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# Theology as a Rationalisation of Religious Faith and Its Different Models

**Abstract:** The purpose of this paper is to reflect critically on the model of theology as a rationalisation of religious faith (the revealed truth), and on different models of theology as the committed knowledge (sapiential) and hermeneutics. The first of these models is insufficient because it is dominated by a rationalistic concept of theology at the expense of its more existential and experiential nature. The paper consists of three parts. The first part presents a model of theology as a rationalisation of the revealed truth (the philosophical critique of revelation, the historical-doctrinal investigation of truths of faith, the explanation and systematisation of the content of revelation by philosophical categories, and the *a priori* system of knowledge). The second part focuses on the model of theology as committed and the wisdom knowledge (a commitment in the recognition of specific truths of faith and a religious way of life, a commitment in the experience of mystery and prayerful contemplation, a commitment in the realization of life's meaning and the transformation of the world). The third part presents a model of theology as hermeneutics, i.e. the art of reading and interpreting various components of reality (problems of human existence, historical events and religious texts).

**Keywords:** theology, rationality, experience, wisdom, hermeneutics

## Introduction

Science is an essential element of culture, along with art, morality, and religion. It is a form of human knowledge that is characterised by its use of precise language, logical order, and appropriate methods. Criteria such as adequate justification of premises, theorisation, criticality, as well as explanatory and predictive power also distinguish scientific knowledge from common knowledge. The use of specific

methods also makes it possible to differentiate between types of sciences, such as the humanities, natural sciences, and theoretical and practical sciences.

Theology represents a special type of scientific inquiry. It may be emphasised that it has no single definition. Instead, various understandings of what it is are in evidence. Among other things, the term is employed to refer to research activities, specific content taught at universities, a rational reflection on truths of faith, an attempt to comprehend revelation, or sciences explaining the substance of faith<sup>1</sup>. One also encounters more metaphorical descriptions of theology as a kind of “speech about God and the human”<sup>2</sup>.

One should perhaps bear in mind that theology is practiced as part of distinct paradigms. The Polish theologian Tomasz Węclawski distinguishes four such models. In the first one, theology is treated as the hermeneutics of the sources of revelation, i.e. the books of the Bible. In the second model, theology seeks to establish the rationale behind the doctrine, resolve difficulties and clarify doubts. In the third model, theology is a reflection on the history of the faith and the development of doctrine. The fourth model, on the other hand, emphasises the existential dimension of theology, for which the individual and social experience of faith constitutes the point of departure<sup>3</sup>.

The aim of these deliberations is to reflect critically on the model of theology which has predominated for a long time, whereby it is understood as a rationalisation of religious faith or, more specifically, of the revealed truth since, within this framework, faith is construed as an assertion of the revealed truth<sup>4</sup>. Another objective is to explore other models of theology approached as the committed (sapiential) knowledge and as hermeneutics.

The first of these models is inadequate because it is chiefly informed by a rationalist concept of theology. Thus, one is called upon to engage with a version of theology whose character would be more existential and experiential, ultimately leading to the emergence of a model of theology as the committed (sapiential) knowledge

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<sup>1</sup> Andrzej Bronk and Stanisław Majdański, „Teologia – próba metodologiczno-epistemologicznej charakterystyki,” *Nauka* 2 (2006): 88–89.

<sup>2</sup> Jerzy Szymik, „Teologia jako (roz)mowa o Bogu/człowieka,” *Studia Nauk Teologicznych PAN* 3 (2008): 121.

<sup>3</sup> Tomasz Węclawski, „Metodologia Teologii,” *Nauka* 3 (2004): 109–116.

<sup>4</sup> It is now common to speak of faith as a form of encounter. However, the author has elsewhere attempted to reflect critically on the paradigm of faith as an encounter. For, in his view, faith cannot be understood as an encounter because a human being never directly encounters the personal God, but only experiences Him through other beings. Adopting such a position is the result of reflection on the nature of encounters and religious experiences. See Karol Jasiński, “Encounter as a Paradigm of Faith,” *Teologia i Człowiek* 2 (2022): 35–51.

or hermeneutics. The analysis will therefore consist of three main parts corresponding to the three aforementioned models of theology.

## Theology as a Rationalisation of the Revealed Truth

According to the Polish philosopher, theologian and cosmologist Michał Heller, theology is first and foremost a reflection of reason on the substance of religion, i.e. the revealed truth<sup>5</sup>. On the other hand, the logician and methodologist Stanisław Kamiński draws attention to the fact that the fundamental model underlying systematic theology in the 20th century was to treat it as an instrument to rationalise the revealed truth. This was pursued through philosophical criticism of revelation, historical-doctrinal inquiries into the truths of the faith, as well as the elucidation and systematisation of the content of revelation with the use of philosophical categories<sup>6</sup>. In this case, the work of a theologian consisted of systematic attempts to understand the content of religious revelation by means of natural reason, drawing on philosophy or the detailed sciences. Hence, revealed truths were the data to be explicated, with the aim of elaborating on a theological doctrine<sup>7</sup>. The Polish dogmatist Jerzy Szymik notes that two approaches to theology may be distinguished: an objective one and a personalistic one. In the first approach, theology focuses on the revealed truths of faith and dogmas as their objects, whereas God, the mystery of Christ and the human are the primary concern in the second approach<sup>8</sup>. Thus, in the model of theology discussed here, the former approach would take precedence.

Elsewhere, Kamiński underlines that theology treated as a rationalisation of revelation employs philosophy in the first place, which is why theological knowledge involves the philosophical elaboration on an aspect of religious life. The author notes that, at times, little attention was paid to harmonising philosophy with the content of faith. Occasionally, one would utilise relativistic or irrationalist

<sup>5</sup> Michał Heller, *Nowa fizyka i nowa teologia* (Kraków: Copernicus Center Press, 2014), 70, 89.

<sup>6</sup> Stanisław Kamiński, *Jak filozofować? Studia z metodologii filozofii klasycznej* (Lublin: Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, 1989), 374–375.

<sup>7</sup> Bronk and Majdański, „Teologia,” 92–93. According to some religious scholars, theology in this version is a speculative justification of religion as a natural or socio-cultural phenomenon. See Sławomir Sztajer, „Naturalność religii a istnienie niewiary,” *Przegląd Religioznawczy* 1 (2011): 41.

<sup>8</sup> Szymik, „Teologia jako (roz)mowa o Bogu/człowieka,” 121.

philosophy, which he finds unacceptable. Kamiński stresses that while certain philosophies cannot be applied in theology, every philosophy may be inspiring. All the while, efforts were made to philosophise or scientify theology, and as a result the “God of revelation” was reduced to the “God of philosophers and scholars”. In addition, the object and the task of theology were defined partially, yet the object cannot be confined to only one element of religious reality, i.e. the content of revelation<sup>9</sup>. Theology was, therefore, circumscribed to comprehending the content of revelation by means of reason, while relying primarily on philosophy, the Aristotelian-Thomist variety in particular, and occasionally taking advantage of the findings supplied by the detailed sciences.

The model of theology which sees it as a rationalisation of the revealed truth is also opted for by the Polish logician Józef Bocheński, for whom theology is, first and foremost, a rational armoury of faith and reflection on its content<sup>10</sup>. Theology is a science which examines not only the truths of faith but also the truths relating to faith, i.e. those which were not revealed but possess a logical connection with the truths of faith. According to Bocheński, the principal task of theology is to study the sources of revelation, as well as determine and specify a set of the revealed propositions. In addition, theology should also strive for a logical elaboration of a system of knowledge based on the ascertained truths of faith, draw conclusions from the latter and formulate appropriate theories<sup>11</sup>.

Bocheński's concept of theology is founded on his conviction that it is necessary to employ logic in religion<sup>12</sup>. Consequently, logic plays an important role in theology because it is pivotal for a cohesive discourse. It is crucial because discourse consists of sentences which communicate specific content by means of commonly used linguistic symbols. Hence, in formal terms, it is not fundamentally different from scientific discourse<sup>13</sup>. As a result, Bocheński sees theology as a certain system of axioms in which at least one proposition originating from the “creed” accepted by the believers of a particular religion is admitted alongside other axioms<sup>14</sup>.

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<sup>9</sup> Stanisław Kamiński, *Metoda i język. Studia z semiotyki i metodologii nauk* (Lublin: Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, 1994), 491–492; Stanisław Kamiński, *Światopogląd – religia – teologia. Zagadnienia filozoficzne i metodologiczne* (Lublin: Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, 1998), 51–52, 147, 160–162.

<sup>10</sup> Józef M. Bocheński, „O racjonalizmie i irracjonalizmie katolickim,” in *Dzieła zebrane*. Vol. 6. *Religia*, ed. Józef Bocheński (Kraków: Philed, 1995), 247, 252.

<sup>11</sup> Józef M. Bocheński, „Wiara,” in *Dzieła zebrane*. Vol. 6. *Religia*, ed. Józef Bocheński (Kraków: Philed, 1995), 216.

<sup>12</sup> Józef M. Bocheński, *Między logiką a wiarą. Z Józefem M. Bocheńskim rozmawia Jan Parys* (Montricher: Noir sur Blanc, 1988), 169, 175.

<sup>13</sup> Józef M. Bocheński, *Logika religii*, trans. Sławomir Magala (Warszawa: PAX, 1990), 37–43, 65, 73–74.

<sup>14</sup> Bocheński, *Logika religii*, 17.

Bocheński believed that theology should make the propositions of objective faith self-evident. Apparently, this may be accomplished by putting them in order and inferring new propositions, which would make theology akin to physics. It would set out with sentences belonging to the objective faith, which are the equivalent of protocol sentences in physics. These would supply the ground for formulating various explanatory hypotheses, which would then be verified through references to the sentences of the fundamental faith<sup>15</sup>.

Bocheński also addressed the question of verifying the terms in religious discourse because verification is indispensable if meanings are to be assigned to particular propositions. Bocheński emphasises that there are various methods of verification, e.g. direct (sensory perception, supernatural experiences) and indirect (authority, inference). Furthermore, direct verification may be sensory and extra-sensory, whereby the latter may be natural and supernatural. However, he rejects indirect verification and advocates any form of direct modality<sup>16</sup>.

Bocheński also highlights the function of philosophy in theology. Philosophy has a critical function in theology, which is to eliminate superstition. It cannot be a rational preparation for the adoption of faith because it lacks intersubjective verifiability. Nor can philosophy provide theology with a general synthesis of knowledge since such a synthesis is impossible<sup>17</sup>. Furthermore, some scholars draw attention to the self-criticism of theology, which consists of being faithful to its sources (e.g. revelation)<sup>18</sup>.

The American philosopher Eleonore Stump underlines that, unlike philosophy, theology is often considered a field that is insufficiently open to reason. This is because theology derives some of its premises from religious authority and revealed texts and creeds, whereas philosophy relies solely on reason in that respect. Philosophy is, therefore, acceptable to the general public, whereas theology is acceptable only to those who recognise revelation and belong to a particular religious community. Philosophy is, therefore, universal and impartial, while theology is particularistic and biased. Stump notes that such an approach traces its descent to the Enlightenment. The author argues that all human knowledge must have its origin somewhere and adopt certain assumptions. As a rule, the latter stem from an

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<sup>15</sup> Stefan Norkowski, „Dwa modele metodologiczne teologii o. Józefa Marii Bocheńskiego OP,” in *Ojciec Józef Bocheński. Drogi życia i myślenia filozoficznego. W stulecie urodzin uczonego*, ed. Czesław Głombik (Katowice: Gnome, 2004), 19–20, 24–25.

<sup>16</sup> Bocheński, *Logika religii*, 75–82.

<sup>17</sup> Józef M. Bocheński, „Światopogląd a filozofia,” in *Sens życia i inne eseje*, ed. Józef M. Bocheński (Kraków: Philed, 1993), 186–188.

<sup>18</sup> Michał Heller and Józef Życiński, *Pasja wiedzy. Między nauką a filozofią* (Kraków: Petrus, 2010), 224.

authority, witnesses or a community<sup>19</sup>. Thus, the difference between theology and philosophy is nullified, as both disciplines invoke authority.

In this context, one cannot overlook the matter of scientificity and epistemic rationality of theology, which meets the requirements that particular disciplines have to satisfy to a minimal degree. One should also note that theology fails to meet certain criteria of scientificity (e.g. intersubjective verifiability) and some of its ultimate premises include propositions that record a particular kind of experience, namely religious experience. However, this does not alter the fact that a theologian can conduct research in a systematic, formally correct and methodologically disciplined manner<sup>20</sup>.

Consequently, the Polish theologian Henryk Seweryniak emphasises that, where theology is concerned, the criteria of scientificity should be slightly different and advances three solutions. First, there is methodical inquiry, i.e. having a method understood as an assortment and a configuration of actions which serve a specific purpose and may be employed in multiple instances, as well as a set of rules describing how to proceed with the matter at hand. Second, one should formulate a non-contradictory set of judgements which are expressed in the most unequivocal language and provided with the best justification possible. Third, one has to have a proper object which is described via truthful, unambiguous and intelligible judgements<sup>21</sup>.

Regarding the rationality of theology, the Polish theologian Tomasz Węclawski emphasises that it represents a borderline discipline of rationality because it admits a different source of knowledge than the other sciences. Its rationality is bound to a supernatural reality, symbolised by the word "God". Węclawski observes that the developed form of theology consists of a systematic reflection on the revelation and the doctrines derived from it. Theology, therefore, possesses a unique status because it is associated with the authority of revelation. However, it shares methods and procedures with the other sciences because it also involves social texts and structures<sup>22</sup>. The Polish logician and methodologist Ryszard Kleszcz draws our attention to the fact that the criteria of rationality must be moderated with respect to theology. He suggests confining oneself to three criteria: linguistic strictness (elimination of incoherent, vague and general wording), adherence to the requirements of logic (eradicating contradictions from the belief system and ensuring deductive capacity)

<sup>19</sup> Eleonore Stump, "Theology and the Knowledge of Persons," *Roczniki Filozoficzne* 3 (2021): 9–10.

<sup>20</sup> Józef Dębowski, „Metodologiczny status teologii czyli o osobliwościach nauk teologicznych,” in *Misja teologii w uniwersytecie*, ed. Marek Jodkowski, Aleksandra Nalewaj and Maria Piechocka-Kłos (Olsztyn: Uniwersytet Warmińsko-Mazurski w Olsztynie, 2015), 53, 59–60.

<sup>21</sup> Henryk Seweryniak, „Miejsce teologii na uniwersytecie w odpowiedzi na zarzuty,” *Studia Nauk Teologicznych PAN* 3 (2008): 71–72.

<sup>22</sup> Węclawski, „Metodologia Teologii,” 101–109, 116–119.

as well as sufficient justification (relying on broad experience and justificatory inferences). Kleszcz is of the opinion that with regard to theology, the criteria of rationality should be met only to an extent which is indispensable. This is especially indicated since religion belongs to the domain of worldview, the adoption of which crucially depends on certain initial intuitions that lead to various interpretative possibilities<sup>23</sup>. Theology thus satisfies the general criteria of epistemic rationality, which is attained by different sciences to varying degrees. However, the strength of the arguments must be weaker in this case.

Minimal though they are, such criteria should be respected, especially considering that one of the most eminent theologians of the 20th century, namely Joseph Ratzinger. He demands that theology proclaim the Christian message and demonstrate its essence in a rational manner<sup>24</sup>. After all, Ratzinger finds that it is the Divine Logos which lies at the foundation of Christianity and, therefore, theology.

However, Bocheński – whose notions show affinity with the discussed model – calls for theology to be steered out of the rationalistic backstreet and insists on a renewed study into the ways to know God<sup>25</sup>. That questionable alley lies in the hubris of reason, which claims to apprehend the complete truth about God. As a result, one would be able to construct other models of theology in which value is attached to its other aspects.

## Theology as a Committed (Sapiential) Science

In view of the above, some scholars have stressed that theology cannot be reduced exclusively to a rational interpretation of the truths of faith since it also constitutes committed knowledge (wisdom). This commitment has four fundamental dimensions. First, it consists of the unique consent of the believer, particularly

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<sup>23</sup> Ryszard Kleszcz, „O racjonalności i jej granicach,” *Roczniki Filozoficzne* 1 (2003): 173–175, 181–184. It is worth bearing in mind that theology has its own technical language, but this differs from the language of the empirical sciences. The language of theology is not only imbued with the language of various philosophical orientations, but also contains terms taken from everyday language. In doing so, these expressions change their meaning while retaining their previous sound. Their use thus often leads to misunderstandings and simplistic, naive or ridiculous ways of understanding. See Heller and Życiński, *Pasja wiedzy*, 225.

<sup>24</sup> Joseph Ratzinger, *Prawda w Teologii*, trans. Magdalena Mijalska (Kraków: Wydawnictwo M, 2001), 5.

<sup>25</sup> Józef M. Bocheński, „W sprawie bożycy,” in *Sens życia i inne eseje*, ed. Józef M. Bocheński (Kraków: Philed, 1993), 162.

a theologian, not only because they acknowledge certain truths of faith but also commit personally to faith, having a sense of faith and acting in unison with the religious community. In order to attain any theological knowledge, one must therefore be a person of living faith, learning and wisdom<sup>26</sup>. However, it seems possible for a non-believer to competently perform purely scientific operations within theology, despite their lack of faith and personal commitment.

Second, the particular form of a theologian's commitment should involve the experience of mystery, and prayerful contemplation, especially since – as the Orthodox theologian Paul Evdokimov asserts – the sense of mystery has now been lost in theology. It has become an abstract science of God, having ceased to be a living thought immersed in God. It is the speculative theology and its superficial form which constitutes one of the sources of unbelief<sup>27</sup>. In this context, the American philosopher John E. Smith notes that a distinction must be made between formal reason and typically human reason. In the first case, reason employs pure formal logic, whereas in the second, humans seek intelligibility based on their own experience. It is, therefore, necessary, Smith argues, to depart from formal reason and return to the typically human reason, to abandon the formal tradition of Aristotle for the sake of the contemplative Platonic-Augustinian tradition<sup>28</sup>.

Evdokimov thus draws on the patristic definition of theology rooted in the Bible, understood as an experiential path to a union with God<sup>29</sup>. This paradigm places particular emphasis on the experience of prayer, contemplation and liturgy, through which a person can participate in the reality of the divine, experience inner transformation and take concrete action<sup>30</sup>. A theologian is, therefore, a practitioner of prayer, from which theology arises<sup>31</sup>. At the same time, according to the English historian of philosophy – Frederick C. Copleston, religious language is an expression of a religious action, such as prayer. Thus, in the first place, it is a language of speaking to God rather than about God<sup>32</sup>.

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<sup>26</sup> William H. Austin, „Zaangażowanie religijne a logiczny status doktryn religijnych,” trans. Piotr Dziliński, in *Filozofia religii. Fragmenty filozofii analitycznej*, ed. Bohdan Chwedeńczuk (Warszawa: Fundacja Aletheia, 1997), 260; Bronk and Majdański, „Teologia,” 103–104.

<sup>27</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *Poznanie Boga w tradycji wschodniej. Patrystyka, liturgia, ikonografia*, trans. Alina Liduchowska (Kraków: Wydawnictwo M, 1996), 157.

<sup>28</sup> John E. Smith, *Doświadczenie i Bóg*, trans. Danuta Petsch (Warszawa: PAX, 1971), 118–125.

<sup>29</sup> Paul Evdokimov, *Wieki życia duchowego. Od Ojców pustyni do naszych czasów*, trans. Maria Tarnowska (Kraków: ZNAK, 1996), 152–153.

<sup>30</sup> Evdokimov, *Poznanie Boga*, 15–20.

<sup>31</sup> Hans Waldenfels, *Odkrywać Boga dzisiaj*, trans. Bernard Białecki (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Apostolstwa Modlitwy, 1997), 53.

<sup>32</sup> Frederick C. Copleston, *Religia i filozofia*, trans. Barbara Stanosz (Warszawa: PAX, 1978), 52–53.

Hence, the French theologian and spiritual writer André Manaranche underlines that theology is born out of religious experience, though simultaneously it evaluates and guides the latter. It is, therefore, necessary to immerse oneself in the experience in order to articulate it anew. Experience and mysticism are specific regulating factors of theology, which is why one must reject abstract speculations in favour of a union with God<sup>33</sup>. Pierre Miquel, a French researcher of spirituality, would further add that theology is a reflection on the spiritual experience, which it supplies with mental and linguistic schemata. It also gives an account of the spiritual experience described in religious writings<sup>34</sup>.

While not seeking to disparage conceptual knowledge in theology, the Italian theologian Cipriano Vagaggini argues that it should be combined with intuitive experience since it may enable one to gain a deeper knowledge of God. Thus, next to the objective, abstract and rational components in theology, one should recognise the value of the subjective, intuitive and experiential elements<sup>35</sup>, notably contemplative experience and prayerful engagement, which are some of the essential sources of theology. It would appear that theology as a form of committed knowledge derives from the nature of religion as such, which is a kind of dialogue demanding the existential engagement of autonomous, free partners who choose one another. Religion is a bond of choice that is made between humans and God. It originates in the event of an encounter, while dialogue and commitment to the relationship are the source, essence and meaning of religion<sup>36</sup>.

Third, the goal of theology is to lend meaning to human life and to engage in its realisation at the expense of its own claim to knowledge<sup>37</sup>. The Polish theologian Alfons Nossol is convinced that theology is true wisdom that aims, above all, to endow human life with meaning<sup>38</sup>. For this reason, some emphasise its practical and utilitarian character. The sapiential dimension of theology is also referred to by Kamiński, to whom wisdom consists of a committed effort to know the ultimate causes of things and to array them in line with the fundamental values.

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<sup>33</sup> André Manaranche, *Bóg żywy i rzeczywisty*, trans. Lucyna Rutowska (Warszawa: PAX, 1974), 26–28, 33, 36–37.

<sup>34</sup> Pierre Miquel, *L'expérience spirituelle dans la tradition chrétienne* (Paris: Beauchesne, 1999), XIII.

<sup>35</sup> Cipriano Vagaggini, *Teologia. Pluralizm teologiczny*, trans. Jacek Partyka (Kraków: Homini, 2005), 18–20, 27–28, 107–110, 114, 178–184.

<sup>36</sup> Witold P. Glinkowski, „Religia jako dialog człowieka z Bogiem,” in *Religie w dialogu kultur*. Vol. II, ed. Marek Szulakiewicz and Łukasz Dominiak (Toruń: Fundacja Societas et Ius, 2107), 352, 359.

<sup>37</sup> Andrzej Bronk, *Podstawy nauk o religii* (Lublin: Katolicki Uniwersytet Lubelski, 2009), 355–356.

<sup>38</sup> Alfons Nossol and Jerzy Szymik, *Być dla, czyli myśleć sercem* (Katowice: Księgarnia św. Jacka, 1999), 72, 94, 130.

Therefore, wisdom may originate from natural or supernatural sources, and it possesses a theoretical as well as a practical dimension. As a theory, it is a justified and comprehensive understanding of the order and meaning of the world. As a practice, on the other hand, it means the ability to apply such knowledge and adopt the right attitude in life. Thus, theology is committed knowledge through which a person attains specific knowledge by virtue of revelation and formulates their life attitudes accordingly<sup>39</sup>. It may, therefore, be stated that theology provides one with a certain orientation in the world and an existential attitude, or what is called life wisdom.

Hence, the methodologist Józef Dębowski defines theology as a sapiential type of science, which strives to explain the world as an entirety and its order from the standpoint of natural and supernatural knowledge. At the same time, it involves numerous practical elements, i.e. those which concern the right ways of guiding one's life<sup>40</sup>. An interesting remark is made by Stump, who highlights the differences between the philosophical and theological notions of wisdom. In philosophy, wisdom is an abstract concept, whereas it has a personal dimension in theology since wisdom is God. Thus, the philosopher seeks impersonal wisdom, while the theologian seeks personal wisdom. It follows that theology must value non-propositional knowledge, i.e. personal contact. It is called "knowledge of a person", in other words, second-person, intuitive, direct knowledge that cannot be adequately expressed in concepts and sentences. In her view, the knowledge of a person is irreducible to the knowledge of things. Stump notes that theology thus engages with the narratives concerning the knowledge of a person, which can have various interpretations. The knowledge of a person is important because it enriches the knowledge of the object<sup>41</sup>. Copleston takes a similar view, stating that God cannot be properly described by the language used to describe the finite, which is why knowledge through contact is required<sup>42</sup>. However, any interpersonal contact demands that two parties be involved. In religion, it leads to the discovery of wisdom, which is interpreted in theology using personalistic categories.

Fourth, theology as committed knowledge can also manifest itself in the social dimension of life. Theological reflection is then geared towards motivating persons to active efforts aimed at solving current world problems and liberating human beings from various forms of oppression in the light of revelation. Good examples of such an approach include the political theology of the German theologian Johann

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<sup>39</sup> Kamiński, *Jak filozofować?*, 25–27.

<sup>40</sup> Dębowski, „Metodologiczny status,” 65.

<sup>41</sup> Stump, “Theology and the Knowledge of Persons,” 11, 13–16, 21–25.

<sup>42</sup> Copleston, *Religia i filozofia*, 65, 87.

Baptist Metz, the theology of liberation practised, e.g. by Leonardo Boff and Gustavo Gutierrez, and the indigenous theology of Bartomeu Melia and Jose Seelwische.

Metz construes his political theology as a response to the socio-cultural problems of the world. Political theology is intended as a critical correction to the privatising tendencies in previous theology, which deprived it of its reference to the world. Instead, it should be oriented towards protecting human beings from reification, bringing the social dimension of charity to the fore and challenging the earthly order. Another task is to shape a new self-understanding of the Church and inform a change in its institutional functioning by promoting sensitivity to the various forms of suffering in the world. Thus, political theology demonstrates critical and liberatory qualities<sup>43</sup>. Elsewhere, Metz notes that political theology is a form of speaking about God when facing the world's suffering. For this reason, its essential category is *memoria passionis*, i.e. the memory of the suffering present in the world<sup>44</sup>.

Associated with the so-called "theology of liberation", Gutierrez also believes that the socio-political dimension of life and involvement in the affairs of the world have, at times, been insufficiently taken into account in Christianity. Christianity is shaped by social practices that seek to liberate humanity. Furthermore, according to Gutierrez, the relationship with God and the relationship with other people are closely interconnected. This is because each encounter with God occurs through encounters with other people, particularly the poor and oppressed, and love for God is expressed and proven through love for others. As a result, a person may be liberated from various forms of oppression, and society may be transformed<sup>45</sup>.

Finally, the goal of indigenous theology is to engage in the discovery of the salvific presence of God across cultures. The new theology is envisioned to supplant classical theology, become a source of critique of the Church's actions and inspire Christians to change how they think. This particular theology emphasises the experience of people, especially aboriginal people, in expressing their faith in a specific cultural context<sup>46</sup>.

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<sup>43</sup> Johann B. Metz, *Teologia polityczna*, trans. Agnieszka Mosurek (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Apostolstwa Modlitwy, 2000), 15, 23–48, 60–64, 74–82, 118, 162–184, 266–275.

<sup>44</sup> Johann B. Metz, *Teologia wobec cierpienia*, trans. Juliusz Zychowicz (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Apostolstwa Modlitwy, 2008), 12, 37, 96–97, 185–194, 215–219.

<sup>45</sup> Gustavo Gutierrez, *Teologia wyzwolenia. Historia, polityka i zbawienie*, trans. Jan Szewczyk (Warszawa: PAX, 1976), 9, 39–46, 58–60, 151–154, 201–215, 238–239, 266–269, 277–279.

<sup>46</sup> Ryszard Hajduk, *Teologia latynoamerykańska i jej praktyczne implikacje* (Olsztyn: Uniwersytet Warmińsko-Mazurski w Olsztynie, 2020), 26, 42–43, 45–48; Dariusz Piwowarczyk, „Indygenizm jako aspekt latynoamerykańskiej teologii wyzwolenia. Refleksja z perspektywy pracy misyjnej wśród Indian Paragwaju,” *Nurt SVD* 2 (2016): 225–234.

## Theology as Hermeneutics

The third major model of theology understands theology as hermeneutics or the art of interpretation. In theology, it will proceed from the standpoint of a particular religious revelation – Christian, for instance. Three fundamental issues may be subject to interpretation: the problems of human existence, historical events and revealed writings. Theology would primarily be a form of revealing the world. Aided by faith, human reason seeks to comprehend the problems of the world and humanity in the light of revelation. Here, the issues with which life confronts the theologian would constitute the data to be elucidated. In this case, the theologian would attempt to give reliable answers to the real questions that humans constantly struggle to resolve (e.g. evil, suffering, death)<sup>47</sup>. Hence, the primary concern of theology is to interpret human existential problems and, potentially, advance solutions in the light of religious revelation.

In so doing, theology becomes hermeneutics. Its task is to interpret or clarify the problems of the world and human existence in line with a particular religious message. The world and human life, thus, constitute a specific text to be interpreted. The theologian begins with a particular religious tradition that is believed to be true so as to juxtapose it subsequently to reality and reinterpret the latter in the light of that tradition<sup>48</sup>. Through this process, a Gadamerian fusion of horizons takes place.

The Belgian theologian Jacques Dupuis notes that in the hermeneutic model of theology, one sets out from an existing reality or a specific situation, which then undergoes interpretation by means of a religious message. Thus, according to Dupuis, three elements become correlated: the text (the data of faith and religious tradition), the historical context (a reality composed of cultural, economic, social, political and religious components) and the interpreter (the theologian and the community of believers). The interaction between these elements results in a kind of a “hermeneutic circle”<sup>49</sup>.

Likewise, for the Czech philosopher and theologian Tomáš Halík, theology means hermeneutics of the experience of faith in history. In this case, the primary task is to interpret historical events while perceiving them to manifest God’s pedagogy since it is God who is revealed in historical events. Consequently, theology

<sup>47</sup> Bronk and Majdański, „Teologia,” 92–93.

<sup>48</sup> Grzegorz Barth, „O specyfice i tożsamości metodologicznej teologii,” in *Misja teologii w uniwersytecie*, ed. Marek Jodkowski, Aleksandra Nalewaj and Maria Piechocka-Kłos (Olsztyn: Uniwersytet Warmińsko-Mazurski w Olsztynie, 2015), 96–99.

<sup>49</sup> Jacques Dupuis, *Chrześcijaństwo i religie. Od konfrontacji do dialogu*, trans. Stanisław Obirek (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Apostolstwa Modlitwy, 2003), 35–36.

should interpret them in the context of history, culture and faith. The Czech intellectual refers to his version of theology as *kairology* (from Greek *kairos*, meaning a time of visitation, attaining maturity, or a decision) because its hermeneutical mission is to yield a new reading and a deeper interpretation of the signs of the times. However, according to Halík, one must master the art of contemplating reality in its entirety in order for this mission to be accomplished<sup>50</sup>.

Consequently, the need for a spiritual reading of the world around is emphasised. Thanks to such an approach, it will be possible to discover the spiritual reality hidden beneath the realm of phenomena<sup>51</sup>. Therefore, using Kantian terminology, theology must inevitably shift from phenomena to noumena, i.e. from the material occurrences to the spiritual thing in itself. Moreover, Halík argues that theology has a diagnostic task in that by reading and interpreting the signs of the times, it pays attention to crisis periods and changes in cultural paradigms from a supernatural perspective<sup>52</sup>. Łukasz Sadłocha also believes that theology has a diagnostic function because it is capable of detecting civilisational change. Thanks to the immutable revealed truths, a scale reflecting such changes may be applied. Theology is primarily concerned with their axiological dimension, i.e. civilisational progress, and its task is not so much to diagnose the changes – the variations within a given timeframe – but to diagnose the progress, i.e. the axiological dimension of those variations<sup>53</sup>. Consequently, theology would identify civilisational progress as opposed to mere change. Moreover, in addition to its diagnostic role, it would possess a valuational function.

Furthermore, Halík maintains that theology as hermeneutics should serve to reinterpret the Good News so that its meaning is not distorted when a particular social and cultural context changes. There is no escaping the fact that new hermeneutics is needed, i.e. a new modality of reading, interpreting and understanding the Scripture and the Tradition in different contexts of human life<sup>54</sup>. Vagaggini recognises an urgent need to rethink and reinterpret the substance of the Scripture and the Tradition since, in many instances, the wording comprises either variable and circumstance-dependent elements or elements which are constant and independent

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<sup>50</sup> Tomáš Halík, *Popołudnie chrześcijaństwa. Odwaga do zmiany*, trans. Tomasz Maćkowiak (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Apostolstwa Modlitwy, 2022), 37–45, 92, 107, 219, 310.

<sup>51</sup> Marko Ivan Rupnik and Tomáš Špidlík, *Teologia pastoralna. Duszpasterstwo na nowe czasy*, trans. Krzysztof Stopa (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Salwator, 2010), 17–19, 24–26.

<sup>52</sup> Halík, *Popołudnie chrześcijaństwa*, 283.

<sup>53</sup> Łukasz Sadłocha, „Diagnostyczna rola teologii,” in *Misja teologii w uniwersytecie*, ed. Marek Jodkowski, Aleksandra Nalewaj and Maria Piechocka-Kłos (Olsztyn: Uniwersytet Warmińsko-Mazurski w Olsztynie, 2015), 114–116.

<sup>54</sup> Halík, *Popołudnie chrześcijaństwa*, 92, 107, 310.

of the conditions<sup>55</sup>. The need to reinterpret the content of faith given the development of science, the natural sciences in particular, is also noted by Heller. In his opinion, such a process may help to cleanse the faith of anthropomorphism and protect it from being reduced to the irrational sphere<sup>56</sup>. It would, therefore, be necessary to reinterpret the content of faith by retaining its universal elements while lending them a new expression. Also, their order would be rearranged considering their relevance for the modern human and the achievements of modern science.

According to Copleston, another reason which makes reinterpretation crucial is that the particular theological formulations are assertions about the God of faith, not metaphysical conclusions. They convey a certain vision of reality and show the direction that human life should follow. They both interpret the words of God and elucidate specific human experiences. It is through them that one arrives at a religious interpretation of reality<sup>57</sup>. Nonetheless, such an interpretation may vary because it not only arises from the unchanging contents of revelation but also derives from the changing human experience and the categories employed to express them. The invariable substance must, therefore, be confronted with the manifold experiences of the human and formulated with the use of updated terminology, one which corresponds better with the mutable human mentality. Religious content, thus, demands to be permanently reinterpreted in the context of the new socio-historical circumstances, mental shifts and language transformations.

## Conclusion

The purpose of these deliberations was to reflect critically on the predominant 20th-century model of theology – which conceived it as a rationalisation of the revealed truth – as well as discuss other models in which theology is practised as the committed (sapiential) knowledge and as hermeneutics. The first of these models proves inadequate because it is governed by the rationalist concept of theology. Its adherents seek to reflect critically on the revealed truths, expound the content of revelation using philosophical categories and construct an axiomatic system of knowledge. This engenders emphasis on the doctrinal dimension of religion, but considering its potential ideologisation, the existential and experiential aspects

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<sup>55</sup> Vagaggini, *Teologia*, 73–74, 86–89, 115–120, 145.

<sup>56</sup> Heller, *Nowa fizyka*, 88.

<sup>57</sup> Copleston, *Religia i filozofia*, 53–54.

should be given more prominence. It would seem, therefore, that the committed (sapiential) knowledge and hermeneutics are promising paradigms, offering alternative understanding and the practice of theology. After all, theology is a type of knowledge engaged in the matters of faith, whose aim is to discover the wisdom of life, find the meaning of human existence and guide human life. Here, theology should stem from the religious experience that results in one's commitment to transforming the world, thus demonstrating both theoretical and practical dimensions. By virtue of theology, it would be possible to combine knowledge and spiritual experience in a more profound and conscious manner. Theology may also be a form of hermeneutics, i.e. the art of interpreting the problems of human life and historical events in the light of a particular religious message and tradition. Moreover, a reinterpretation is called for with respect to the texts of the revelation themselves which should be read in the new socio-cultural circumstances and involve a new language.

This would respond to the demand to develop a novel version of theology – a theology that should be mystagogic (relying on spiritual experience and introducing the experience of mystery), symbolic (avoiding treatises while giving preference to myths, parables and symbols), narrative (drawing on the stories of concrete persons and their experience of God) and pastoral (deriving from and leading to practice)<sup>58</sup>. Following Bocheński's demand, it would be worthwhile to lead theology out of the "rationalist backstreet". In order to do so, one has to relinquish abstract speculation, excessive rationalism and dogmatism, while recognising the value of the problems of human existence, spiritual experience and the challenges of social life. These can be an important source ("*locus theologicus*") and a propitious point of departure for theological reflection. Naturally, one cannot diminish the role of reason when practising theology – its Christian variety in particular – in which God is understood first and foremost as the Logos. Furthermore, the claim of theology to be a science means that it must meet the criteria of rationality and scientificity, at least to a minimal degree. With the acknowledgement that the roots of theology lie in human spiritual life, existential experience and historical events interpreted in the light of revelation, theology ceases to be speculation detached from life and begins to be regarded as a form of profound reading and interpretation of reality, a path of discovering the wisdom and meaning of human existence, and an axiological foundation and point of reference in the process of transforming the world.

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<sup>58</sup> Viktor Codina, *Kościół wykluczonych. Teologia z perspektywy Nazaretu*, trans. Kasper Kaproń (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Apostolstwa Modlitwy, 2018), 265–280; Rupnik and Špidlík, *Teologia pastoralna*, 292–307, 341, 345–347.

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Rev. Karol Jasiński

## La théologie comme rationalisation de la foi religieuse et ses différents modèles

### Résumé

L'objectif de cet article est de mener une réflexion critique sur le modèle de la théologie en tant que rationalisation de la foi religieuse (la vérité révélée) et sur différents modèles de théologie en tant que connaissance engagée (sapientielle) et herméneutique. Le premier de ces modèles est insuffisant car il est dominé par une conception rationaliste de la théologie au détriment de sa nature plus existentielle et expérientielle. L'article se compose de trois parties. La première partie présente un modèle de théologie en tant que rationalisation de la vérité révélée (la critique philosophique de la révélation, l'investigation historico-doctrinale des vérités de la foi, l'explication et la systématisation du contenu de la révélation par des catégories philosophiques, et le système a priori de la connaissance). La deuxième partie se concentre sur le modèle de la théologie en tant que connaissance engagée et sagesse (un engagement dans la reconnaissance de vérités spécifiques de la foi et d'un mode de vie religieux, un engagement dans l'expérience du mystère et la contemplation dans la prière, un engagement dans la réalisation du sens de la vie et la transformation du monde). La troisième partie présente un modèle de théologie en tant qu'herméneutique, c'est-à-dire l'art de lire et d'interpréter divers éléments de la réalité (problèmes de l'existence humaine, événements historiques et textes religieux).

M o t s - c l é s : théologie, rationalité, expérience, sagesse, herméneutique

Rev. Karol Jasiński

## La teologia come razionalizzazione della fede religiosa e i suoi diversi modelli

### Sommario

Lo scopo di questo articolo è quello di riflettere criticamente sul modello di teologia come razionalizzazione della fede religiosa (la verità rivelata) e sui diversi modelli di teologia come conoscenza impegnata (sapienziale) ed ermeneutica. Il primo di questi modelli è insufficiente perché dominato da un concetto razionalistico di teologia a scapito della sua natura più esistenziale ed esperienziale. Il documento è composto da tre parti. La prima parte presenta un modello di teologia come razionalizzazione della verità rivelata (la critica filosofica della rivelazione, l'indagine storico-dottrinale delle verità di fede, la spiegazione e la sistematizzazione del contenuto della rivelazione mediante categorie filosofiche e il sistema a priori della conoscenza). La seconda parte si concentra sul modello di teologia come impegno e conoscenza sapienziale (un impegno nel riconoscimento di specifiche verità di fede e di uno stile di vita religioso, un impegno nell'esperienza del mistero e nella contemplazione orante, un impegno nella realizzazione del significato della vita e nella trasformazione del mondo). La terza parte presenta un modello di teologia come ermeneutica, cioè l'arte di leggere e interpretare i vari componenti della realtà (problemi dell'esistenza umana, eventi storici e testi religiosi).

**Parole chiave:** teologia, razionalità, esperienza, saggezza, ermeneutica