some of the typical features that influence doing theology in our region today that are implicitly present in some of the articles our journal publishes.

This issue of *Communio Viatorum* offers four articles. First, the study by Peter Morée, already mentioned, critically examining the contribution of the first fifty years of our journal. It is followed by two studies in biblical interpretation and theology. Viktor Ber’s article analyses the relationship between Moses and Jethro, what each of them represents, and focussing on the exegesis of Exodus 18, discusses the main points of the harmonising and the suspicious interpretations of Jethro’s visitation of Moses during the Israel’s stay in the wilderness. Walburga Zumbroich’s article is from the field of Rabbinic interpretation and concentrates on the first biblical creation narratives and the question of theodicy that is entwined with the narratives about the beginning. The last article in this issue takes us to the boundary between theology and music. A musicologist Anthony Noble examines ways in which the works of Johann Sebastian Bach or Olivier Messiaen might “embody, reflect or analogize aspects of our understanding of the nature of the Holy Spirit,” whilst “allowing musical features to carry extra-musical significance.”¹ Enjoy the reading!

Ivana Noble, Prague

¹ These precise formulations are taken from the abstract of Anthony Noble’s article.

FIFTY YEARS COMMUNIO VIATORUM: FROM A THEOLOGICAL PROGRAM INTO A PLATFORM FOR THEOLOGY¹

Peter Morée, Prague

A small faculty like the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University in Prague – previously the Protestant Theological Comenius Faculty – linked to a small minority of protestants in the Czech Republic, should be proud of celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of its international theological journal. After all it made its theological tradition known across the borders of its own confessional, cultural and even political limitations. *Communio Viatorum* has been a window on the world which brought the international theological debate closer to the Czech environment and vice versa. Czech protestantism has always had an internationalist outlook, a drive to be involved in debates in other parts of the world, which is one of the strong sides of a tiny minority refusing to be inward looking.

In one way or another, *Communio Viatorum* is a product of this window-on-the-world mentality. From its environment it requires a continuous intellectual capacity to launch such a journal, to run it on a regular basis and to maintain its quality. It requires also a courage or boldness from its community to suppose that it has something to offer into the international debate from its own tradition on a continuous basis. And all this happened not without success. *Communio Viatorum* is perhaps not widely known, but many associate it to the faculty and to Czech Protestantism.

Nevertheless, this fiftieth anniversary is not without mixed feelings. The other side of the international coin is that within the totalitarian communist system till 1989 *Communio Viatorum* also func-

¹ This article is part of the project 'Josef Lukl Hromádka (1889–1969) and Czech Protestantism 1945–1989,' financed by the Grant Agency of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic (GA AV A801830801).

tioned as a way to justify a political system that brought oppression and dictatorship. When after an interruption of two years from 1990 to 1991 *Communio Viatorum* was re-published in 1992, the new editors by way of explaining why the journal was back on track, expressed this ambivalence in the following way:

So dass wir leider von unseren Vorgängern eine große Schuld vererbt bekommen haben und nun wohl verpflichtet sind, was nur immer in diesem Bereich möglich wird gutzumachen. Keineswegs meinen wir damit einen einfachen Pendelschlag in eine andere Einseitigkeit – aber eben wenn heute in der Welt die Fragen nach einer „sozialen Revolution“ immer noch so brennend sind und zugleich der Mensch mit ihrem nachhaltenden Terror, welcher auch die ursprünglichen Ziele zerfrisst, die schlimmsten Erfahrungen gemacht hat, ist es notwendig, über die ganze Sache weitaus präziser und differenzierter, komplexer und subtiler, mit einem Wort profunder denken zu können. Und dazu gehört auch eine möglichst authentische und durch-reflektierte Auskunft über das, was schon geschehen ist.²

The new editors spoke about an inherited guilt, which they wanted to reconcile under the new political conditions of freedom and democracy. The decision to continue the journal was inspired by the conviction of the faculty – now a part of Prague’s Charles University – that the innate value of *Communio Viatorum* was more significant than the share of responsibility and guilt it had in implementing mechanism of exclusion and oppression (by not allowing certain authors to publish) or justifying the political line of Czechoslovakia (by publishing articles which had to prove that communism was the better choice). Now, the journal had to return to its roots, which in the eyes of the new editors was to provide a platform for a dialog between continents and traditions. In short, the mission of *Communio Viatorum* outweighed the function it had received during the years of the communist rule.

This presupposed that the mission and the function were once sepa-

² *CV* 1992/1, Editorial, p. 8.

rated and should be separated again. This raises the question whether this understanding of the history of *Communio Viatorum* is a proper assessment of the complexity of the problem. Is it true that the aims of the founders and editors of *Communio Viatorum* were independent on the aims of the communist authorities throughout the period of 1958–1989? Or is there an intrinsic dependence of the two? What then were the intentions and aims of the founders of the journal back in 1958? What was their concept of *Communio Viatorum*? And what were the reasons for the state authorities to agree with the launch, as it could never have happened without their direct involvement?

The agenda of the communist regime

To start with the last question, the launch of *Communio Viatorum* fitted perfectly well in the strategy of the Czechoslovak communist regime to make use of Czech protestantism and its international network to influence the opinion among the international ecumenical partners about the communist bloc. The beginning of this strategy went back to 1953, to the eve of the Second General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Evanston. Less than a year before the Assembly, the leadership of the State Bureau for Church Affairs – the institution which implemented the control over religious communities in the country – had been changed.³ The new leadership wanted on the one hand to ease some of the restrictions on church life, but at the same time to make use of the capabilities of the churches – especially of the non-Catholic churches – to give a different picture of religious life in communist Czechoslovakia. For that the State Bureau started an information campaign of several publications in different languages about the role of churches in the past and present.⁴ Also a bulletin was published regularly to give current information about the churches in the country. Needless to say that the publica-

³ Jiří Piškula, *Předzvěst pražského jara v době stalinismu*, Státní úřad pro věci církevní v letech 1963–1956, in: *Teologie a společnost*, 3/2006, IV, str. 23 ff.

⁴ E.g. Amedeo Molnár, *Czechoslovak Protestantism Today*, Praha 1954 – this publication in English, German and French was produced especially for Evanston. Another publication with the same aim was Luděk Brož (ed.), *Yesterday and today: a survey of Czechoslovak Protestantism*, Praha 1955.

tions did not contain a word of criticism about the severe limitations churches faced under the communist church laws of 1949.

According to internal reports concerning Evanston, the State Bureau was enthusiastic about the results of its efforts – which were by the way closely coordinated with its Hungarian counterpart – and decided to continue on this track.⁵ The key figure in their strategy was Josef L. Hromádka, who on the international level severely criticized what he called anti-communism among many Western church representatives and legitimized communism as a historical force that had to be taken seriously as a partner. For that reason the regime decided to strengthen the position of Hromádka both nationally and internationally, as it was afraid that Hromádka would lose the respect of his colleagues at home and abroad.⁶

In the following years several new initiatives were taken to implement this strategy. Regular visits of selected theologians from Western Europe – especially Western Germany – were organized (Niemöller, Iwand and others). Hromádka was awarded the Lenin Peace Prize, the highest decoration of its kind in the Soviet Union. The Christian Peace Conference was founded as an international ecumenical structure to outbalance the WCC. And *Communio Viatorum* was launched.

To complete this side of the picture: *Communio* was largely financed by the communist authorities. Subscription covered about one third of the costs. According to accounting documents in the archive of the Secretariat for Church Affairs (the successor to the State Bureau) from the 1980s, the authorities never refused to pay. The financial documents give also reason to believe that some, who were involved in producing *Communio Viatorum* as correctors or translators, demanded a significant payment for their work.⁷ In other words: It

⁵ National Archive of the Czech Republic, SÚC [State Bureau for Church Affairs], box 130, Evanston, document no. T 556/54–S „Zpráva o průběhu konference Světové rady církví v Evanstonu“ [Report on the course of the conference of the World Council of Churches in Evanston].

⁶ See e.g. National Archive of the Czech Republic, Ministry of Education and Culture, Division for Church Affairs, box 44, Politická spolupráce s prof. J. L. Hromádkou [Political cooperation with prof. J. L. Hromádkou].

⁷ National Archive of the Czech Republic, Ministry of Culture, Secretariat for Church Affairs, box 278, Faculty Press.

would not be possible to celebrate the 50th anniversary of *Communio Viatorum* without the thorough planning and the generous gifts of the communist authorities.

Here we can ask a similar question as above. How should we evaluate the efforts of the communist regime as it aimed to use the journal as a kind of propaganda for its international reputation? Or is there more to say? Was the regime was right in its assumption that it was successful in its strategy of making use of the Czech protestants for its own benefit? The regime collapsed, but *Communio Viatorum* is still being published – though now continuously facing a financial deficit. Could we say that the vision of the founders of *Communio Viatorum* was strong enough to resist the manipulation of the regime? And what was the vision of the founding fathers, Josef L. Hromádka and Josef B. Souček?

The agenda of the founders of *Communio Viatorum*

For an answer to the last question we turn to the very first issue of *Communio Viatorum*. Here we find three texts that explain the aims. First Hromádka explained in his Editorial that *Communio Viatorum* wants to be a forum of a broader, not only academic debate on theology. “We wish to indicate the way in which we wrestle with the main questions of theology and what is in the background of our practical decisions both in our domestic life and in the ecumenical cooperation.”⁸ (1).

Also *Communio Viatorum* wants to bring the Bohemian Reformation and its heritage to the international forum:

“But it is our desire to interpret in the most vital and actual way the great heritage of our own reformation, represented by the figures of Jan Hus, Petr Chelčický, Lukáš of Prague, Jan Blahoslav and John Amos Comenius (Komenský). As heirs of the Hussite movement and of the Unity of the Brethren (*Unitas Fratrum*) we are guided by their great achievements, but we

⁸ J. L. Hromádka, Editorial, in: *CV* 1958/1, p. 1.

know that we have to re-discover and to re-interpret our spiritual heritage in our concrete life.⁹

By all means did *Communio Viatorum* achieve this goal of introducing the Bohemian Reformation to an international audience. In almost every issue we find articles about representatives or developments of this Reformation, often written by the church historians of the Comenius Faculty Amedeo Molnár, František M. Bartoš or Rudolf Říčan. In the later years we find also articles by German, Italian or Canadian church historians and even of secular, marxist historians from Czechoslovakia.

Nevertheless, Hromádka did not intend to limit this aim only to church historians. He wanted to put the present situation of church and society in the light of the Bohemian Reformation. In this way he read his contemporary state of affairs through what he understood as the heart of the Bohemian Reformation, which could be an inspiration for the world after the Second World War. In this hermeneutic way, Hromádka developed an ecclesiastical model of the church as a community of pilgrims under way, of which *Communio Viatorum* wants to be the voice and platform.

The name of the journal, explains Hromádka in the first issue, is related to a central motive of the Brethren. It indicates a church under way, free from an institutional petrification, free from an inclination to search for institutional guarantees for survival and therefore free to explore its theological identity in the present circumstances. “We are finding ourselves in the midst of one of the most decisive spiritual struggle in the history of the Christian church. What is the basic meaning of this very struggle?”

The question about the meaning of the struggle is the leading motive for Hromádka to launch *Communio Viatorum* as an international theological quarterly. This project was not his private endeavor, but it was supported by his colleagues at the Comenius Faculty. In the first issue of *Communio Viatorum* Josef B. Souček, co-founder of the journal, analyzed the biblical evidence for the image of the pilgrim. His conclusion is that to be a sojourner is a difficult thing, because he

⁹ Item, p. 2.

is without the security of habitation, not knowing where his path will take him to.

To lead this life of pilgrims is certainly far from comfortable. It may lead to many troubles and trials. But this ultimate freedom from all temporary fixations of God's truth, this openness towards new and unexpected manifestations of His grace and of His judgment, is the true road of hope."¹⁰

As examples of this way of understanding faith he mentions John Bunyan and Jan Amos Comenius, who both wrote about the pilgrim on the way to understand the truth. In the Old Testament Souček finds the motive of the pilgrim in the story of Abraham, who was called leave his country. As sojourner he was a stranger to his environment, not possessing anything in the land he finally died in. Also in the story of Jesus we find the wandering around in the wilderness, where Jesus prepared himself for his mission under the people. And finally in the letters of Paul we find the Christian under way as a pilgrim, being in the world, but not of the world.

To Souček these biblical sources underline that the order of the world is only provisional. Therefore, the notion of sojourning derives from a rejection of any form of idolatry, which in his eyes is also to be understood as a tendency to stick to the status quo, to property and to comfortable positions. "But it is important to keep in mind that only a church prepared to let itself be freed from any its intermediate habitations and as a communion of wayfarers to enter untravelled paths, can perform this essential service."¹¹ By this he means the service of salvation to the world by warning against idolatry.

In a longer article Hromádka wrote about the ecumenical and church political background of the initiative for *Communio Viatorum*. The tone of the article reveals some frustration on Hromádka's side with the reactions of his Western colleagues to his position on the legitimacy of the communist rule. The ecumenical movement is paralyzed by the East-West division. Many theologians in the West are

¹⁰ J. B. Souček, *Pilgrims and Sojourners*, in: *CV* 1958/1, p. 3.

¹¹ *Item*, p. 17.

caught by anticommunism, but they do not see the crisis of Western civilization, he says. They refuse to accept the new, very different situation in the world, in which communism has shown to be a credible alternative.

We who have been living under a more or less communist leadership were not for a moment tempted to adjust our faith and theology to a communist ideology. Quite the opposite was true. Under the impact of Marxistic thought and action we had to reexamine the integrity of our faith and genuineness of our church life. But we also realized that we had to take seriously the men and women who after the indescribable suffering in view of the millions of dead and of the destruction of vast areas of Eastern Europe had started the work of rebuilding and renewal. We had come to realize that unless we all joined the work of reconstruction, without prejudice, suspicion and morose hostility, we could hardly cope spiritually and morally with the post-war situation. Whenever we spoke of the new historical situation we never implied any idea that the post-war history had any revelatory or redemptive meaning.”¹²

As his starting points Hromádka distinguishes three principle for the position of Christians in the modern world: they have a large share in the guilt for Second World War, the (Christian) West has lost a serious part of its credibility due to the War and therefore communism has to be taken seriously. He invites his audience on a challenging theological journey, which has to be undertaken for the future of Christian faith. It will not be easy, because so many Christians are caught in a negative mindset against communism as an ideology and as a political system. Hromádka calls this a tragedy of the ecumenical movement:

Something terrible has happened: so many honest, incere [sic] Christians genuinely longing for the Gospel and yet halting at the penultimate station of an aticommunist [sic] ‘Confessional

¹² J. L. Hromádka, *The Crisis of the Ecumenical Fellowship*, in: *CV* 1958/1, p. 24.

Church.’ The atmosphere of anticommunism has confused human hearts, blinded human eyes and prevented our ecumenical fellowship from seeing the real issues of our spiritual struggle, from understanding one another and from helping the millions of communists to understand the depth and the Glory of the Gospel.”¹³

The theological program behind *Communio Viatorum* – a rejection of anti-communism as a failure to acknowledge the crisis of Christendom and therefore a rehabilitation of communism by theological-historical arguments – becomes an evergreen in the journal. In the second issue Hromádka published another article on this subject. He sees a strong need for a reinterpretation of theological themes at the background of the changed times, in which Christian culture is in crisis. It is wrong to refuse any effort to come to terms with marxist ideology, because it is based on a wrong understanding of the roots of communism.

We who live within the orbit of ‘socialist experiments’ have been distressed by a continuous effort on the part of many Western Christians to discourage us, to warn us and to predict our eventual defeat and frustration. We very well know that the most difficult spiritual struggle is still ahead of us. But we also know that we have to carry it on the plane of socialism, and to resist any temptation of going back and of associating ourselves with the traditional Christian civilization. On the ground of socialism we must gradually establish all the prerequisites and institutions, safeguarding, socially and politically, human dignity and freedom. (...) But we know that we are responsible also for this framework and that the framework which is, in our countries, under construction has all the promise of history.¹⁴

¹³ Item, p. 26.

¹⁴ J. L. Hromádka, *The Present Age and the Crisis of Christian Civilization*, in *CV* 1958/2-3, p. 94.

Post-Constantinian Church

Hromádka was convinced that the heritage of the Bohemian Reformation enabled him much better than any other Christian tradition to find his theological answer to the communist rule. The key to his position he found in the criticism of reformers like Hus or especially Chelčický to the close connection of spiritual and secular power. For both, Emperor Constantine's alleged donation to pope Silvester became the symbol of corruption entering the church. The church after Constantine was spoiled because of its share in power and wealth.

In Hromádka's eyes, the communist regime had established a situation of before Constantine, by cutting the ties between the church and worldly power. By that, the regime had given the church the incentive to reform itself and come closer to its true identity. Communism in this way was a blessing to the church, because it could now concentrate on its theological existence instead of focusing on issues of property and power. Western civilization as symbolized by the close connection between throne and altar was at its end, was Hromádka's prediction.

This position Hromádka and his students – especially Josef Smolík, but also Jan Milíč Lochman – describe as the post-Constantinian church. The Constantinian church was regularly criticized in *Communio Viatorum*, because the marriage of secular power and spirituality bore only corruption, something that was criticized by the leaders of the Bohemian Reformation, as Molnár reminds regularly in his contributions to the journal. And Jan Milíč Lochman wrote in the first issue of the journal about his stay in Bonn in 1957, where he met a rich church closely associated to political circles of Western Germany. He gave his short report the title 'Eine Konstantinische Kirche?', where according to him only theologians like Niemöller, Iwand and Gollwitzer (not by coincident theological sojourners of Hromádka) are aware of the dangers of the comfortable position of the church.

The underlying suggestion of the idea of the post-Constantinian church is, that the church under communism is more free than a church which is still caught in the Constantinian system. In 1971 F. M. Dobiáš, then the dean of the faculty, published an article about

secularization with the title 'The Church without Privileges.' He concluded that when the church gained worldly power, it meant a loss of its credibility and faithfulness. Without privileges church is more free.

Yet another proof for the statement that Christ's church is the church without privileges we many [sic] obtain by looking into history. As long as the church belonged to the unprivileged minority in society she grew as a spiritual power. But as soon as the church in the Roman empire reached the status of privileged society, her spiritual power waned.¹⁵

In 1973 Josef Smolík stated in an article *Die Überwindung des Konstantinismus als die Aufgabe der Kirchen Europas* that the ideology of the *Corpus Christianum* is still present in the churches. Conditions to overcome this are in place, but they are a result of outside factors: the catastrophe of WW II, the threat of atomic weapons, and the rise of USSR.

Zum konstantinischen Erbe gehört die Tatsache, dass zwischen der Kirche als der Institution im juristisch-politischen Komplex und der Kirche als der Gemeinschaft des Glaubens fast kein inneres Bindeglied besteht. Die Kirche ist nur dann wirklich frei, wenn ihre juristisch-institutionelle Gestalt in eine direkte Abhängigkeit zum eschatologischen Geschehen des Wortes gebracht wird. Werden die Kirchen Europas fähig sein, ihre Sicherheit in den Verheissungen Gottes, nicht in den erfolgreichen Investitionen, in der Hoffnung auf die Parusie, nicht in der Gunst der Welt, in der Liebe, nicht in äusserlicher Effektivität zu suchen? Das ist die Frage der jungen Generation, die Frage der Zukunft des europäischen Christentums.¹⁶

Communio Viatorum therefore had to signify a program for all theological disciplines and for the political orientation of the church.

¹⁵ F. M. Dobiáš, *The Church without Privileges*, in *CV* 1971/1, p. 51.

¹⁶ J. Smolík, 'Die Überwindung des Konstantinismus', in *CV* 1973/3, p. 138

By its essence it was a critique to Western, liberal society and churches, where the church was a part of the establishment and therefore a part of the problem. This *Communio* concerned the pilgrims that had separated themselves from the idea of a Christian civilization, which was in decay anyway, and instead were building a church community without the seductions of power, influence and economic profit. Essentially, this program could not criticize the other, eastern side of Europe's division, because it assumed that under communism the church was more free and genuine than in the Western societies.

Activism

In the first ten years *Communio Viatorum* is bringing this message in a very convincing way. Hromádka regularly wrote editorials or also articles to remind this position and to give updates on its development. From 1964 a new notion occurs in his concept of the community of wayfarers, which is the dialog with the other side, being representatives of the marxist ideology. He discerned a change in the course of the regime, which is looking for acceptable partners in a dialog on the future of the socialist society. In the editorial of the first issue of 1964 he wrote:

The situation is significant first of all within the ranks of Christians living in the orbit of social and political reconstruction of human society. Many of them have, for a long time, been waiting for the return of the old days. The illusion that what was needed was to hibernate and to expect another more favorable weather resulted both in a spiritual malady and in an intellectual weakness. The faith in the Gospel can grow only if it wrestles with the problems of human life within and without and strenuously desires to shape our personal and social life. In the moment it has withdrawn into the walls of sanctuary and of the purely inner life it invariably loses its stamina and sooner or later ceases to be a real creative power in a church community and in the secular world. Today, we may observe to what extent the atmosphere has become different. The construction of the new social order is proceeding and the expectation of going back

has proved to be futile. More and more Christian people in our countries are taking the revolutionary changes as an opportunity to make a new beginning. It is a very salutary change: it is a challenge to mobilize all our spiritual, moral and intellectual powers to go ahead and to become co-architects of the future.¹⁷

Another instrument that Hromádka had at his disposal in order to realize his vision was the Christian Peace Conference (CPC), founded also in 1958. Very soon *Communio Viatorum* became linked to the CPC and for a while it was also published under the auspices of the international secretariat of it. From 1959 onwards *Communio Viatorum* brought regularly documents, statements and declarations from the CPC. Some issues of the journal give the impression of a political bulletin of a leftist activist movement instead of a publication also addressing academics. For instance the first issue of 1961 brought extensive articles from the field of the CPC, with an editorial of Hromádka writing about the need to be one-sided face to face with the threat of nuclear destruction:

What is needed us to take one another seriously and to take with open mind, with courage and hope the unceasing and tremendous revolutionary transformation of our common world. Nothing is static and stable. The world of 1939, yes, the years of 1945 and 1950 cannot come back. The old, leading, nominally Christian nations have ceased to be the only legitimate architects of the international community. Socialism and communism and, in recent years, new African and Asian nations are claiming an equal place and opportunity in the struggle for peace, international order and a new human society. We anxiously hope that the All Christian Peace Assembly in June 1961 will provide an effective forum for confronting our views, proposals and projects, for clarification of our theological basis and for a deeper co-operation of nations in general and of Christian churches in particular.¹⁸

¹⁷ J. L. Hromádka, Editorial, in *CV* 1964/1, p. 2.

¹⁸ J. L. Hromádka, Editorial, in *CV* 1961/1, p. 3.

Due to the convergence of all these activities, Hromádka got a position of an nearly infallible father of Czech theology with some prophet-like features. On the occasion of his 70th birthday, Souček wrote:

In more than forty years of active life, Professor Hromádka has been of enormous importance for the Czech Brethren Church and for other Protestant Churches and Christian movements in Czechoslovakia. He was an original, bold and stimulating thinker, a respected and beloved teacher and pastor of students, a powerful preacher, a pioneer of new outlooks, a severe but at the same time loving critic of the church. By his manifest goodwill and the absence of any personal grudge, he ever anew won the hearts of those whom he was obliged to oppose, and in this way helped many to share at least some of his vision in which he often so remarkably anticipated the needs and tasks of the times. His activity has for a long time grown beyond the limits of his own church. On the one hand he has been for years a prominent figure in the ecumenical movement, on the other hand an equally prominent factor in the international movement of the Defenders of Peace. These two sides of his activity are for him organically bound together. He believes that the Church of Christ has to meet the coming world of socialism with a broad vision, without prejudice and fear, in the profound faith that God in Jesus Christ is the master of this future, too, and that His aims are the aims of peace for those who endeavour to build society on new foundations. And he is deeply convinced that the first and foremost task of men of every description today is to preserve peace.¹⁹

In his sermon at the funeral of Hromádka in early 1970 the synodic senior of the ECCB Václav Kejř put Hromádka in the line of the spiritual genealogy of the Czech evangelical tradition, starting with Hus, via Comenius, now finding its contemporary saintly figure in Hromádka.

¹⁹ J. B. Souček, Editorial, in: *CV* 1959/2-3, p. 97 ff.

The seal of the fact that God carried him we also observe in his relationship to man and people. It was his special gift to be a helper of all at any time and in all occasions. No one could make the list of the visitors and letters of people who sought his help and advice. And he put aside the pen of the theologian, the official duties of the dean, the concerns of the leader of the Christian Peace Conference so that he could be a friend to the distressed, to console them and strengthen them in hope. He was troubled by every act of wrongness, violence, and injustice. Up to his highest age he stood in the midst of his people and even on the highest places as a knight of truth and righteousness.²⁰

On the one side Hromádka received the highest praise at his funeral, on the other hand the event also marked his abandonment from the side of his friends of the CPC after 1968. Many of them were not present, as they refused his criticism to the Soviet-led invasion into Czechoslovakia to stop the experiment of socialism with a human face. In that respect, Hromádka's death in 1969 marked the end of the credibility of the concept of the *Communio Viatorum*.

Communio Viatorum had warmly appreciated the reforms by way of an editorial of Lochman, who wrote about the renewal of the Czechoslovak society. The church can participate in this process, as it still preserved a democratic spirit in their way of being a community. Nevertheless, the church should not be triumphant, but do penance in the first place.

Unsere Gemeinden waren schon durch ihre Existenz, als Orte nichtkonformen Suchens und nichtkonformer Verkündigung der Wahrheit, potentielle Quellen einer demokratischen Atmosphäre inmitten unserer Gesellschaft der vergangenen Jahre. Jeder treue und bekennende Bruder oder Schwester waren dessen Wegbereiter. Wie oft blieben aber diese Quellen ungenützt! Sicherlich: wir waren machtpolitisch an den Rand gedrängt ge-

²⁰ V. Kejř, Sermon on the funeral of J. L. Hromádka, in *CV* 1970/1, p. 3.

wesen. Oft haben wir das aber eher nur als Ausrede benützt und manchmal has [sic] es uns im Abseits und in der Windstille gefallen. Die Talente der Kirche blieben oft im Blick auf die Gesellschaft vergraben. Deshalb ist die Reklamierung angeblicher Verdienste nicht am Platze. Kein Triumphalismus. Keine Selbstgerechtigkeit. Eher das Bewusstsein der Schuld. Busse.²¹

Lochman saw in the program of the Prague Spring a revival of the Reformation tradition in Czech history. Therefore, the service of the church to the society is to remind the people about the struggle for the truth and meaning of history, which had been fought already by Jan Hus, the reformer of the 15th century.

Wahrlich: nostra res agitur. Das gilt noch in einem anderen Sinn. Nicht nur vom allgemein christlichen Blickpunkt aus, sondern auch vom Blickpunkt der individuellen Akzente der tschechischen Reformation aus. Gerade in ihr wurde doch überaus nachdrücklich ein solches Ringen um eine Anordnung der Gesellschaft geführt, in der sowohl die revolutionäre Forderung einer sozialen Gerechtigkeit, als auch das persönliche Bekenntnis und die Freiheit des Einzelnen in der Wahrheit ernst genommen würden. im Vermächtnis unserer Reformation ertönte gerade diese Stimme. „Liebet einander und gönnt jedem die Wahrheit“ steht bis heute in Stein gemeißelt im Herzen Prags. Und gerade von dort wurde in den letzten Monaten mit neuer Aktualität die Frage nach dem Sinn der tschechischen Geschichte gestellt.²²

The loss of credibility

The hope of Hromádka, Lochman and others that the reforms of the Dubček government would show that socialism and democracy are not two opposite entities, but rather related to each other and depend-

²¹ Jan Milič Lochman, Editorial: Kirche und Erneuerung der Gesellschaft, in: *CV* 1968/3, p. 121 ff.

²² Item, p. 123.

ent on each other, was crushed on August 21 and the months after the invasion.

After the invasion of 21 August *Communio Viatorum* did not publish any document of protest against the invasion of the Warsaw Pact troops. Surprisingly enough it did not bring the letter of Hromádka to the Soviet ambassador, nor his memorandum for the Central Committee of the CPC, nor the statement of the ECCB of 1969, in spite of the tradition of the journal to publish important documents from the Czech Protestant environment. The only sign of unease with the situation became apparent in an article of Ileana Marculesco. By the end of 1969 she wrote in an article on the question of the meaning of history some remarks about Hromádka (the issue was dedicated to him on the occasion of his 80th birthday), mentioning his disappointment with the development of August 1968.

For those who try to grasp the tragic meaning of contemporary history and the paradox of simultaneous progress-regression which accentuates the disequilibrium between *values* and socio-historical *reality*, the position, passion and actions of Joseph [sic] Hromádka will never be without major interest. For this man found himself placed at the crossroads of existential problems, infinitely susceptible of making difficult sometimes even untenable choices, because he has had in the past, and he still maintains, a vigilant faith amidst uncertainty, confusion and the most unpredictable upheavels [sic], because he has always been at the side of those who suffer, because similar in his respect to the best intellectuals of his country and elsewhere, he has played a losing game, without however losing hope in the future unity of justice and reason in humanity. Armed with an inexhaustible [sic] source of faith, he is, like all thinking individuals, totally disarmed in the face of the present historical developments, the meaning and significance [sic] of which continue to escape us.²³

This attempt “to grasp the tragic meaning of contemporary history” is the one and only time *Communio Viatorum* gives a hint of a

²³ Ileana Marculesco, Faith and Conviction, in: *CV* 1969/3, p. 107.

reflection on the events of 1968. With the death of the founder of the journal in December 1969 *Communio Viatorum* entered the phase of its “normalization” (the term used by the regime to indicate the suppression of the reforms after 1968) in 1970. As a symbol of this now the editorials disappeared. They had been in every issue from the beginning as a kind of comment on certain developments and had functioned as an attempt to justify the course and concept of the *Communio Viatorum*. Luděk Brož, systematic theologian at the faculty, who was now in charge of *Communio Viatorum* – for while together with Souček – did not invest anymore in justifying current affairs in the light of higher values, as Hromádka often did. By that *Communio Viatorum* essentially adopted much earlier than other Czech church magazines and newspapers the strategy of the normalization, where addressing sensitive political issues was avoided and from time to time articles confirming the loyalty to the regime had to be published.

From now on the backbone of *Communio Viatorum* became contributions on the history of the Bohemian Reformation and from the field of biblical studies. The journal also published numerous articles on liberation theology or the African reception of Christianity, which in the light of the “normalization” character became basically a statement of the resignation to any attempt to seriously deal with questions of the own context. Articles that were published related to current affairs in Czechoslovakia or Central Europe, had to confirm the political line of the leadership of the faculty and of the Evangelical Church of the Czech Brethren. In 1973 it published a document of the synod of the Evangelical Church of that year with the title *The Mission of the Church Today*.²⁴ It criticized the synods of 1969 and of 1971, which had defended the democratization of society of 1968, suggesting that they had been partly manipulated by some forces within the church or had not taken enough distance from the rapid events of 1968.

On other occasions loyalty was pledged to the normalization regime in the following way (1985/1–2, Molnár: 40 years liberation):

²⁴ *The Mission of the Church Today*, in: *CV* 1973/4.

The forty years since liberation have been for us an era of peace. During this time, our society has undergone a basic transformation. We highly appreciate the possibility the members of our churches and religious societies have been given with respect to co-creating socialist social relations. We see these relations as the prerequisite for the overall development of the inviolable conditions of life. The collectivization of the means of production has made it possible to eliminate relations of social superiority and inferiority. The most valuable past efforts and traditions, the legacy of which we avow, were oriented toward the establishment of such humane relations among people. This year's anniversary reminds us of the liberation aspect of cultural efforts in their linkage to the Holy Scripture. It is precisely here that every later striving for an improvement of all things human in our national history has set its healthy roots.²⁵

Conclusion

Communio Viatorum had started as a theological journal in search of answers to the challenges of the time. Many of the answers given in the first ten years were doubtlessly one-sided and favored the political line of the Soviet Union. Nevertheless, it undertook a serious attempt to justify this position in a polemical dialog with western theology. This polemic made it an interesting journal of a voice from the socialist bloc which was prepared to go at length to explain and legitimize the communist regime by theological arguments. In its first years *Communio Viatorum* received its credibility from theological concepts of the community of pilgrims or the post-Constantinian church, though much of it raised many serious questions.

After the Prague Spring and the death of J. L. Hromádka the journal gave up legitimizing its theological and political concept. Now articles on the Bohemian Reformation and on biblical issues gave *Communio Viatorum* an academic reason for existence, as they were the result of respectable scholarship.

After the Velvet Revolution of November 1989 *Communio Via-*

²⁵ Amedeo Molnár, 40 Years Liberation, in: *CV* 1985/1-2, p. 6.

torum ceased to be published. The editor-in-chief, Luděk Brož, who was also dean of the faculty at that moment, resigned on his positions. *Communio Viatorum* seemed not to survive the communist era, but in 1992 it was renewed for reasons mentioned in the beginning of this article. Authors who had been on a blacklist for two decades, reappeared and gave the journal a new spirit. The Bohemian Reformation continued to inspire authors, now also of a younger generation.

Nevertheless, the question remains whether also the original concept of the *Communio Viatorum*, the community of wayfarers survived. After the collapse of the communist regime, which brought so much devastation and deformation to the societies in Central and Eastern Europe, the concept of the post-Constantinian church does not offer any credible perspective on a renewal of Christian faith or the Christian community. It does not stand for a church without power, but in reality for a church divided between collaboration and a fight for its genuine identity.

The question remains open whether there are other aspects of the pilgrimage that we can explore in a fruitful way for our social, political and theological reality. It is the question which we formulated in the beginning: is it possible to overcome the dark parts of the past while preserving the good things of it? The least we have to do as pilgrims in our era is to take the journey of our predecessors seriously, without necessarily justifying it. Their intentions, aims and answers are different from ours, but they can offer either an inspiration or a warning to us.

The present editorial board considers *Communio Viatorum* as a Central European platform for theology, where those who are interested in the discussion on the present and the future of theology, church, religion and culture can find inspiration and a place to contribute. In this view any theological statement has a preliminary nature as a work under construction. We are under way to understand the relation between faith and culture, between text and context. The metaphor of a community of pilgrims gives a lot of space to dialog each time in a different perspective. The context is changing under way, but our heart is no less longing for words of inspiration and comfort.

*Summary: In 1958 *Communio Viatorum*, the foreign language journal of the Protestant Theological Comenius Faculty in Prague was founded. For Czech Protestant theologians under the leadership of J.L. Hromádka the journal was a way to communicate the theological views and perspectives of Christians in the Eastern Bloc without denouncing the one-party rule. For the communist regime – which had to sanction the journal – it was a way to gain legitimacy in the eyes of Christians in other parts of the world. In the field of biblical studies as well as church history the journal published many interesting articles, but the articles with a political focus had a strong tendency of collaboration with the communist regime.*

Keywords: *Communio Viatorum* – theological journals – J. L. Hromádka – Protestant Theological Comenius Faculty – Communism – contemporary church history

MOSES AND JETHRO HARMONY AND CONFLICT IN THE INTERPRETATION OF EXODUS 18

Viktor Ber, Prague

Israel in the wilderness between conflict and harmony

Conflicts and tensions are necessary ingredients of a good story. Such a story usually also contains a moment of literary catharsis, when tension is released and harmony returns. This is the case of the book of Exodus. Exodus in the Old Testament represents a paradigm of conflict and resolution. The book is clearly framed by motifs of conflict (the conflict with the pharaoh in chap. 2), and harmony when the tabernacle is finished and filled with the glory of the Lord (chap. 40). In the book of Exodus, there are passages in which the relationship between conflict and harmony is difficult to ascertain. The wilderness narrative in Exod. 15:22–18:27 exemplifies this situation. An important movement in the narrative occurs after Israel leaves the Sea of Reeds. At this point in the story, one has read about the conflict between the Lord and the pharaoh. Upon Israel's departure, the pharaoh and all of Egypt disappear and become nothing more than a memory of the Israelites. And whilst only God and his people are left on the scene, the pharaoh's disappearance does not resolve the conflict. Instead, in the wilderness narrative that follows, the conflict between Israel and God becomes one of the unifying elements in the story. It appears in the characteristic motif depicted by murmuring at Moses (and Aaron); this motif is explicitly interpreted as grumbling at the Lord himself (Exod. 16:8) or as "testing" the Him (Exod. 17:2). A different and novel conflict exists in the episode about the battle with the Amalekites in Exod. 17:8–16.

At the same time, this part of the Exodus narrative contains motifs of order and harmony. These themes are found in the wilderness tra-

dition, which is interpreted by some of the prophets (Hos. 2:16ff MT; Jer. 2:2) or elsewhere in the Pentateuch (Deut. 32:10ff). Childs believes that positive elements exist alongside negative elements in the wilderness tradition.¹ In this pre-Sinai wilderness narrative, most commentators notice God's inclination towards peace, reconciliation, and re-establishment of harmony. The Lord is willing to show Moses how to remove bitterness from the water (Exod. 15,25), he feeds the Israelites with manna and quails (Exod. 16), and brings forth water from the rock (Exod. 17) despite the people's murmuring. The battle with the Amalekites is a conflict, of course, but it is through this conflict that the people of Israel become a protected people under God.

Thomas B. Dozeman conveys the theological importance of the wilderness narrative in Exodus.² He argues that this narrative "inter-relates the two traditions [i.e. exodus and Sinai traditions] into a larger story, making each part of a history of salvation".³ Moreover, the journey in the wilderness works in a transformative manner here and in other parts of the Pentateuch. So in the deuteronomistic layer, the tradition of exodus from Egypt is reinterpreted through its connection to the wilderness narrative – the great wonder of exodus and the Lord's victory over the pharaoh at the Sea of Reeds are modified by the following wilderness wanderings, where the Israelites must again and again make a new decision to keep walking and following the Lord. In their murmuring, the Israelites hint at potentially bringing a premature end to the story.⁴ At this point God's approach to the conflict changes from using methods of power to methods of persuasion. Also, in the priestly tradition the wilderness narrative is placed between the exodus and Sinai. Both in the priestly exodus narrative and the priestly version of wilderness wanderings, the goal of the

¹ Childs, B. S. *The book of Exodus*. The Old Testament Library. The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1974, p. 263. He is followed in this respect e.g. by Fretheim, T. E. *Exodus*. Interpretation: a bible commentary for teaching and preaching. John Knox Press, Louisville, Kentucky, 1991, p. 173.

² Dozeman, T. B. *God at war: power in the Exodus tradition*. Oxford University Press, Oxford–New York, 1996, pp. 178–181.

³ Dozeman, T. B. *God at war*, p. 178. Dozeman thinks the tradition of exodus from Egypt and the Sinai tradition were originally independent.

⁴ Dozeman, T. B. *God at war*, p. 178f.

Lord is “to be known” – which depends, to a great extent, on partners (or opponents). “This inability of God to determine the content of knowledge in humans is a relational view of power, since God can undergo change depending on how humans respond”, declares Dozeman.⁵

According to Dozeman, the wilderness tradition marks a very important hermeneutical principal inherent in the text. It is an important complicating factor in the story, whether the final aim is understood as the conquest of the land (Dtr), or a return to the perfect, original creation (P). In both cases, the wilderness narrative postpones the aim in the realm of hope – present wandering postpones the realization of the future. Both traditions and their respective goals are conditioned and limited by the wilderness narrative. Neither one is, however, allowed to dominate in the final narrative; the emphasis is placed on their mutual relationship.⁶ The canonical hermeneutic is aware of different traditions and knows about the tension between them. The purpose of the tension is to exclude the dominion of “unilateral power”. These factors influence the reader and his or her interpretation, which should change in time as it is influenced by other traditions, just as it happened in the traditions of the Pentateuch.⁷

If Childs therefore asserts that motifs of conflict and harmony are present in the wilderness narrative from the beginning, then Dozeman conveys a theological reason for their coexistence. In other words, Dozeman thinks that God and Israel’s complicated and difficult journey through the wilderness to the Siani is an extremely important theological moment in the book of Exodus. During this journey it becomes apparent that God is willing to suffer damage, to bear the people’s grumbling, to make a compromise, to look for a new solution. But at the same time due to the existence of other traditions it is obvious, that this willingness does not mean that the Lord is passively resigned or lacks a strong will.

⁵ Dozeman, T. B. *God at war*, p. 179.

⁶ Dozeman, T. B. *God at war*, p. 181.

⁷ Dozeman works with notions of “unilateral view of power” and “relational view of (divine) power.” He himself refers to “process-relational school of contemporary American philosophical theology, of which Bernhard Loomer was a leading figure” (Dozeman, T. B. *God at war*, p. 5).

Exodus 18 as an oasis of peace?

Most of Dozeman's observations are based on his reflections on Exod. 15:22–17:7, where he finds arguments for his theology of God's willingness to undergo a change. Exodus 18, however, does not only challenge Dozeman's understanding of the wilderness section in Exodus, but it challenges exegesis and the theology of this book in general.

From the point of view of narrative analysis, God is not present in this chapter as an acting or speaking character. In contrast with the direct and active presence of God in Exod. 15:22–17:7, the activity of God seems to have faded away in Exod. 17:8–16 and in Exod. 18. In the Amalekite episode, the Lord speaks *ex post*; in Exod. 18, God is only present in the rhetoric of individual characters.⁸ This may explain why the chapter sometimes seems less promising in its theological potential than the preceding episodes in the wilderness narrative of Exodus.⁹ God's absence as an active participant in the narrative seems to mark an absence of implied tension or conflict, which is characteristic of the other wilderness episodes in Exodus. The resulting narrative of Moses and Jethro is therefore often described as an "idyllic family scene",¹⁰ "respite of shalom for Israel",¹¹ and as the narrative itself conveys, the "quiet has returned to the story".¹²

⁸ This was observed by D. Gowan: "The account of the visit of Jethro in chapter 18 is a special case, for although God is referred to frequently, he neither speaks nor acts." Gowan, D. E. *Theology in Exodus: biblical theology in the form of a commentary*. Westminster/John Knox, Louisville, 1994, p. 170.

⁹ So again Gowan, D. E. *Theology in Exodus*, p. 170. In his commentary, Brueggemann points out the isolated character of Exod. 18 in its present context and in this chapter (and probably also in the preceding Amalekite episode). He writes that "primary interpretive attention, however, will most likely be given to the other narratives concerning need and gift." Brueggemann, W. *The book of Exodus: introduction, commentary, and reflections*. The new interpreter's bible, vol. I. Abingdon Press, Nashville, 1994, p. 805.

¹⁰ Childs, B. S. *The book of Exodus*, p. 327.

¹¹ Carpenter, E. Exodus 18: its structure, style, motifs and function in the book of Exodus. In: Carpenter, E. (Ed.), *A biblical itinerary: in search of method, form and content*. No. 240 in JSOT Supplement Series. Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1997. Essays in honor of George W. Coats, p. 106.

¹² Houtman, C. *Exodus*, vol. 2. Kok Publishing House, Kampen, 1996, p. 393.

The “Jethro episode” does raise some questions. Childs points out that a similarity exists between the genre of this narrative and the patriarchal narratives of Genesis,¹³ in which the aforementioned idyllic atmosphere creates a common denominator. I would, however, like to pose another question to our text. Does this patriarchal parallel indicate a certain theological and ethical ambiguity in the narratives in Genesis and elsewhere, where the characters act more according to their own will and with a greater measure of freedom? Such motifs in Exodus could serve the motif in which help is received from and agreements made with gentiles. Perhaps what we observe here is an emphasis on human responsibility, compromise, organization, and giving and receiving advice...

In the following treatment of this chapter, you will see that many commentators of Exodus 18 have emphasized its overall positive and harmonic features. This essay’s objective is to study the possible conflicting and polemic motifs in Exod. 18. I will try to demonstrate how the “Jethro episode” as a piece of literature invites a dialectic reading in conjunction with a harmonic one. I will also attempt to show how a dose of suspicion towards this perceived harmony can enrich its theological interpretation.

Harmonizing interpretations of Exodus 18

There currently exist many harmonic and harmonizing interpretations regarding individual details of this passage or regarding its overall message. In this section we will present and evaluate literary elements in Exod. 18 that appear to support such a reading of this chapter.

A thematic tie of the book of Exodus

Exodus 18 certainly plays an important role in search for this book’s thematic structure. Very few suggestions of such structure have man-

¹³ Childs, B. S. *The book of Exodus*, p. 327.

aged not to assign Exod. 18 with an important structuring function, not least because the Sinaitic pericope begins in Exod. 19.¹⁴

In the last decade, Eugene Carpenter¹⁵ persuasively presented Exod. 18 as the most important transitional chapter of Exodus. His approach is relevant for our study of this chapter because Carpenter derives a generally harmonic theological interpretation from the chapter's sophisticated and harmonic structure. Carpenter thinks Exodus 18 is "the major hinge in the structure of the total composition [i.e. of the book of Exodus], serving both as a prologue *and* an epilogue".¹⁶ The chapter itself is divided into two parts (vv. 1-12 and 13-27), which are oriented backwards to the exodus (1-12) in the past, and forwards to the promulgation of the commandments and therefore to Sinai (13-27).¹⁷ Thus, Exod. 18 functions to connect the two main parts of Exodus, which each contain different prevailing genres and specific theological emphases. This connection is achieved through the narrative between Moses and Jethro: "Their continuous peaceful interaction leads to literary unity and the 'presence' of an ambience of intimacy throughout the chapter".¹⁸ The peaceful atmosphere is expressed by the key term *šalôm* (שלום "peace") present in both parts of Exod. 18 (v. 7 and v. 23). This chapter stands in immediate contrast with the motif of war in Exod. 17,8-16, and according to Carpenter even "bridges the gap between two storms, at the ים סוף [i.e. the Reed Sea] and at the Mountain of God" and is "artfully, psychologically and theologically pleasing in its present position".¹⁹

¹⁴ Exod. 18 is important regardless of whether the twofold or threefold division of Exodus is used. Suggested structures of Exodus are summarized e.g. in Propp, W. H. C. *Exodus 1-18: a new translation with introduction and commentary*. No. 2 in The Anchor Bible. Doubleday, New York, 1999, p. 37. It is interesting that Propp himself understands Exodus as a dyptich and considers Exod. 15:1-21 to be the main transitional passage.

¹⁵ Carpenter, E. Exodus 18.

¹⁶ Carpenter, E. Exodus 18, p. 91f.

¹⁷ Carpenter, E. Exodus 18, p. 93.

¹⁸ Carpenter, E. Exodus 18, p. 97.

¹⁹ Carpenter, E. Exodus 18, p. 108.

The Midianite motif and the reunion motif

Obviously, Jethro's arrival in Exod. 18 calls to mind memories of Moses' stay in the land of Midian (Exod. 2,15-4,26). Referencing many literary motifs, Carpenter states that "an evident purpose for relating ch. 18 to chs. 2-4 is to demonstrate the fulfillment of issues first raised there."²⁰ The second part of the chapter where in which Jethro improves the administration of the people of Israel, seems to Carpenter to speak of "the continuing contribution to Israel by one of the ancestors of the Midianites, thus opening up room for continued relationships between the two peoples".²¹

John Durham perceives the harmony achieved in Exod. 18 in even broader canonic terms, again with special emphasis on the Midianite motif. According to Durham, this chapter represents the integration of traditions regarding the two branches of Abraham's family: Sarah-Isaac-Jacob-Joseph on one side, and Keturah-Midian on the other. Moses, a member of Sarah's line, finds a new family in Midian, - but this is actually another branch of his own family.

"And Moses becomes the guide and the bridge-person who links the two parts of the family separated since Abraham's day (Gen. 25,1-6)."²²

Jethro then rightly becomes the central figure of Exod. 18. He takes care of Moses' wife and sons, and he enthusiastically accepts the report of the Lord's action on behalf of Israel. Jethro acts as a priest even before Moses and Aaron, and he gives his best advice in administrative matters.²³

²⁰ Carpenter refers to his key term *šālôm* (שָׁלוֹם) used in Exod. 4,18, which appears again in the dealings between Moses and Jethro. Other motifs include mentioning the name(s) of Moses' sons, references to the mountain of God in Exod. 2-4 and Exod. 18, etc. Carpenter, E. *Exodus 18*, p. 100.

²¹ Carpenter, E. *Exodus 18*, p. 107.

²² Durham, J. I. *Exodus*. No. 3 in *Word biblical commentary*. Word Books, Waco, Texas, 1987, p. 240.

²³ In comparison to other parts of Exodus, the centrality of one character (Jethro) produces a sense of unity in this episode. The historical-critical approach explains this particularity by assigning the whole chapter to one source (E) (Durham, J. I. *Exodus*, p. 240).

Durham believes that the overall harmonic character of the “Jethro episode” provides an important narrative and theological means to overcome the series of divisions and conflict within Abraham’s family, such as the sending away of Keturah’s sons (Gen. 25:1–6), the expulsion of Hagar and Ishmael (Gen. 21:8–21), or most dramatically, the conflict between Jacob and Esau.²⁴ Moses is a mediating element in this division, and he now belongs to both lines of the family represented by Jethro on one side, and Aaron and the elders on the other. According to Durham, this explains the silence surrounding Moses during the communion narrated in Exod. 18:12 – as this unifying character, Moses stands above this meeting.²⁵

Durham proposes this interpretation of Exod. 18 as a means to understand the long-perceived chronological problem that this chapter embodies in the context of the whole book.²⁶ He believes that despite the chronological difficulties, “the compilers of Exodus were for a number of very good reasons eager to have ‘one’ Israel before the momentous events at Sinai.”²⁷

Harmony within Exodus 18

I have already written about the general agreement on this chapter’s twofold division. In the first part, Jethro arrives and responds to Moses’ account of exodus from Egypt. The second part concerns present and future events – i. e. the current administration of Israel, and, in Jethro’s speech, a perspective on the future journey and the future goal (v. 23). Both parts are separated by a temporal reference.

To some, the transition from the first to the second scene seems “abrupt” and their juxtaposition “odd.”²⁸ But at the same time, many

²⁴ Durham, J. I. *Exodus*, p. 241.

²⁵ Durham, J. I. *Exodus*, p. 242.

²⁶ E.g. the Israelites seem to have already reached the mountain, and Moses has already received the commandments and learned how to apply them.

²⁷ Durham, J. I. *Exodus*, p. 242. Carpenter argues along similar lines: “According to theological logic, practical logic, and narrative logic it [i. e. Exod. 18] belonged here. Chronologically, it may belong later...” Carpenter, E. *Exodus 18*, p. 105.

²⁸ Brueggemann, W. *The book of Exodus*, p. 829. According to Houtman, Moses and Jethro are in the second part put “in an entirely new role” Houtman, C. *Exodus*, p. 395.

commentators speak of the coherence and unity of this chapter.²⁹ They have identified specific elements which create literary symmetry and harmony within the two parts, such as numerical schematism, the parallelism between the verbs of perception in each introduction (“Jethro heard” 18:1 // “Jethro saw” 18:14), and the sending away motif, (the root ŠLḤ (שלח) which frames the whole chapter with both of its parts in v. 2 and v. 27. These features were observed by Cassuto.³⁰ His work was continued by E. Carpenter, who added his own insights, and argued for literary symmetry and balance within the chapter. According to Carpenter, literary harmony is a tool that serves a theological purpose – to legitimize Jethro’s role in the events.

“After Jethro has gone through a basic religious change upon hearing the sacred deliverance story (vv. 7–8)... [after he has] confessed to Yahweh above all gods...worshiped him...then he, as the father-in-law of Moses, [begins to hold] a privileged place in Israel’s history. He is now capable and qualified to offer the advice that he does in the second part”.³¹

If the story is understood in this way, Jethro’s positive response to Moses’ speech in the first part of the chapter represents a necessary prerequisite to legitimize and explain his right to become involved in matters concerning the people of Israel.

²⁹ “There is general agreement among critical scholars that ch. 18 is basically a unified narrative” (Childs, B. S. *The book of Exodus*, p. 321). Childs points to some difficulties in the history of the tradition of Exod. 18, e.g. its relationship to the history of the Midianite tradition, to the history of traditions dealing with the administration of Israel (e.g. Num. 11) etc. (pp. 322–326). Finally, however, he concludes that “in spite of the complex history of tradition problems which lie behind the Midian stories, these chapters now perform a simple and straightforward function within the Exodus narrative” (p. 327). Durham speaks about Exod. 18 as a “Jethro compilation consisting as it does of the two principal Jethro narratives of the OT” (Durham, J. I. *Exodus*, p. 252), but again he sees the whole chapter basically in coherent and harmonical unity. In his final reflection, Brueggemann also qualifies his interpretation of the abrupt change from the first to the second scene in this chapter, and he suggests that their juxtaposition embodies deeper theological meaning (p. 829).

³⁰ Cassuto, U. *A commentary on the book of Exodus*, first English ed. The Magnes Press, Jerusalem, 1967, p. 221–222.

³¹ Carpenter, E. *Exodus 18*, p. 97–98.

In preceding sections, we have referenced Durham's interpretation of the first part of Exod. 18 as a reunion between the two branches of Abraham's family. In this context, Durham interprets the second scene in close connection to the first. If one considers that Exod. 18:1–12 represents the reconciliation and reunification between the two branches, the second scene affirms that this reunion is not only real, but functioning and beneficial.³²

Moses, Jethro, Israel

The interpretation of Moses and Jethro's relationship as harmonical (especially in Exod. 18, but also in other pentateuchal texts) is an important basis for the harmonizing interpretations of Exod. 18.

The encounter between Moses and Jethro is friendly, and Moses pays a special honor to Jethro. He goes out to meet Jethro, kisses him, and bows down. Moses' behavior is usually interpreted as an indication of Jethro's importance as a figure in the story, as a reflexion of historical convention,³³ and also as an expression of the encounter's warm and peaceful atmosphere. Jethro's affirmative answer to Moses' narration of God's deeds emphasizes this friendly spirit. The episode's harmony culminates when Jethro brings the sacrifice into the presence of Aaron and the elders. Whilst some commentators have identified a tension here in regards to Jethro's non-Israelite background, Childs provides us with a typical explanation:

“Nevertheless, Jethro acts throughout the story as a faithful witness to Yahweh. He is not treated as an outsider, nor does he act as one. He rejoices with Moses because of what Yahweh has done for Israel, and offers him praise in the language of Israel's faith. The sacrifice which Jethro offers is the final stage in a series of acts of worship.”³⁴

³² Durham, J. I. *Exodus*, p. 248.

³³ E.g. Sarna, N. M. *Exodus: the traditional Hebrew text with the new JPS translation*, 1st. ed. The JPS Torah commentary. Jewish Publication Society, Philadelphia, New York, Jerusalem, 1991, p. 99.

³⁴ Childs, B. S. *The book of Exodus*, p. 329.

Soo too, the following meal and fellowship between Jethro, Aaron, and the elders of Israel (v. 12) represent their acceptance of Jethro, his confession, and his sacrifice. The Israelites receive Jethro with approval in Exod. 18:10–12. This approval creates a transition to Exod. 18:13–26, where Jethro can consequently act as Moses' respected counselor.³⁵ The second scene therefore presents the problem of administration and management in Israel. Because of the friendly relationship he has established with Moses, Jethro is ready and able to provide his son-in-law with good advice.³⁶ Jethro has no special revelation; his counsel stems from the realm of common experience. Greenstein even asserts that Jethro, using various wordplays, embodies a wise man, a sage, an individual who uses his wisdom to acknowledge the God of Israel and to contribute to the proper organization in Israel.³⁷

Reading Exodus 18 with suspicion

The aforementioned interpretations of Exodus 18 emphasize the chapter's interpretation as harmonic and frictionless. This reading is supported by references to its literary quality (Carpenter), by the sentiment of conclusion or connection to previous motifs (like the reunion between Moses' family), by the conclusion of the Midianite motif (Carpenter), or by the integration of the motifs that reach back to the book of Genesis (Durham). This chapter is also said to embody the harmonic coexistence of natural revelation or natural wisdom (Childs, Greenstein).

One should note that most of these observations are valid and helpful. Furthermore, even their proponents recognize the possible tensions or conflicts which exist in the narrative. But what's interesting is how quickly such harmonistic interpretations have been applied in the attempt to overcome and remove these tensions.

³⁵ Houtman, C. *Exodus*, p. 412.

³⁶ Houtman, C. *Exodus*, p. 395.

³⁷ Greenstein, E. L. Jethro's wit: an interpretation of wordplay in Exodus 18. In: Cook, S. L., and Winter, S. C. (Eds.), *On the way to Niniveh: Studies in honor of George M. Landes*. No. 4 in ASOR Books. Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia, 1999, p. 166.

Our next objective, therefore, is to study the possible disharmonies of these texts, or in other words, the inner dialectic of Exodus 18.³⁸

The family of Moses and the Midianite motif

Jethro is undoubtedly the dominant figure in the entire chapter. His arrival (or return) on the scene is explained in terms of his response to the news regarding his son-in-law Moses, and also in terms of Jethro's activity towards Moses' family reunion

Zipporah

It is legitimate to interpret the appearance of Jethro, Zippora, and her sons as an indication of a motif in Exodus called "the Midianite motif."³⁹ In its context, Moses' family reunion in Exodus 18 represents the motif's harmonic conclusion.

An old tradition exists, however, that struggles to deal with the tensions and questions concerning Moses' wife in this story. On the one hand, the problem exists on a level of literary coherence. The narrative does not explain why Zipporah should be brought back to Moses. While she is not mentioned during the exodus narrative since Moses' return to Egypt, Exod. 4 does allude to her presence in Egypt. It is only in Exod. 18:2 in which the reader learns that she did not follow Moses to Egypt. Until this verse, we are not sure if Zipporah has been sent home to her father (as Exod. 18:2 presupposes) or if Moses' has divorced her (another possible interpretation).⁴⁰ An alter-

³⁸ On method of dialectic reading of the Old Testament see e.g. Clines, D. J. A. *God in the Pentateuch: reading against the grain*. In: Clines, D. J. A. *Interested parties: the ideology of writers and readers of the Hebrew bible*. No. 205 in JSOT Supplement Series. Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield, 1995, pp. 187–211.

³⁹ I hold the opinion that it is helpful to understand the Midianite motif not only in terms of geography (i.e. only when the events take place in Midian) but also in connection with the Midianite characters, especially Jethro and Zipporah. Even if, as George Coats thought, the figure of Zipporah did not originally belong to the Midianite tradition (Coats, G. W. Moses in Midian. *Journal of Biblical Literature* 92, 1 (1973), 3–10, see p. 9), in the final narrative of Exodus Zipporah–Moses' wife is clearly connected to Jethro and Midian.

⁴⁰ See Mekilta, Lauterbach, J. Z. (Ed.), *Mekilta de-Rabbi Ishmael: a critical edition on the basis of the manuscripts and early editions with an English translation, intro-*

native (and ancient) interpretation⁴¹ of the noun שלוים in the sense of “dowry” or “wedding gift”⁴² provides an equally insufficient explanation. The different translations of this noun do not explain why Zipporah did not follow Moses to Egypt. And so the questions remain.⁴³ The present incoherence finds a natural explanation in the assumed and complicated historical process that stands behind the final form of the story.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, any attempt to seriously deal with the current form of the text must look for other explanations.

Before Exod. 18, Zipporah is mentioned in the mysterious episode in Exod. 4:24–26. It is not, however, clear whether this difficult passage of suspicious origin is relevant to Exod. 18 – even though a connection has been sought out.⁴⁵ I think that the characters here (Moses’ father-in-law, wife, children) embody a strong argument in favor of the connection between these texts. Zipporah herself becomes a very important figure in the narrative in Exod. 4:24–26. She acts as an independent character; her actions are unexpected, new, and surprising. One should also note the geographic parallel between Exod. 18 and Exod. 4:24–26. Both passages are not only situated between Sinai and Egypt, but they both include an event that is a part of a journey. In any case, both events take place in the wilderness, and in the narrative they are in some way close to the reference to the mountain of God.

duction and notes, vol. II. The Jewish Publication Society of America, Philadelphia, 1933, p. 167.

⁴¹ See Rashbam’s commentary: Lockshin, M. I. (Ed.), *Rashbam’s commentary on Exodus: an annotated translation*. No. 310 in Brown Judaic Studies. Scholars Press, Atlanta, Georgia, 1997, p. 189n.

⁴² More recently adopted by Propp Propp, W. H. C. *Exodus 1–18*, p. 629.

⁴³ I consider the interpretation of (שלוים) as “sending away” the more likely one. In the given context, it is more probable that the narrator has dealt with Zipporah’s surprising absence from the preceding narrative than that he has given some technicalities regarding Moses and Zipporah’s wedding.

⁴⁴ Exod. 4:24–26 has been either understood as an originally independent tradition, or has been assigned to the source J, contrary to Exod. 18 (mostly E). See the discussion in Durham, J. I. *Exodus*, p. 57, also in Propp, W. H. C. *Exodus 1–18*, p. 191, and Childs, B. S. *The book of Exodus*, p. 326.

⁴⁵ So e.g. in W. H. C. Propp’s attempt to explain Zipporah’s absence in Egypt, he suggests that she may have made this decision herself in reaction to the terrifying experience narrated in Exod. 4:24–26. “In the composite Torah, one can well imagine Zipporah’s own second thoughts after the Bloody Bridegroom incident,” Propp, W. H. C. *Exodus 1–18*, p. 629. Propp seeks to refute interpretations, which assert that Moses sent Zipporah away or even divorced her.

Once we accept the opinion, that Jethro, Zipporah and the sons mark the presence of the Midianite motif connecting Exod. 4 and Exod. 18, we need to ask, whether Zipporah's return on the stage in Exod. 18 signals unambiguously positive and harmonizing moment. The final verdict will depend on our understanding of Exod. 4:24–26. Propp convincingly argues that this passage concerns the guilt (šā'at "bloodshed") once committed by Moses in Egypt (Exod. 2:12). Zipporah has found a way out and "improvised a blood expiation rite" by which Moses was made suitable to continue his mission.⁴⁶ Later in his commentary on Exodus Propp explains the "Bloody Bridegroom" passage as an event of Moses' initiation and rebirth. Propp suggests that in this context Zipporah becomes the third motherly figure in the life of Moses and even speculates if she (in perspective of Exod. 18 without success) does attempt to usurp the position of Moses' father-in-law.⁴⁷ Even if Propp's interpretation is found a little fanciful, it demonstrates how Exod. 2:24–26 is capable of bringing complication, conflict or ambiguity into the narrative in Exod. 18. Susan Ackerman with reference to Propp argues that Exod. 4:24–26 "provocatively hints at the notion of Zipporah assuming a priest-like role."⁴⁸

Interpretations like those of Propp and Ackerman share the same feature from the point of view of narrative analysis; they do not consider Zipporah to be a mere "agent," or in other words, only a functional character. Since the situation in Exod. 4 is complicated, and since Zipporah acts in a surprising manner which presupposes some deep understanding of the problem, we should naturally conclude that Zipporah herself embodies a rather complicated character with its own dynamic. The socially clumsy girl, who is hidden in anonymity among Jethro's seven daughters in Exod. 2, becomes in Exod. 4:24–26 a creative, bold, and present-minded woman. She is an active character, which can be contrasted with Moses' inaction, bewilderment, or passivity. I am inclined to see Moses as the object

⁴⁶ Propp, W. H. C. That bloody bridegroom (Exodus IV 24–26). *Vetus Testamentum XLIII*, 4 (1993), 495–518, see p. 505.

⁴⁷ Propp, W. H. C. *Exodus 1–18*, p. 240.

⁴⁸ Ackerman, S. Why is Miriam also among the prophets? (And Zippora among the priests?). *Journal of Biblical Literature* 121, 1 (2002), 47–80, see p. 75.

of God's attack. If after all, the son was in danger rather than Moses, doubts about Moses would increase – but since Moses is not struck, why is Zipporah acting in his place? J. M. Cohen explains Zipporah's exclamation in Exod. 4:25 as one of contempt or accusation against Moses.⁴⁹ T. C. Butler notes that “whatever the precise meaning, the content of the story casts Moses in a bad light”.⁵⁰

Zipporah's sudden disappearance from the story in the rest of Exod. 4 is interesting. Her not quite real presence in Exod. 18 is puzzling and difficult to understand. Zipporah is given less attention than Moses' sons, who are quite anonymous “agents” in Exod. 4. Zipporah is also ostensibly ignored by Moses (or the narrator?) in Exod. 18, which contrasts with Moses' father-in-law. In Exod. 18, Zipporah has become an unimportant agent. Rather than creating or embodying a harmonic conclusion, she seems to present a complication.⁵¹ Is her presence embarrassing for Moses or the narrator?

...and Jethro

In regards to Zipporah's quality as a potentially “unstable” and disharmonic element in Exod. 18, we are forced to argue partially *a silentio*. For it is the silence which surrounds Zipporah that stirs our interest. But as we move on now to examine Moses' father-in-law, one will see that we have more explicit reasons for our suspicions.

Before he returns to Egypt, Moses requests formal permission from his father-in-law (Exod. 4:18). Moses says that he must embark on this journey because he is concerned about the Israelites – Moses' “kinsmen”. Jethro sends him “in peace.” As we have discussed, Carpenter interprets the word *šālōm* (שלום) to characterize the relationship between Moses and Jethro, and even to represent covenantal hospitality.⁵² Childs refers to historiographical questions to interpret Moses' evasiveness and his attempt to conceal the goal of his mis-

⁴⁹ Cohen, J. M. Hatan damim – the bridegroom of blood. *Jewish Bible Quarterly* 33, 2 (2005), 120–126, see p. 124f.

⁵⁰ Butler, T. C. An anti-Moses tradition. *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 4, 12 (1979), 9–15, see, p. 12.

⁵¹ “The wife and children are almost humorously ignored in the description of Moses' reception for his father-in-law.” Coats, G. W. *Moses in Midian*, p. 6.

⁵² Carpenter, E. *Exodus 18*, p. 106.

sion.⁵³ Nahum Sarna's brief reference to the Laban-Jacob narrative is instructive, although in this case, Sarna probably identifies a contrast rather than a parallel.⁵⁴ The similarity is represented in the following motif: father-in-law beguiled by a son-in-law and their following confrontation.

In resemblance to the "Bloody bridegroom" text, we must question the degree to which Moses' strange answer to Jethro in Exod. 4:18 relates to their next meeting in Exod. 18. It is evident that Jethro is a very important character in the story, perhaps a more important figure in relation to Moses than Zipporah.⁵⁵ If Laban's words (Gen. 31:43) generalize something about the father-in-law's authority in ancient world, "These are my daughters and these are my sons", then we should consider what Jethro's arrival means for Moses' authority and confidence, especially when these have been attacked during the wilderness wanderings (Exod. 16:3,7).

Another set of questions stems from Moses's submissive behavior in Exod. 18:7. The hand responsible for the variant reading in the Samaritan Pentateuch identified some problems here.⁵⁶ Whilst Moses' behavior could merely represent a standard greeting, we must still question what role this behavior plays within this specific narrative. Does it serve to express a harmonic relationship between Moses and Jethro? Or does it, like in the case of Jacob meeting his brother Esau (Gen. 33), reflect an attempt to appease a dominant and potentially angry partner, or is it a preventive action to ward off a conflict – which Moses fears with or without a reason? The verb השתחוה "to bow down" is an important marker here, as it is elsewhere in the Old Testament, where it is often used in the context of social or some other type of submission.⁵⁷

⁵³ Childs, however, does not elaborate on this point, and for him the meeting of Moses and Jethro in Exod. 18 is characterized by their "mutual affection," Childs, B. S. *The book of Exodus*, p. 101f.

⁵⁴ Sarna, N. M. *Exodus*, n. 12 to Exod. 4:18 on pp. 22 and 241.

⁵⁵ Propp, W. H. C. *Exodus 1–18*, p. 240, Houtman, C. *Exodus*, p. 394.

⁵⁶ The Samaritan Pentateuch makes it explicit that it was Jethro who bowed down in front of Moses, and not Moses in front of Jethro, as the massoretic text most likely implies (Sadaqa, A., and Ratson (Eds.) *Jewish version/Samaritan version of the Pentateuch with particular stress on the differences between both texts*. Tel-Aviv, 1962–66).

⁵⁷ Besides many cases where the subject of this verb expresses submission to a deity

The way Jethro is referred to in this narrative (as Moses' father-in-law) has been interpreted as an element which produces harmony. Carpenter's statement deserves a full quotation here:

“The clear identity of Jethro as Moses's father-in-law leaves no doubt or ambiguity about the intimate relationship between them.”⁵⁸

Whilst one can legitimately assert that the references to Jethro as Moses' father-in-law express a friendly and safe family atmosphere, our concern is to determine to what degree this conclusion is underlain by the harmonizing pre-understanding of the given text. After all, the family relationships in the Torah and other biblical narratives are very rarely a beautiful demonstration of positive, uncomplicated, and intimate relationships – more often the family provides a primary space for complications, antagonisms, enmity, or even open war. T. C. Butler rightly sees the dark side of Jethro's care for Moses' family: “...the chief of Israel, who is not even the chief in his own family.”⁵⁹

Institutions in Israel: the sacrifice and the administration

As a character, Moses is gradually removed from the narrative – of course, this is done through peaceful and positive means. When the first part of Exodus 18 ends, Jethro assumes the role of a patriarch during the sacrifice; Moses is not, however, mentioned at all. Rashbam provides a harmonizing explanation for this fact. He suggests that since the narrative only specifies the guests at the sacrifice, Moses, as the host, is thereby omitted.⁶⁰ Other commentators have pre-

or to its messengers, the following texts seem relevant: Abraham bows to the Hittites when asking for property to bury Sarah (Gen. 23:7.12); Isaac speaks about nations bowing down to his blessed son (Gen. 27:29). Bowing down is a thing to do before a king or a ruler (e.g. Gen. 43:28; 2 Sam. 1:2 or 2 Sam. 14:22). Saul bows down to Samuel in 1 Sam. 28:14.

⁵⁸ Carpenter, E. Exodus 18, p. 97.

⁵⁹ Butler, T. C. An anti-Moses tradition, p. 13.

⁶⁰ According to Lockshin, Rashbam argues here against the midrash exactly in order to refuse speculations about Moses' absence, Lockshin, M. I. (Ed.), *Rashbam's commentary on Exodus*, p. 194.

sented their own explanations as well. Durham, for example, explains Moses' absence from the narrative by his mediating role between the Midianite line (Jethro) and the Israelite line (Aaron and the elders) of Abraham family.⁶¹ Propp,⁶² on the other hand, asserts that Jethro is the only available priest to conduct a sacrifice. But this explanation does not make much sense in the context of the whole book, since in Exod. 24 Moses conducts an important celebration which includes a sacrifice.

I want to argue that Jethro's leading role during the sacrifice must be understood in regards to the narrative's overall rhetoric. One can understand Jethro's role as the climactic point in a chain of positive responses to the story of God's actions for Israel. Within a wider narrative context, he stands as a reminder of Melchizedek—Jethro becomes a representative of nations to which Abraham's descendants will be a blessing... But within the Midianite context and within the context of Jethro-Zipporah-Moses narrative, this represents another case after Exod. 2:24–26 of Moses' sudden absence from the text when priestly matters are, in broader sense, at stake. It is significant to note that the narrative of God's mighty deeds in which Moses plays such a prominent role, is framed by two "Midianite" texts that reveal Moses' weaknesses and insufficiencies. If we agree with Ackerman that in Exod. 2:25 Zipporah assumes a priestly role in Moses' family (or instead of Moses), Exod. 18:12 presents another case in which Moses' relative (Zipporah's father) assumes a priestly role while Moses is strangely absent from the story. Jethro's dominant role in Exod. 18 does not diminish in its second part. Here we can easily see a potential for a real conflict. There is no doubt about a rational (maybe rather "wise" in the Old Testament idiom) basis of Jethro's suggestion in Exod. 18:14–23. We must also be aware of the rhetorical effort to present this advice as in accord with God's will and God's plan for Israel. Jethro in his speech gives positive, rational, and wise arguments, and he shows concern for Israel, Moses, and for proper, just, and good administration in Israel.

⁶¹ Durham, J. I. *Exodus*, p. 245.

⁶² Propp, W. H. C. *Exodus 1–18*, p. 631.

Concurrently, Jethro's rhetoric presents a striking contrast to Moses' humility, submission, hospitality, and respect for the partner. Jethro (or "Moses' father-in-law" throughout Exod. 18:13–27) does not show much concern for subtle diplomacy. Houtman's description⁶³ of Jethro's words "the way you are doing it is not good" (לא טוב הדבר אשר אתה עשה) in Exod. 18:17 as "polite and tactful language" seems purely subjective. The only other text where "it is not good" (לא טוב) is used in the Pentateuch is in a well-known case of Gen. 2:18. Neither is this phrase used in much of a positive sense in other parts of the canon.⁶⁴

The narrator uses one more potential word-play to present Jethro's speech, i.e. the verb NBL (נבל) "to wear oneself." Whilst Rashbam⁶⁵ tries to associate the verb that is employed with the verbal root BLL (בלל) "to be confused," one can easily criticize this connection as unlikely. We can, however, offer a more plausible association with the homonymous verbal root NBL (נבל) "to be foolish."⁶⁶ So in Jethro's rhetoric, Moses' way of management is presented as a tiresome job, exhausting, foolish, and crazy activity.

Great tension exists in Jethro's advice and the presentation of his rhetoric. On one hand, he radically criticizes Moses' leadership, and on the other hand, the speech is in itself a positive step. His criticism of Moses is thereby balanced by his stress on the final success of Moses, Israel and God's plan.

Anti-Moses or Anti-Jethro?

T. C. Butler interprets Exodus 18 as a piece of anti-Moses tradition in the book of Exodus.⁶⁷ Since Moses is not able to take care of his own family, he allows Jethro to lead the sacrifice, and because of Jethro's

⁶³ Houtman, C. *Exodus*, p. 416.

⁶⁴ See e.g. 1 Sam. 26:16. The specific usage of this expression in Proverbs puts לא טוב in contrast with things wise, good, and godly (e.g. Prov. 17:26; Prov. 18:5).

⁶⁵ Lockshin, M. I. (Ed.), *Rashbam's commentary on Exodus*, p. 196f.

⁶⁶ Of all consulted works only Propp (Propp, W. H. C. *Exodus 1–18*, p. 631) has mentioned this possibility.

⁶⁷ Other texts considered anti-Mosaic by Butler include Exod. 2:11–15a; Exod. 2:15b–22 and Exod. 2:24–26.

administrative reform, he is subsequently deprived of his authority and leadership which is redistributed among the people of Israel. Brueggemann also identifies this text to be a limitation on Moses' absolutism, although Brueggemann believes that Moses continues to keep a large share of his authority.⁶⁸

This is not the only way to interpret the possible tension and polemical tendencies in our text. Aside from this anti-Moses interpretation, we can also offer an anti-Jethro understanding.

Moses comes to Jethro because he committed a murder in Egypt. He becomes a resident in Midian, and becomes a member of Jethro/Reuel's family, but does not inform him (nor Zipporah) about the crime. Moses socially (Exod. 2:20) and economically (Exod. 3:1) depends on his father-in-law, and is aware of his sensitive social status, as perhaps his firstborn son's name indicates (Exod. 2:22). When he sets out on his mission to Egypt, he hides the real purpose of his journey from Jethro (Exod. 4:18). His journey is not, therefore, as peaceful as Jethro would have wanted. Moses is confronted by the Lord, and his murder (or his negligence as far as circumcision) is revealed for the first time to someone from Jethro's family (Zipporah). Moses is rescued only due to Zipporah's quick action. For some strange reason, Zipporah is sent back to her father, Moses' father-in-law, after this event.

Following great events in Egypt, Israel comes to the wilderness, where problems between God and Israel begin to surface. Moses has proved to be a good servant of God in Egypt, and a good leader during the exodus and in the wilderness. Jethro's arrival can, however, be seen as a complication. Moses is neither certain why Jethro has come, nor aware of Zipporah's role. Moses does not know whether Jethro has come as a friend or enemy (Exod. 17:8-15). Moses' greeting with Jethro is a result of his uncertainty and his perceived submissive position towards Jethro (Exod. 18:7). Since Jethro's arrival turns into a peaceful meeting, Moses has an opportunity to inform Jethro about the past events.

With a greater measure of methodological suspicion we can find tension even in this calm and quiet passage. Moses' version of the

⁶⁸ Brueggemann, W. *The book of Exodus*, p. 828.

story seems to stress the military dimension of deliverance (“all that the Lord did to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians,” “how the Lord delivered them,” v. 8) in comparison with the softer and more neutral version first heard by Jethro (“all that God did to Moses,” “how the Lord brought Israel out of Egypt,” v. 1). The military aspect is repeated in Jethro’s following confession (Exod. 18:10,11), and becomes, in Jethro’s mind, the definite version of the exodus report. In contrast, the strong emphasis on the peaceful atmosphere of the meeting, Moses’ hospitality, and the richness of Jethro’s confession all seem to be a narrative and rhetorical response to the implied or feared conflict.

Jethro’s dominance in the story is obvious; he is an active agent in most of the events. The complementary phenomenon is the weakening of Moses’ role in the narrative. In the first part of Exod. 18, Moses’ participates in naming his sons, gives Jethro a respectful welcome, provides Jethro with details regarding the events in Egypt. But in the second part of Exodus 18, Moses occupies even less space. First he does things wrong (from Jethro’s perspective), then he does them right according to Jethro’s advice, finally he lets his father-in-law go home. Moses’ absence is not, however, particularly negative – he simply lets Jethro act. One can read Jethro’s strong criticism of Moses in Exod. 18:17–23 equally as simply criticism of Moses’ bad administration skills, or as evidence of Jethro’s disrespect towards Moses.

Harmony, conflict, or harmonizing?

Which reading of Exodus 18 is, therefore, enriching and adequate? Is it more legitimate to look in the text for harmony, be it literary or theological? Or is the episode full of polemics and hidden conflict? Does it help to see some tension in Exodus 18?

As especially Carpenter has shown in detail, the chapter’s narrative does artfully integrate the different motifs found within the entire book of Exodus. But avoiding certain aspects of conflict or ambiguity reflects, no less, a one-sided approach to the text. The peaceful relationship between Moses and Israel with Jethro and the Midianites

is found within the Pentateuch, and is consequently in every second or canon-aware reading of Exodus. This is in tension with other stories about Israel and Midian (Num. 25; Num. 31). Jethro's administration reforms in Israel did not prove to be a definite solution, as the parallel wilderness text which follows the Sinai pericope shows (Num. 11).

In preceding paragraphs, we referred to J. Durham's view that Exodus 18 integrates the two divided parts of Abraham's family. In his concluding comments to Exod. 18:1-12, Durham writes about a desire of final redactors of Exodus to express the ideal unity of Israel in this text:

“Moses, as the forerunner who became a member of both halves of the family, was the agent of the reunion. Jethro was the symbol of the nomadic desert side, Aaron and all the elders were the symbol of the settled farming side. And the reunion was an ideal attained by Israel only in faith, and even there, no doubt, only by the greatest of Israel's prophets and teachers.”⁶⁹

Clearly Durham is aware of some tension or conflict, which this narrative attempts to solve. The longed for ideal that Exodus 18 narrates is supposed to represent a harmonic narrative that unites two conflicting streams (nomadic and farming), which are represented by two nations.

I also believe that this chapter seeks to harmonize some tensions. I suggest, however, that these tensions are found closer to this chapter. The story should be read, first and foremost, in its immediate context – which is in the wilderness narrative. Exod. 15:22-17:7 concerns the conflict between Israel and God, in which God's response to the emerging conflict tends to be conciliatory and consensual. Despite a clearly present motif of “murmuring” and despite Israel's lack of trust, God does not speak about sin at all.⁷⁰ Exodus 18 subsequently portrays similar dynamics in human relationships, between Moses (Israel) and Jethro (Midian). When Jethro arrived he held the

⁶⁹ Durham, J. I. *Exodus*, p. 246.

⁷⁰ Gowan, D. E. *Theology in Exodus*, p. 170.

power not only to destabilize Moses' authority in his family,⁷¹ but also his leadership in Israel.

The story in the present form and present context stands neither as an anti-Moses nor anti-Jethro narrative. In the first part of Exod. 18, the questions or fears relating to Jethro's arrival find balance in Jethro's positive response to the news of the exodus. Moses' humbleness and submission leads to the victory of "Moses's truth:" "Jethro identifies himself with Moses's understanding rather than the other way around."⁷² In the second part of this chapter, the tension results from Moses' lack of administration skills, and the potential for conflict increases with Jethro's disrespectful criticism of Moses. Jethro's reform finally takes place, but it does not have an automatic or expected result. His advice is sound because its aims are one with God's plan for Israel, however, it could have been rejected because it undercut Moses' authority and potentially interfered with Moses' mediatory role between Israel and God. Again, if refer to the book of Numbers and its wilderness section,⁷³ the "happy ending" in Exodus 18 appears more as a miracle than something that simply had to have taken place.

The final harmony embodied in Exodus 18 should not hide this tension. This chapter is really not an "idyllic family scene," but rather an important and complicated attempt to work out a potential conflict in a peaceful manner. The chapter should be read in the context of Dozeman's observations referred to above, that is, as a human world application towards the principle of relationally conceived power. If God is willing to indulge for the benefit of his people, if God is willing to compromise because of Israel, then similar attitudes must exist in this chapter. Establishing harmony in relationships is a matter that is indeed difficult for God himself. Exodus 18 develops this theology on the level of interpersonal relationships. Peace does not come alone. Exodus 18 does not represent an ever-existing oasis of peace. Peace and harmony are reached through a willingness to retreat, to listen, and respond with understanding. As the leading figures of Exo-

⁷¹ Cf. Num. 12:1ff.

⁷² Fretheim, T. E. *Exodus*, p. 197.

⁷³ Cf. especially Num. 12 and Num. 16 for conflict regarding Moses' authority.

dus 18, Moses and Jethro demonstrate this willingness as they listen and undergo changes, just as God did in the preceding wilderness narrative.⁷⁴

Summary: Exodus 18 is the last chapter of the wilderness section in the book of Exodus. Very often its commentators focus on harmonic, positive, and affirmative elements of the narrative in Exodus 18. This article deals with proposed harmonic readings of Exodus 18, but also seriously examines possible motifs of conflict or tension. The conclusion of the author is that the narrative does present harmony. However, this harmony is reached after real or potential conflicts are solved or avoided. An attempt is made to understand this narrative of resolved tensions in Exodus 18 in the context of theology in the book of Exodus.

Keywords: Biblical studies – Old Testament studies – Exodus – Moses – Jethro – Zipporah – Midianite – conflict – harmony – Wilderness section

⁷⁴ This text is a result of the grant project GAAV 242185 – ‘The Hermeneutic of narrative and legal texts of the OT’ provided by the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic.

DIE SCHÖPFUNG IM SPANNUNGSFELD DER THEODIZEE-FRAGE. RABBINISCHE ERWÄGUNGEN ZUM ERSTEN BIBLISCHEN SCHÖPFUNGSBERICHT.¹

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Klassische Einführungen in die rabbinische Religiosität unterstreichen oft die Bemühung der rabbinischen Gelehrten, für Ereignisse persönlichen und allgemeinen Unheils unter allen Umständen eine Rechtfertigung Gottes zu finden.² Sowohl das alte biblische Konzept einer kollektiven Verantwortlichkeit für die Verfehlungen Einzelner als auch das andere Modell, wonach ein Mensch nur für seine eigene Lebensführung von Gott belangt wird, waren in der Epoche des frühen rabbinischen Judentums geläufige Erklärungsmuster. Auch die Eschatologie übernahm zur Lösung der Theodizeefrage eine wichtige Funktion. Auch wenn eine feste Zukunftshoffnung im Hinblick auf die aktuellen Leiden eine nicht zu unterschätzende geistige und psychische Stärkung bedeutete, nahmen die Rabbiner die Erfahrungen von Generationen, die von fortgesetzter politischer Unsicherheit und religiös-kulturellen Kämpfen geprägt waren und nach dem letzten jüdischen Aufstand gegen Rom im Martyrium gerade der Frömmsten ihren Gipfel gefunden hatten, wichtig genug, um sich mit großem Ernst um theologisches Verständnis zu bemühen. Der erste biblische, priesterliche Schöpfungsbericht zeichnet das idealtypische

¹ Dem Aufsatz liegt ein Vortrag zugrunde, der im April 2007 auf dem XV. *Colloquium Biblicum* an der evangelisch-theologischen Fakultät in Prag gehalten wurde. Thema des Colloquiums war „Chaos und Ordnung in den Bekenntnisschriften Israels“.

² G. F. Moore, *Judaism in the First Centuries of the Christian Era. The Age of the Tannaim*, Cambridge, Mass. ⁸1958, Part II, Chap. I, 380; Part VI, Chap. IV, 248–256; Part VII, Chap. III, 377; S. Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, New York 1958, 105–122; E. Urbach, *The Sages. Their Concepts and Beliefs*, (transl. from Hebr. by I. Abrahams), Jerusalem ²1979, Chap. XV.2, 442–444; 3, 444–448; 8, 511–523; Chap. XVII, 672f; D. Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering in Classical Rabbinic Literature*, New York, Oxford 1995, 146, 212f.

Bild einer Welt, die von festgefügtten, ewig fortbestehenden Ordnungsstrukturen gehalten ist – dies unter Voraussetzung eines priesterlichen Tempelkultes, der als ihr Gegenstück die kosmische Ordnung zu stabilisieren hat.³ Ein solch hoch stilisierter Entwurf musste die besondere Aufmerksamkeit der Gelehrten auf sich lenken. Die Dissonanz, in der dies betont optimistische Bild, mit dem die Bibel anhebt, zur ihrer erfahrenen Lebenswirklichkeit stand, schlug sich in einer Reihe von Kommentaren zu Gen 1 nieder, die in der Midraschsammlung *Bereschit Rabba*⁴ zum Buch Genesis überliefert sind. Dieses Werk wurde etwa zu Beginn des 5. Jahrhunderts n. Chr. redigiert und überliefert Lehrmeinungen aus dem palästinischen, nicht dem babylonischen Raum. *Bereschit Rabba* ist kein Werk populärer Traditionsbildung, es reflektiert vielmehr die Diskussion theologisch hochgebildeter rabbinischer Kreise. Die hier ausgewählten Quellen lassen erkennen, welche existenzielle, theologisch erstaunlich gewagte Auseinandersetzung mit dem Thema Theodizee in der Zeit des frühen rabbinischen Judentums in Palästina geführt worden ist.

Gut rabbinisch stehen verschiedene Ansätze der Interpretation nebeneinander. Gemeinsam ist den Texten, dass sie das Thema unwillkürlich auf der Ebene der Anthropologie und Theologie verhandeln. Die Wahrnehmung zerstörerischer Naturkräfte ist hier nie losgelöst vom Verhältnis Gott – Mensch verstehbar. Dieser Ansatz entspricht dem Denken der Alten Welt überhaupt, wo Mikrokosmos und Makrokosmos in Entsprechung zueinander stehen und wechselseitig aufeinander einwirken.

Die Unterschiedlichkeit der vorhandenen Ansätze lässt sich folgendermaßen systematisieren. A) Die Ambivalenz von lebensfördernder und das Leben zerstörender Erfahrung wird zunächst als ein einfacher Antagonismus von Gott und Mensch wahrgenommen: Gott und die Frevler. B) Diese Ambivalenz wird als ein Antagonismus des inneren Menschen wahrgenommen: Der Fromme im Ringen um

³ Siehe B. Janowski, ‚Tempel und Schöpfung. Schöpfungstheologische Aspekte der priesterschriftlichen Heiligtumskonzeption‘, *Jahrbuch für Biblische Theologie* 5, 1990, 37–69.

⁴ Die Zitation erfolgt nach *Midrash Bereshit Rabba*, Critical Edition with Notes and Commentary, ed. J. Theodor, Ch. Albeck, I, Berlin 1912, (Ndr. mit Korrekturen Jerusalem 1965).

Frömmigkeit. C) Die Ambivalenz erscheint schließlich als ein innerer Antagonismus des Schöpfers selbst.

Die ersten beiden Texte deuten die Darstellung der präkosmogonen Urgewässer in Gen 1. Ihnen liegt die Beobachtung zugrunde, dass von den sechs Schöpfungstagen alle außer dem zweiten mit der sog. Billigungsformel versehen sind. D. h. die jeweiligen täglichen Schöpfungswerke werden als ‚gut‘ bezeichnet, das Schöpfungswerk als Ganzes abschließend als ‚sehr gut‘.⁵

Die Auslegung versucht nun, das Fehlen der Formel כִּי טוֹב – ‚dass es gut war‘ – beim zweiten Schöpfungstag zu deuten. Basisvers der Kommentare ist Gen 1,7:

„Und Gott machte die Feste und schied zwischen den Wassern unterhalb der Feste und den Wassern oberhalb der Feste. Und es geschah so.“

Die Diskussion zu diesem Schriftvers wird auf der Ebene der Redaktion mit der die Rabbiner hier interessierenden Frage eingeführt:

„Warum steht am zweiten (Tag)⁶ nicht geschrieben: ‚(und Gott sah,) dass es gut war כִּי טוֹב?‘“

Der erste Kommentar hierzu ist im Namen des Rabbi Schmu'el bar Nachman überliefert, der zu Beginn des 4. Jhs. n. Chr. ein bedeutender Lehrer war.⁷ Er gibt folgende Erklärung:

„Da das Werk der Wasser (noch) nicht abgeschlossen war. Deshalb steht beim dritten (Tag) zweimal ‚dass es gut war‘.⁸ Das

⁵ „gut“: Gen 1,3.10.12.18.21.25; „sehr gut“: 1,31.

⁶ Die in Klammern gesetzten Ergänzungen und Erläuterungen stammen hier wie im Folgenden von der Verfasserin.

⁷ *Bereschit Rabba* 4,6 (im Folgenden abgekürzt BerR), deutsch A. Wünsche, *Bibliotheca Rabbinica: Eine Sammlung alter Midraschim, zum ersten Male ins Deutsche übertragen*, I, Leipzig 1880, Ndr. Hildesheim 1967, 17. Zu R. Schmu'el bar Nachman s. W. Bacher, *Die Agada der palästinensischen Amoräer*, Bde., Straßburg 1891–1899, Ndr. Hildesheim 1965, I, 477–551.

⁸ Gen 1,10.12.

eine Mal ist es auf das Werk der Wasser (bezogen, d.h. auf den Abschluss dieses am zweiten Tag begonnenen Schöpfungswerkes), das andere Mal auf das (besondere) Werk des (dritten) Tages (d.h. auf die Entstehung der Pflanzenwelt).“

R. Schmu'el bar Nachman nimmt hier darauf Bezug, dass die Zuweisung der präkosmogonen Wasser an jenen Ort, der für sie im Schöpfungsplan vorgesehenen ist, am zweiten Tag noch nicht, sondern erst am dritten vorgenommen wird.

Am zweiten Tag vollzieht sich zunächst eine erste Teilung der kosmischen Urgewässer in einen oberen Himmelsee, der sich jenseits der Himmelfeste befindet, und eine untere Urmeerflut diesseits dieser Feste. Es folgt dann am dritten Tag eine zweite Teilung. Jetzt erst entstehen durch den Rückzug der unteren Urmeerfluten die Weltmeere: das Festland wird so freigelegt. Erst hiermit ist nun die Voraussetzung für die Besiedlung des Landes und die Erschaffung des Menschen gegeben. Und erst an dieser Stelle erfolgt im biblischen Text die Formel „und Gott sah, dass es gut war“.

Soviel zur formalen Klärung der Äußerung R. Schmu'els. Inhaltlich bleibt indessen die Frage offen, warum wohl die erste Teilung der Urwasserfluten am zweiten Schöpfungstag nicht als solche schon die Billigung Gottes verdient, ist sie ja doch in sich selbst schon ein ganz entscheidender Schöpfungsakt.

Folgendes Gleichnis erhellt den Assoziationszusammenhang. Es steht im selben Kontext und wird von R. Schim'on im Namen des R. Joschua ben Levi tradiert. R. Joschua ben Levi gilt als einer der hervorragendsten Lehrer des entstehenden Rabbinischen Judentums, er lebte in der 1. Hälfte des 3. Jhs.⁹ Die im Hintergrund stehende Frage ist nach wie vor: Warum wird das Werk des zweiten Tages im Schöpfungsbericht nicht für ‚gut‘ erachtet ?

„Es ist wie ein König, der eine harte Legion לַגִּיוֹן קָשָׁה hatte. ‚Weil sie so hart ist‘, sprach der König, ‚darf sie meinen Namen (‚gut‘) nicht tragen‘. Ebenso sprach der Heilige, gepriesen ist

⁹ R. Joschua ben Levi, s. Bacher, a.a.O. I, 124ff.

er: ‚Weil durch diese Wasser die Generationen des Enosch, der Sintflut und des Turmbaus zu Babel geschlagen wurden,¹⁰ sollen sie nicht als ‚gut‘ bezeichnet werden.‘¹¹

Für das Gleichnis dienen die Sintflutgeschichte Gen 7 und der Schöpfungsbericht Gen 1 als wechselseitige Interpretationshorizonte. Der methodisch-philologische Anhaltspunkt dieser Konstruktion ist die wiederholte Verwendung von Schöpfungsvokabular aus Gen 1 in Gen 7, besonders die Erwähnung der ‚T^ehom‘ תְּהוֹם, jenes präkosmogonen Urozeans, der Gen 1,2 das Ausgangsszenario der Schöpfung darstellt.¹² In der Sintfluterzählung dient der Terminus ‚T^ehom‘ dazu, den Anbruch sowie das Ende der Sintflut literarisch zu kennzeichnen: Das Aufreißen der ‚T^ehom‘ – Quellen (Gen 7,11) und ihr Verstopftwerden (Gen 8,2) bilden die Klammer um dieses Geschehen der Sintflut.

Die Frage, warum die Wassermassen des zweiten Schöpfungstages vom Schöpfer nicht für gut befunden werden, erklärt der Midrasch theologisch. Auf der Ebene einer religiösen Ethik werden sie mit Hinblick auf die Sintflut als Gerichtsexekutive des Schöpfers interpretiert. Die Schöpfungsordnung ist, so zeigt die Sintflut, keine fraglos gegebene, sondern *durch den Menschen* vom Abdriften ins Chaotische grundsätzlich bedroht. Zu einem Faktor, der die Schöpfung gefährdet, wird der Mensch dadurch, dass er der göttlichen

¹⁰ Es ist allgemein rabbinische Tradition, dass außer der Sintflutgeneration auch noch andere Generationen der Urgeschichte durch Wasserfluten dahingerafft worden sind, s. BerR 38,8; Wünsche, a.a.O., 127; Mechilta De Rabbi Jischma'el, BaChodesch 6: *Mechilta d'Rabbi Ismael* cum variis lectionibus et adnotationibus, ed. H. S. Horowitz, I.A.Rubin, Frankfurt/M. 1931, Ndr. Jerusalem ²1960, II, 239f.

¹¹ BerR 4,6, Wünsche, a. a. O., 17.

¹² תְּהוֹם s. Gen 7, 11; 8,3; weiteres Vokabular aus dem Schöpfungsbericht s. Gen 7, 7.14.21.23; 8,17.19. Etymologisch geht das Wort ‚T^ehom‘ auf das babylonische Urmeerungeheuer ‚Tiamat‘ aus dem Schöpfungsepos Enuma Elish zurück, s J. B. Pritchard, (ed.), *Ancient Near Eastern Texts relating to the Old Testament*, Princeton ³1969, 60–72. Im biblischen Schöpfungsbericht ist Tiamat entmythisiert, kein personhaft-mythisches Wesen eines altorientalischen Götterpantheons mehr. Schon innerbiblisch existieren allerdings Traditionen, in welchen die schöpferfeindlichen präkosmogonen Mächte i. U. zum Schöpfungsbericht wieder als mythisch-personale Größen dargestellt sind. S. etwa Hes 32,2–8; Jes 51,9f; Ps 74,14; Ps 89,11; Ps 104,7–9. Dennoch ist die Figur aber auf der begrifflichen Ebene des Schöpfungsberichts erhalten, eben als *terminus technicus* für die wässrigen Abgründe des Urozeans in Gen 1,2.

Schöpfungsordnung nicht entspricht. Dies ist der Grundton auch anderer rabbinischer Aussagen über die erwähnten Generationen der Sintflut, des Enosch und des Turmbaus zu Babel. Ihnen wird Idolatrie angelastet.¹³

Der rabbinische Autor erkennt in jenem Stadium, in dem sich die Urwassermassen an diesem Tag vorfinden, eine im Rahmen der Schöpfung gegebene Stufe der Degeneration in Richtung des präkosmogonen Chaos. Die Schöpfung kann sich, so deutet er die Sintflut, grundsätzlich in ein Stadium zurückverwandeln, das dem des zweiten Schöpfungstages entspricht, an dem das Urmeer noch ubiquitär das Festland überschwemmte. Eine derartige regressive Dynamik erkennt er in der Sintflutkatastrophe.

Das Gleichnis bezeichnet nun die Wassermassen des zweiten Schöpfungstages als ‚harte Legion‘ Gottes. Hier klingt der Rabbinische Topos מִדַּת הַדִּין – *Midat HaDin* an, das ‚Maß des (göttlichen) Richtens‘. Dieser Terminus zeigt ein zentrales Konzept Rabbinischen Denkens an: Die Wahrnehmung eines komplexen Tun-Ergehens-Zusammenhanges, in dem Makrokosmos und Mikrokosmos in einem wechselseitigen Einfluss stehen.¹⁴ Das Leben zerstörende Potential der Wasserfluten im Stadium des zweiten Schöpfungstages wird im Sinne des *Midat HaDin* als eine Reaktion Gottes auf das destruktive Potential des Menschen interpretiert. Es wird vom Weltenkönig instrumentalisiert, um seine Untertanen zu disziplinieren.

Die Bedeutung des Tun-Ergehens-Zusammenhangs für Zerstörung oder Erhalt der Schöpfung aufzuzeigen ist allerdings nicht das eigentliche Interesse der Auslegung. Der Midrasch setzt diese als

¹³ Bzgl. der Generation des Enosch wird der Vorwurf des Götzendienstes von Gen 4,26 abgeleitet: ‚Zu der Zeit fing man an הוֹכִיל, den Namen des Herrn anzurufen.‘ Die Form הוֹכִיל kann neben ‚anfangen‘ (von הוּל) auch ‚profanisieren‘, (von חִלּוּל) bedeuten. Die Rabbiner interpretieren durchgängig nach dieser zweiten Möglichkeit, so BerR 23,7 (227), Wünsche, a.a.O., 108f, u. ö. *Mechilta d’Rabbi Ismael*, a.a.O., bestimmt die Schuld dieser Generation darin, dass sie sich selbst als Gottheit verehren ließ. Das Unterfangen des Turmbaus Gen 11,1–9 wird BerR 38,6 (354), Wünsche, a.a.O., 169, als Kriegserklärung der Menschheit gegen die himmlische Welt gedeutet, der gegenüber sie sich als benachteiligt wahrgenommen habe.

¹⁴ Dem ‚Maß des Richtens‘ ist als Pendant der andere Begriff, das ‚Maß des Erbarmens‘ מִדַּת הַרַחֲמִים zugeordnet, der die Erfahrung der Huld und Vergebung bezeichnet. Beide Attribute sind hergeleitet von Ex 34,5f. Vgl. Urbach, *Sages*, 448ff.

gegeben voraus. Die Aufmerksamkeit wird vielmehr auf die Beobachtung gelenkt, dass der Schöpfer seinem Werk des zweiten Tages das Prädikat ‚gut‘ vorenthält. Die ‚harte Legion‘ darf Gottes Namen¹⁵ ‚gut‘ nicht tragen. Dies Bild besagt, dass Gottes Handeln als Richter nicht von einer Art ist, die Gott mit dem Attribut ‚gut‘ benennen wollte. Auf diese Weise erklärt sich das Fehlen der Billigungsformel am zweiten Schöpfungstag. Mit der Formulierung „sie darf meinen Namen nicht tragen“ lässt der rabbinische Autor den Schöpfer sich von seinem zerstörerischen Handeln distanzieren. Der Vorbehalt, den der Midrasch gegenüber dem gerichtlichen Handeln Gottes zur Geltung bringt, geht allerdings nicht so weit, dass solches Handeln als von Gott nicht veranlasst dargestellt würde. Hier lässt das Gleichnis keinerlei dualistische Deutungen offen, die ‚harte Legion‘ ist die des Königs, als ihr Befehlshaber zeichnet er für ihr Vorgehen verantwortlich. Allerdings nimmt der Midrasch eine klare, bewusst wertende Abstufung vor, das Verhältnis Gottes zu seinem Handeln betreffend: Die Qualität ‚gut‘ bezeichnet Gottes ‚Identität‘ im engeren Sinn, sie hat die Stellung eines Eigennamens inne, während der Qualität ‚richten‘ eben diese Nähe zum Eigentlichen, die das Wort ‚Name‘ hier anzeigt, vorenthalten bleibt.

Im Aspekt der Theodizeefrage betrachtet ist die Aussage dieses Midrasch dennoch einfach: Die Verantwortung für zerstörerische und vernichtende Aspekte der menschlichen Lebenserfahrung hat der Mensch selbst zu tragen. Er verfehlt seine ihm von Gott zugedachte Geschöpflichkeit, indem er sich der Gottesbeziehung entzieht, wie dies von den Generationen Noahs, Enoschs und des Turmbaus zu Babel gesagt wird.¹⁶ Der Mensch, Chaosfaktor ersten Ranges und Bedroher der guten Ordnung zwingt den Schöpfer zur Zerstörung seiner Schöpfung.

Sehr viel subtiler als in diesem im Namen des R. Levi tradierten Midrasch wird die rabbinische Diskussion zur Theodizee dort, wo nicht der ‚Frevler‘ Gegenstand der Erörterung ist, der Mensch, dessen Haltung als Abkehr von Gott beschrieben wird, wie die genann-

¹⁵ Vgl. hierzu Exodus Rabba 3,6 zu Ex 3,13f, im Namen des R. Abba bar Mamel: „Du willst meinen Namen kennen? Ich werde nach meinen Taten benannt.“

¹⁶ S.o Anm. 9.

ten Generationen, sondern der Fromme, der als ‚Gerechter‘ bezeichnet wird, nicht weil er ohne Fehl wäre, sondern weil er in der Gottesbeziehung steht und um sie ringt.

Basisvers der beiden folgenden Midraschim ist Gottes abschließende Bewertung seines Schöpfungswerkes Gen 1,31:

„Und Gott sah alles, was er gemacht hatte, und siehe, (es war) sehr gut“.

Im Rahmen der Auslegungen dieses Verses findet sich eine Bemerkung über R. Me’ir, einen der großen Lehrer der frühen tannaitischen Zeit.¹⁷

„In der Thora von R. Me’ir fand man (als Glosse zu Gen 1,31) geschrieben: ‚und siehe: sehr gut‘ – siehe: gut ist der Tod“.¹⁸

Methodischer Anhaltspunkt dieser gewagten Exegese ist die phonetische Ähnlichkeit der Vokabeln ‚sehr‘ und ‚Tod‘ im Hebräischen: מְאֹד – ‚m’od‘ und מָוֹת – ‚mavät‘. Statt וַיִּרְאֵהוּ טוֹב מְאֹד „und siehe: sehr gut“ liest Rabbi Me’ir וַיִּרְאֵהוּ טוֹב מָוֹת – „und siehe, gut ist der Tod“.

R. Me’irs in ihrer Kommentarlosigkeit kryptische Bemerkung lässt zwei Möglichkeiten offen, die hier implizite Auffassung von der Schöpfung zu deuten. Entweder wird hier der Tod als zusätzliches Schöpfungswerk zu den Werken des 6. Schöpfungstages mit hinzugezählt und so als ursprünglich integraler Bestandteil der Schöpfung bewertet. Demgemäß wäre R. Me’irs Notiz etwa wie folgt zu paraphrasieren: „Und Gott sah alles, was er gemacht hatte, und siehe: auch der Tod ist gut.“¹⁹

Als anderer Interpretationsansatz kommt eine Haltung in Frage, die das Sosein der Welt insgesamt ablehnend beurteilt. Den Tod positiv zu bewerten hieße dann, ihn der Schöpfung als deren Negation gegenüberzustellen. Gut wäre die Schöpfung so nur, indem sie durch den Tod auch zu verneinen ist.

¹⁷ R. Me’ir lebte in der 2. Hälfte des 2. Jhs., s. W. Bacher, *Die Agada der Tannaiten*, II, Straßburg 1890, Ndr. Berlin 1965, 1–96.

¹⁸ BerR 9,5, Wünsche, a.a.O., 37.

¹⁹ So Urbach, *Sages*, 429.

Redaktionell sind an R. Me'irs Midrasch einige weitere angeschlossen, deren gemeinsame Fragestellung die Bedeutung des Todes ist. Unter Ihnen findet sich folgendes Dictum R. Jochanans, Oberhaupt des rabbinischen Lehrhauses in Tiberias,²⁰ die R. Me'irs Midrasch im Sinne der zweiten Deutung aufnimmt.²¹

„Warum wurde über die Frevler der Tod verhängt? – Solange sie leben, erzürnen sie den Heiligen, er ist gepriesen, wie geschrieben steht (Mal 2,17): *„Ihr habt dem Herrn mit euren Worten Mühsal bereitet* אָהוּ גִעַתָּם . Sterben sie, so hören sie auf, den Heiligen, er ist gepriesen, zu erzürnen, wie geschrieben steht (Hi 3,17): *„Dort (im Tod) hören die Frevler auf mit Toben“* – dort hören die Frevler auf, den Heiligen, er ist gepriesen, zu erzürnen.

Warum wurde über die Gerechten der Tod verhängt? – Solange die Gerechten leben, kämpfen sie mit ihren Leidenschaften יִצְרָר.²² Wenn sie sterben, so ruhen sie aus, dies ist, was geschrieben steht (ebd.): *„und dort ruhen die in (ihrer) Kraft Erschöpften (יְנִיעֵי-כֹחַ) aus“*. (Sie sprechen:) *„Uns ist's genug, wir sind abgemüht (יְנִיעֵנוּ)!“*

Das zerstörerische Potential des Menschen ist in der Wahrnehmung R. Jochanans nicht eingrenzbar durch eine äußerliche, formale Unterscheidung von Frevlern und Gerechten, wie sie dem Midrasch des R. Joschua ben Levi zugrunde liegt. Dort evozieren die frevlerischen Generationen das zerstörerische Potential der Schöpfung, die Wasserfluten, und können so die Schöpfungsordnung massiv gefährden. Hier jedoch ist dieses Potential des Menschen nicht eingegrenzt auf die Frevler. Vielmehr gehört es zu den Bedingungen des Menschseins überhaupt. Der Gerechte leidet nicht nur unter den grob ins Auge stechenden Strukturen des Unrechts, er leidet auch unter sich selbst. Es ist gerade der religiöse Mensch, der dies als mächtige Realität

²⁰ R. Jochanan lebte gegen Ende des 3. Jhs., s. Bacher, *Amoräer I*, 205ff.

²¹ BerR 9,5, Wünsche, a.a.O., 37f.

²² Der יִצְרָר – *Jezer*, gewöhnlich im Deutschen mit dem Wort ‚Trieb‘ wiedergegeben, bezeichnet rabbinisch alle jene Willensregungen des Menschen, die, bleiben sie unkultiviert, die Schöpfungsordnung gefährden. Zur Bedeutung des Begriffs vgl. Urbach, *Sages*, 471ff.

erfährt.²³ Bis zur Erschöpfung entkräftet sind die Gerechten nach R. Jochanan von einem inneren Kampf, in dem sie ihre Kräfte verschleißen.

Der biblische Kontext, den R. Jochanan für seine positive Deutung des Todes wählt, ist der düstere Horizont des Klageliedes Hiobs, worin er den Tag seiner Geburt verflucht (Hi 3). Der Bezugsvers ist Hi 3,17:

„dort (i.e. im Totenreich) haben die Frevler aufgehört mit toben, und dort ruhen die (in ihrer) Kraft Erschöpften aus.“

Der rabbinische Autor parallelisiert den Gerechten des Midrasch mit dem biblischen Hiob. Auf diese Weise wird die innere Situation des Gerechten überhaupt als eine Hiob'sche Situation bestimmt. Das Thema Leiden ist hier im inneren Menschen verortet und damit an den äußersten Punkt geführt, wo der Mensch zu sich selbst in einem Verhältnis fortgesetzt aufreibender Spannung steht. Sein Leiden an sich selbst ist strukturell bedingt, der *conditio humana* geschuldet. Seine Sehnsucht richtet sich nicht auf eine wie auch immer geartete Restitution, auf ein noch zu erwartendes Heilsgut, sondern auf den Untergang. So ist es gerade der Tod, der zum eigentlich Positiven der Schöpfung wird.

Setzt man das Ergebnis dieser Untersuchung von neuem in Beziehung zu dem biblischen Basistext Gen 1,31, der hier ausgelegt wird: „Und Gott sah alles, was er gemacht hatte, und siehe, es war sehr gut“ so ergibt sich für die Frage der Theodizee die Feststellung, dass die Affirmation des Todes hier nicht als Affirmation der Vergänglichkeit der Schöpfung gemeint ist, was sich für R. Me'irs Bemerkung nicht sicher ausschließen lässt. Die Affirmation des Todes ist hier

²³ Die Sensibilität des religiösen Menschen gegenüber Frage des *Jezer* im Vergleich zum Frevler ist im Talmudtraktat Sukka mit feinsinniger Ironie beschrieben: „Der Heilige, er ist gepriesen, wird (einst) den bösen *Jezer* herbeibringen und ihn vor den Gerechten und vor den Frevlern schlachten. Den Gerechten kommt er wie ein hoher Berg vor und den Frevlern kommt er wie ein haardünner Faden vor. Jene weinen und diese weinen. Die Gerechten weinen und sprechen: Wie hätten wir einen so hohen Berg (denn) bezwingen können!? Die Frevler weinen und sprechen: Wie haben wir diesen haardünnen Faden nicht bezwingen können!?“ (bSuk 52a).

vielmehr die Geste dessen, der die Verantwortung für das Quälende seiner Existenz an den Schöpfer zurückgibt.²⁴

Einen weiteren Beitrag zur Frage der Theodizee bieten einige Midraschim, die zum Ausgangspunkt ihrer Schriftauslegung Gottes letztes Schöpfungswerk, die Erschaffung des Menschen nehmen. Haben die bisher untersuchten Quellen das Thema unter dem Aspekt der Anthropologie entfaltet, an einer differenzierten Wahrnehmung der Situation des Menschen interessiert, so entwickeln die folgenden Texte eine andere Perspektive. Die Schwierigkeit der Frommen, am Leben zu sein, hat ihre letzte Ursache nicht im Menschen, sie weist vielmehr auf seinen Schöpfer zurück. Gemeinsamer Basisvers dieser Kommentare ist Gen 1,26, ein Satz, der in jeweils neuen Ansätzen unterschiedlich nuanciert beleuchtet wird:

„Und Gott sprach: Lasst uns einen Menschen machen **נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם**²⁵ in unserem Bilde, nach unserer Ähnlichkeit...“

Freilich waren die Rabbiner vertraut mit der dualistisch-gnostischen Herausforderung, die die Pluralform **נַעֲשֶׂה** – ‚lasst uns machen‘ geradezu provoziert. Im Namen R. Schmu’el bar Nachmans ist ein Hinweis darauf enthalten, in welche Verlegenheit diese Formulierung die Rabbiner im Streitgespräch bringen konnte:

„Als Mose die Tora niederschrieb und es bei der Niederschrift der einzelnen Schöpfungstage zu der Passage kam „Und Gott sprach: ‚Lasst uns einen Menschen machen‘, sagte er (i. e. Mose): ‚Herr der Welt, warum gibst Du den Häretikern²⁶ ein Argu-

²⁴ Zu einer Interpretation des gesamten Abschnittes BerR 9 vgl. Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering*, 135–139. Die Aussagetendenz der Kraemer’schen Analyse (S. 138f) stimmt mit der hier vorgeschlagenen überein: Es kann nicht als bloß unbeabsichtigter Nebeneffekt seines Kommentars übergangen werden, dass R. Jochanan es unterlässt, von einer Hoffnung für die Gerechten zu sprechen, die jenseits ihres erlösenden Todes selbst läge. Kraemer lässt allerdings den biblischen Bezugstext des Diktums außer acht. Die Verfluchung, die Hiob ganz ausdrücklich über sein Leben ausspricht (Hi 3,1), stellt das Prekäre der Aussage R. Jochanans in ein noch greller Licht.

²⁵ Das Verb **נַעֲשֶׂה** steht hier in der 1. Person Plural und ist modal gebraucht.

²⁶ Zur Diskussion über die Identität der „Häretiker“ als Gnostiker vgl. Urbach, *Sages*, 194ff.

ment zur Hand!?“ Er bekam die lapidare Antwort: „,Wer abirren will, möge abirren“²⁷

Dualistische und gnostische Positionen wehren die Rabbiner immer wieder ab. Eine solche Erwiderung signalisiert vielleicht ein Desinteresse an einer theologischen Auseinandersetzung überhaupt, sie mag etwa auch der Einsicht folgen, dass die heiligen Texte etwas anderes darstellen als eine Dogmenlehre, wo mit exakten begrifflichen Definitionen ein geschlossenes System fixiert werden kann, das eine höchstmögliche Eindeutigkeit der Aussagen gewährleistet.

Andere rabbinische Texte zeugen davon, dass man sich auf die Auseinandersetzung mit Häretikern durchaus eingelassen hat. So versuchte man etwa den Plural des Wortes אֱלֹהִים, des in der hebräischen Bibel üblichen Begriffs für „Gott“, gegenüber kritischen Anfragen mit dem Hinweis zu entkräften, dass das Verb, das in den fraglichen Schriftstellen als Prädikat dem Subjekt אֱלֹהִים zugeordnet ist, nicht im Plural steht, sondern im Singular. So steht Gen 1,1 nicht בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים – ‚im Anfang schufen „Götter“‘, sondern בָּרָא – ‚schuf‘. Ebenso steht Gen 1,27 nicht וַיִּבְרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הָאָדָם – ‚und es schufen „Götter“ den Menschen‘, sondern וַיִּבְרָא – ‚und es schuf‘.²⁸

Die literarische Form, eine ans Häretische grenzende Vorstellung als Position eines Fremden darzustellen, ist zweifellos nicht zufällig und muss als bewusste Distanzierung ernst genommen werden. Bei aller Entschiedenheit, die man nach außen hin zu erkennen gab gegenüber Anfragen, die nicht aus einer Haltung der Solidarität gestellt wurden, waren die Rabbiner im Rahmen ihres internen Diskurses weit davon entfernt, sich mit Antworten zufrieden zu geben, mit denen man Häretiker abspießte.²⁹ Die von außen an die jüdischen Ge-

²⁷ BerR 8,8, Wünsche, a.a.O., 33.

²⁸ BerR 8,9, Wünsche, a.a.O., 33.

²⁹ Vgl. die Diskussion zwischen R. Simlaj und seinen Schülern BerR 8,9, Wünsche, a.a.O., 33f. Tatsächlich existiert eine breite Tradition von rabbinischen Kommentaren, die das Theodizeeproblem auf die eine oder andere Weise zu Lasten des Menschen zu lösen versuchen. In der älteren Forschung hat man sich diesen Texten allerdings einseitig zugewendet. So wies Schechter darauf hin, dass Aussagen, die etwa die Vorstellung von Gott als herzlosem, despotischen König suggerieren, nur im Munde von Nichtjuden tradiert wurden (s. S. Schechter, *Studies in Judaism*, New York

lehrten gerichteten Fragen wurden nicht einfach im Rahmen der Apologie abgetan, sondern waren auch für diese selbst von ernster Bedeutung. Dies wird etwa an Texten deutlich, die in einer inner-rabbinischen Diskussion Erwägungen etwa über Gen 1,26 präsentieren. Die folgenden drei Midraschim erörtern den Plural **נַעֲשֶׂה אָדָם** – ‚lasst uns einen Menschen machen‘. Sie nehmen diesen Plural durchaus theologisch ernst. Auf der Grundlage ihres monotheistischen Bekenntnisses konstruieren sie aus ihm einen innergöttlichen Konflikt, dessen Implikationen für eine Theodizee erstaunlich gewagt sind.

Die Kommentare, die *Bereschit Rabba* zu Gen 1,26 anführt, sind mit einer redaktionellen Einleitung versehen, die ihre gemeinsame Fragestellung *expressis verbis* zusammenfasst: „Von wem wurde Gott beraten?“³⁰ Diese Frage impliziert zweierlei. Zunächst wird deutlich, dass die Rabbiner den *Plural majestatis* des göttlichen **נַעֲשֶׂה** hier so verstehen wollen, als sei dem Entschluss, den Menschen zu erschaffen, ein Abwägen vorausgegangen, bei dem durchaus gegensätzliche Positionen zu berücksichtigen waren. Wer der Beratung bedarf, ist sich seines Handelns nicht gewiss, steht vor einem Entscheidungsprozess. Sodann sind mit der Formulierung „Von wem...?“ personale Größen angezeigt, die eine Eigenständigkeit gegenüber dem Schöpfer kennzeichnet. Berät sich Gott mit anderen, so ist er jedenfalls nicht autonom. Etwas Unentschlossenes, ein Zögern klingt hier an.

Eine weitere Beobachtung ergibt sich aus der Frage „Von wem wurde Gott beraten?“ Der Wortlaut im Hebräischen ist **בְּמִי נִמְלָךְ**. Bemerkenswert ist die Wortwahl dieser Formulierung. Die nahe liegende Vokabel, um den Vorgang des Sich-Beratens auszu-

1958, 111). Auch Marmorstein hat unterstrichen, dass die Rede von einer „cruelty“ Gottes als häretisch abgelehnt wurde (s. A. Marmorstein, *The Old Rabbinic Doctrine of God*, Oxford 1927, 207). In neuerer Zeit haben Daniel Boyarin, David Stern und David Kraemer solche in den Texten implizit formulierten Zweifel als durchaus beabsichtigte Intention der Autoren herausgestellt (s. D. Boyarin, *Intertextuality and the Reading of Midrash*, Bloomington, Indianapolis 1990, 57–79; D. Stern, *Parables in Midrash: Narrative and Exegesis in Rabbinic Literature*, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London 1991, 74–82; D. Kraemer, *Responses to Suffering in Classical Rabbinic Literature*, New York, Oxford 1995, 124–149).

³⁰ BerR 8,3, Wünsche, a.a.O., 31.

drücken, ist das Verb יעץ, dessen Grundbedeutung ‚beraten‘ ist.³¹ Die Rabbiner wählen jedoch ein anderes Verb, das von der Wurzel מלך gebildet ist. Die Wurzel מלך in der Stammesmodulation Nif'al, wie sie hier vorliegt, bedeutet ‚sich Erlaubnis / Rat erteilen lassen‘, sie hat im nachbiblischen Hebräisch eine Färbung, die die Tätigkeit des Ratgebers hinsichtlich seiner Kompetenz als fragwürdig erscheinen läßt.³² Indem Gottes Selbstaufforderung Gen 1,26, einen Menschen zu schaffen, in *Bereschit Rabba* mit der Frage „Von wem wurde er beraten?“ paraphrasiert wird, eröffnet sich deutend eine veränderte Perspektive auf Gottes Handeln. Die Rabbiner bringen hier eine kritische Position zur Geltung, die in den redaktionell angefügten Gleichnissen auf je spezifische Weise ausgeführt wird.

Der erste Midrasch ist im Namen R. Joschua ben Levis tradiert.³³ Die Frage „Von wem wurde Gott beraten?“ beantwortet er mit folgendem Dictum:

„Er wurde beraten vom Werk des Himmels und der Erde. Wie ein König, der zwei Ratgeber³⁴ hatte und nichts ohne deren Zustimmung unternahm.“

Das Königsgleichnis korrespondiert in seiner Aussage mit dem, was durch die einleitende Fragestellung bereits angedeutet wurde. Es schildert einen Schöpfer, der sich im Ansinnen, den Menschen zu erschaffen, seiner Souveränität entäußert. Aus der Darstellung des Verhältnisses, das hier zwischen Gott und seinen Ratgebern besteht, ergibt sich eine weitere Aussage. Den Beratern eignet eine auffallend starke Position. Sie werden vom König nicht konsultiert, um dann in freiem Entschluss so oder so zu entscheiden, vielmehr liegt bei ihnen

³¹ יעץ – Qal und Pi'el: ‚beraten‘, Nif'al: ‚beraten werden‘, Hitpa'el: ‚sich beraten‘, vgl. J. Levy, *Wörterbuch über die Talmudim und Midraschim*, Berlin, Wien 1924, Ndr. Darmstadt 1963, II, 252.

³² s. Levy, a.a.O. III, 129.

³³ BerR 8,3, Wünsche, a.a.O., 31. R. Joschua ben Levi ist bekannt als einer der hervorragendsten amoräischen Lehrer. Er lebte in der 1. Hälfte des 3. Jhs., s. Bacher, *Amoräer I*, 124ff.

³⁴ סינקליטין – von σύγκλητος, s. S. Kraus, *Griechische und lateinische Lehnwörter im Talmud, Midrasch und Targum*, II, Berlin 1899, Ndr. Hildesheim, Zürich, New York 1964, 405.

eine letzte entscheidende Befugnis: sie haben gegenüber den Wünschen des Königs ein absolutes Vetorecht.

Auch die Identität der Ratgeber im Gleichnis ist theologisch zu berücksichtigen. Die Faktoren, auf die der Schöpfer sich hier rückhaltlos einlässt, sind geschöpfliche Elemente, Himmel und Erde. Mit anderen Worten: Gott unterwirft sich im Zuge der Erschaffung des Menschen den Bedingungen der Materie.

Ein anschließender Midrasch greift diese Deuterichtung auf und differenziert sie noch:³⁵

„R. Schmu'el bar Nachman³⁶ sagte: ‚Vom Werk jedes einzelnen Tages wurde er beraten. Wie ein König, der einen Ratgeber hatte und nichts unternahm, bevor er nicht dessen Meinung eingeholt hatte‘.“

Ist der zuerst angeführte Midrasch dahingehend zu verstehen, dass die Schöpfung insgesamt, repräsentiert durch Himmel und Erde, des Geschöpfs Mensch bedarf – daher ihr Plädoyer für seine Erschaffung, so legt der Autor dieses Dictums Wert darauf zu zeigen, dass dies in einem sehr genauen Sinn der Fall ist. Er stellt einen sinnvollen Zusammenhang sämtlicher einzelnen Schöpfungswerke zur Existenz des Menschen her und betont damit, dass die Schöpfung einer inneren Gesetzmäßigkeit zufolge auf den Menschen hin geschaffen ist. Erwählt Gott sich seine Geschöpfe zu seinen Ratgebern, so ist damit gesagt, dass er sich ganz der Eigendynamik des Schöpfungswerks überlässt.

Ein anderer Midrasch zu dieser Bibelstelle wird im Namen R. Amis tradiert, der Ende des 3. Jhs. ein bedeutender Lehrer in Tiberias war.³⁷ Auch er formuliert ein Königsgleichnis. Es spitzt die gegebene Fragestellung zu:

„(Gott) wurde von seinem Herzen beraten. Wie ein König, der durch einen Bau-meister einen Palast baute. Als er ihn sah, gefiel er ihm nicht. Über wen sollte er erzürnen? Über den Bau-

³⁵ BerR 8,3, Wünsche, a.a.O., 31.

³⁶ R. Schmu'el bar Nachman s.o. Anm. 7.

³⁷ Ber 8,3, Wünsche, a.a.O., 31. R. Ami ben Natan, s. Bacher, *Amoräer* II, 143ff.

meister doch wohl! So (steht geschrieben Gen 6,6): ‚Und er betrübte sich gegenüber seinem Herzen‘.“

Die Harmonie des himmlischen Hofrates, die das vorige Gleichnis besonders herausstrich, ist im Bild dieses Midrasch zu einer Dissonanz missraten. Der Misston gewinnt dadurch noch an Schärfe, dass der Konflikt hier nicht aus einem Gegeneinander von Schöpfer einerseits und Schöpfung andererseits resultiert. Einen Dualismus von Geist und Materie beschreibt der Kommentar gerade nicht. Vielmehr ortet er die Krise in Gott selbst: Gott und sein Herz – ein inneres Dilemma des Schöpfers entwirft dieses Gleichnis.

Wodurch gewinnt der rabbinische Autor diese überraschende Perspektive? Er zieht die biblische Sintfluterzählung Gen 6–9 als Horizont seiner Interpretation heran. Explizit bezieht er sich auf Gen 6,6. Dort gibt der biblische Autor im Auftakt der Erzählung die Ursache der bevorstehenden Katastrophe an: Gottes Enttäuschung darüber, dass die Menschheit sich seinem Schöpfungsplan entzieht. Achtet man auf den genauen Wortlaut der Formulierungen, so fällt auf, dass in der Begründung des sich anbahnenden Weltgerichts die Verbwurzel רעע eine Leitfunktion innehat. Ihre Grundbedeutung ist ‚böse sein‘, ‚schlecht sein‘.³⁸ „...groß war die Bosheit רעה des Menschen auf Erden und ... alles Treiben ... seines Herzens war nur böse רע den ganzen Tag“ (Gen 6,6). Das positive Gegenstück zu רעע ist die Wurzel טוב ‚gut sein‘.³⁹ Diese Verbwurzel dient der göttlichen Bekräftigung seines anfänglichen Schöpfungshandelns in Gen 1: „und er sah..., dass es gut war כִּי טוֹב“.⁴⁰ Der intertextuelle Bezug zwischen dem ersten Schöpfungsbericht und der Sintfluterzählung klingt so bereits durch die mit רעע gegebene Wortwahl an, er ist darüber hinaus durch weiteres schöpfungsspezifisches Vokabular gegeben.⁴¹

Der explizite Bezug von R. Amis Midrasch geht auf Gen 6,6 als sein Basisvers. Der Text sagt, dass Gott angesichts der Bosheit des

³⁸ S. W. Gesenius, / F. Buhl, *Hebräisches und Aramäisches Handwörterbuch über das Alte Testament*, Berlin 1915, Ndr. ¹⁷1962, 768.

³⁹ Vgl. hierzu die Paradiesgeschichte Gen 2,9.17; 3,5.22.

⁴⁰ Gen 1,3.10.12.18.21.25.

⁴¹ So die Verwendung der Verben ברא in Gen 6,7, *terminus technicus* des göttlichen Schaffens in Gen 1: V 1.21.27, und עשה in Gen 6,6 und Gen 1,7.16.25.31. Vgl. auch die Aufzählung der Lebewesen Gen 6,7 mit Gen 1.

Menschen „sich seinem Herzen gegenüber betrübte“.⁴² R. Amis Aussage, Gott wurde bei der Erschaffung des Menschen von seinem Herzen beraten, hat also hier, in Gen 6,6, ihren Anhaltspunkt.

Die Intention der theologischen Aussage des Midrasch hebt sich allerdings von jener der Sintflutzerzählung markant ab. Während die Flutgeschichte den Akzent so legt, dass Ursache und Verantwortung im Fehlverhalten des Menschen zu sehen sind,⁴³ arbeitet der Midrasch einen anderen Aspekt heraus, der gleichwohl nicht ohne Anhaltspunkt im biblischen Text ist. Gen 6,6 erweitert die im Text breit angelegte Kommunikationsstruktur Gott – Mensch um einen zweiten Beziehungsfaktor. Gott verhält sich zum einen zu dem Menschen: „...ich will auslöschen den Menschen, den ich geschaffen habe“, zunächst jedoch verhält sich Gott zu sich selbst: „...und er betrübte sich seinem Herzen gegenüber.“ Diese in Gen 6,6 angedeutete selbstbezügliche Kommunikation Gottes greift der Midrasch auf. Er wendet sie auf den *Plural majestatis* in Gen 1,26 an, der den Ausgangspunkt seiner Auslegung darstellt: „...lasst uns einen Menschen machen...“ Hier – Gen 1,26 – wie dort – Gen 6,6 – lässt sich, so man dies möchte, eine innergöttliche Zwiesprache am biblischen Text ablesen. Das Gegenüber des göttlichen Ratschlags, das in Gen 1,26 anonym bleibt, kann im Licht von Gen 6,6 als das göttliche Herz gedeutet werden. Diese Deutung nimmt der Midrasch vor. Indem die Auslegung die Aufmerksamkeit der Lesenden auf eine weitere am Geschehen beteiligte Größe lenkt, das göttliche Herz, verschiebt er die Last der Verantwortung für die Sintflut. Während der biblische Text die Tendenz zeigt, den Menschen als die Ursache für die Vernichtung der Schöpfung darzustellen, des Herzens Treiben „nur böse den ganzen Tag“ war (Gen 6,5), biegt das im Namen des R. Ami tradierte Gleichnis diesen Vektor um:

„(Gott) wurde von seinem Herzen beraten. Wie ein König, der durch einen Baumeister einen Palast baute. Als er ihn sah, gefiel er ihm nicht. Über wen sollte er erzürnen לְהִתְרַעַם? Über

⁴² וַיִּתְעַצֵּב אֶל לְבוּ

⁴³ S. Gen 6, 1-3.5.11-13.

den Baumeister doch wohl! So (steht geschrieben Gen 6,6):
 ‚Und er betrübte sich וַיִּתְעַצֵּב gegenüber seinem Herzen‘.“

Anders als der oben besprochene, im Namen des R. Joschua ben Levi tradierte Midrasch weist dieser Text die Verantwortung für die Vernichtung dem Schöpfer zu. Gott beehrt für sich den Menschen als seine ‚Wohnstätte‘, seinen ‚Palast‘, so die Sprache des Gleichnisses. Sein Herz ist maßgeblich an der Gestaltung der Schöpfung beteiligt. Die Wahl dieses Begriffs verleiht dem Midrasch eine besondere Note. Das Wort „Herz“ weist im Hebräischen auf drei semantische Grundaspekte. Es bezeichnet den Sitz der Emotionen, den des Willens und auch das rationale Zentrum.⁴⁴ Auf der Ebene des biblischen Textes, den der Midrasch kommentiert, kommt dem Wort „Herz“ eine Schlüsselposition zu:

„Als der Herr sah, dass die Bosheit des Menschen auf der Erde groß war und aller Antrieb der Absichten seines Herzens nur böse den ganzen Tag. Da reute es den Herrn, dass er den Menschen auf der Erde gemacht hatte und er betrübte sich gegenüber seinem Herzen.“ (Gen 6,5f)

Das Herz des Menschen ist hier Ursprung aller menschlichen Verfehlung und damit zugleich Ursache und Gegenstand der Enttäuschung Gottes über seine Schöpfung. Im gegebenen textlichen Rahmen erscheint das Herz also als eine Größe, die als unzuverlässig wahrgenommen wird. Es ist dieser Bedeutungsaspekt, den der Midrasch aufnimmt. Der rabbinische Autor wendet seine Aufmerksamkeit allerdings dem Herzen *Gottes* zu und formuliert ein Gleichnis, in dem nun das göttliche Herz eine unzuverlässige Größe darstellt. Liegt in dieser parallelisierenden Darstellung des menschlichen und göttlichen Herzens bereits eine kritische Anspielung darauf, dass im Bibeltext allein der Mensch die Verantwortung für die misslingende Schöpfung zu tragen hat, so verschärft sich diese Tendenz noch zusätzlich dadurch, wie der Midrasch Gottes emotionale Reaktion auf dieses

⁴⁴ S. Botterweck, Ringgren, Fabry (Hgg.), *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, IV, 427–437.

sein fragwürdiges Herz beschreibt. Das Schriftzitat aus der Sintfluterzählung wählt hier den Begriff **וַיִּתְעַצֵּב** – ‚sich betrüben‘, ‚sich grämen‘:⁴⁵

„...und er betrübte sich **וַיִּתְעַצֵּב** gegenüber **לְאָל** seinem Herzen.“
(Gen 6,6)

Die midraschische Paraphrase indessen formuliert:

„...Über wen sollte er erzürnen **לְהִתְרַעַם**...“

Während der biblische Text Gottes Empfinden mit dem Verb **וַיִּתְעַצֵּב** „er betrübte sich“ beschreibt, benennt der Midrasch dasselbe mit dem Verb **לְהִתְרַעַם** „er erzürnte“. Die Szene ist so insgesamt in einen dramatischeren Ton gesetzt, was ganz allgemein die Vehemenz der emotionalen Beteiligung hervorhebt. Überdies verändert die abweichende Wortwahl des Kommentars das Bild in einem spezifischen Sinn: Das Gefühl der Trauer, mit **וַיִּתְעַצֵּב** gegeben, beschreibt eine nach innen gerichtete Haltung, das des Zorns – **לְהִתְרַעַם** – zeigt hingegen einen nach außen gerichteten Vektor. Der Autor hebt so ganz bewusst die aus menschlicher Perspektive bedrohliche, zerstörerische Tendenz des Schöpfers hervor.

Ist die Perspektive des Menschen vordergründig auch nicht das Thema des Gleichnisses, so klingt sie doch zwischen den Zeilen dieser Texte mit an. Die Frommen, in deren Kreisen ein solches Bild entworfen wurde, konstatieren hier zunächst Gottes Leidenschaft für seine Schöpfung. Allerdings stellen sie diese ins Zwielflicht einer spontanen Handlung, die im Nachhinein als Fauxpas verworfen wird. Gott wünscht für sich einen Palast, einen Ort zum Wohnen – und als der ihm nicht zusagt, zerstört er ihn. Zugespitzt könnte man formulieren: *Während im biblischen Text der Mensch das Dilemma Gottes ist, wird im Kommentar Gott zum Dilemma des Menschen.* Gott hegt eine emotionale Schwäche für den Menschen, deren Konsequenzen er nicht zu tragen bereit ist. Vor dem Hintergrund der bohrenden Zweifel des Gerechten an Gottes Gerechtigkeit kann diese Leidenschaft fragwür-

⁴⁵ S. Gesenius, *Handwörterbuch*, 609.

dig werden. Der im Midrasch gestellten Frage „Über wen sollte er erzürnen?“ korrespondiert ja nicht die Antwort „über den Menschen“, sondern die Antwort „über den Baumeister doch wohl!“ Deutlich genug klingt hier die nonverbale Botschaft mit an: „Warum eigentlich über den Menschen?“

Ein weiteres Gleichnis ist im Namen R. Josses tradiert.⁴⁶ Es ist ganz parallel wie das vorige gebaut. Die ihm zugrunde liegende Frage ist auch hier wieder: Von wem ließ sich Gott bei der Erschaffung des Menschen beraten?

„Es ist wie ein Gleichnis auf einen König, der sich auf einen Handel einließ durch einen Mittelsmann סְרַסְוִיר, und es wurde zu einem Verlustgeschäft. Über wen sollte er erzürnen? Über den Mittelsmann doch wohl! Daher steht geschrieben (Gen 6,6): ‚und er betrübe sich über sein Herz‘.“

R. Josses Gleichnis unterscheidet sich nur in einer Nuance vom Gleichnis R. Amis, indem die Vokabel ‚Baumeister‘ als Metapher für das göttliche Herz durch die Metapher ‚Mittelsmann‘ ersetzt ist. Die Enttäuschung, die ein den eigenen Vorstellungen nicht genügender Wohnsitz hervorruft, ist nicht geringer als die durch ein fehlgeschlagenes Geschäft. In beiden Fällen ist Gottes Entschluss, den Menschen zu erschaffen, Ergebnis einer emotional bestimmten Situation. Gott erscheint als ein Wesen, das Mangel empfindet, das sich selbst nicht genügen kann. Eine Zuspitzung gegenüber der Aussage des vorigen Midrasch ist darin zu sehen, dass der König sich nicht selber um sein Anliegen kümmert, sondern die Sache einer dritten Figur überlässt, die als weniger direkt beteiligte möglicherweise nicht im erforderlichen Maß zuverlässig und vertrauenswürdig ist. Der Autor des Gleichnisses arbeitet so das Moment des Vorwurfs an Gott noch stärker heraus. Es entsteht der Eindruck, als versäume es der Schöpfer, sein Interesse mit der angemessenen Sorgfalt zu verfolgen, ihr die entsprechende Aufmerksamkeit angedeihen zu lassen.

Bezieht man diese implizite Botschaft des Gleichnisses als durchaus absichtliche Nuance in die Interpretation mit ein, so entspricht

⁴⁶ BerR 8,3, Wünsche, a.a.O., 31.

seine Aussage dem Gesamteindruck, dass diese Texte einer tiefen menschlichen Verunsicherung Ausdruck verleihen. Textlicher Ausgangspunkt aller drei Gleichnisse ist die Pluralform der göttlichen Selbstaufforderung in Gen 1,26 ‚lasst uns einen Menschen machen‘. Diesem Plural entnehmen sie den Impuls ihrer Interpretation. Sie entwickeln daraus die Vorstellung eines Schöpfers, der keine in sich ruhende oder allmächtige Gottheit darstellt, sondern im Konflikt auseinanderstrebender Gemütsbewegungen steckt. Die emotionale Voreingenommenheit Gottes für den Menschen, die zu seiner Erschaffung führt, ist mit dem göttlichen Herzen bezeichnet. Die nachträgliche Distanzierung von den Regungen seines Herzens gibt den Ausschlag zur katastrophalen Vernichtung der Sintflut. Die Verunsicherung, die die rabbinischen Autoren hier zum Ausdruck bringen, besteht zum einen darüber, ob das Prädikat ‚gut‘ für die Schöpfung denn nun tatsächlich am Platze sei, zum andern besteht sie darüber, ob denn der Mensch die Ursache dieser Situation sei oder ob sie vielleicht doch beim Schöpfer zu sehen ist.

Während die drei Gleichnisse den Eindruck entstehen lassen, der Schöpfer habe sich gedankenlos in ein missglücktes Abenteuer gestürzt, dessen missliche Konsequenzen die Kreatur zu tragen hat, bringt der folgende Midrasch einen wichtigen Aspekt der rabbinischen Wahrnehmung der Problematik hinzu. Der Kommentar ist R. Berechja zugeschrieben, einem bedeutenden, viel zitierten Midraschgelehrten der 2. Hälfte des 4. Jhs.⁴⁷

„Zur Stunde, als der Heilige, er ist gepriesen, daranging, den ersten Menschen zu erschaffen, sah er, dass Gerechte und Frevler aus ihm erstehen würden. Er sprach: Erschaffe ich ihn, so erstehen Frevler aus ihm, erschaffe ich ihn nicht, wie sollen Gerechte aus ihm erstehen!?! Was tat der Heilige, er ist gepriesen? Er entfernte **דַּרְכֵי הַפְּלִיג** den Weg der Frevler von seinem Angesicht und verband mit sich das Maß des Erbarmens – und erschuf ihn. Dies ist, was geschrieben steht (Ps 1,6): ‚Denn der Herr kennt **דַּרְכֵי הַיֹּדֵעַ** den Weg der Gerechten, der Weg der Frevler aber verliert sich **וְהַתְּאַבֵּד** – Was bedeutet ‚verliert sich‘? Er ver-

⁴⁷ BerR 8,4, Wünsche, a.a.O., 32. Zu R. Berechja s. Bacher, *Amoräer* III, 344ff.

lor sich אֶת־פָּנָיו von seinem Angesicht, und er (i. e. Gott) verband mit sich das Maß des Erbarmens – und erschuf ihn.“

Der Midrasch weicht insofern von den anderen ab, als die Erschaffung des Menschen hier nicht als ein emotionales Abenteuer geschildert wird. Wohl, das Emotionale als Antriebskraft bleibt weiterhin sichtbar. Die besorgte Frage ‚Wie können Gerechte erstehen, wenn ich den Menschen nicht erschaffe!?’ zeugt deutlich davon, dass Gott den Menschen, den Gerechten, der sich ihm zuwendet, wünscht und ersehnt. Im Hinblick auf die Gerechten ist dieses Wünschen Gottes hier durch eine wohlüberlegte Strategie gesteuert, welche das Potential des Destruktiven in den Blick fasst. Um die Existenz der Gerechten zu verwirklichen, ist als Möglichkeit göttlichen Handelns das Erbarmen unabdingbar, denn auch die Gerechten werden mit der Realität des *Jezer*, menschlichen Leidenschaften konfrontiert und ihr nicht immer gewachsen sein. Das Maß des Erbarmens steht also in der Funktion, den Gerechten die Aporie ihres Daseins zu erleichtern, die im Midrasch des R. Jochanan so zugespitzt ausgedrückt ist.⁴⁸

Im Vergleich zu den Gleichnissen, die in den Namen R. Schmu’el bar Nachmans, R. Josses und R. Amis tradiert sind, wird hier ein Gott geschildert, der sich seinen Wunsch nach der Entstehung von Gerechten in verantwortungsvoller Rücksicht auf die Problematik, die dieser Wunsch mit sich bringt, erfüllt. Bei genauerer Betrachtung ist dies allerdings nur die eine Seite des Vorgangs. Achten wir auf Gottes Handeln im Hinblick auf die Frevler. Der Text sagt

„er entfernte den Weg der Frevler von seinem Angesicht“.

Die Tatsache, dass Gott sich gezwungen sieht, die Existenz der Frevler zu ignorieren, und nur so die von ihm gewünschte Existenz der Gerechten ermöglichen kann, macht deutlich, dass man sich über die Fragwürdigkeit der *conditio humana* im Klaren ist. Sie zeigt zugleich, dass Gott die Erschaffung des Menschen nicht in vollem Umfang befürworten kann. Zwar kann er die Hinfälligkeit der Gerechten im Hinblick auf die menschlichen Leidenschaften verantworten. Die

⁴⁸ S. o. S. 6.

Problematik der Frevler hingegen ist untragbar, deshalb „entfernte er den Weg der Frevler von seinem Angesicht“. Gott hat für die Frage der Existenz der Frevler keine Lösung. Er schaut weg.⁴⁹ Berücksichtigen wir an dieser Stelle die Perspektive der Gerechten, so ergibt sich eine Wahrnehmung, die jener der beiden vorigen Gleichnisse nun doch wieder ähnelt. Während Gott die Existenz der Frevler ignoriert, um sich der Freude an seinen Gerechten zuzuwenden, können sich die Gerechten ihrerseits der Gegenwart der Frevler ja eben nicht durch eine Abwendung ihrer Aufmerksamkeit leicht entziehen. Im Gegenteil: ihr Leiden verschärft sich durch die Übermacht derer, die Unterdrückung und Gewalt skrupellos ausüben.⁵⁰

Stellt man diese im Midrasch nur zwischen den Zeilen Kontur gewinnende Perspektive für die Interpretation in Rechnung, so erscheint das Ungelöste in Gott, das den Ursprung des Dilemmas der Schöpfung ausmacht, fast noch kritischer als in den drei Königsgleichnissen. Während Gott dort gewissermaßen naiv und ganz arglos wie durch eine unwiderstehliche Versuchung gelockt ans Werk geht und später erst von den schwerwiegenden Folgen seines Handelns überwältigt wird, ist er sich hier der radikalen Ambivalenz seines Vorhabens von Anfang an voll bewusst. Die Lösung, mit welcher Gott dieser Aporie beizukommen beschließt, ist aber nur eine halbe.

⁴⁹ Dass diese Aussage als problematisch empfunden wurde, zeigt etwa die Lesart der *Pesiqta Rabbati*, Kap. 40, (*Pesiqta Rabbati, Midrasch für den Festzyklus und die ausgezeichneten Sabbathe*, ed. M. Friedmann, Wien 1880, Ndr. Tel Aviv 1963, כ, קט"ו), wo die Einsetzung der beiden Maße göttlichen Handelns auf den Menschen allgemein bezogen wird, so dass auch für das Phänomen der Frevler ein Konzept vorliegt. Noch schlichter ist die in Midrasch *Tehillim* Kap. 1,22, (*Midrasch Tehillim*, ed. S. Buber, Wilna 1892, Ndr. Jerusalem 1966, כ') tradierte Variante, wonach Gott den Weg der Frevler vor dem Weg der Gerechten verbirgt, damit diese nicht auf den falschen Weg geraten sollten.

⁵⁰ Mit der Aussage, Gott entfernte den Weg der Frevler von seinem Angesicht, beruft sich der Autor auf Ps 1,6: ‚der Weg der Frevler aber verliert sich‘. Dieser Vers wird in der rabbinischen Tradition schon früh eschatologisch gelesen. Dies erhellt daraus, dass die Psalmen 1 und 2 ursprünglich als eine Einheit aufgefasst worden sind, und Ps 2 eindeutig messianisch rezipiert wurde (s. Traktat *B'rachot*, bBer 9b; bBer 10a). In diesem Sinn könnte ebenso die Aussage, Gott entfernte den Weg der Frevler von seinem Angesicht, eschatologisch gemeint sein. Tatsächlich werden die Gerechten ja gemäß ihrer Erwartung am Ende von der Bedrängung durch die Frevler befreit sein. Doch auch mit dieser Annahme einer eschatologischen Lesart bleibt die Frage nach dem Leiden der Gerechten in ihrem gegenwärtigen Leben unverändert dringlich.

Die Haltung des Erbarmens greift nur bei den Gerechten. Was die Frevler betrifft, so entspricht das Verhalten Gottes dem, was wir heute eine Verdrängungstaktik nennen würden. Eine Verdrängung, die nicht unwillkürlich, vielmehr ganz bewusst vorgenommen wird, weil Gott seiner Leidenschaft für die Gerechten Priorität einräumen will. Diese Leidenschaft ist in der Darstellung des Autors so mächtig, dass Gott alles Misslingende außer Acht lässt, sich damit jedoch auch von all jener absehbaren Not, die die Gerechten nicht durch sich selbst, sondern durch das Handeln der Frevler erleiden, vollen Bewusstseins abwendet.

Ein weiterer Midrasch, unmittelbar an den Kommentar R. Berechjas angeschlossen, verdeutlicht die dargestellte Situation, indem er die widersprüchlichen Impulse Gottes ähnlich wie dies in den drei Gleichnissen geschieht, hypostasiert.⁵¹

„R. Chanina⁵² formulierte es nicht so, sondern (folgendermaßen): Zur Stunde, als er daranging, den ersten Menschen zu erschaffen, wurde er von den Dienstengeln beraten. Er sprach zu ihnen: ‚*Laßt uns einen Menschen machen*‘, da sagten sie: Was hast du davon *מָה טִיבוֹ*? Da sagte er ihnen: Gerechte erstehen aus ihm! Dies ist, was geschrieben steht (Ps 1,6): ‚*Denn der Herr kennt יְהוָה יִדְרֹעַ* den Weg der Gerechten‘ – der Herr gab den Dienstengeln den Weg der Gerechten bekannt *הַדֶּרֶךְ הַיְדִיעַ*. ‚*der Weg der Frevler aber verliert sich*‘ – er verlor sich vor ihnen (den Dienstengeln) *אֶבְדָּה מִמָּהֶם*. Er (i. e. Gott) zeigte *נִלְוָה* ihnen, dass die Gerechten aus ihm erstehen, zeigte ihnen aber nicht, dass die Frevler aus ihm erstehen. Hätte er ihnen gezeigt, dass Frevler aus ihm erstehen, so hätte das Maß des Richtens nicht zugelassen, dass er ihn erschaffe.“

Die Negation des Menschen kommt im Szenario dieses Midrasch durch die Gruppe der Dienstengel zu Wort. Diese sind dem ‚Maß des göttlichen Richtens‘ zugeordnet, das ebenfalls hypostatisch als eigene Größe dargestellt wird. Die feine Korrektur, die damit im Ver-

⁵¹ BerR 8,4, Wünsche, a. a. O., 32.

⁵² R. Chanina, wohl R. Chananja II. aus Sepphoris, ein Zeitgenosse des R. Berechja, s. Bacher, *Amoräer* III, 673f.

gleich zu dem im Namen R. Berechjas überlieferten Midrasch vorgenommen wird, ist unübersehbar. Nicht von ungefähr wird R. Chaninas Auslegung ausdrücklich als Abweichung von der des R. Berechja vorgestellt.⁵³ Sein Anliegen ist es, die Schärfe der Aussage abzumildern. Die Verneinung der Schöpfung ist im Midrasch R. Berechjas ein Impuls, der von Gott ‚selbst‘ ausgeht. Gott ‚selbst‘ wendet seinen Blick von den Frevlern ab. Indem R. Chanina hier die Hypostasierung einführt, schafft er sich die Möglichkeit, eine größere Souveränität Gottes gegenüber dem Impuls der Negation zur Geltung zu bringen. Er macht von dieser Möglichkeit Gebrauch, indem er die Dienstengel auf Distanz zu Gott setzt. So bestimmt er deren abwertende Position als etwas Gott weniger Eigenliches, mit ihm ‚selbst‘ nicht direkt Assoziiertes, ähnlich wie dies im Gleichnis von der Sintflut der Fall ist, die als „harte Legion“ des Königs vom König ‚selbst‘ unterschieden wird und aufgrund ihres destruktiven Einflusses seinen Namen nicht tragen darf.⁵⁴

Im schmerzlichen Bewusstsein der eigenen Hinfälligkeit empfindet der Mensch die Konfrontation mit einem Gott, der die Solidarität mit dem Geschöpf verweigert, als gar zu problematisch. Er kann eine solche Ablehnung nur im Sinne einer sekundären, die authentische Botschaft Gottes in ihrem Kern nicht berührenden Erfahrung aufnehmen. In der hypostasierenden Herabsetzung, die den Stimmen der Negation in diesem Midrasch zuteil wird, tritt klar hervor, von welcher Dringlichkeit eine solche Depotenzierung für den Autor dieses Midrasch gewesen ist.

Die untersuchten Quellen geben, auf die Frage der Theodizee hin beleuchtet, unterschiedliche Aspekte der rabbinischen Wahrnehmung zu erkennen. Die beiden ersten Midraschim⁵⁵ verstehen den Bereich der destruktiven Erfahrungen des Lebens als vom Schöpfer mehr *no-lens volens* eingesetztes pädagogisches Medium, um das Geschöpf Mensch für eine der Schöpfung dienlichen Lebensführung zu disziplinieren. Destruktives Potenzial geht hier ursprünglich vom Menschen aus. Im Kontext des Tun-Ergehens-Zusammenhangs wird es

⁵³ S. Zeile 1 der zitierten Quelle. Der hebräische Wortlaut ist לֹא אָמַר בֵּן אֱלֹהִים.

⁵⁴ BerR 4,6, s.o.S. 3.

⁵⁵ R. Schmu'el bar Nachman, s.o. S. 2f; R. Joschua ben Levi, s.o. S. 3.

von Seiten Gottes auf ihn zurückgelenkt. Gottes zerstörendes Handeln ist nicht Ursache, sondern gerichtliche Wirkung des sich verfehlenden Menschen. Im Hinblick auf die Frage der Theodizee bedeutet dies: Der Schöpfer wird gerechtfertigt zulasten des Geschöpfes.

Zwei weitere Kommentare⁵⁶ richten das Interesse auf ein vertieftes Verstehen der menschlichen Situation. Der im Namen R. Jochanans tradierte Midrasch beschreibt die Erfahrung des Gerechten als einen lebenslangen Kampf mit seinen Leidenschaften um persönliche Integrität, in welchem eine quälende Zerrissenheit auszuhalten ist. Auch dieser Text sieht im Menschen die Ursache seines Leidens. Indem er dieses jedoch als uneinholbare Gegebenheit menschlicher Existenz beschreibt, der gerade auch die Frommen nicht ausweichen können, ist hier nicht von menschlicher Schuld zu sprechen. Wird der Tod als Erlösung vom Kampf des Lebens begrüßt, so ist damit vom Standpunkt des Gerechten aus eine Anklage formuliert, auch wenn dies nicht *expressis verbis* geschieht.

Eine andere Gruppe von Midraschim leitet aus der Erfahrung des unverschuldeten Leidens an der *conditio humana* die Erkenntnis ab, dass sich hierin etwas in Gott selbst Ungelöstes widerspiegelt.⁵⁷ Die Erfahrung des strafenden und vernichtenden Gottes, im Sintflutmotiv archetypisch gegeben, verstehen sie nicht primär als Folge menschlicher Verfehlung, sondern als Konsequenz einer nicht ausgetragenen inneren Ambivalenz Gottes gegenüber der Schöpfung, die ursprünglich und bereits im Akt der Erschaffung des Menschen selbst virulent ist. Seine Entscheidung für den Menschen erscheint hier als Ausdruck einer emotionalen Verführbarkeit Gottes, die zugleich von ihm schon immer in Frage gestellt ist im Sinne einer kritischen Verneinung, wohl wissend um die problematischen Implikationen der Erschaffung der Welt. Mit seiner Entscheidung gegen die Stimmen der Skepsis und für die Erschaffung des Menschen fällt die Verantwortung für die *conditio humana* auf Gott selbst zurück und wird als Gottes eigene Problematik bestimmt. Die Leidenschaft Gottes für den Menschen wird in diesen Texten unterschiedlich beleuchtet, doch

⁵⁶ R. Me'ir, s.o. S. 5; R. Jochanan, s.o. S. 6.

⁵⁷ R. Joschua ben Levi; R. Schmu'el bar Nachman; R. Ami, s.o. S. 9f; R. Josse s.o.S. 13.

eher kritisch denn affirmativ beurteilt. Ist die Kehrseite dieser Leidenschaft Zerstörung, so erlebt sich der Mensch in diesen Texten in erster Linie als Leidtragender der Leidenschaft Gottes für seine Schöpfung und nicht etwa primär als verantwortlich für dieses Leiden. Angesichts der offensichtlichen Schwäche des Schöpfers, einen inneren Konflikt zu lösen, wird dem Menschen, den die Enttäuschung Gottes über das Misslingende seiner Leidenschaft unverschuldet trifft, Rehabilitation zuteil.

Die Schärfe einer solchen Darstellung abmildernd versucht ein anderer Autor, doch einen Akzent auf das Vernünftige, planmäßig Durchdachte der menschlichen Situation zu legen.⁵⁸ Zumindest im Blick auf die Hinfälligkeit der Gerechten setzt Gott ganz bewusst auf das Erbarmen als Möglichkeit seines Handelns, um deren Dasein vor der Verwerfung zu schützen. Bei genauerer Betrachtung entpuppt sich die hier entwickelte Lösung jedoch als Scheinlösung, da sie zwar das direkte Verhältnis der Gerechten zu Gott entlastet, aber keine Antwort auf ihr Leiden unter den Frevlern gibt, deren Existenz Gott ebenfalls ermöglicht. Während Gott das Treiben der Frevler ganz eigennützig ignoriert, haben die Gerechten nicht diese Wahl, sich zu entziehen. Sie können jederzeit deren Opfer werden.

In der Mehrzahl dieser Kommentare zum ersten biblischen Schöpfungsbericht, die aus der normativen Epoche des rabbinischen Judentums stammen, erscheint die Frage des menschlichen Leidens als bohrende Frage nach der Verantwortbarkeit seiner Schöpfung auf Gott hin gewendet. Den Antagonismus zweier Impulse, lebensbejahend und Leben zerstörend, gestalten sie im Rahmen des monotheistischen Bekenntnisses konsequent als eine Spannung widersprüchlicher Impulse in Gott selbst. Diese Spannung wird durch personifizierte Attribute sichtbar gemacht. Zu einem viel späteren Zeitpunkt der Geschichte des rabbinischen Judentums, in der Mystik der Kabbala, wurde diese Wahrnehmung eines inneren Ringens Gottes in das System der *Sefirot* eingebunden und so in systematische Formen gebracht.⁵⁹ Dass sie dort jedoch nicht ganz neuartig ist, vielmehr der

⁵⁸ R. Berechja, s.o. S. 14; s. auch R. Chanina, S. 15.

⁵⁹ Vgl. hierzu ausführlicher Y. Liebes, *Studies in Jewish Myth and Jewish Messianism*, transl. from the Hebr. by B. Stein, New York, 1993, 50f.

Sache nach bereits von den Gelehrten der frühen rabbinischen Zeit ausgebildet wurde, zeigen diese Texte in aller Deutlichkeit.

Summary: The article examines how the theodicy question was answered by the rabbinic traditions. Some suggest that the experience of evil and suffering is a means of the Creator to bring his creation to deeper insights and to a better life. Not always though is suffering seen in the context of human guilt. Other voices see the existence of suffering as a result of an unfinished aspect in God himself, who has an ambivalent relation to his creation.

Keywords: Theodicy – rabbinic traditions – midrash – Jewish tradition – suffering

‘CHOIRS OF LARKS AND TIBETAN TRUMPETS’: IN SEARCH OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN MUSIC

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Introduction

When the subject of this paper was first proposed to me I imagined that I should have little problem producing an overview of Western art music in which the Holy Spirit clearly provided the stimulus for the works I described. I hoped to examine how composers using different stylistic and technical features, at different points in musical history transferred to music extra-musical images or notions of the Spirit. After only a very short reflection, however, I came up with what seemed a major stumbling block; the apparent relative absence of musical works that dealt exclusively and explicitly with the Holy Spirit.

With well over a thousand years of religious music available (and remembering that the history of Western art music and that of religious music are pretty much one and the same thing until at least the fifteenth century), let me try to explain why I think it is that the Holy Spirit does not seem to stand out in the way other aspects of Christian faith do. It is not difficult, for example, to find works dealing with Jesus’ earthly life and ministry (one thinks of the immense amount of music related to Christmas, Easter and, perhaps especially, Christ’s Passion), or to find music devoted to Marian topics. It even appears that lesser saints have, when compared with the Holy Spirit, done quite well for themselves.

The liturgical function of music

To understand why this is the case it is necessary to understand a little of the development of religious music, in particular the reasons why

it has been written. Curiously, despite the fact that music is, of all the arts, the least practical (that is, it does not generally affect our actions or response to the outside world on a day-to-day basis), the least representative of anything but itself (unlike traditional visual arts), and the least precisely communicative (compared, for example, with literature or even poetry), its role in the Christian church has tended to be merely functional.

Whereas religious art, poetry and literature were able from a relatively early point in the life of the Church to separate themselves from a purely liturgical context, allowing them to comment on and look differently at historical and dogmatic issues, art music, at least, has to a very large extent remained tied to the liturgy. In other words music has simply supported what is already present; the texts, prescribed by the liturgical contexts, that it sets.

There are, it is true, some fairly early (mediaeval) examples of non-liturgical religious music, but interestingly these developed largely outside of the realms of art music as popular dance-songs (carols). They consequently tended to take as their subject populist topics: the Virgin, favourite or local saints and, especially, Christmas, a feast whose mid-winter pagan traditions and sub-text were never buried very deeply beneath its lately imposed Christian significance.

What is it, then, about this functional nature of music that has resulted in so little of it that is uniquely concerned with the Holy Spirit? Liturgical music has historically (and here I am still referring principally to the period prior to the reformation), and by definition, been restricted to those texts traditionally sung as parts of services. These comprise predominantly music for the ordinary of the Eucharist and those parts of the offices of the church which remain unchanged throughout the year. In addition there are those texts (derived from scripture) which are set for specific days (the proper of the mass, for example, or the psalms, antiphons and responsories for the office). To these were added newly composed texts, proper to specific occasions and elaborating on themes relevant to those occasions, such as the hymns and sequences to be found in the plainsong repertory of the Catholic Church.

Clearly, while we look for religious music dealing with the Holy Spirit only amongst liturgical works or those non-liturgical dance and

procession songs of the late middle ages whose music and theology is unashamedly popular, the issue is one of the texts required to be set. Theologians and liturgists will be better able to explain than I why the Holy Spirit occurs only relatively rarely as the exclusive subject of liturgical texts, though I note with interest that Velli-Matti Kärkkäinen in a section entitled ‘The Holy Spirit as the “Cinderella of Theology”’ in his book *Pneumatology*¹ lists writers from the fourth century onward who describe the Holy Spirit as the *theos agraptos* (the God about whom no-one writes), or the forgotten God. Obviously the Holy Spirit is ever-present textually in the liturgy; in the Creed, in every blessing and in every doxology. In musical terms, however, this Trinitarian context rarely allows for any specific musical comment on the Holy Spirit itself (I shall return, though, to a musical representation of the Trinity in due course). Let me take the doxology as a simple example of why this is. The strophic structure of music used for hymns and psalms, from the earliest times to the present day, precludes any musical nuance appropriate to any particular textual references as the same music can fit words of substantially different character.

Mediaeval settings of texts of the Spirit

It is also true, of course, that the *Graduale* and *Antiphonale* contains some fine chants associated with the Feast of the Holy Spirit: notably the sequence *Veni Sancte Spiritus* (dating from the late twelfth/early thirteenth century) and the office hymn *Veni Creator Spiritus* (from the tenth century, though the melody may pre-date the text, possibly having been set to the Ambrosian² hymn *Hic est dies versus Dei*).

¹ Velli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International and Contextual Perspectives*, Grand Rapids, 2002, 16–19.

² Ambrosian chant is a branch of chant distinct from, and developing parallel to, Gregorian Chant. It is found in the area around Milan, and takes its name from one of Milan’s most famous bishops, the fourth century St Ambrose. Tradition suggests that Ambrose was responsible for much of the music and liturgy that now bears his name, but although his authorship of a number of hymn texts attributed to him is relatively secure there is little evidence to suggest that he composed the tunes for them. Musically Ambrosian chant is interesting in that it is more ambiguous in its use of modes than Gregorian Chant; it also tends towards more stepwise movement, greater motivic repetition and greater use of sequences within melismas.

From the latter part of the twelfth century also comes one of earliest single-author collections of music, Hildegard of Bingen's *Symphonia Armonie Celestium Revelationum*.³ This volume contains 77 separate pieces, four of which have texts concerning the Holy Spirit. As both poet and composer Hildegard exercises a unique control over her artistic products. Though the texts draw on some standard symbols her visionary verses far exceed in passion and imagery the norms of her time.⁴ Similarly, there is an ecstatic quality to her music which distances it from the plainchant which, at first listening, it may seem to resemble. The sequence *O ignis spiritus* uses images of fire, breath and water, the first two of these having a particular significance for Hildegard. In a famous poetic description Hildegard saw herself as being carried and directed by the Holy Spirit.

Listen... There was once a king sitting on his throne. Around him stood great and wonderfully beautiful columns ornamented with ivory, bearing the banners of the king with great honour. Then it pleased the king to raise a small feather from the ground and he commanded it to fly. The feather flew... Not because of anything in itself, but because the air bore it along. Thus am I... 'A feather on the breath of God.'⁵

She is also reported to have seen tongues of flame descend from Heaven and settle on her head on becoming Abbess in 1141, and it is from this point in her life that her intense creativity dates: the noted

³ There are two more-or-less contemporary manuscript versions of this volume (1170s and 1180s). The earlier of the two (the Dendermonde manuscript) contains two unique items. The later (Wiesbaden) manuscript has been published in a facsimile version (ed. J Gmelch, Düsseldorf 1913). I have included a translation of *O ignis spiritus* in the Appendices to this paper from: Hildegard of Bingen, translated and introduced by Barbara Newman, *Symphonia: A Critical Edition of the Symphonia Armonie Celestium Revelationum*, Ithaca, New York, ²1998). As well as giving the Latin texts, Newman gives both 'straight' and 'poetic' translations; I have used the latter.

⁴ Though Ian D Bent makes comparisons to Notker Balbulus, Peter Abelard and Walter of Châtillon in his article on the composer in Stanley Sadie (ed.), *The New Grove Dictionary of Music and Musicians*, London 1980, Vol. 8, 554.

⁵ Cited in the liner notes to *A feather on the breath of God: Sequences and hymns by Abbess Hildegard of Bingen*, Gothic Voices directed by Christopher Page, Hyperion CDA66039, London 1984.

mediaevalist and musician Christopher Page says in the notes to his recording of this work that “*O ignis spiritus* is Hildegard’s apostrophe to her Muse, the Pentecostal fire which settled upon her and imparted knowledge of the major biblical books.”⁶

Issues of text and functionality

However beautiful the anonymous chants of the Gregorian repertory, however inspired the music of Hildegard the double constraints of text setting and normative compositional practices right through the mediaeval and renaissance periods mean that whatever the text the music can scarcely attempt to add anything more than a general sensation of mood.

As we move into the baroque, composers increasingly attempted to paint musical pictures for the texts that they set. If earlier composers were limited to very general evocation of moods (faster or slower moving music, or example), or depicting individual words that responded well to particular musical devices (dissonances on words relating to pain or sorrow for example), the new generation, when not composing directly for the liturgy seems to seek out texts, whether scripturally based or newly written, that allowed for the most emotive and pictorial settings: one thinks of the *Matthew Passion* by Bach or the *Stabat Mater* by Pergolesi. Clearly texts relating to the Holy Spirit were not only relatively few in number, but also tended to lack images readily transferable to music by the compositional practices of the time.

So far I have been talking about music which sets texts relating to the Holy Spirit. Up to about this point there is no other music which is *about* the Holy Spirit – the sense in which I have so far chosen to interpret my brief. There is, however, another way of looking at things and that is to consider the idea that music may be inspired by the Holy Spirit, whether it is clearly *about* it or not.

The relationship between the Holy Spirit and a great many musical products of the human race may take some elaborate explaining, but

⁶ See previous note.

to many it would seem likely that there must be a link between the finest artistic products and the Divine.

Robin Leaver points out in his essay on ‘Music and Lutheranism’ that ‘Luther understood music as a *donum Dei*, a gift from God, rather than a human invention.’⁷ Another Bach scholar, John Butt, notes in an essay on ‘Bach’s metaphysics of music’ that in Bach’s world ‘the Pythagorean tradition of viewing music as the sounding evidence of God’s creation was still evident in the writings of music theorists who embraced natural theology.’⁸ Butt suggests, in fact, that ‘Bach saw the very substance of music as constituting a religious reality, that the more perfectly the task of composition (and, indeed, performance) is realised, the more God is immanent in music.’⁹

For the musician and theologian Jeremy Begbie, it is the power of the Holy Spirit which gives ‘inspired’ art works what perfection they have, and thus allows them to become ‘anticipations’ of the fulfilment of God’s purpose and promise:

In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit is the foretaste of the new age, the age of resurrection. Art which truly bears the imprint of the Spirit will thus not so much hark back to an imagined paradise, as anticipate within space and time, provisionally but substantially, the final transfiguration of the cosmos.¹⁰

Later on in his essay John Butt argues that Bach also regarded music as being intrinsically eschatological:

[The] conception which I attribute to Bach I will term ‘musicocentric,’ the view that the very substance of music both reflects and embodies the ultimate reality of God and the Universe. In this view, music can be an important, and rhetorical, purveyor

⁷ Robin A Leaver, ‘Music and Lutheranism,’ in John Butt (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Bach*, Cambridge 1997, 40.

⁸ John Butt, ‘Bach’s metaphysics of music,’ in Butt, *The Cambridge Companion to Bach*, 46.

⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰ Jeremy S Begbie, *Voicing Creation’s Praise: Towards a Theology of the Arts*, London 1991, 228.

of texts and semantic material, but it is not subservient to these functions.¹¹

In such a view, then, the theology lies in the music itself and not the purpose it serves. With this notion of the transcendence of music over function in mind I shall now move on. (I do not wish to indicate, I should make it clear, that settings of liturgical texts are merely functional and that they cannot 'anticipate... the transfiguration of the cosmos' as Begbie puts it or, in Butt's words, embody 'the ultimate reality of God and the Universe.' It is simply that, for my particular purposes, we need to look elsewhere: to look for music that more obviously balances the roles of being music and purveying semantic material.)

Bach and the Trinity

The turning point for a more complex approach to transmitting theology through music comes, perhaps surprisingly, through the introduction of instruments, and particularly the organ, into churches. By definition purely instrumental music cannot be liturgical in quite the same sense that texted music is, even when used liturgically (to replace a verse of a psalm or canticle, or a section of the ordinary of the mass, which verse or section is therefore neither sung nor said).¹² Freed from the need to directly transmit a text musicians could construct musical works in entirely musical terms, but, perhaps paradoxically, become freer to use musical processes as analogies for extra-musical concepts.

I have already mentioned Bach and also indicated that I would return to the notion of the Trinity in music. Bach's huge output has largely been handed down to us in manuscript copies: very little of his music was published in his lifetime. In the last two decades of his life, however, whilst he was the Cantor of the Church of St Thomas in Leipzig, Bach issued four collections of keyboard music under the

¹¹ John Butt, 'Bach's metaphysics of music,' 54.

¹² The organ masses of François Couperin are good examples of such works. Here the sections of each movement of the mass alternate between organ and plainchant: the first Kyrie sung, the second on the organ, and so on.

title *Clavierübung* (keyboard exercises). Collectively the four volumes represent an encyclopaedic survey of keyboard forms, styles and textures as they were available to Bach at that time. Individually the volumes and pieces they include amount to what may be regarded as the most perfect examples of the chosen genres that Bach, or, arguably any other composer, ever produced. The first two and last volumes all contain secular harpsichord music, but the third, published in 1739, is a volume of music for organ.

The title page of this volume runs as follows:

Third Part of the Keyboard Practice, consisting of various preludes on the Catechism and other hymns for the organ. Prepared for music-lovers and particularly for connoisseurs of such works, for the recreation of the spirit.¹³

The ‘various preludes’ refer to what are now generally known as chorale preludes; pieces of organ music based on the chorales (hymns) in use at the time. Once the listener had identified the tune at the heart of the music they would, as now, associate it with a particular text. As Bach spells out, his preludes are based on chorales whose texts were at the centre of Christian faith and worship. So it includes chorales which were German hymn paraphrases of the Kyrie, Gloria, Credo and the Pater noster. But as Peter Williams points out ‘any unity that the volume may have is musical rather than strictly liturgical.’¹⁴ For this collection is not primarily intended for any particular liturgical context, but, in keeping with the general criteria of the *Clavierübung* series, and turning again to Peter Williams, ‘the whole volume appears as a compendium formally arranged, with cyclic elements more striking to the reader than the player.’¹⁵

It is not, however, amongst the chorale preludes that we shall find the musical construct of the Trinity which I have previously hinted at, but in a work which Bach does not mention on his title page. Framing the smaller scale works are a substantial prelude and fugue, each for

¹³ Translation from Peter Williams, *The Organ Music of J S Bach II*, Cambridge 1980, 175.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 179.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

full organ, and together forming a pair equal to any of the large-scale organ preludes and fugues for which Bach is famous. This Prelude and Fugue are in the key of E flat major, a key signature which has three flats. Each of the pair is constructed on three themes, but it is in the Fugue that the significance of this can be most clearly seen and heard.¹⁶

The Fugue falls into three very distinct sections, each characterised by a different theme or subject. Furthermore, the number of bars in each section (36.45, 36) is always a multiple of 3×3 (9).¹⁷

The first section is based on a grand, even grave, subject in the old style (*stile antico*) which highlights the interval of the fourth and harks back (as does the movement's tripartite structure) to composers a century earlier like Frescobaldi. The second section has a continuous, running theme that moves mostly by step (the interval of the

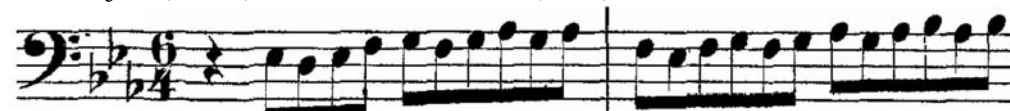
¹⁶ The key signature and the three themes are as follows: The key signature of three flats for E flat Major (Es-Dur)



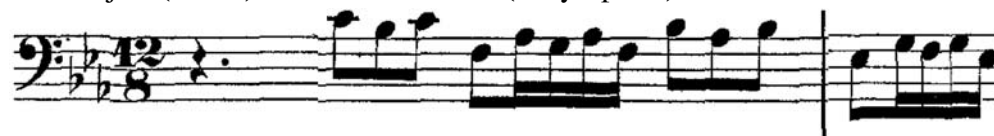
The subject (theme) of the first section. (Father?)



The subject (theme) of the second section (Son?)



The subject (theme) of the third section (Holy Spirit?)



¹⁷ For more on the numerology of this work see Peter Williams, *The Organ Music of J. S. Bach*, Cambridge ²2003, 137–140.

second in musical terminology), and the third section uses a sprightly, almost gigue-like theme which concentrates on the interval of the third but also includes the fourths and seconds of the two previous subjects as well as sequential material that calls to mind the second theme.¹⁸

What is particularly interesting, though it must be said, not unique to this work or even to Bach, is that during the course of the second section we become aware that the subject from the first section has been reintroduced and is being heard *simultaneously* with the second section's own subject. In the final section once again the theme from the opening section reappears and is this time combined with the final section's own theme. As the final section's theme also calls to mind aspects of the theme from the second section we seem almost to hear all three sections at once.¹⁹

All of these features are purely musical; they all relate to the masterly construction of a fine musical work of art, and none of them is to be found only in this context. What is highly suggestive, however, is that Bach chose to concentrate on the number three and the different combinations of three separate themes in this particular context, alongside works far more explicitly evocative of the most important aspects of the Christian faith. There is no reason at all why we should consider the three themes as Father, Son and Holy Ghost, yet once the other Trinitarian qualities of this music have been apprehended it is not difficult to do so. Though John Butt does not cite this work, it seems a good example of the 'musico-centric' approach which he attributes to Bach.

Olivier Messiaen and the Holy Spirit

Having, I hope, demonstrated how music can both exist purely in its own terms but also be useful in creating analogies for or describing theological issues, I shall, at last, turn to a work, another organ piece,

¹⁸ Compare especially notes 5–8 of the third theme with notes 8–11 of the second theme.

¹⁹ In reality, however, there is no *true* combination of all three subjects.

that deals explicitly with images of the Holy Spirit, though I must warn you that the symbolism may not be quite so obvious.

2008 marks (on 10th December) the centenary of the birth of one of the truly great composers of the twentieth century, Olivier Messiaen. Messiaen started his studies at the Paris Conservatoire as a pianist, beginning the organ with Marcel Dupré only at the age of 19. Within four years, having gained a string of prizes as organist and composer at the Conservatoire, he was appointed titular organist of the important nineteenth-century Parisian Church of the *Trinité*, a post he retained until his death in April 1992. The Church contains a very fine organ by the outstanding nineteenth-century organ builder, Aristide Cavallé-Coll. Although Messiaen is now well known for orchestral works like the *Turangalila-Symphonie* and piano works like the *Catalogue d'oiseaux* it is perhaps hardly surprising that he originally made his name as an organist and composer of organ music, inspired as he was, and remained throughout his life, by the organ of the *Trinité*. The year before he died he said of it, 'It is like a brother or a son to me and I would be driven to despair without it.'²⁰ As we shall see, the types of timbres available on the organ in general, and on this instrument in particular, were to be valuable tools in both Messiaen's approach to the formal construction of his music and as signifiers of extra-musical content.

Copies of Messiaen's music published by Leduc now have a very brief biography of the composer on the back cover. This biography (in line with most other works on the composer) gives five particular influences apparent in the composer's output. Four of these are noteworthy to the extent that they mark Messiaen out as a composer who stands alone in the twentieth century, belonging to none of the schools or groups in which the vast majority of his contemporaries are usually placed. These musical features are (and in this account I shall expand a little on the information given by Leduc): his work on rhythm, including his use of Indian and Greek rhythmic devices; his

²⁰ 'Le musicien de la joie: Entretien avec Olivier Messiaen 60 années à la Trinité,' in *Du côté de la Trinité; le journal de la paroisse*, (March 1991), translated in Nigel Simeone, "'Chez Messiaen, tout est prière": Messiaen's appointment at the Trinité,' *The Musical Times*, Winter 2004, 53.

modes of limited transposition, scales which, unlike modern major and minor modes, do not always alter the selection of notes used even when the starting note changes; his interest in chord construction and the colours (musical, and, for him at least, actual) these chords create; and his use of birdsong in his music. The fifth influence listed is perhaps even more remarkable because it is not intrinsically musical as are the other four; it is Messiaen's Catholic faith.

Even at the age of 22, during the process culminating in his taking up the post at the *Trinité*, those writing in his support cited out not only his own faith, but the fact that this was what transferred into his music. Charles Tournemire, the organist of Sainte-Clotilde, wrote:

The musical value and the future of this Christian organist are of the highest order: a transcendent improviser, and astonishing performer, and a biblical composer, my protégé is growing very clearly into someone well above the majority of artists... With Messiaen all is prayer.²¹

And his former teacher, the composer Maurice Emmanuel, wrote:

His enormous success in his studies have [sic] been confirmed by his compositions which are very remarkable and very daring, musically speaking, almost all of them inspired by deep religious feelings. This young artist is a complete believer.²²

Messiaen himself said 'the illumination of the theological truths of the Catholic faith is the first aspect of my work, the noblest, and no doubt the most useful.'²³ And at the end of his life:

I have written pure music (for the purposes of technical experimentation), and music of a secular character. I regret that a

²¹ Cited in Simeone, "'Chez Messiaen, tout est prière": Messiaen's appointment at the Trinité,' 40.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Claude Samuel, Olivier Messiaen: *Music and Color. Conversations with Claude Samuel and Olivier Messiaen*, (trans. E Thomas Glasow), Portland, OR, 1994, 20. Cited in Andrew Shenton, *Olivier Messiaen's System of Signs: Notes Towards Understanding His Music*, Aldershot 2008, p. 1.

little. Music composed to sing the mysteries of my faith seems more useful for my contemporaries. Perhaps they will be grateful to me for that.²⁴

In 1951 Messiaen published his *Messe de la Pentecôte*, an organ work in five separate movements: perhaps the best way of introducing this work is simply to cite the composer's own introduction to the work, contained in volume IV of his *Traité de Rythme, de Couleur, et d'Ornithologie*.²⁵

This work was written in 1950, but improvised a long time before this. Here is its history: Having become organist of the Grand Orgue of la Trinité in 1930 [technically the following year] (when I was 22) my duties involved playing short improvisations on the plainsong texts especially the verses of the antiphons at Vespers. During the other offices I always played written music (Nicholas de Grigny, J. S. Bach, modern music etc.). In 1945 the creation of a midday mass and permission to perform exclusively modern music allowed me to play more substantial works, either those of my contemporaries or my own, and to improvise, of course, so that I might better become one with the great divisions of the Holy Sacrifice: the Offertory, the Consecration and Communion. I was also able to set in relief the mysteries of the liturgical year, the grace proper to each mystery, the colour, the poetry, the particular mood of each season and each feast. Little by little these improvisations became 'one' improvisation, always forgotten, always re-found, always repeated: the terrifying growls of the Beast of the Apocalypse alternating with the songs of the thrushes and blackbirds, the sound of water and wind in the leaves with religious meditation and the storms of joy of the Holy Spirit; Hindu rhythms mingle with plainsong neumes, choirs of larks with Tibetan

²⁴ 'Le musicien de la joie' translated in Simeone, "'Chez Messiaen, tout est prière": Messiaen's appointment at the Trinité,' 53.

²⁵ (Paris, 1997). Compiled between 1949 and the composer's death, this formed the basis of Messiaen's teaching programme at the Paris Conservatoire and was prepared for publication by his widow Yvonne Loriod-Messiaen.

trumpets, carefully coloured and resonant melodies with subtly changing rhythms, the most ornate polymodality and the strangest, shimmering timbres sit alongside the most marked rhythmic permutations and re-orderings. Here can be found the known and the unknown, the visible and the invisible, the world of men and the world of angels. Thus was born my *Messe de la Pentecôte*. Thought not my greatest work, it is, without doubt, the closest to my true nature and also the only one really written for my organ at la Trinité (it uses all the sounds and all the combinations of sounds available on this instrument), because it had been improvised several times, in 1948 and 1949, on the organ there. I wrote it down in 1950 and then gave up improvising.²⁶

The five movements of this work correspond, as Messiaen indicates, to the structure of the Mass. To this extent the work may be described as being liturgical, as its genesis implies, though, of course, not in the sense that it replaces some fixed portion of the liturgy. Speaking in general of the organ works at the opening of the 1995 Messiaen Festival at the *Trinité*, Cardinal Jean-Marie Lustiger had this to say:

...he created a new genre, because the organ work is something which has powerfully been incorporated into the Catholic religion by music alone, which does not substitute the acts of the religion, but which adds to them a new dimension.²⁷

Each movement of the *Messe* is given a title and a sub-heading drawn from scriptures or some other sacred source, and these make clear, as is so often the case with Messiaen's music, that these pieces are intended to comment on, portray, or illuminate aspects of theology relevant to the Feast. The work can therefore be used liturgically,

²⁶ Olivier Messiaen, *Traité de Rythme, de Couleur, et d'Ornithologie*. Tome IV (Paris, 1997), p. 83. Hereafter, *Traité*. All quotes from this work are in my translation.

²⁷ Cited in Jean-Rodolphe Kars, 'The works of Olivier Messiaen and the Catholic liturgy,' in Christopher Dingle and Nigel Simeone (eds.), *Olivier Messiaen: Music, Art and Literature*, Aldershot 2007, 332.

running parallel to the liturgy proper (giving it, as Lustiger says, 'a new dimension,' or it can be (and more usually is) performed in a non-liturgical context.

The five movements are: *Entrée Les langues de feu*, with a quotation from the Acts of the Apostles, 'tongues of fire came to rest on each one of them'; *Offertoire Les choses visibles et invisibles*, the same text from the Nicene Creed, 'things visible and invisible,' appearing as a sub-heading; *Consécration Le don de Sagesse*, the quotation from John's Gospel reads 'The Holy Spirit will make you remember all that I have said'; *Communion Les oiseaux et les sources*, this quotes the Canticle of the three children from an interpolated section in the book of Daniel 'Springs of water, bless the Lord; birds of the sky, bless the Lord'; and finally, *Sortie Le vent de l'Esprit*, whose quotation is the passage immediately prior to that of the first movement, 'a furious wind filled the whole house.'

It will probably be clear already that some of these themes associated with the Holy Spirit may be more easily and obviously transferable into musical terms than others, and I have already warned you that this work may not be as straight forward as the Bach piece we looked at earlier.

In an excellent new book, *Olivier Messiaen's System of Signs: Notes Towards Understanding His Music*,²⁸ Andrew Shenton, focusing on a later and more complex organ work (*Méditations sur le mystère de la Sainte Trinité*, 1969), examines in detail the symbolism and theology of Messiaen's music.

Shenton sets out early on in his book the strengths and limitations of music as a signifier of things external to itself, and he briefly explains how Messiaen dealt with these.

It is widely accepted that music has mystical and transformative powers; however, because music without text has no programmatic content, Messiaen sought to refine his compositions to speak more clearly about the truths of Catholicism by developing a sophisticated system of signs in which aspects of music

²⁸ Andrew Shenton, *Olivier Messiaen's System of Signs: Notes Towards Understanding His Music*, Aldershot 2008.

become direct signifiers for words and concepts. Since music has inherent capacities to move people and to affect them in a spiritual dimension but cannot be specific, Messiaen chose to use titles, epigraphs or detailed programme notes as the principal means by which to add meaning to his music. As his message becomes more sophisticated, so the method by which he communicated became more complex.²⁹

Bach's fugue from the *Clavierübung* contains features which are, in terms of semiotics, more iconic than symbolic of the Trinity (albeit in the case of the key signature, perhaps visually rather than audibly). Messiaen's approach is largely symbolic, thus often arbitrary, and even a careful study of his own detailed musical analysis of a work like the *Messe de la Pentecôte*,³⁰ whilst it clarifies the structure of the music, the building blocks, rhythmic, melodic, modal and harmonic, of the piece and the compositional processes these undergo as the music progresses, does not always make explicit exactly how the title has been translated into musical terms.

I propose to look at just two of the movements of the *Messe*, the last two, in a little more detail, and will attempt to show some of the musical and programmatic features that can be found in them.

In the following account of the music of these movements I shall draw largely on Messiaen's own account of it in the *Traité*.³¹

The movement for communion, *Les oiseaux et les sources*, not only clearly derives its title from the Canticle in Daniel, in which the whole of creation is invited to join in the praise of the Lord, but must also, though Messiaen does not mention this in his *Traité*, be seen to refer to two traditional images of the Holy Spirit: as water,³² and as the dove present at the baptism of Jesus, and also on the ark at the end of the inundation.

Messiaen does say, however, that 'This is a good opportunity to

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p.1.

³⁰ To be found in the *Traité*, vol. IV, pp. 83–124.

³¹ See previous note. I shall not note each quotation separately as I move through the analysis of these two movements.

³² See Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology*, 24.

use birdsong and the sounds of drops of water, and one that I have not let slip.'³³ And we shall look at this aspect in some detail shortly.

The movement begins with a single melodic line played on the oboe stop on the Récit (the top keyboard on the organ at the Trinité). It is the 'call of an ideal bird, herald of spring.'

The passage which follows is made up of slow moving chords using a new timbre, and is explained by Messiaen only in modal and harmonic terms. One may however, hear at the very end of this little section the first indications of the drops of water which are to appear later, or possibly, because of the organ timbre used for these notes, the cuckoo.

The next section of the work is another single line, this time the song of a nightingale, played on several different sounds and at different volumes.

The fourth section, Messiaen says, is the most important (there are seven in total), and is what justifies the title of the piece. It has two separate, but rhythmically and melodically interweaving, musical lines; that played by the left hand representing drops of water, and that played by the right hand, birdsong. It is perhaps worth quoting Messiaen's description of this passage a little more extensively as it demonstrates the composer at his most naturalistic.

The drops of water are played on the Récit using the bourdon 16 ([a stop] sounding an octave lower [than the written note]) and octavin 2 (sounding two octaves higher). A hollow timbre, at a quiet volume with short detached notes all of which combine to make this percussive series of water drops liquid, very gentle and very precise. These are true drops of water, written according to nature ... they do not fall from the same height, hence the melodic movement, they do not fall at regular intervals, hence the regularity or irregularity of the rhythm.

The bird song begins with the ornamentations of a blackbird, which pierces space with joyous and rapid whistling, describing the same melodic shape but with variations of rhythm. On a bourdon 8 (a quiet

³³ *Traité*, vol. IV, p.109.

stop with stopped pipes), a cuckoo so distant that its call of a falling third seems to become just a single note.

I shall not describe in detail the remaining sections, only the sixth is at all extensive, and formed of new material, but will point out that the sections of the music are characterised not only by the musical material employed (the notes, rhythms and chords), but by the timbres used as well. The ending of this movement is also worthy of note, as the piece finishes with the very lowest sounds available on the organ simultaneously with one of the highest. Is this an allusion to the sources of the springs in the depths of the earth, and the birds climbing heavenwards in the sky?

The *Sortie, Le vent de L'Esprit*, focuses at the beginning on the terrifying suddenness of the wind that filled the house where the Apostles and the Virgin were gathered. 'A furious wind,' Messiaen notes, 'a tempest, representing the irresistible power of the spiritual life and the irruption of the Force from On High ... an abrupt whirlwind, sudden, unexpected, which falls on you ... and carries you where it will.'

Just as the scriptural text is connected with the opening movement, *The tongues of fire*, so too does this movement use thematic material first found there. The opening fortissimo flourish, the first surge of the furious wind, uses a theme initially heard in longer note values during the first movement. Messiaen does not mention the following point, but the 'furious wind' theme misses the first note of the theme as initially presented in *Les langues de feu*, but adds it at the end and goes on to play the next two notes of the theme for a second time before breaking off suddenly. The interrupted circular motion this implies is highly suggestive given Messiaen's description of the Holy Spirit as an abrupt whirlwind.

The extended central section of this movement is all based on the song of the lark, accompanied by ever rising chords in the left hand, each one very slightly shorter than the one before and a repeating melodic phrase played on the pedals, with each note very slightly longer than the one before.

On the significance of the lark Messiaen has this to say: 'The lark, symbol of courage, symbol of grace and of the spiritual life, symbol of alleluia and of power, symbol of the joy of the Holy Spirit.' He

then quotes the words of the poet Paul Claudel (from *l'Annonce faites à Marie*).

It is the lark, alleluia [this works better in French, C'est l'alouette, alleluia]. The lark of the Christian earth, alleluia, alleluia. Do you hear it cry four times in succession, hi, hi, hi, hi, higher still, higher still? Do see you it, its wings spread out, a small, passionate cross, like the seraphim, nothing but wings, without feet, and with its shrill voice before the throne of God?

After this central section we hear a powerful slow passage whose pedal part, Messiaen tells us, evokes the immense trumpets used by Tibetan monks to produce low, terrifying sounds. Then the movement ends with a short toccata, the keyboard parts of which recall material from the second and third movements (*Les choses visibles et invisibles*, and *Le don de sagesse*). The pedal theme of this section also uses material from the second movement. The direct recapitulation of material from the first three movements in this final movement, and the inclusion of a substantial central section based, as is the fourth movement, on bird song, of course provides a powerful musically unifying effect in this cycle of pieces. Surely it also affirms that the qualities of the Holy Spirit singled out and separately treated are but facets of the same force, co-existing in something beyond words and beyond description.

Conclusion

We have seen that Messiaen can produce musical analogies for theological concepts; we have also seen that he can recreate musical versions of natural sounds, and that he can use melodic shape and direction in imitation of spatial movement and position. When asked whether there was an interpretative or just an inspirational connection between the scriptural quotations and the music he wrote Messiaen said:

I've allowed my thoughts to revolve around a specific subject, a mystery of the Christian faith... I've tried to find everything

which has to do with the subject I've chosen and then tried to translate it into music – not just into notes, not just into sounds and rhythms, but into sound-colours as well.³⁴

Messiaen, like Hildegard, is often regarded as a mystic, though he himself did not like the label.³⁵ In fact, despite the tone of much of what he said, Messiaen's view does not seem so very far away from the 'musico-centric' conception that John Butt attributes to Bach. We have seen that, just as the features of Bach's music which pointed to a Trinitarian interpretation were also explicitly musical in nature, so too Messiaen's musical language is just that, a language of sound, self sufficient and in no way subservient to its extra-musical symbolism.

In the end looking in music for a direct translation of anything extra-musical is always dangerous. What we find may have more to do with the person looking (or listening) than with the music or its composer. For as Messiaen says in the preface to his *Méditations sur le mystère de la Sainte Trinité*:

Music... does not express anything directly. It may suggest, create a feeling, a state of mind, touch the subconscious, expand the dream faculties, and these are its immense powers; however, it is not able to 'speak,' to inform with precision.³⁶

However, there can be no denying the transformative powers of music of which Messiaen speaks, nor the possibility of God's immanence in that music. Bach wrote in his copy of a commentary on the Bible 'Where there is devotional music, God with his grace is always present.'³⁷ And, in a comment which also recalls our earlier discussion of the problem inherent in the functionality of liturgical music,

³⁴ Almut Rößler, *Contributions to the Spiritual World of Olivier Messiaen, with Original Texts by the Composer*, (trans. Barbara Dagg and Nancy Poland), Duisburg 1986, 29, cited in Shenton, *Olivier Messiaen's System of Signs*, 44.

³⁵ See Shenton, *Olivier Messiaen's System of Signs*, 23–24.

³⁶ Shenton, *Olivier Messiaen's System of Signs*, 4.

³⁷ Butt, 'Bach's metaphysics of music,' 54.

Messiaen wrote in the conclusion to his chapter on liturgical music in the *Traité*:

It is true that I place religious music above liturgical music. Liturgical music is exclusively dependent on public worship, whereas religious music reaches to all times, all places, touches on the material and the spiritual, and finally finds God everywhere.³⁸

Summary: This paper sets out to examine ways in which musical works of art might embody, reflect or analogize aspects of our understanding of the nature of the Holy Spirit, and in particular how a purely musical (that is non-texted) medium attempts this. It begins by looking for musical settings of texts relating to the Holy Spirit, and endeavours to explain why the functional nature of liturgical music both circumscribes such works and has tended to limit the role of music as a discrete signifier of the theology and imagery of its topic. Having briefly discussed the notion that works of musical art may intrinsically embody, or at least 'anticipate,' theological truths, regardless of the aim of the composer or the understanding of the listener, this paper looks at one of Bach's greatest organ works, a piece that stands as a testament to the pure power and art of music, and in it finds a pleasing musical analogy for the Trinity. Moving on to the great twentieth-century composer, Olivier Messiaen, this paper examines the musical imagery of another organ work, one explicitly written by the composer to try to 'translate into music' images of the Holy Spirit. Once again, though, it attempts to show that the work functions at a purely musical level whilst simultaneously allowing musical features to carry extra-musical significance.

Keywords: Religious music – liturgical music – Holy Spirit – Pneumatology – Trinity – Hildegard of Bingen – Johann Sebastian Bach – Olivier Messiaen

³⁸ Messiaen, *Traité*, p. 69.

Jaroslav Hrdlička, *Život a dílo Prof. Františka Kováře, příběh patriarchy a učence*, [Leben und Werk des Prof. František Kovář, Patriarch und Gelehrte] Brno: L. Marek, 2007, 523 S., ISBN 978-80-87127-05-6

Nur wenige Werke, die sich größtenteils auf unerforschtes Feld begeben, vermeiden Mängel der Pionierstudien. Ein großer Forschungsraum ohne Wegweiser und von vorherigen Forschern abgesteckten Banden, scheint zur gewissen Partialität direkt zu verurteilen. Das ist auch der Fall im Buch *Život a dílo Prof. Františka Kováře: příběh patriarchy a učence*, einer Biographie des dritten Patriarchen der Tschechoslowakischen Kirche (CČS – der heutigen Tschechoslowakischen Hussitischen Kirche) von Jaroslav Hrdlička, der am Lehrstuhl für Kirchengeschichte und – recht der Hussitischen Theologischen Fakultät der Prager Karlsuniversität wirkt.

Das Werk hat eine gelungene Textverteilung, was die Aufspaltung des Textes angeht. Keine der Lebensphasen des František Kovář wurde zu Gunsten seiner Karrieregipfel vernachlässigt. Es ist in einer gut lesbaren Sprache geschrieben und beinhaltet eine ausreichende Fotodokumentation. Der Verfasser hat auch das größte Problem sehr gut bewältigt: Er hat das Leben des Professor Kovář in den Kontext der meist unerforschten tschechoslowakischen Kirchengeschichte und vor allem in den Kontext der Geschichte der CČS gestellt. Der Autor befasst sich sehr interessiert und ausführlich auch mit den verschiedenen Strömungen in der Kirche und ihren gegenseitigen Beziehungen.

Zum Nachteil der literarischen Verarbeitung ist dagegen das Fehlen der Einleitung und Zusammenfassung. Den Verzicht einer Schlussfolgerung kann man als eine nüchterne Resignation der Bewertung Kovářs und seines Lebens auffassen, eine Einleitung jedoch anstelle des simplen Beginns der Schilderung seiner Kindheit wäre höchst geeignet. Das Buch verfügt über ein Register, eine Bibliographie des Werkes und des Autors und eine deutsche Zusammenfassung.

Aus der fachlichen Sicht fehlt dem Buch eine Abhandlung über die Quellenbasis und ein Vergleich mit bisherigen Studien zu Kovář, was vor allem für kommende Forscher sehr wertvoll wäre. Demgegenüber stören die Passagen den Textzusammenhang, die zu der un-

terlassenen historiographischen Einleitung zurückkehren (z. B. „Der deutsche Historiker Rudolf Urban und CČS(H)“ – in der Schilderung der Lage der tschechoslowakischen bzw. böhmisch-mährischen Kirche im Protektorat Böhmen und Mähren).

Die Quellenbasis erscheint als die größte Schwäche des Werkes. Der Verfasser geht vor allem vom Familienarchiv des František Kovář und von ähnlichen Archivfonds aus. Die Archivalien eines amtlichen Charakters staatlicher Institutionen wurden nahezu übergangen oder nur sehr selektiv benutzt, die Archive des Innenministeriums und die Fonds der Kommunistischen Partei der Tschechoslowakei fehlen gänzlich. Die ganzen Passagen des Buches weisen nur auf Kovářs Tagebücher hin, infolge dessen hat das Buch den Charakter einer von einem anderen Autor verfassten Autobiographie. Das muss nicht unbedingt negativ bewertet sein, der Autor sollte es aber in der Einleitung ausdrücklich zugeben.

Diese Selektivität im Umgang mit den Quellen kann aber in den Passagen über den Zeitkontext und über das Geschehen in der CČS nur schwerlich gewinnbringend sein. Auch in dieser Schilderung wurden viele Ereignisse, welche die gesamte Kirche oder Hus-Fakultät betreffen, auf der Basis der Tagebücher des Patriarchen oder z. B. der Kirchenausschussprotokolle beschrieben, wohingegen der Vergleich mit den ähnlichen Archivalien aus Staatarchiven fehlt. Das Buch stellt zwar viele neue und interessante Tatsachen vor, das erwähnte grundsätzliche heuristische Ungleichgewicht wirft automatisch die Frage nach der Objektivität des Werkes auf. Aus der Einseitigkeit der Quellen folgen auch einige faktische Ungenauigkeiten in den Passagen über die Kirchenpolitik des Staates. Es stellt sich auch die Frage, ob die fehlerhaft aufgeführten Namen der Menschen und Institutionen (z. B. IMCA anstatt YMCA) der begrenzten Quellenbasis oder der nachlässigen Arbeit des Korrektors zuzurechnen sind.

Im problematischsten Zeitabschnitt der Geschichte der CČS – im Jahrzehnt 1945 – wird die Quelleneinseitigkeit noch deutlicher. Es ist hier der Beginn der Benachteiligung der CČS berichtet, die deutliche Bevorzugung der CČS in den ersten zwei Jahren der Diktatur wurde aber nicht erwähnt. Eine tiefere Analyse dieser Stellung des kommunistischen Regimes zur CČS finden wir in diesem Buch nicht. In ähnlicher Weise ist hier z. B. Kovářs innere Abwehrhaltung zur kom-

munistischen Diktatur verdeutlicht ohne zu erwähnen, dass der Patriarch in den Fünfziger Jahren zu den am meisten vom Regime finanziell entlohnten nichtkatholischen Geistlichen gehörte, obwohl der Autor den finanziellen Verhältnissen Kovářs in den vorigen Kapiteln nicht ausweicht. Es ist nötig zuzugeben, dass es nicht eindeutig ist, ob dieses Bild der Vergangenheit eine Konsequenz der Tatsache ist, dass die Ereignisse „durch die Brille des Patriarchen“ geschildert wurden oder eine Konsequenz der Quellenauswahl des Autors ist.

Die Gesamtbewertung des Werkes hängt von unseren Erwartungen ab. In der Suche nach Informationen über Leben und Werk des Gelehrten F. Kovář, ist Hrdličkas Monographie ein sehr gutes Buch, das einen ausgeglichenen Überblick über den Lebensweg dieser Persönlichkeit anbietet. Falls wir aber den Patriarchen F. Kovář kennen lernen und (wie es die Forschungsabsicht anvisiert, deren Bestandteil die Publikation ist) uns in die Problematik der Kirche in den tschechischen Ländern vertiefen wollen, muss man das Werk aufgrund der Unausgewogenheit der Quellengrundlage, deren Folge ein irreführendes Bild der Vergangenheit ist, als unzureichend bezeichnen. Es lässt sich nur hoffen, dass dieses Buch nur ein Sprungbrett zu den komplexeren Studien darstellt.

Jiří Piškula

Daniel Deme (ed.), *The Selected Works of Isaac of Stella, A Cistercian Voice from the Twelfth Century*, Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2007, 232 p., ISBN 978-0-7546-5366-0.

Cistercian spirituality and theology enjoy broad interest since the renaissance of the Middle Ages (more specific the 12th century) following the work of Marie-Dominique Chenu and Colin Morris about the nature of the profound changes in theology and religious practice in the twelfth century. Their central thesis of a new understanding of the human being, phrased as the discovery of the individual (Morris), evoked a long-lasting debate about this crucial period in the history of Western civilization. Subsequently, studies of Carolyn Walker Bynum (e.g. her *Jesus as Mother. Studies in the Spirituality of the High Middle Ages*), of André Vauchez or Bernard McGinn have opened new perspectives on the spirituality of Cistercian monasticism as a significant product of the changes of the twelfth century.

Much of the attention concerning Cistercian spirituality has been paid to Bernard of Clairvaux and William de St. Thierry. Other theologians from the religious order, which was founded in the twelfth century as an attempt to reform monastic life, are less known. For that reason the selection of sermons of Isaac of Stella in an English translation edited by Daniel Deme is a valuable addition to the current knowledge of both the Cistercian world and of this mystical theologian himself.

Isaac of Stella studied in Paris in the first half of the twelfth century. During this time he met the great names of the time, who create a truly challenging theological milieu in the centre of the academic world of the twelfth century. Peter Abelard was perhaps the most outspoken and provocative theologian, stressing the role of the critical mind in theological inquiries. A further important part of the theological environment was the school of the Victorines with its Augustinian background. Another significant voice in Isaac's period of theological formation was the school of Chartres, the centre of the revival of Christian Platonism.

It seems that Isaac was well aware of the different theological schools of his days, but it is hard to determine to which of them he belonged himself. What we do know, is that he discontinued his aca-

demic activities in the 1140s, perhaps following a visit of Bernard of Clairvaux in Paris in 1139 or 1140. In 1147 Isaac became the abbot of the small Cistercian abbey of Stella in the region of Poitiers.

Despite his withdrawal from public life, Isaac did not give his involvement in church political matters of the time. Around 1167 the abbot of Stella spent some time in exile on a small island in the Atlantic. There are some indications that the context of this event was one of the most important conflicts on the autonomy of the church – the conflict between Henry II of England and the archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Becket. In it Isaac chose the side of the archbishop, but when the tide in France turned against Becket the abbot of Stella had to bear some consequences. Nevertheless, after a short time he returned to Stella, where he died around 1178.

From the monastic practice of Isaac we have some fifty-five sermons, several other writings and a number of letters, which give some insight in the theological thinking and the spirituality of the abbot of Stella. They are available in the *Patrologia Latina* and a selection of them in an English translation (*Isaac of Stella, Sermons on the Christian Year*, Kalamazoo 1979). Daniel Deme brings another selection in English of Isaac's sermons in his *The Selected Works of Isaac of Stella, A Cistercian Voice from the Twelfth Century*.

Deme's edition has three parts. The most important part contains twenty-five sermons and two letters of Isaac de Stella (1–6, 8–11, 16, 17, 19, 21, 25, 27, 33, 34, 40–43, 45, 46–48, 51, the Letter on the Soul, and a Letter on the Mass). These texts are excellent material for students of twelfth-century theology, mentality and religious practice. In a way, Isaac's sermons – rather short for the standard of the time – are attractive because of their accessible language and direct language. When in the first sermon on All Saints he discusses the issue of poverty (an evergreen for this feast, as the reading is from the Sermon on the Mount), he says: “As if he [Christ] were to say: ‘You seek happiness but it is not where you think it is. You are running hard, but off the track. Here is the right road, here is the way to happiness. Poverty is the way, poverty willingly embraced for my sake. Happiness is the kingdom of heaven in me. You run energetically but not profitably, for the faster you run, the further you are from the track. Poverty is the way to happiness. Keep to the way and

you will arrive.” (p. 6). The audience Isaac is addressing is clearly the community in his monastery in Stella. Often he underlines the notion of the holy marriage his brothers are engaged in with Christ, which requires discipline and love. The Cistercian model of religious life is based on a balance between spiritual and physical work: “Attending to discourses [i.e. sermons] should not get in the way of our work; yet from time to time we should ease off on our work and find leisure in for the Word of God. Man in neither flesh alone nor spirit alone, nor has he been made fully spiritual as yet by the life-giving Spirit. The whole man cannot live by the bread alone for which we work, nor by the word alone to which we consecrate ourselves.” (p. 56). Though Isaac’s sermons are practical in their message and conclusions, he doesn’t hesitate to address more difficult theological or philosophical questions. In a sermon for Easter (no. 40) he discusses the issue of the relation between body and soul, and in a sermon for Sexagesima (no. 19) he analyses the Aristotelian division of accidents and substance.

Isaac’s sermon collection is not a typical *postilla* with “prefabricated” sermons meant for use in concrete circumstances. It is a collection of sermons with a known *Sitz im Leben*, which is the community of Stella. In that sense, from the sermons we learn not only about Isaac’s theological, pastoral and personal skills, but also about issues that were moving the Cistercian community of Stella.

Unfortunately, Deme does not indicate how he proceeded in selecting the twenty-five sermons from the *Opera Omnia* of Isaac. The book lacks an introduction which would guide the reader through the sermons, explaining what makes them interesting or worthwhile for this selection. Fifteen of the sermons from the book have been published in English earlier, but we do not get an answer to the question why the sermons yet not translated are not included here, though it would give much more sense.

The second and third parts of the book are filling this gap only to a certain extent. In a very interesting essay Bernard McGinn explains the *Werdegang* of Isaac of Stella, starting from a passage of sermon 48 about the way of proper interpretation of the Scriptures. Here we get a perspective on Isaac in the conflict between academic and monastic life, or – more concretely – in the controversy between Peter

Abelard and Bernard of Clairvaux. One would only wish that McGinn had extended his contribution to the context of the sermons as such, though he gives an important example of how to study medieval sermons in their context.

In the third part of the book Daniel Deme brings an introduction to the theology of Isaac of Stella. It would be more proper to say that in this part we find Deme's reconstruction of Isaac's theology. Isaac himself did not write a work that could be defined as his concept of systematic theology. Deme therefore uses Isaac's sermons and letters as bricks for to build up the main structures of the theology of the abbot of Stella. Beginning with Isaac's ideas about epistemology, he continues with ecclesiology and anthropology, ending his account with notions on the doctrine on the Holy Spirit. One of Deme's major conclusions is that Isaac had a strong Christological scope in his theological thinking. In this respect Deme has a tendency to read Isaac as a contemplative theologian in a protestant light (e.g. the principle of *Sola Scriptura*).

The main problem of the third part of the book is that it frames the abbot into someone he was not: a systematic theologian. Isaac was primarily the pastoral leader of the Cistercian community of Stella who by his explanations and "discourses" gave leadership to his fellow brothers. His work was a response to his context, the challenges, problems and dilemmas he and his brothers faced. The theological notions he brought were meant to give inspiration to his community in a time of profound change in all layers of society.

To reconstruct Isaac's theology from his sermons and letters takes necessarily away the dynamics of Isaac's life and work and result in a rather abstract construction of what might have been Isaac's theology. This type of effort would have a higher chance to success in a comparative model. If Isaac's theological notions would be compared to other theologians of the time (here mainly Bernard as the leading Cistercian voice), it would be much easier to answer the question what is specific or special in Isaac's work as a response to the context he was living in.

Peter C. A. Morée