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# **Imagination as a Theological Term**

Rigorózní práce

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## **Prohlášení**

1. Prohlašuji, že jsem předkládanou práci zpracovala samostatně a použila jen uvedené prameny a literaturu.
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V Praze dne 25.5.2014

Barbora Šmejdivá

## **Bibliografická citace**

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## **Anotace**

Cílem rigorózní práce *Představivost jako teologický pojem* je uchopit téma představivosti na poli teologie jak v teoretické tak i v praktické rovině. Práce vychází z teorie představivosti Paula Ricoeura, který pojímá téma z lingvistického hlediska. První kapitola, která je věnována právě Ricoeurově teorii, představuje téma z hlediska teorie vyprávění, metafory a symbolu.

Druhá kapitola se věnuje teologické reflexi představivosti z perspektivy tří autorů: J. H. Newmana, K. Rahnera a H. U. von Balthasara. Newman popisuje představivost na základě svého rozlišení mezi reálnou a pojmovou shodou. Rahner se věnuje představivosti z hlediska různých druhů umění a von Balthasar přichází s celým propracovaným konceptem teologické estetiky. Tyto různé pohledy nám nabízejí otevření několika klíčových témat. Kapitola se proto dotýká problematiky jazyka teologie, který nemá pouze působit na rozum posluchačů ale i na jejich srdce. Dále ukazuje, jakým způsobem k nám mluví jednotlivá umění a za jakých podmínek se umění stává teologickým výrazem. V neposlední řadě představuje samotné pojetí člověka jako imaginativní bytosti a objasňuje, že jazyk představivosti je také způsob jakým mluví Bůh k člověku skrze své stvoření, Písmo a nakonec skrze svého Syna.

Celá práce je uzavřena třetí kapitolou, která se věnuje přínosu irského teologa M. P. Gallaghery. Na základě jeho díla ukazuje, jak se body z předchozích kapitol promítají do praxe.

## **Klíčová slova**

Představivost, umění, teologie, Paul Ricoeur, John Henry Newman, Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Michael Paul Gallagher

## **Abstract**

The aim of the rigorous work called *Imagination as a Theological Term* is to grasp the theme of imagination in the field of theology both in theory and practice. The work is grounded on the theory of imagination of Paul Ricoeur, who approaches the theme from a linguistic perspective. The first chapter, which is devoted to Ricoeur's theory, introduces his concept of narrative, metaphor and symbol.

The second chapter deals with the theological reflexion of imagination from the point of view of three authors: J. H. Newman, K. Rahner and H. U. von Balthasar. Newman describes imagination by his distinction of real and notional assent. Rahner introduces the theme from the perspective of various kinds of arts, and von Balthasar comes with a concise project of theological aesthetics. These various points of view enable us to open several important questions. The chapter thus touches the theme of theological language which should appeal not only to the reason of the listeners but also to their heart. After that it shows how various kinds of art speak to us and on which condition they can serve as a theological expression. Finally, it introduces the theme of man as an imaginative being and shows that the language of imagination is also the language of God, who reveals himself to man by his creation, Holy Scripture and, finally, by his Son.

The whole work is concluded by the third chapter, which is focused on the work of an Irish theologian M. P. Gallagher and shows how the themes sketched in the previous chapters are reflected in practice.

## **Keywords**

Imagination, art, theology, Paul Ricoeur, John Henry Newman, Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar, Michael Paul Gallagher

**Počet znaků** (včetně mezer): 228 166

## **Poděkování**

Ráda bych poděkovala všem, kdo se na mé práci at' přímo či nepřímo podíleli. Největší díky patří mému muži Liborovi a synovi Antonínovi za jejich trpělivost a podporu, protože na ně nejvíce dopadaly všechny starosti spojené s mým studiem a psáním této práce. Dále bych chtěla poděkovat svým rodičům a dalším příbuzným za jejich vedení a motivaci. V neposlední řadě patří díky mému školiteli ThLic. David Boumovi, Th.D. za jeho cenné rady a povzbuzení.

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## Introduction

*The gleam of an heroic act,  
Such strange illumination—  
The Possible's slow fuse is lit  
By the Imagination!*

(Emily Dickinson)

“No language is worthy of God but some are worthier than others, because they reach our imagination and because they invite us towards attunement with the inner word of the Spirit, which leads us in turn to the outer Word of Christ our Lord.”<sup>1</sup> The aim of this work is to justify this statement of Michael Paul Gallagher, which indicates that imagination plays an irreplaceable role for communicating Christian message. As William Lynch says, “the philosophy of the transcendental and lordly mind is at least respected as being sophisticated. But when religious belief becomes a pleasant unrelated-to-anything haven for the minds of the naïve and for those seeking to escape reality, it is *not* respected.”<sup>2</sup> Our hypothesis is that it is the role of imagination which is in touch with the real to be a tool of grounding theological concept in a concrete human experience.

The importance of imagination for spiritual growth is something which is not commonly refused by theologians. The fact that novels, films, paintings or architecture open us to a new experience beauty in which we feel the presence of God is something which experience not only believers but also unbelievers. Nevertheless, sometimes, the place of imagination in theology and spirituality might seem to be so self-evident that it can be in a result undervalued. It can be viewed as nothing more than a complement and decoration of rational theological reflection. It might appear only as something additional, which does not have scientific relevance.

The title of this work is *Imagination as a Theological Term* reflects also the principal goal of the thesis. We presume that imagination is not a marginal theme in

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<sup>1</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Disturbing Freshness of Christ*. Dublin: Veritas, 2008, p. 31-32.

<sup>2</sup> LYNCH, William F.. *Christ and Apollo: The Dimensions of the Literary Imagination*. New York : The New American Library, 1963, p. 60.

theology and it deserves a proper place in theological reflection. Although some of the principles concerning imagination discussed in this work are reflected in theological approaches, the term is often used randomly without any clear illumination and without any connection to philosophical or theological concepts. This study intends to serve as an aid for those who want to support their points concerning imagination by a concise theory. What is more, it hopes to spur the discussion on theological field with would lead to increasing reflection of the role of imagination in theology both in theory and in practice.

This work intends to formulate what the status of imagination as a theological term is with the help of unifying philosophical and theological concepts. We are going to ask how imagination actually works in human mind, why we have the tendency to express our experience by the means of narratives, poems and non-verbal art and why it seems to us that a novel, painting or short poem is often more telling than extensive philosophical and theological treatises. After attempting to give a satisfactory answer to these questions, our purpose is to show how imagination works in Christian practice. In which way does imagination open human heart to accepting Christian message? How can it be helpful for our talking about God? How does it work as an active power of human self-understanding in the light of Christian faith so that it would lead to a concrete action?

Right after the formulation of our main questions, it shows up that the theme of imagination offers a number of approaches. The topic can be actually dealt with from the point of view of any literary theory or theory of art. It can be grounded on a number of philosophies and it can imply numerous epistemological principles. What is more, there are also various theologians on whose concept we could ground our theory. In addition, the theme can be regarded from the point of view of both verbal and non-verbal art. Similar studies are also often influenced by the specific cultural background of the authors and their personal tastes. For instance, the title of Paul Avis called *God and the Creative Imagination* is strongly influenced by his personal interest in the work of British Romantic poets.<sup>3</sup> That is why our study should be clearly specified from the

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. AVIS, Paul. *God and the Creative Imagination: Metaphor, Symbol, and Myth in Religion and Theology*. New York : Routledge, 1999.

Other titles from the last decade dealing with the theme of imagination in theology, for example, are: BUSTARD, Ned (ed.). *It was Good: Making Art to the Glory of God*. Baltimore: Square Halo Books, 2007., BEGBIE, Jeremy. *Resounding Truth: Christian Wisdom in the World of Music*. Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2007., GUYE, Malcom. *Faith, Hope and Poetry: Theology and the Poetic Imagination*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2010., WOOD, Ralph C.. *Literature and Theology*. Nashville, TN:

very beginning as well. It means that this work offers only one of many possible approaches, but we still hope that our approach will be contributive in the contemporary discussion of this field.

We have decided to delimit our theme according to the concepts of five authors, who complement each other, but who are different enough to introduce various perspectives. These authors are Paul Ricoeur, John Henry Newman, Karl Rahner, Hans Urs von Balthasar and Michael Paul Gallagher.

As a method in which we are going to approach the theme, we have chosen to analyze the view of individual authors separately rather than connecting their theories into one text which would be organized according to particular themes. The reason is that each author comes with an original view and regards the theme from a different perspective although all of our authors arrive to very similar conclusions. The thesis thus basically shows five different ways towards the same goal.

Of course, it would be possible to unite the text into one fluent whole without any recurrences and with clear logical bonds, but something important would be lost. After that it would not be possible to demonstrate how the topic of imagination can be grasped from various starting points, how the theologians work with their concepts in order to formulate their conclusions and how they complement each other in this regard. From my point of view, this is one of the most important contributions of the work. None of our theologians devotes a separate coherent study to the theme of imagination, but it is our task to isolate the theme from their work and show it in clear connections.

The theological study is confined by the philosophical account of Paul Ricoeur, whose notion of imagination creates the basic context for the whole thesis. The concepts of the theologians are thus mostly presented in the perspective of Ricoeur's theory so the thesis is partly a comparative study as well. We are going to sketch not only the links between Ricoeur's approach and the individual authors, but we want to

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Abingdon Press, 2008., SIEDELL, Daniel A. *God in the Gallery: A Christian Embrace of Modern Art*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008., VILADESAU, Richard. *The Triumph of the Cross: The Passion of Christ in Theology and the Arts from the Renaissance to the Counter-Reformation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008., CAWKWELL, Tim. *The Filmgoer's Guide to God*. London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 2004., CHRISTIANSON, Eric S. – FRANCIS, Peter – TELFORD, William (eds.). *Cinéma Divinité: Religion, Theology and the Bible in Film*. London: SCM Press, 2005., DEACY, Christopher – ARWECK, Elizabeth (eds.). *Exploring Religion and the Sacred in a Media Age*. Farnham: Ashgate, 2009., DETWEILER, Craig. *Into the Dark: Seeing the Sacred in the Top Films of the 21st Century*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008.

mention also the connections between the theological concepts as such. Finally, the whole study is going to be concluded by the reflection of Gallagher's work, which helps us to set the theme of imagination in practice. This chapter serves also as an attempt to unify the themes discussed in the rest of the work, and it wants to offer a specific illustration of the way how the language of imagination can be used in theology and spirituality.

As we have mentioned, it is firstly necessary to specify what imagination actually means for us. Our work is not intended to focus on a specific kind of art, but it aims to discuss imagination in general. That is why we have chosen one philosophical concept which would stand in the background. From my point of view, one of the best philosophical concepts of imagination which are available and which invite also theological reflection is the theory of Paul Ricoeur. That is why the first chapter is devoted to the description of his ideas concerning metaphorical and symbolic imagination. The chapter intends to show the role of imagination in our self-understanding and our understanding of the world. It continues to justify the role of imagination as a relevant tool for grasping reality, and it also sketches the importance of imagination for concrete action. Ricoeur's notion of imagination serves also as a unifying factor of the whole work as his ideas are later shown in relation to the theological reflections of following authors.

The second chapter is the core of the whole study since it is devoted to the theme of imagination in theology. It starts with one of the first explorers of this topic – John Henry Newman. His distinction between real and notional apprehension basically refers to the kind of language touching the concrete human experience and the language of rational concepts. This is something which is still very topical and which is mirrored also in the work of modern theologians, including the theology of Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar. We are going to show that Newman's idea of real assent can be regarded also in the light of Ricoeur's theory, and thus it establishes the bases of the discussion of imagination as a useful tool for theological expression in the context of contemporary philosophical and theological reflection.

The chapter continues with the theological notion of imagination in the work of Karl Rahner. This author follows the theological accents of John Henry Newman, but he investigates the way how imagination opens human heart to Christian message from the point of view of individual kinds of art. He also introduces the significant concept

of a faithful messenger and thus shows that imagination as such is not sufficient if the message is delivered by somebody who is not trustworthy.

The final subchapter deals with the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar, who formulates his ideas in a concise project of theological aesthetics. In this part of the thesis, we are going to continue the discussion by the reflection on the ability of images to point to mystery, which is a necessary way towards beauty, goodness and love. After that we want to show that imagination is also the language of God, who speaks to us through his creation, by the means of the Scripture and, finally, through his Son. As we respond to God's revelation not only by our reason but by our whole life, it is also the theme of conversion which can be described in terms of imagination as well.

Nevertheless, the whole work does not want to stop on a theoretical level, but its aim is also to show imagination in practice. This is the goal of the third chapter, which is based on the approach of Michael Paul Gallagher, who uses the language of imagination to address those who are searching God. On the basis of his book *The Human Poetry of Faith* we are going to demonstrate how the points presented in the preceding chapters can be used practically. At first we are going to show the importance of imagination for opening human heart to the acceptance of Christian message. After that we are going to suggest the way how to speak about God and, finally, discuss how imagination is relevant for our everyday life as Christians.

# 1. The View of a Philosopher: Paul Ricoeur and his Theory of Imagination

As it was mentioned in the introduction the first point of the thesis will be devoted to the clarification of the term imagination in the light of a theory, which is not primarily connected to theology. The reason is that such theories can be accepted by all people regardless of their religious or cultural background. If we want to demonstrate the importance of imagination for Christian faith, it is useful to start before the gates towards it since Christianity encompasses and transforms everything which is essentially human in order to lead it towards its fulfilment. As this paper is going to show, it is true also about imagination. That is why we should start with the description of imagination as an essentially human faculty, before it is shown in the context of Christian faith and theology. Nevertheless, the following research is not going to be an exhaustive study of philosophy and literary theory,<sup>4</sup> but its aim is to serve as a sufficient introduction for the subsequent theological reflection. For the sake of conceptual coherence, I have chosen to base this chapter on the notion of one author, namely on the work of a philosopher and literary theorist Paul Ricoeur, whose work illuminates the meaning of the term imagination and its role in human life.<sup>5</sup>

The reason of this choice is the fact that most philosophical accounts treat imagination as a special kind of vision, so it is closely connected to sensual perception. As Richard Kearney mentions in his *Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Postmodern*, “Husserl describes the act of imagining as a ‘neutralized’ mode of seeing, Sartre as an ‘unrealized’ mode of quasi-seeing, and Merleau-Ponty as a dialectical counterpart of the visible.”<sup>6</sup> This is not the route this thesis intends to explore. Instead, I would like to

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<sup>4</sup> On this occasion I would mention a book dealing closely with the historical development of the term imagination from Greek thinkers to modern time: SEPPER, Dennis L. *Understanding Imagination: The Reason of Images*. London: Springer Science+Business Media Dordrecht, 2013.

<sup>5</sup> Some of the recent titles investigating the theme of imagination in philosophy are: TANNER, Sonja. *In Praise of Plato's Poetic Imagination*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2010., KARNES, Michelle. *Imagination, Meditation, and Cognition in the Middle Ages*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011., MAGUIRE, William. *The Conversion of Imagination: From Pascal Through Rousseau to Tocqueville*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2006., GILLIAN, Robinson – RUNDELL, John F. (eds.). *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity*. London: Routledge, 1994., CURIE, Gregory – RAVENSCROFT, Ian. *Recreative Minds: Imagination in Philosophy and Psychology*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2002.

<sup>6</sup> KEARNEY, Richard. *Poetics of Imagining: Modern to Postmodern*. New York : Fordham University Press, 1998, p. 142.

focus on imagination which shapes our self-perception and helps us to interpret the world around us. This approach shows imagination as connected to language and to the creation of meaning, and Ricoeur is the author who provides his readers with an impressive and useful grasp of imagination in this context.

## 1.1. Clarifying the Term

Although imagination is dealt with in numerous books and essays by Paul Ricoeur, it is not possible to find any extensive systematic treatise concerning the definition of the term. The author often shows imagination in different contexts and describes it with regard to narration, symbol, metaphor or human action. However, as Kearney observes, it looks as if Ricoeur was reluctant to devote a more extensive work to the elucidation of the term as such. In one of his most comprehensive studies of the theme called “Imagination in Discourse and in Action,” Ricoeur admits that “a philosophical investigation into the problem of imagination cannot but encounter, right from the start, a series of obstacles, paradoxes, and stumbling blocks.”<sup>7</sup>

On the other hand, it is also true that “Ricoeur’s tentative and always provisional probing of a poetic hermeneutic of imagination represents...the ultimate, if discreet, agenda of his philosophical project.”<sup>8</sup> That is why the attempt to give a clear definition of imagination according to Ricoeur is both welcome and demanding, and, even though we are going to try to explain the term in the best possible way, it is still necessary to be aware of the fact that the following study is rather like the pieces of jigsaw from Ricoeur’s work, which is more about the role of imagination rather than about what imagination actually is. Anyway, for our needs an exact definition is not necessary, but what we really need to delimit is the way in which imagination is active in our lives and how it can be relevant to Christian faith and theology.

As it stands, let us start with Ricoeur’s description of imagination from his essay “The Bible and the Imagination,” where he characterizes the term according to two important traits:

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<sup>7</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*. London: Continuum, 2008, s. 165.

<sup>8</sup> KEARNEY, Richard. *Poetics of Imagining*, p. 143.

I want to plead for a concept of the imagination that will highlight two traits that are usually misconceived by philosophy. First, imagination can be described as a rule-govern form of invention or, in other terms, as a norm-govern productivity. This is how Kant conceived imagination in his *Critique of Judgment* by coordination the free play of the imagination and the form of the understanding in a teleology that had no goal beyond itself. Next the imagination can be considered as the power of giving form to human experience or, to take up again an expression I used in *The Rule of Metaphor*, as the power of redescribing reality.<sup>9</sup>

Firstly, our task is to describe what actually “a rule-govern form of invention or...a norm-govern productivity” means. In the Kantian way, Ricoeur distinguishes between productive and reproductive function of imagination. The later concerns the field of psychology and does not have cognitive function whereas the former is bound to philosophical reflection. Kant explains the difference in the following way:

Imagination (*facultas imaginandi*), as the faculty of intuitions, even of an object that is not itself present, is either productive, viz., a faculty of original presentation of the latter (*exhibitio originaria*), which consequently precedes experience; or reproductive, a faculty of derivative presentation (*exhibition derivative*), which brings back to the mind an empirical intuition one has already had.<sup>10</sup>

In the interpretation of Paul Ricoeur, productive imagination is tied to verbal expression. Language is the way of giving a form to the world around us, and that is why verbal imagination is the faculty of cognition. Non-verbal imagination would correspond to reproductive imagination, but, as we will see later, it is not possible to draw a clear line between these two.

As it was mentioned above, the method to place language to the center of the discussion about imagination is the particularity of Ricoeur’s approach. The author thus intends to focus on the productive imagination and reproductive imagination is put

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<sup>9</sup> RICOEUR, Paul — WALLACE, Mark I. (ed.). *Figuring the Sacred : Religion, Narrative, and Imagination*. Minneapolis : Fortress, 1995, p. 144.

<sup>10</sup> KANT, Immanuel — LOUDEN, Robert B. (eds). *Antropology from a Pragmatic Point of View*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006, p. 60.

off.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, Richard Kearney emphasizes that “the imagination needs images. Without any visual aspect, the verbal imagination would remain an invisible productivity.”<sup>12</sup> On the other hand, Ricoeur simultaneously assumes that “we see images only insofar as we first hear them.”<sup>13</sup> That is why he chooses to approach the topic of imagination from the point of language. Since verbal expression is also the core of theological expression, the emphasis of the verbal corresponds to the approach of the whole thesis, which is going to focus mainly on the language of theology and faith, although non-verbal expression cannot be neglected as well.

One of the most significant features of the productive imagination is the fact that it is essential for human understanding since it “has a synthetic function. It connects understanding and intuition by engendering syntheses that are intellectual and intuitive at the same time.”<sup>14</sup> Imagination is thus not only an irreplaceable faculty for understanding the surrounding world, but it is indispensable also for understanding ourselves. That is why the topic of imagination spurs a discussion on the field of theology, which deals with human self-understanding in relation to transcendent God.

The second trait of imagination is closely connected to the first one. Imagination is understood as a tool for “re-describing reality,” which means that thanks to imagination we summarize, explicate, interconnect, symbolize or rationalize our experience in order to give a comprehensive form to it because we want to grasp the meaning of our lives and communicate our experience with other people. In this way, we create stories, read some words and objects as symbols of invisible entities or we are able to connect two dissimilar things by the means of metaphor. What is more, thanks to the fictive worlds we create in our minds, we open ourselves to a number of new possibilities. In other words, we re-describe our reality, which enables us to view our life from a different perspective.

A perfect example of these two traits of imagination is, according to Ricoeur, a narrative. Narratives represent a rule-governed productivity “to the extent that their submission to narrative codes testifies to the encoded character of their invention, and where their abundance attests to the ludic character of this rule-governed generation.”<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Cf. KEARNEY, Richard. *Poetics of Imagining*, p. 158 -159.

<sup>12</sup> KEARNEY, Richard. *Poetics of Imagining*, p. 159.

<sup>13</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *From Text to Action*, p. 170.

<sup>14</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Time and Narrative*. 3. vol. Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. 68.

<sup>15</sup> RICOEUR, Paul — WALLACE, Mark I. (ed.). *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 145.

Narratives also “offer a remarkable example of the conjunction between fiction and redescription.”<sup>16</sup>

That is why a narrative perspective is the starting point of the following analysis, which hopes to clarify the meaning of the preceding sketch. From the level of a text we are going to proceed to a metaphor, which is basically the level of a sentence, and finally several lines will be devoted to a symbol, that is to the level of individual words. After that, we could proceed to the important question of the relationship between imagination and action.

Finally, it should be noted that this paper is going to focus mainly on the individual level of imagination. However, Ricoeur is interested also in social imagination, which includes the themes of the relation between tradition and innovation and of the tension between ideology and utopia. If we intended to include also social dimension in our study, the topic would be too broad and it would be impossible to deal with it within the scope of this paper. That is why the theme had to be restricted to the role of imagination in the life of an individual so social imagination, both in Ricoeur’s theory and in theology, is an open field for further study.

## **1.2. Imagination, Time and Narrative**

Time is a basic dimension of human life, and, as we know from our common experience, the way we perceive it does not correspond to the way it is measured by physics or historiography. A special sensitivity of this fact is shown, for example, in the work of Virginia Woolf, whose narratives either stretch or condense according to individual perception of events by her characters. For instance, her novel *Mrs. Dalloway* describes just one single day in the life of the protagonist, but it is able to encompass her whole world. Therefore, human time is not the objective time which is measured by minutes, hours and days, but the physical time is always redescrbed by the person who perceives it.

As William Lynch says, time

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<sup>16</sup> RICOEUR, Paul — WALLACE, Mark I. (ed.). *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 145.

is a succession of pure instants, each incredibly small and incredibly brief, each of which can itself be broken down into even briefer parts. In each of these instants nothing survives of the past; no moment of the present can be made to stay, and there are no resources in either the present or the past that can totally dictate the character of a single instant in the future.<sup>17</sup>

The only way how to capture this flow of time is the imaginative way, which is able to unify these disparate moments into narratives of life by the means of productive imagination.

In Ricoeur's theory we can isolate two principal roles of a narrative, which corresponds to the structure of this subchapter. Firstly, as we are essentially connected to the flow of time, our identity cannot be grasped in one moment, but it is best expressed by a narrative of our life. The second role of narrative is closely connected to the first one because we use the means of both fictive and real narratives to understand the world around and thus enrich our self perception. In this way, Ricoeur shows that imagination belongs to the basic nature of man, who can be thus described as an imaginative being.

### **1.2.1. Human Identity as a Story**

In his *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur expresses his agreement with Hannah Arendt that human identity can be best expressed by the narrative means:

To state the identity of an individual or a community is to answer the question, "Who did this?" "Who is the agent, the author?" We first answer this question by naming someone, that is, by designating them with a proper name. But what is the basis for the permanence of this proper name? What justifies our taking the subject of an action, so designated by his, her, or its proper name, as the same throughout a life that stretches from birth to death? The answer has to be narrative.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> LYNCH, William F.. *Christ and Apollo*, p. 45-46.

<sup>18</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Time and Narrative*, p. 68.

Simply speaking, when we want to introduce somebody, it is not sufficient to describe his or her appearance or try to capture it by any kind of generalization, but we have to tell his or her story. Ricoeur underlines that “without the recourse to narration, the problem of personal identity would in fact be condemned to an antinomy with no solution.”<sup>19</sup> Human identity is subjected to the flow of time and it cannot be arrested.

In order to show the necessary role of narrative imagination for determining human identity, the author distinguishes between “identity understood in the sense of being the same (*idem*) [and] identity understood in the sense of oneself as self-same ...(*ipse*).”<sup>20</sup> The former identity is abstract and ungraspable. Although it is trying to capture human identity firmly without the limitations given by the changes caused by time, it is in a result “nothing more than a substantial illusion, whose elimination merely brings to light a pure manifold of cognitions, emotions, and volitions.”<sup>21</sup> This problem disappears when this notion of identity is substituted by self-same identity, which does not dwell in abstract notions but expresses who a particular person is in his or her concreteness.

The self-same identity is an identity perceived in its dynamics, mutability and temporal dimension which “conforms to the model of dynamic identity arising from the poetic composition of a narrative text.”<sup>22</sup> A person lives in unstoppable presence. Therefore, narrative imagination is what helps to unify the disparate stories this person experienced in the flow of ungraspable time and simultaneously warrants that the identity of the person does not essentially change even though he or she is once a baby, then an adult and finally an old man or woman since the story of life encompasses its all stages. In addition, narrative identity opens the possibility to communicate who we are to the others.

Expressing human identity by a life story thus means that the identity is constantly changing and developing. The presence, which is gradually becoming past, is conditioned by the stories a person experienced before and by his or her wishes and intentions pointing to the future. Human identity is thus a never-ending reinterpretation of past events in the light of new experience and intentions.<sup>23</sup> This is an important moment for theology as also the act of conversion can be described in this perspective.

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<sup>19</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Time and Narrative*, p. 246.

<sup>20</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Time and Narrative*, p. 246.

<sup>21</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Time and Narrative*, p. 246.

<sup>22</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Time and Narrative*, p. 246.

<sup>23</sup> Cf. KEARNEY, Richard. Narrative Imagination: Between Ethics and Poetics. In KEARNEY, Richard (ed.). *Paul Ricoeur: the Hermeneutics of Action*. London: Sage Publications, 1996, p. 171-190, p. 181.

As Ricoeur concludes, “the subject then appears both as a reader and the writer of its own life, as Proust would have it.... This refiguration makes this life itself a cloth woven of stories told.”<sup>24</sup>

### 1.2.2. Facing fictive worlds

Another significant theme, which is going to be described with regard to narrativity but concerns imagination in general, is the question of the connection between imagination and reality. It is actually a question which comes to our mind when we take part in any discussion concerning the role of imagination because imagination is often perceived as belonging to the realm of fiction, which has very little in common with real life. Imagination is often associated with something unreal and untrue, and in consequence it seems to be irrational or unscientific. When we are thus trying to show the relevance of imagination on the field of theology, does it not mean that theology would be a kind of pseudoscience, which is based on illusions and phantasms? The paragraphs above tried to show the significance of narrative imagination for grasping human identity in its mutability. Nevertheless, it still does not answer the question of the relation between reality, fiction and redescription. The stories in which we live and which determine our identity are both real and fictive. The example of fictive stories determining the course of our everyday life is our projection of the future, which is decisive about our present action since we adjust our presence according to future promises, fears or dreams. Therefore, it is necessary to ask what the role of fiction in human life is.

Ricoeur criticizes philosophical accounts of imagination which assume that image is nothing more than a shadow of reality. According to his notion, the reverse is true: “The paradox of fiction is that setting perception aside is the condition for augmenting our vision of things.”<sup>25</sup> Fiction is thus the means how to redescribe reality in the light of new possibilities, which would be impossible to approach in other ways. The area of fictive narratives offers to the author and to the reader the opportunity of non-

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<sup>24</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Time and Narrative*, p. 246.

<sup>25</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *From Text to Action*, p. 171.

involvement, in which “we try out new ideas, new values, new ways of being in the world.”<sup>26</sup>

Ricoeur suggests that fiction in poetic discourse is something like a model in scientific discourse: “The trait common to models and to fictions is their *heuristic* force, that is to say, their capacity to open and unfold new dimensions of reality by means of our suspension of belief in an earlier description.”<sup>27</sup> In other words,

whether an ancient tragedy, a modern drama or novel, a fable or legend, the narrative structure provides fiction with the techniques of abbreviation, articulation, and condensation by which the effect of iconic augmentation is obtained, an effect that has been described elsewhere in painting and in the other plastic arts.<sup>28</sup>

If this statement was not true and the work of verbal art would not be tied to real life and real human experience, it would be difficult to justify the role of Biblical poems and narratives in theology and faith. Nevertheless, Ricoeur claims that “it is within the structure of the narrative itself that we can best apprehend this intersection between the text and life that engenders the imagination according to the Bible.”<sup>29</sup> It shows that narrative imagination is not something additional as it comes to Christian theology or faith; a narration of real or fictive Biblical stories occupies the central place of this reflection. Going back to Ricoeur’s simile, we could say that the stories of the Bible are models, and in the course of history these models are constructed over and over again from the material accessible in various epochs and cultures.

Focusing again on the main line of thought of this subchapter, Ricoeur emphasizes that it is necessary to distinguish between narration as an act and narration as a structure. He says that “we must accord narration the scope of a specific speech act, possessing an original illocutionary and referential force.”<sup>30</sup> This delimitation uncovers the core of our question. If we want to advocate the legitimate place of both fictive and real narrations in the realm of true testimony, we have to discuss the problem whether the language of fiction has any referential power.

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<sup>26</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *From Text to Action*, p. 170.

<sup>27</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *From Text to Action*, p. 171.

<sup>28</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *From Text to Action*, p. 172.

<sup>29</sup> RICOEUR, Paul — WALLACE, Mark I. (eds.). *Figuring the Sacred*, p. 146.

<sup>30</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *From Text to Action*, p. 172.

Not only Ricoeur but also the history of art criticism shows that positive affirmation is not self-evident. “It may seem,” he says, “that, in its poetic usage, language is concerned only with itself and so lacks reference.”<sup>31</sup> However, this is not the answer which is satisfactory. The author continues to suggest his own solution of this problem:

An examination of the power of affirmation unfurled by poetic language shows that it is not only meaning that is split by the metaphorical process but the reference as well. What is abolished is the reference of ordinary discourse applied to the objects that respond to one of our interests, our first-order interest in manipulation and control. When this interest and the sphere of signification it commands are suspended, our profound belonging to the life-world is allowed to be and the ontological tie of our being to other beings and to being is allowed to be said by poetic discourse. What is thus allowed to be said is what I am calling the second-order reference, which in reality is the primordial reference.<sup>32</sup>

Even though the meaning of this quotation is going to be illuminated in the subchapter devoted to metaphor more in detail, this account has considerable consequences for the theory of fiction. With regard to the differentiation of first-order and second-order reference, Ricoeur argues that fiction

is directed elsewhere, even nowhere; but because it designates the nonplace in relation to all reality, it can indirectly sight this reality, following what I should like to call a new ‘reference-effect’... This new reference-effect is nothing more than the power of fiction to redescribe reality.<sup>33</sup>

In order to choose an example from the field of theology, we could recall the parables of Jesus. The parables are fictional narratives, that is to say that they lack the first-order reference. On the other hand, they allow the listeners or the readers to step out from their reality and sight it indirectly through the perspective of a fictive story. The story does not remain on the level of fictive worlds, but it shows new possible

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<sup>31</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *From Text to Action*, p. 170.

<sup>32</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *From Text to Action*, p. 170-171.

<sup>33</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *From Text to Action*, p. 171.

versions of the real. In this way, the story creates a new “ontological tie” and thus the second-order/primordial reference is established. The fictive story thus becomes an experience for the audience so that they can redescribe their life according to it.

The fact that poetry and narration has a referential power is a basic presupposition of this work, without which the whole thesis would fall apart. As we have shown, it is also a presupposition which is applied in our everyday reading of the Scripture.

In summary, narrative is one of the dimensions in which imagination proves to be significant as a power essential for human understanding and therefore also a power for grasping Christian identity. Nevertheless, narration is only one of possible perspectives how to treat imagination in this way. Let us thus proceed with Ricoeur’s analysis to the level of sentences and individual words; that is to say, to his study of imagination in relation to metaphor and symbol. As we will see, narration, metaphor and symbol are not isolated areas of human imagination, but they complement each other and overlap in many aspects.

### **1.3. Metaphor**

The theory of metaphor is a next important topic of Ricoeur’s scholarly career, and it reflects and complements his theory of narration. The reason is that Ricoeur does not regard these two as separate entities, but narration is also essentially based on metaphorical imagination. In his *Interpretation Theory*, Ricoeur argues:

The theory of metaphor comes down to us from the ancient rhetoricians, but this theory will not fulfill the role we expect of it without one important revision. This revision, briefly stated, shifts the problem of metaphor from the semantics of the word to the semantics of the sentence.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press, 1976, p. 47.

If we approach metaphor from the point of view of a sentence, the main difference of a text and metaphor seems to be in their length. A metaphor could be called a work in miniature since both text and metaphor belong to the same category of discourse.<sup>35</sup> In the history of literary criticism, metaphor was often thought of as “a mere embellishment, a rhetorical flourish, a linguistic device, a way of pulling the wool over the eyes of the reader or listener.”<sup>36</sup> Nevertheless, a significant role of metaphor for language and human imagination has been recognized by numerous recent scholars and artists. For instance, Bedell Stanford says:

Metaphor is the vital principle in all living languages. It is the verbal expression of the process and products of the imagination with its powers of creative synthesis.... Metaphor is thus the dynamic, synthetic and creative force in language.<sup>37</sup>

What is more, Stanford’s account helps us view the theme of metaphor immediately in the light of Ricoeur’s notion imagination. For him a metaphor reflects Kantian perception of imagination as a “norm-govern productivity,” since he says that a metaphor is “the verbal expression of the process and products of the imagination” and he classifies it as “the vital principle in all living language.” In the same way as Kant, he underlines that metaphorical imagination has a synthetic function, which, as Ricoeur adds, gives “form to human experience.” However, in his account, Ricoeur pushes the theory of metaphor further, showing that it does not only modify our perception of the world, but it is also an ontological event constituting our reality. Nevertheless, before developing these thoughts further, let us start with the basic description of the term. After that we can proceed to the reflection of the problem concerning the relevance of metaphorical utterance in scientific discourse and, finally, the relation between a metaphorical statement and reality.

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<sup>35</sup> Cf. RICOEUR, Paul. Metaphor and the Main Problem of Hermeneutics. *New Literary History*, vol. 6, no. 1, p. 95-110, p. 97.

<sup>36</sup> AVIS, Paul. *God and the Creative Imagination*, p. 93.

<sup>37</sup> STANFORD, W. B. *Greek Metaphor: Studies in Theory and Practice*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1936, p. 100.

### 1.3.1. Ricoeur's Basic Notion of Metaphor

In his reflection of metaphor, Ricoeur decides to take a fresh start and not to continue in the line of thought of classical rhetoric, which was a dominant voice for centuries. Together with other modern authors, such as I.A. Richards, Max Black, Monroe Beardsley, Colin Turbayne and Philip Wheelwright, he does not find traditional notion of metaphor sufficient for explaining the main features and functions of this figure of speech. At first, let us start with Ricoeur's six-point summary of a traditional view, which he is going to question later:

- (1) Metaphor is a trope, a figure of discourse that concerns denomination.
- (2) It represents the extension of the meaning of a name through deviation from the literal meaning of words.
- (3) The reason for this deviation is resemblance.
- (4) The function of resemblance is to ground the substitution of the figurative meaning of a word in place of the literal meaning, which could have been used in the same place.
- (5) Hence the substituted signification does not represent any semantic innovation. We can translate a metaphor, i.e., replace the literal meaning for which the figurative word is a substitute. In effect, substitution plus restitution equals zero.
- (6) Since it does not represent a semantic innovation, a metaphor does not furnish any new information about reality. This is why it can be counted as one of the emotive functions of discourse.<sup>38</sup>

The last two points stating that a metaphor does not add anything new to the word it substitutes can be rejected only when we question the first point, which restricts a metaphor only to the level of denomination. This is actually the reason why Ricoeur emphasises that our thinking about metaphors should not start on the level of individual words, but it should focus on the level of sentences. Referring to I.A. Richards, Ricoeur underlines that a metaphor is the result of a tension between a tenor and vehicle, which means that before speaking about a metaphorical word, it is necessary to speak about a

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<sup>38</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Interpretation Theory*, p. 49.

metaphorical utterance.<sup>39</sup> If we neglected the fact that a metaphor works on the level of a sentence and restricted our analysis only to individual words as it happens in classical rhetoric, we would omit one important semantic observation, which Ricoeur states in *The Rule of Metaphor*: “As a lexeme, the word is a difference in the lexical code .... As a part of discourse, it bears a part of the meaning that belongs to the entire statement.”<sup>40</sup> If we did not take this thought into account, it would never be possible to speak about semantic innovation, which is one of the most important aspects of Ricoeur’s theory.

Another important fact which Ricoeur underlines is that “metaphorical utterance is really not something that occurs between two terms in utterance, but rather between two opposed interpretations of the utterance.”<sup>41</sup> What is more, the author points out that a metaphor is a result of absurdity emerging from the tension of the two interpretations, which is revealed when we want to interpret a metaphor literary: “The angelus is not blue, if blue is a color; sorrow is not a mantle, if the mantle is a garment made of cloth.”<sup>42</sup> Ricoeur speaks about the process of self-destruction of words and a semantic shock, which leads to the extension of meaning, in which literal interpretation would not make sense. In *The Rule of Metaphor*, the author thus concludes that a metaphor “turns imagination into the place where the figurative meaning emerges in the interplay of identity and difference.”<sup>43</sup>

In relation to the preceding analysis, Ricoeur arrives at a description of metaphor, which marks the clash between the above described classical perception and contemporary view:

In this sense, a metaphor is an instantaneous creation, a semantic innovation which has no status in already established language and which only exists because of the attribution of an unusual or an unexpected predication. Metaphor therefore is more like the resolution of an enigma than a simple association based on resemblance; it is constituted by the resolution of a semantic dissonance.<sup>44</sup>

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<sup>39</sup> Cf. RICOEUR, Paul. *Interpretation Theory*, p. 50.

<sup>40</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor: the Creation of Meaning in Language*. London: Routledge, 1978, p. 157.

<sup>41</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Interpretation Theory*, p. 50.

<sup>42</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Interpretation Theory*, p. 50.

<sup>43</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 199-200.

<sup>44</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Interpretation Theory*, p. 52.

Metaphor is therefore something more than a mere flourishing of speech. It creates new meanings, enriches the language and opens human imagination to new ideas. In case of metaphors, the power which produces new meanings does not spark from literal level, but it is the role of imagination to create semantic innovation and discover new insights.<sup>45</sup>

### 1.3.2. Metaphor as a Model

It is an important feature of Ricoeur's theory of metaphor that he analyses the theme from several point of views: rhetorical, semantical and hermeneutical, which is actually a method adopted in his leading study *The Rule of Metaphor*. In the previous chapter, we have briefly explained the way in which a metaphor leads to semantic innovation, and how it works as a sentence. In the following lines we are going to focus on the relation between a metaphor and hermeneutics to propose an answer to a question of metaphorical reference. In order to answer this question we have to go back to the idea introduced in the chapter devoted to fictive narrations, where Ricoeur speaks about the similarity between narratives and scientific models. This idea is going to be in the centre of the following reflection.

In *The Rule of Metaphor*, Ricoeur refers to an essay by Max Black called "Models and Archetypes," in which the author formulates his thoughts concerning the perception of a metaphor as a model for poetic language. Ricoeur finds this essay useful for demonstrating the relation between metaphorical language and reality:

The central argument is that, with respect to the relation to reality, metaphor is to poetic language what the model is to scientific language. Now in scientific language, the model is essentially a heuristic instrument that seeks, by means of fiction, to break down an inadequate interpretation and to lay the way for a new, more adequate interpretation. In the language of Mary Hesse, another author close to Black, the model is an instrument of redescription.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Cf. KEARNEY, Richard. *Poetics of Imagining*, p. 160.

<sup>46</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 283.

Ricoeur continues that models are not the means of justification or scientific proof, but their purpose is discovery, which is not “without authentic epistemological interest but rather involves a cognitive process, a rational method with its own canons and principles.”<sup>47</sup>

In the light of Black’s theory, Ricoeur distinguishes three types of models: scale models, analogue models and theoretical models.<sup>48</sup>

Scale models stand for the models of the lowest level. It is for example a miniature of a ship or an enlarged model of a mosquito. The purpose of these models is to demonstrate an appearance and function of the thing they imitate. According to their properties, it is possible to learn the properties of the original. Nevertheless, some features are relevant and some are not. As Black shows, the example of this kind of a model in semiotics is an icon.

The second type called analogue models is exemplified by “hydraulic models of economic systems, or the use of electrical circuits in computers.”<sup>49</sup> These models need a special interpretation. They are similar to the original not according to their visible features but according to their structures.

Theoretical models belong to the third type. Ricoeur describes them in the following way:

One cannot point at them, nor are they to be constructed. They are not things at all; rather, they introduce a new language, like a dialect or idiom, in which the original is described without being constructed. An example would be Maxwell’s ‘representation of an electrical field in terms of the properties of an imaginary incompressible fluid.’ The imaginary medium is here nothing more than a mnemonic device for grasping mathematical relationships. The important thing is not that one has something to view mentally, but that one can operate on an object that on *the one hand is better known* and in this sense more familiar, and on the other hand is full of implications and in this sense *rich at the level of hypotheses*.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 283.

<sup>48</sup> Cf. RICOEUR, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 284.

<sup>49</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 284.

<sup>50</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 284-285. Italics mine.

It means that the nature of theoretical models is such that they do not operate with something unknown; they present to us things with which we are familiar. In other words, they refer to our previous experience, and thus they enable us to operate with them according to our principles. As they are “rich at the level of hypotheses,” theoretical models offer us various ways how to manipulate with them, and by this means we can discover something new.

The question remains what the interpretation criteria of models, mainly of theoretical models specifically, are. The most important observation in this regard is that “the model’s only properties are those assigned to it by language convention, beyond any influence of a real construction.”<sup>51</sup> The key idea is that in the case of models, we do not speak about the correspondence between the original domain and something constructed but about the correspondence between the original domain and something described. The original domain is thus redescribed by a new language, which helps to grasp other dimensions of the original than the areas of purely logical deduction. In this way, a model opens the field to new implications and hypotheses so that it becomes a tool leading to new discovery. Ricoeur explains that “to remove the model from the logic of discovery, or even to reduce it to a provisional measure as the best substitute available for direct deduction, is ultimately to reduce the logic of discovery itself to a deductive procedure.”<sup>52</sup>

The epistemological impact of these ideas is summarized in the quotation by Marry Hesse that “the deductive model of scientific explanation should be modified and supplemented by a view of theoretical explanation as metaphoric redescription of the domain of the *explanandum*.”<sup>53</sup> Ricoeur underlines two aspects of this statement. The first one is the reference to explanation:

If the model, like metaphor, introduces a new language, its description equals explanation. This implies that the model operates precisely on the deductivist epistemological plane, modifying and completing the criteria of deductibility of scientific explanation as spelled out, for example, by Hempel and Oppenheim. According to these criteria, it must be possible to deduce the *explanandum* from the *explanans*, which must contain at least one general law that is not redundant

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<sup>51</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 285.

<sup>52</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 285.

<sup>53</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 286.

for the deduction; it must not yet have been empirically falsified; it must be predictive. Recourse to metaphorical redescription is a consequence of the impossibility of obtaining a strictly deductive relationship between *explanans* and *explanandum*.<sup>54</sup>

Together with Marry Hesse, Ricoeur questions the possibility of purely deductive science and highlights the necessity of metaphorical discourse in scientific method. Purely deductive language is not sufficient as even science tends to recourse to models in order “to interpret rules of correspondence in terms of extension of the language of observation through metaphorical usage.”<sup>55</sup>

The second word of Hesse’s statement which Ricoeur emphasises is the word “redescription.” He refuses an argument that a model is only a physic aid in the same way as a metaphor cannot be reduced just to an ornament of speech.

Ricoeur points out that what corresponds to the idea of a model best is not an isolated metaphorical statement, which is too short and reduced, but it is rather an extended metaphor, that is, for instance, a tale or allegory.<sup>56</sup> Root metaphors are usually parts of expanded metaphors, and the meaning of isolated metaphors is usually identified in the context of wider work. This is the reason why he prefers to speak about metaphorical networks. The term “metaphorical network” is used in a similar meaning to the word “archetype” from the title of Black’s essay.

Referring to Aristotle, Ricoeur notices that the theory of models mirrors Aristotelian thought concerning the relationship between *muthos* and *mimêsis*, which corresponds to modern terminology of the relation between heuristic fiction and redescription. He explains that

metaphoricity is a trait not only of *lexis* but of *muthos* itself; and, as in the case of models, this metaphoricity consists in describing a less known domain – human reality – in the light of relationships within a fictitious but better known domain – the tragic tale – utilizing all the strengths of ‘systematic deployability’ contained in that tale.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 286.

<sup>55</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 286.

<sup>56</sup> Cf. RICOEUR, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 287.

<sup>57</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 289.

Aristotle's *mimêsis* is in this light understood as a redescription rather than a copy. In contrast to history, which is often accidental, *muthos* teaches us to see our life "as." As Richard Kearney points out, "seeing-as plays the role of a schema which unites the *empty* concept and *blind* impression;" metaphorical imagination thus works on the borderline between thought and experience.<sup>58</sup> It is an important moment not only for scientific thinking but also for human way of perceiving the world in general.

However, it is important to note that Ricoeur's theory of redescription does not concern only epic poetry, but it is also lyric poetry which plays an active role in the redescription of reality. Instead of "seeing-as" he speaks, in this case, about "feeling-as." According to the author, "the feeling articulated by the poem is no less heuristic than the tragic tale."<sup>59</sup> This ability "to see as" or "to feel as" is possible only with the help of poetic imagination, which also enables us to notice similarity in two dissimilar ideas and thus enrich the world of human perception.<sup>60</sup>

### 1.3.3. Creation through Discovery

In the previous study we introduced Ricoeur's basic approach concerning the nature of a metaphorical statement. We have shown that a metaphor does not serve only as a decoration of a speech, but it opens the door to new meanings and discoveries, which makes a metaphorical imagination a necessary complement of purely deductive knowledge since poetic imagination is active in the redescription of our reality, and by these means it makes reality more accessible and understandable. Nevertheless, this is not the whole story. Let us hence continue to ask with Ricoeur: "Are we not ready to recognize in the power of the imagination, no longer simply the faculty of deriving 'images' from our sensory experience, but the capacity for letting new worlds shape our understanding of ourselves?"<sup>61</sup> It is true that we have partly answered the question in the previous subchapter, which derived the bases of Ricoeur's theory of redescription and the ability of 'seeing-as' from the theory of models according to Max Black.

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<sup>58</sup> KEARNEY, Richard. *Poetics of Imagining*, p. 159.

<sup>59</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 290.

<sup>60</sup> Cf. KEARNEY, Richard. *Poetics of Imagining*, p. 158-159.

<sup>61</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. Metaphor and the Central Problem of Hermeneutics. In THOMPSON, J. B. (ed.). *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981, p. 181.

However, we are going further back to the chapter devoted to narration, which touched the topic from a different perspective. What the following lines are going to focus on is actually the nature of the reality reference of poetic imagination and the question if this mirror of reality can be considered to be true.

In the beginning of the chapter of *The Rule of Metaphor* devoted the problem of metaphorical truth, Ricoeur reminds the reader again of the fact that a metaphorical statement is characterized by a tension between tenor and vehicle. Let us remember also the second tension on which a metaphorical statement is based – the tension between a literal and metaphorical interpretation, which gives the sense to a literary nonsensical statement. The last tension which Ricoeur identifies is the tension in the copula; it means the tension “between identity and difference in the interplay of resemblance.”<sup>62</sup>

The nature of the tension in the copula leads us to the investigation of the exact meaning of the verb ‘to be’ in a metaphorical statement. Ricoeur claims that when a poet says, for instance, that “nature is a temple,” the copula has not only relational function, but it has existential value: “It implies besides, by means of the predicative relationship, that *what is* is redescribed; it says *that* things really are this way.”<sup>63</sup> The fact that the verb “to be” has not only relational function but also existential is the prerequisite of justifying Ricoeur’s concept of metaphorical truth. Ricoeur’s basic hypothesis is that the copula of metaphor “is” simultaneously implicitly includes “is not,” which mirrors the tension of the sameness and difference. Some of the naïve and uncritical concepts he identifies do not respect this tension, but they either ignore “is not,” or reduce “is” merely to “as if.”<sup>64</sup>

The nature of metaphorical reference to reality is, however, explicitly described almost ten years later in Ricoeur’s *Time and Narrative*. He refers to his thesis from *The Rule of Metaphor* and argues that

it implies that poetic texts, too, speak *of* the world, even though they may not do so in a descriptive fashion. Metaphorical reference, it will be recalled, consists in the fact that the effacement of descriptive reference—an effacement that, as a first approximation, makes language refer to itself—is revealed to be, in a second

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<sup>62</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 292.

<sup>63</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 292.

<sup>64</sup> Cf. RICOEUR, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 294.

approximation, the negative condition for freeing a more radical power of reference to those aspects of our being-in-the-world that cannot be talked about directly.<sup>65</sup>

As Ricoeur points out, there are realities which are not accessible by description and deduction, but some realities can be reached only by poetic imagination. What is more, the function of imagination in poetry or myth is the “disclosure of unprecedented worlds, an opening onto possible worlds which transcend the limits of our actual world.”<sup>66</sup> Because of its ability to approach mystery, metaphorical language shows to be an irreplaceable tool for talking about God.

It would not be possible to establish any persuasive link between a metaphor and reality unless the copula “to be” between the tenor and vehicle becomes metaphorized as well. The tension between the similar and dissimilar with regard to the function of the copula, which Ricoeur introduces in *The Rule of Metaphor*, does not concern only literal level but it is also topical for ontological level. In other words, it has existential function. If Ricoeur underlines that this metaphorical “is” should imply also “is not,” it means that the verb “to be” becomes metaphorized also in reality. The tension between the similarity and difference still remains, but a new ontological tie is established. It means that if a poet says that “nature is a temple,” a new link between “nature” and “temple” is discovered and the human language is enriched and thus also our sense of reality: “as the conjunction of fiction and redescription suggests, poetic feeling itself also develops an experience of reality in which invention and discovery cease being opposed and where creation and revelation coincide.”<sup>67</sup> That is why metaphorical imagination stands behind the creation of new meanings and opens the door towards a creation which is simultaneously a discovery, because metaphorical “seeing-as” implies also ontological “being-as.”<sup>68</sup> This line of thought also explains Ricoeur’s statement that “we see images only insofar as we first hear them.”<sup>69</sup>

As “seeing-as” implies “being-as,” metaphorical imagination joins visual aspect with the verbal. In other words “saying” is complemented by “seeing.”<sup>70</sup> Kearney

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<sup>65</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Time and Narrative I*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984, p. 80.

<sup>66</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. Myth as a Bearer of Possible Worlds. In KEARNEY, Richard (ed.). *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984, p. 44.

<sup>67</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 291.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. RICOEUR, Paul. *Time and Narrative I*, p. 80.

<sup>69</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *From Text to Action*, p. 170.

<sup>70</sup> Cf. KEARNEY, Richard. *Poetics of Imagining*, p. 159.

explains that “‘seeing-as’ provides a key to the sensible aspect of poetic imagination. It holds sense and image together in an intuitive manner. It selects from the quasi-sensory mass of imagery, producing a certain semantic order.”<sup>71</sup> It means that metaphorical imagination is not only a thought but also an experience.

Someone could object that metaphorical imagination does not factually change the real world around and stays only in the minds of people who perceive it. However, I would reply that the concept of reality outside human mind is a philosophical pitfall in which it is very easy to get caught. It is true that we can suppose that the world exists also outside the reach of our perception, but it is only a human mind, which gives the form to individual objects and events. We find new relationship between them, explain them and use them for our purposes. The basic tool thanks to which we are able to do all these things is a language, which is the primary prerequisite of grasping the world around. It does not concern only the language of science but poetic language as well. In *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur formulates his attitude to this problem:

The concept of horizon and world does not just concern descriptive references but also nondescriptive references, those of poetic diction. To take up again one of my earlier statements, I will say that, for me, the world is the whole set of references opened by every sort of descriptive or poetic text I have read, interpreted, and loved. To understand these texts is to interpolate among the predicates of our situation all those meanings that, from a simple environment (*Umwelt*), make a world (*Welt*). Indeed, we owe a large part of the enlarging of our horizon of existence to poetic works.<sup>72</sup>

#### **1.4. Imagination and Symbol**

The last point of view from which we are going to investigate productive imagination is the area of a symbol. As we are going to show, Ricoeur’s reflection of a symbol is closely connected to his theory of metaphor, but it simultaneously pushes the discussion of imagination further as it steps out from a purely linguistic area and

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<sup>71</sup> KEARNEY, Richard. *Poetics of Imagining*, p. 159.

<sup>72</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Time and Narrative I*, p. 80.

reveals the importance of a non-linguistic dimension. In its linguistic aspect, a symbol complements Ricoeur's theory of metaphor while, in its non-linguistic one, it opens the gate towards the introduction of non-verbal imagination.

#### 1.4.1. Semantic Kernel of a Symbol

In his *Interpretation Theory*, Ricoeur shows that the semantic moment of a symbol can be inferred from his theory of metaphor. The tension between literal and metaphorical interpretation of a metaphorical statement serves as a ground for demonstrating the way in which "extension of meaning [is] operative in every symbol."<sup>73</sup> While the result of a metaphor is a semantic shock, which creates new connection between the meanings of seemingly different words and simultaneously establishes new ontological links, the result of a symbol is this extension of meaning. Ricoeur further explains:

Freud's treatment of little Hans' wolf signifies more than we mean when we describe a wolf. The sea in ancient Babylonian myths signifies more than the expanse of water that can be seen from the shore. And a sunrise in a poem by Wordsworth signifies more than a simple meteorological phenomenon.<sup>74</sup>

The phrase "signifies more" is a characteristic feature of a symbol. A symbol always leads to the extended meaning, which is related to the primary one. In other words, a symbolic or secondary signification is always derived from the primary signification, which is in effect "the meaning of a meaning."<sup>75</sup>

In contrast to a metaphor which can be logically grasped as a similarity in the dissimilar, symbols cannot be described so transparently. Ricoeur speaks about a process of assimilation, which stands behind the basic relation between a literal and figurative meaning. The author adds that "in assimilation some things to others it assimilates us to what is thereby signified. This is precisely what makes the theory of

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<sup>73</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Interpretation Theory*, p. 55.

<sup>74</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Interpretation Theory*, p. 55.

<sup>75</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Interpretation Theory*, p. 55.

symbols so fascinating, yet deceiving. All the boundaries are blurred – between the things as well as between the things and ourselves.”<sup>76</sup>

In summary, let us demonstrate the relationship between a symbol and a metaphor is a chart according to Vít Hušek:<sup>77</sup>

	METAPHOR	SYMBOL
1.	tension in the utterance  metaphorical shift	“signify more”  the surplus of meaning
2.	primary and secondary meaning, two interpretations	
3.	secondary meaning is accessible only through the primary	
4.	new categorization of reality	assimilation to the signified

#### 1.4.2. Non-linguistic Stratum of a Symbol

Another typical feature of a symbol is that it contains the connection to the non-linguistic sphere. While metaphor remains on the level of discourse, symbol surpasses into the space of other areas. As Ricoeur comments, “metaphor occurs in the already purified universe of the *logos*, while the symbol hesitates on the dividing line between *bios* and *logos*. It testifies to the primordial rootedness of Discourse in Life. It is born when force and form coincide.”<sup>78</sup> That is why Ricoeur speaks about a bound character of a symbol, which “makes all the difference between a symbol and a metaphor. The latter is a free invention of discourse; the former is bound to the cosmos.”<sup>79</sup> The author identifies three non-linguistic areas to which a symbol is bound. The first is the realm of the sacred, the second is psychoanalysis and the last is poetic symbolism.

Sacred symbols reflect the human ability to interpret the phenomena of the world as a sign of another meaning. These symbols are rooted in non-semantic order of the

<sup>76</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Interpretation Theory*, p. 56.

<sup>77</sup> HUŠEK, Vít. *Symbol ve filosofii Paula Ricoeura*. Svitavy: Trinitas, 2004, p. 72.

<sup>78</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Interpretation Theory*, p. 59.

<sup>79</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Interpretation Theory*, p. 61.

cosmos. What is more, “the preverbal character of such an experience is attested to by the very modulations of space and time as sacred space and sacred time.”<sup>80</sup> Be it the heavens, sun, wind or waters, the primary meaning of these symbols are transcended to refer to “the divine immanent in the hierophanies of life.”<sup>81</sup> The author continues that “within the sacred universe there are not living creatures here and there, but life is everywhere as a sacrality, which permeates everything and which is seen in the movement of the stars, the return to life of vegetation each year, and the alternation of birth and death.”<sup>82</sup>

It is also an area of psychoanalysis where symbolic imagination can be found on the borderline between the linguistic and non-linguistic space. The author identifies this borderline on more levels, e.g. between desire and culture or between instincts and their representation.<sup>83</sup> As Richard Kearney points out, “the dream image shows, in exemplary fashion, how we can say things other than what we are ostensibly saying; how behind direct meanings there are indirect ones.”<sup>84</sup> These oneiric symbols belonging to the area of human psychology are, however, closely connected to the sacred symbols reflecting the cosmic order, because “to manifest the ‘sacred’ on the ‘cosmos’ and to manifest it in the ‘psyche’ is the same thing... Cosmos and psyche are two poles of the same ‘expressivity’: I express myself in expressing the world.”<sup>85</sup>

The last way how symbolic imagination transcends into the non-linguistic area is poetic. Examining the necessary prerequisites of each symbolic language, the first question Ricoeur asks is in which way poetic language is a “bound” language. In contrast to other kinds of discourse which have to follow certain rules, as it is in the case of scientific language, poetic language seems to be without any linguistic constraints and to rely only on the invention and ability of a poet. Ricoeur points out that a poetical world is a hypothetical world in a similar way to the order of mathematics. He adds that “a poet, in short, operates in a hypothetical realm.”<sup>86</sup> In this regard, poetic imagination is liberated. Nevertheless, poetic language becomes bound just because of the same fact it is liberated by. The author explains:

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<sup>80</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Interpretation Theory*, p. 61.

<sup>81</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Interpretation Theory*, p. 61.

<sup>82</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Interpretation Theory*, p. 61.

<sup>83</sup> Cf. HUŠEK, Vít. *Symbol ve filosofii Paula Ricoeura*, p. 73.

<sup>84</sup> KEARNEY, Richard. *Poetics of Imagining*, p. 154.

<sup>85</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *The Symbolism of Evil*. Boston, Mass.: Beacon Press, 1969, p. 12.

<sup>86</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Interpretation Theory*, p. 59.

The poem is bound by what it creates, if the suspension of ordinary discourse and its didactic intention assumes an urgent character for the poet, this is just because the reduction of the referential values of ordinary discourse is the negative condition that allows new configurations expressing the meaning of reality to be brought to language. Through those new configurations new ways of being in the world, of living there, and of projecting our innermost possibilities onto it are also brought to language....What binds poetic discourse, then, is the need to bring to language modes of being that ordinary vision obscures or even represses.<sup>87</sup>

Poetic language is symbolic as it always aims to signify more than ordinary discourse. It has to break and tease common language in order to arrive at new realities which are not possible to be expressed by other means. As we could see in the case of cosmic and oneiric imagination, poetic imagination is not clearly cut off these two, as it “enables us to draw back from both the religious images of cosmology and the dream images of psychoanalysis, disclosing the symbolic function of the image *per se* in its nascent state.”<sup>88</sup>

We can notice that the borderline between symbol and metaphor is rather blurred. Ricoeur shows that metaphors create networks and thus a poem or a narrative can be described also as an extended metaphor. On the other hand, symbols can have the same form as they can be expressed by a myth or a poem too. The author himself admits that the borderline between these two is not clear. The relation between metaphor and symbol can be described rather as a gradual transition from one to another. Ricoeur isolates three main differences between them. While a symbol is bound, metaphor is a free linguistic invention. A symbol is more stable than a metaphor, and metaphor is considered to be more explicit. For our purposes, we do not need to elaborate this complex theme any further, but it is important to remember that there is no clear cut between narratives, metaphors and symbols, but they can be found very near to each other.<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Interpretation Theory*, p. 60.

<sup>88</sup> KEARNEY, Richard. *Poetics of Imagining*, p. 152.

<sup>89</sup> For the elaborated description of the relation between poetic symbols and metaphors see HUŠEK, Vít. *Symbol ve filosofii Paula Ricoeura*, p. 74-78.

## 1.5. Imagination and Action

The last topic which we are going to touch is the problem of the relationship between imagination and action. This question is important for the following theological reflection as well since theology should not stay only on theoretical level, but it should spur the believers to a concrete ethical behaviour. In his essay “Imagination in Discourse and in Action,” Ricoeur claims that “without imagination, there is no action, we shall say. And this is so in several different ways: on the level of projects, on the level of motivations, and on the level of the very power to act.”<sup>90</sup> The main condition of this statement is the fact that imagination should not be perceived from the point of view of the theories of reproductive imagination; we should not suppose that the image is like “a ‘scene’ unfolding in some mental ‘theatre’ before the gaze of an internal ‘spectator.’”<sup>91</sup> Imagination is also not “the cloth out of which we tailor our abstract ideas, our concepts, the basic ingredient of some sort of mental alchemy.”<sup>92</sup> As we have shown in the preceding analysis, Ricoeur’s theory of productive imagination which finds its expression in the language is not static but dynamic. It does not only help us to evoke forgotten experience and objects and show it in new combinations, but it has cognitive function. Thanks to linguistic imagination we interpret the world around us and understand ourselves. What is more it helps us discover new worlds and grasp those areas of understanding which are not accessible in other ways. In the same time, imagination does not dwell in any abstract spheres, but it is concrete and tied to our everyday experience. Only this kind of imagination can lead to concrete action.

As it is mentioned above, imagination opens the door towards fictive worlds, in which we have the opportunity of non-involvement so that we are liberated to try new ways of being in the world. This feature of imagination is involved in projects, where imagination helps us to play with new possibilities of action and try them out. The project borrows “the narrative’s structuring power and the narrative receives the project’s capacity for anticipation.”<sup>93</sup>

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<sup>90</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *From Text to Action*, p. 173.

<sup>91</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *From Text to Action*, p. 167.

<sup>92</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *From Text to Action*, p. 167.

<sup>93</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *From Text to Action*, p. 173.

Imagination is also active in the process of motivation. According to Ricoeur, imagination

provides the milieu, the luminous clearing, in which we can compare and evaluate motives as diverse as desires and ethical obligations, themselves as disparate as professional rules, social customs, or intensely personal values. Imagination offers the common space for the comparison and mediation of terms as heterogeneous as the force that pushes as if from behind, the attraction that seduces as if from in front, and the reasons that legitimate and form a ground as if from beneath.<sup>94</sup>

This hesitation between different motives for the final decision to act is reflected in our everyday use of language, especially in the variation of the phrase ‘I can.’ Our use of sentences like ‘I could do that if I wanted to’ or even ‘I could have done that if I had wanted to’ point at the capacity of imagination to formulate different motivations and possibilities with regard to an action which has been or is going to be realized. As Ricoeur concludes, “what is essential from a phenomenological point of view is that I take possession of the immediate certainty of my power only through the imaginative variations that mediate this certainty.”<sup>95</sup>

What is more, imagination enables us to find the way to other people around. It is one of the basic conditions of ethical behaviour to step out from ourselves and open our mind to the other. This is possible only when we are able to imagine the world of somebody else, to experience his or her pleasure or pain, to imagine what they think and what is their motivation to act based on. In one word, we speak about the ability of empathy. Nevertheless, this empathy does not have to be only in the form of love, but it can be connected also with hate.<sup>96</sup> It is thus important in which way we use our imagination and how we develop and enrich it.

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<sup>94</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *From Text to Action*, p. 173.

<sup>95</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *From Text to Action*, p. 174.

<sup>96</sup> Cf. RICOEUR, Paul. *From Text to Action*, p. 174.

## **1.6. Imagination according to Paul Ricoeur: Summarizing Ideas**

Since the view of Paul Ricoeur delimits the notion of imagination which is going to be discussed in the following study, it is necessary to summarize key points which are going to be shown later in the perspective of theology. That is why we are going to ask now: What kind of imagination does Ricoeur talk about? In which way is it open to theological interpretation?

As we have repeatedly underlined, Ricoeur comes with the idea of productive imagination, which is essentially tied to linguistic expression. It means that he does not speak about imagination which is only reflective, but he elaborates the concept of creative imagination. Ricoeur shows that imagination does not only help us to grasp the meaning of the world, but it is a force thanks to which we shape our perspective, create new connections between our experience and use it actively to decide about our future action. It is thus a kind of imagination which does not stay on the level of dreams and fantasy, but which can penetrate into our daily reality and which can shape it.

This is the first reason why we found Ricoeur's theory useful for the discussion of imagination on the field of theology. Christian faith is something which does not stay on the level of theory, but it transforms whole human existence. In other words, we imagine our world with God. We are going to show that Ricoeur's concept helps us capture this process.

For the sake of clarity, we have divided imagination into three areas: narrative, metaphoric and symbolic. However, we have also underlined that these kinds of imagination cannot be absolutely separated from each other, but they are closely connected.

Our analysis was focused on narrative imagination in the perspective of metaphor. We showed that narrative serves as a useful tool for expressing human identity, which can be always found in its mutability thanks to its anchoring in the flow of time. In addition, thanks to fictive narratives we are able to access the world of possibility, in which we can indirectly get new experience and establish new ontological ties. The narrative then becomes a model according to which we can adjust our life.

This is the next point which invites theological reflection, as there is a concrete story of Jesus Christ in the very core of Christian religion. It serves as a model for the life of believers. After that we can ask, among others, if metaphorical imagination can

be also addressed from the perspective of God's revelation and human response to this revelation.

Last but not least, we have touched the theme of symbolic imagination and its capacity to signify more. It enables us to cross from the area of the verbal to the sphere of non-verbal imagination. This fact again inspires our discussion on the field of theology as we want to find the language which would be able to point at the mystery of God and his creation.

The purpose of this chapter was to show what imagination actually means, how it works and which fields it influences. As we have mentioned, Ricoeur's work is only one of possible attitudes towards imagination; but we believe, that his concept could serve as a firm ground for the discussion of imagination in theology. The theological point of view is going to elaborate Ricoeur's theme further as it is going to ask in which way imagination works as a tool to develop human life fully in the light of Christian faith.

## 2. Imagination in Theology: Newman, Rahner and von Balthasar as its Explorers

Before we restrict the topic of imagination to our three authors, namely Newman, Rahner and von Balthasar, let us briefly look at a short overview of the topic of imagination in theology in general.

It would be a mistake to state that the theme of imagination in theology is restricted only to modern time. For instance, it can be found as early as in the theology of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), whose research of theological language is still fruitfully used in modern theology. He argues for the need of symbolic theology, when he discusses three levels of meaning in Scripture (historical, moral, allegorical and analogical). He shows that purely argumentative approach is not possible and theological language should be enriched by the poetic dimension.<sup>97</sup>

We can also refer to Saint Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), who in the *Spiritual Exercises* introduced his imaginative method of contemplation, which had also a significant impact on the world of poetry, e.g. the work of an early modern English poet John Donne and a modernist poet T. S. Eliot.

We can go even further to the past to the Fathers of the Church. We could mention at least Saint Ambrose's (340-397) concept of *arcanum*, which underlines the dimension of mystery as a necessary part of theology and Christian faith. In this way, he shows that the language of concepts is not sufficient to express the truth about man and God as there is always the intimate personal dimension of the relationship between these two, which escapes any conceptualization.<sup>98</sup>

Nevertheless, the emphasis on the indispensable role of imagination in theology is mainly the matter of the theology of twentieth century, which is recently very sensitive to the need of finding a new language which would appeal not only to the reason but mainly to the heart of contemporary believers and non-believers. In this regard, John Henry Newman's (1801-1890) approach can be labelled as pioneering.

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<sup>97</sup> Cf. GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. Retrieving Imagination in Theology. In PIERCE, A. — G. SMITH (ed.). *The Critical Spirit: Theology at the Crossroads of Faith and Culture*. Dublin: The Columba Press, 2003, p. 200 – 207, p. 200.

<sup>98</sup> Cf. VOPŘADA, David. Ambrose's Use of *Arcanum*: A Friendly Space both Human and Divine. *European Journal for Science and Theology* 2014.

The most significant advocates of the imaginative level in theology of the twentieth century are Karl Rahner (1904-1984), Hans Urs von Balthasar (1905-1988) and Bernard Lonergan (1904-1984). The first two authors are going to be given larger space in this chapter. In the theology of Karl Rahner, imagination seems to be a marginal theme, but as we are going to show later, his contribution is considerable. Hans Urs von Balthasar does not need any special introduction, as the themes of beauty and aesthetics in theology are central for his whole theological project. Bernard Lonergan is known for his emphasis on the ability of imagination to enrich our way of life. “He sees life as in danger of becoming unlivable unless we find ways of recreating our more fundamental potentials of freedom. We live too often in a merely utilitarian and ready-made world which art can transform so that it ‘heads on to God.’”<sup>99</sup>

Last but not least, William Lynch (1908-1987), as a theologian and expert on ancient Greek drama, investigates the role of imagination in theology. In his work *Christ and Apollo*, he points out that imagination should not escape reality, but it should be essentially tied to reality in order to be able to soar to the transcendence. The model of such imagination is Jesus Christ, who comes from the Father to the Earth and then returns to him. In the similar way imagination should be directed from the finite to the infinite.

Michael Paul Gallagher (\*1939) belongs to those explores of imagination who do not stay on a theoretical level, but apply their findings in practice. Although he published numerous studies concerning imagination, he continued to apply this theory in his books designed for wider public in order to touch the imaginative wavelength of the hearts of his readers. That is why he is going to be the author who will demonstrate the example of blending the theological with the imaginative in practice in the last chapter of our study.

From contemporary theologians we could name, for instance, Oliver Davies (\*1956) and his book *A Theology of Compassion* or Pierangelo Sequeri (\*1944), who is interested in the role of music with regard to Christian faith.<sup>100</sup> We could mention also researchers from the field of the Biblical studies, such as Leland Ryken or Walter Brueggemann (1933).

Of course, the list of the authors who research the theme of imagination in theology could be much longer. This is related also to the fact that there are numerous

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<sup>99</sup> GALLAGHER, *Retrieving Imagination in Theology*, p. 203.

<sup>100</sup> Cf. GALLAGHER, *Retrieving Imagination in Theology*, p. 202.

approaches towards imagination, and imagination as a concept still needs clarification, which is a continuous challenge for philosophers and art theorists. It can be approached from literary theory, theory of language, theory of visual art or psychology, biblical studies, etc. That is why there are numerous titles which we could refer to. Needless to say, that our aim is to show that imaginative approach should be more or less present in each theological work, as theology from its very essence cannot survive without imaginative dimension.

This chapter is going to discuss imagination from the perspective of John Henry Newman, Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar in relation to the notion of imagination of Paul Ricoeur. The choice of these authors was not accidental, but it has its clear purpose.

Firstly, all of these authors are well-known theologians who are widely appreciated. In the course of time, they have been recognized as key authors and their theological concepts are respected with authority. That is why we have not chosen contemporary authors, whose contribution to the field of theology will have to be proved in the retrospective reflection of future generations.

Secondly, if we want to discuss the term imagination in the context of theology, it is useful to regard it in connection to more elaborated theological concepts. Even though there is not space to analyse this dimension, all of our authors offer this possibility. As imagination is an integral part of their theological projects, it shows that the struggle to establish the theme of imagination as one of essential theological terms is not vain. If imagination should be considered to be theologically relevant, it should prove its importance with regard to basic Christological and anthropological schemes.

Finally, as it was mentioned in the introduction, Newman, Rahner and von Balthasar show us different ways towards the same goal. We are going to see that their view of imagination is sometimes very similar, but they arrive at their conclusions differently. Newman starts with the question how Christian religion can touch the heart of a man. Rahner starts with a hypothesis that both verbal and non-verbal art are relevant theological expression, and von Balthasar's aim is to formulate a concise concept of theological aesthetics.

The following lines are going to describe each of the theologians separately, but we will also try to establish important links between their ideas. What is more, we want to compare their concepts with the theory of imagination of Paul Ricoeur and thus secure

that our notion of imagination is consistent. For this purpose, the chapter is concluded by a subchapter summarizing our basic findings.

## 2.1. John Henry Newman: A Pioneer of Imagination

Although in his famous work *An Essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent* (1870), commonly abbreviated as *The Grammar of Assent*, Newman does not often explicitly speak about imagination, it is necessary to bear in mind that the expression “real assent” was originally “imaginative assent,” which can be still accidentally found in the final version of the book.<sup>101</sup> Imagination thus shows to be the predominant theme of the book. What is more, several meeting points between Newman’s theory of assent and Ricoeur’s notion of imagination can be found. One of the reasons of this concordance could be the fact that Newman was also inspired by the philosophy of Immanuel Kant and by the poetry and literary theory of T. S. Coleridge, who, on the bases of Kant’s philosophy, distinguishes between primary and secondary imagination.<sup>102</sup> As a main hypothesis of this chapter, we could therefore state that Newman’s concept of real assent corresponds in various aspects to Ricoeur’s emphasis of productive imagination and the importance of its linguistic realization. This accent is reflected in the very title of Newman’s work. It says “the grammar of assent,” not “the theology of assent” or “the notion of assent.” The word “grammar” is literally a linguistic term referring to the proper use of language, which indicates that imagination in Newman’s context is also rooted in the area of linguistics. One of the aims of the following text is thus to elucidate and prove the connection between Newman’s theory and Ricoeur’s notion of imagination. The second task of this chapter is to introduce the theme of imagination on the field of theology. In this regard, Newman is a prophetic figure foreshadowing the emphasis on imagination in twentieth-century theology. The text of this chapter is going to follow the structure of Newman’s *Grammar of Assent*, compare and contrast his notion with the view of Paul Ricoeur and, finally, prepare the ground for the discussion of the role of imagination in the theology of Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar.

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<sup>101</sup> Cf. GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *Faith Maps: Ten religious explorers from Newman to Joseph Ratzinger*. London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2010, p. 19.

<sup>102</sup> Cf. NICHOLLS, David — KERR, Fergus (ed.). *John Henry Newman: Reason, Rhetoric and Romanticism*. Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1991, p. 4.

### 2.1.1. The Ways of Apprehending Propositions

The first step that Newman's *Grammar of Assent* introduces is the study of making propositions. The author divides propositions, which are formed by a subject and predicate united by the copula, into three forms: interrogative, conditional and categorical.

Interrogative proposition is a question, which implies that the proposition is either true or false. As an example, the author uses a sentence: "Does free trade benefit poorer classes?" The second kind, conditional proposition, leads to a conclusion, which is based on other previous propositions. For instance, we could say: "Free trade therefore benefits poorer classes." Finally, categorical propositions (assertions) are not based on any conclusion, but they are complete on their own, e.g. "Free trade does benefit."<sup>103</sup>

The relationship between these forms of propositions is described in the following way:

A proposition, which starts with being a Question may become a Conclusion, and then be changed into an Assertion, but it has of course ceased to be a question, so far forth as it has become a conclusion, and has rid itself of its argumentative form – that is, as ceased to be a conclusion, – so far forth as it has become an assertion. A question has not yet got so far as to be a conclusion, though it is the necessary preliminary of a conclusion, and an assertion has got beyond being a mere conclusion, though it is the natural issue of a conclusion.<sup>104</sup>

The forms of propositions described above are both closely interconnected and clearly distinct from each other. They represent three kinds of possible attitudes towards the world not only in the field of science but also on personal level. In addition, they also represent the possible ways in which these attitudes are formulated by a language as "the internal act of holding propositions is for the most part analogous to the external act of enunciating them."<sup>105</sup> The mental acts corresponding to the three kinds of propositions are doubt, interference and assent. As the author explains, "a question is the expression of a doubt; a conclusion is the expression of an act of

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<sup>103</sup> Cf. NEWMAN, John Henry. *An essay in Aid of a Grammar of Assent*. London: Burns, Oates, & Co., 1870, p. 1.

<sup>104</sup> NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 2.

<sup>105</sup> NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 3.

inference; and an assertion is the expression of an act of assent.”<sup>106</sup> Accordingly, in the context of Christian religion, we could distinguish between a sceptic, a philosopher, for whom the religion is a conclusion of reason, and a believer, who accepts his or her faith without any condition.<sup>107</sup>

What Newman is initially interested in is this distinction between the religion of a philosopher and a religion of a believer. That is why he investigates the difference between assent and interference. The author summarizes it in two points.

The first contrasting fact between the two is that, while interference is based on the previous premises, assent is unconditional. The second contrast concerns our attitude towards the subject and predicate as such:

We cannot assent to a proposition, without some intelligent apprehension of it; whereas we need not understand it at all in order to infer it. We cannot give our assent to the proposition that “ $x$  is  $z$ ,” till we are told something about one or other of the terms; but we can infer, if “ $x$  is  $y$ , and  $y$  is  $z$ , that  $x$  is  $z$ ,” whether we know the meaning of  $x$  and  $z$  or no.<sup>108</sup>

Newman finds interference to be a useful but insufficient scientific method as it is dependent on the exact interpretation of individual premises and the correspondence of the meanings of the words which are used in them. Today we could speak about an arbitrary nature of each language, as it is formulated by Saussure. In mathematics a symbol 1 stands always for a symbol 1 and never for anything else, and we can rely on this fact whenever we encounter the same symbol. Contrastingly, a word can acquire a various range of meanings, and it often happens that one word refers to different realities.<sup>109</sup> This is a pitfall of a knowledge based on interferences only.

The second danger which an act of interference can encounter is the fact that, although the conclusion of a syllogism can be built on strong premises, the process of interference is itself based on certain preconceptions, which cannot be proved by the means of logical argument. For instance, “we are not able to prove by syllogism that

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<sup>106</sup> NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 3.

<sup>107</sup> Cf. NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 4.

<sup>108</sup> NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 6.

<sup>109</sup> NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 259-260.

there are any self-evident propositions at all; but supposing there are (as of course I hold there are), still who can determine them by logic?"<sup>110</sup>

These examples of possible deficiencies of knowledge based on interference show that J. H. Newman would advocate for the same as Paul Ricoeur — the necessity to complement purely deductive knowledge by another way of cognition as there are realities accessible only by other means. What is more, people commonly do not reduce their cognitive faculties to logical reasoning at all, but they take advantage of all faculties they have at their disposal. Newman illustrates this fact on a beautiful metaphor of a climber:

The mind ranges to and fro, and spreads out, and advances forward with a quickness which has become a proverb, and a subtlety and versatility which baffle investigation. It passes on from point to point...it makes progress not unlike a clamberer on a steep cliff, who, by quick eye, prompt hand, and firm foot, ascends how he knows not himself: by personal endowments and by practice, rather than by rule, leaving no track behind him, and unable to teach another...And such mainly is the way in which all men, gifted or not gifted, commonly reason, — not by rule, but by an inward faculty.<sup>111</sup>

Interference is thus a form of reasoning, which is shown as an important but still insufficient scientific method by both J. H. Newman and Paul Ricoeur. This is the first meeting point of Ricoeur's and Newman's theory. Let us remember that Ricoeur claims that deductive reasoning should be complemented by metaphorical imagination. Metaphorical imagination, based on the logic of discovery according to the design of a metaphorical network, enables to redescribe reality thanks to its ability to create a semantic shock because of the tension between literal and figurative interpretations. As we have shown, Ricoeur holds that metaphorical imagination is cognitive analogically to the way in which scientific models work for the purposes of scientific discovery. This discovery does not come from deduction, but from the possibility to create fictive words, in which we have the advantage of non-involvement, and thus we are able to regard realities in a new light and create new connections between them. In this way we are able to get knowledge which is not dependent on previous premises. We reflect on

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<sup>110</sup> NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 263.

<sup>111</sup> Quoted in: GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *Faith Maps*, p. 18.

our experience, assent to the ideas presented by other people thanks to the ability to imagine the inner world and experience of somebody else and also communicate this experience to the others. In this way Ricoeur complements Newman, who could not have the access to the philosophies of twentieth century, by which he would describe the nature of the reference of assertion.

In a similar way to Newman's idea of assent, Ricoeur's notion of metaphor logically presupposes direct understanding of the words involved in a metaphorical statement, which is actually a kind of proposition as it consists of a subject and predicate connected by copula. In Ricoeur's theory, it is necessary to directly comprehend not only individual words but the whole sentence. Even though we understand individual words, metaphorical statement does not make sense unless we are able to find the figurative meaning. In order to be able to do that, we cannot read the words in isolation but in a specific relation between them, which is usually determined by the whole metaphorical network. From the perspective of Paul Ricoeur, we could say that the act of assent often requires larger context and, in the case of a metaphor, the ability to discover its figurative meaning, in other words, the ability to "see as."

However, Newman distinguishes between two kinds of assents according to the nature of the information it contains and the way it involves an individual person. The first kind is a notional assent, which refers to the language of abstraction and does not touch the personal sphere of those who comprehend it. The second kind of assent is called real, and it is described as more concrete and personal.

Ricoeur does not involve in his theory any distinction which would correspond to Newman's notional and real assent, metaphorical statement can represent both of them. In a certain contexts, it can be approached notionally if the attitude of the speaker or the reader is detached, but it can also belong to the area of real assent if it directly touches the existence of those involved. To conclude, productive imagination can be found in the area of both real and notional assent, but it should be remembered that it always necessarily stands behind real assent, which a basic prerequisite of personal acceptance of Christian religion.

### **2.1.2. Two Modes of Assent: Real and Notional**

After a brief description of three kinds of propositions according to Newman's *Grammar of Assent*, which led us to elucidate the meaning of assent as opposed to interference, we have mentioned that Newman distinguishes between notional and real assent. Both real and notional assent is unconditional, and it presupposes the concomitant apprehension of its terms. However, as it was mentioned, the distinction between these two modes of assent is based on the kind of statement the person assents to (general or specific) and on the way it concerns the person's existence.

In the case of notional assent, terms of proposition usually stand for "what is abstract, general, and non-existing, such as 'Man is an animal, some men are learned, an Apostle is a creation of Christianity, a line is length without breadth, to err is human, to forgive divine.'" <sup>112</sup> Contrastingly, real assent usually refers to concrete "things external to us, unit and individual, as 'Philip was the father of Alexander,' 'the earth goes round the sun,' 'the Apostles first preached to the Jews.'" <sup>113</sup> In other words, "in Notional Assent as well as in inferring, the mind contemplates its own creations instead of things; in Real, it is directed towards things, represented by the impressions which they have left on the imagination." <sup>114</sup> Both forms of assent are indispensable for human cognition and both of them have some advantages and disadvantages since

to apprehend notionally is to have breath of mind, but to be shallow; to apprehend really is to be deep, but to be narrow-minded. The latter is the conservative form of knowledge, and the former the principle of its advancement. Without the apprehension of notions we should for ever pace round one small circle of knowledge; without a firm hold upon things, we shall waste ourselves in vague speculations. However, real apprehension has the precedence, as being the scope and end and the test of notional. <sup>115</sup>

Nevertheless, these two modes of apprehension are related to each other also in other aspects as Newman emphasises that it can happen that the same statement can be apprehended by notional assent by one person and by real assent by another. For instance, if we say "sugar is sweet," the sentence could mean something different for a child, who has never tasted anything sweet than for a man who can compare the taste

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<sup>112</sup> NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 7.

<sup>113</sup> NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 8.

<sup>114</sup> NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 72.

<sup>115</sup> NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 32.

with honey or glycerine. A child apprehends the statement notionally while a person with a preceding experience responds by real assent.<sup>116</sup>

It can also happen that something which is commonly apprehended by real assent is deliberately made detached to be apprehended notionally. For example, medicine hides the shocking reality of illness and physical suffering under Greek and Latin terms so that the concrete is moved to the abstract and reality is transferred to the area of the general.<sup>117</sup>

Similarly, a notional apprehension can become real in the course of life of one person. Newman again provides his readers with a vivid example:

Let us consider, too, how differently young and old are affected by the words of some classic author, such as Homer or Horace. Passages, which to a boy are but rhetorical commonplaces, neither better nor worse than a hundred others which any clever writer might supply, which he gets by heart and thinks very fine, and imitates, as he thinks, successfully, in his own flowing versification, at length come home to him, when long years have passed, and he has had experience of life, and pierce him, as if he had never before known them, with their sad earnestness and vivid exactness.<sup>118</sup>

This example illustrates our previous point that metaphorical imagination as perceived by Ricoeur is active in both real and notional assent. We can read poems and listen to stories and we can understand them and they enrich our way of seeing the world; however, some of them reach our heart so that we can identify with them and some are not able to do it since we cannot connect it with real life.

For example, in legal practice, especially in the case of common law, previous legal cases are studied as a binding model of subsequent cases. Although these cases usually concern interesting and complex life stories, their purpose is not to be apprehended by real assent but to serve as an illustrative solution for future decisions. The professional who studies the cases for this purpose should observe them as objectively as possible without personal involvement.

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<sup>116</sup> Cf. NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 9.

<sup>117</sup> Cf. NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 20.

<sup>118</sup> NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 75.

It is thus not possible to simply state that notional assent is without imagination, and that real assent is the only imaginative approach towards propositions. What is important is the way how we use our imagination and how we are able to identify with it or not.

### **2.1.3. Newman and Ricoeur in Dialogue: Real Assent and Productive Imagination**

It has been mentioned that real assent was originally called imaginative assent, and that imagination is a necessary prerequisite of such apprehension. Now, our question is how to specify this relation. What is the nature of such imagination and how the view of Paul Ricoeur can complement it?

Let us start with Newman's explanation how the information we assent to gets into our mind, which is going to form the core of this subchapter.

Real Apprehension is, as I have said, in the first instance an experience or information about the concrete. Now, when these informations are in fact presented to us, that is, when they are directly subjected to our bodily senses or our mental sensations, as when we say, "The sun shines," or "The prospect is charming," or indirectly by means of a picture or even a narrative, then there is no difficulty in determining – what is meant by saying that our enunciation of a proposition concerning the implies an apprehension of things, because we can actually point out the objects which they indicate. But supposing those things are no longer before us, supposing they have passed beyond our field of view, or the book is closed in which the description of them occurs, how can an apprehension of things be said to remain to us? It remains on our minds by means of the faculty of memory. Memory consists in a present imagination of things that are past; memory retains the impressions and likenesses of what they were when before us; and when we make use of the proposition which refers to them, it supplies us with objects by which to interpret it.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, s. 21.

Now, after being presented with a comprehensive summary of Newman's own notion of imagination, we can continue to reflect on its relationship to the theory of Paul Ricoeur. That is why we are going to ask how this description can be viewed as corresponding to Ricoeur's theory of imagination. Our hypothesis is that Newman's and Ricoeur's theories are not contradictory and that Ricoeur's theory can help us to regard Newman's account in the perspective of contemporary point of view.

At first sight, it might seem that Newman's account cannot be compared to Ricoeur's as he does not explicitly mention the linguistic area of imagination and emphasises the fact that the information presented to us are "subjected to our bodily senses or our mental sensations." In my opinion, Ricoeur would not disagree with this statement, but he would add that, although we experience directly, we always approach the information in retrospective. Time is in continuous flow, and everything what we experience becomes a part of our life story, which is subjected to continuous reinterpretation and reevaluation in the light of new experience. It is true that a person can experience directly; nevertheless, it is the role of imagination to give a form to this experience so that he or she would be capable of real assent.

When Newman speaks about an indirect way of getting information for real assent, he mentions picture and narrative. Visual aspect of imagination was researched by Ricoeur both in the context of a metaphor and symbol. According to Ricoeur, a symbol consists of a linguistic and non-linguistic stratum. It is thus the point where the worlds of language and visual images meet. The capacity of a symbol to signify more spurs our imagination to discover new areas of being. In the case of metaphor, Ricoeur speaks about 'seeing as' not 'hearing as' so, although it might seem that he neglects the area of the visual, it is not true as we commonly tend to visualize what we speak about. Similarly, in the case of narrative we tend to imagine a picture of what is being presented. The only thing which Ricoeur rejects is the notion of imagination as a faculty for forming something like mental theatre, which has no cognitive power.

The fact that Newman mentions narrative as an indirect way how to arrive at real apprehension is very interesting from the point of view of Ricoeur's theory of fictive narratives and their power to redescribe reality. As it was illustrated before, fictive narratives introduce us to new worlds, in which we have the opportunity of non-involvement. Thanks to this fact we can reflect on realities of our own experience from a new point of view. After that this narrative is actually also an experience, which is able to touch us and change our way of seeing the world.

One of the most important points of Newman's view of imagination is the significant role of memory which is defined as a "present imagination of things that are past." In Ricoeur's view, it is the power of narrative imagination to unite past experiences accessible by memory into a concise story of life, which is reinterpreted over and over again in the course of time. This story does not only help us to grasp our experience and to be able to communicate it to the others, but it has much more significant role as it expresses our identity. The ability of imagination to reinterpret present events in the light of past experience is hinted at when Newman mentions the fact that memory "supplies us with objects by which to interpret" the things before us.

Let us also remember that Ricoeur rejected an abstract notion of human identity but advocates for the expressing it in its concreteness and mutability. The theory that our identity is determined by our life story thus fulfils this requirement.

What is more, the emphasis of concreteness and directness is typical of Newman's approach too. The author points out that "it is in human nature to be more affected by the concrete than by the abstract."<sup>120</sup> We do not think in abstract terms, but we always reflect them in the perspective of our concrete experience:

The apprehension which we have of our past mental acts of any kind, of hope, inquiry, effort, triumph, disappointment, suspicion, hatred, and a hundred others, is an apprehension of thing.... Such an apprehension again is elicited by propositions embodying the notices of our history, of our pursuits and their results, of our friends, of our bereavements, of our illnesses, of our fortunes, which remain imprinted upon our memory as sharply and deeply as any recollection of sight.<sup>121</sup>

From this point of view, real assent thus refers to realities which have become a part of our story of life, which actually expresses who we are. That is why the statement that we should identify ourselves with the information which is the subject of real assent is meant literally. The subject of real assent forms and modifies our identity. It means that if we accept Christian faith by real assent, Christianity penetrates into our existence. It cannot stay on the surface, but it becomes a part of who we are.

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<sup>120</sup> NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 35.

<sup>121</sup> NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 23.

#### 2.1.4. Real Assent and Action

After showing the nature of real assent as complemented by Ricoeur's theory of imagination, we can proceed to the question of the relation between real assent and action. We can ask if Newman would agree with Paul Ricoeur that there is no action without imagination.

According to Newman, "it is not imagination that causes action; but hope and fear, likes and dislikes, appetite, passion, affection, the stirrings of selfishness and self-love. What imagination does for us is to find a means of stimulating those motive powers."<sup>122</sup> In this point, Newman's vision would correspond to Paul Ricoeur's idea that "imagination offers the common space for the comparison and mediation of terms as heterogeneous as the force that pushes as if from behind, the attraction that seduces as if from in front, and the reasons that legitimate and form a ground as if from beneath."<sup>123</sup>

In the case of Christianity, it might be, from Newman's point of view, the thought of "Divine Goodness, future reward, eternal life"<sup>124</sup> which motivates us for concrete action. The author continues that it is important that these ideas are accepted by real assent. Otherwise our mind does not open towards these horizons.

For a certain action, he argues, there should be a certain preparation of mind. In this sense, Newman admits that "imagination may be said ... to be of a practical nature, inasmuch as it leads to practice indirectly by the action of its object upon the affections."<sup>125</sup> That is why we cannot expect that somebody whose mind is not prepared to accept Christian faith by real assent would understand the action of those whose mind apprehends the faith in this way. In this point, Newman opens the discussion of the necessity of the reflection of basic attitudes of people mostly given by their culture as an opening gate towards God.

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<sup>122</sup> NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 79.

<sup>123</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *From Text to Action*, p. 173.

<sup>124</sup> NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 79.

<sup>125</sup> NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 80.

### 2.1.5. Religion and Theology, between the Real and Notional Assent

The last point which we are going to discuss with regard to J. H. Newman's notion of imagination is the consequences of this theory for Christian religions and theology. In general, the author claims that "theology, as such, always is notional, as being scientific: religion, as being personal, should be real."<sup>126</sup> However, he simultaneously adds that there is not a clear borderline between the religious and theological assent: "As intellect is common to all men as well as imagination, every religious man is to a certain extent a theologian, and no theology can start or thrive without the initiative and abiding presence of religion."<sup>127</sup> As M. P. Gallagher observes, Newman thus foreshadows contemporary discussion about "healing the divorce between theology and spirituality, or of rethinking the role of the affective and the aesthetic dimensions in faith."<sup>128</sup>

As the consequence, we can say with Newman that theology needs religion, but also religion needs theology. Without theology, religion would have nothing to adhere to: "The formula, which embodies a dogma for the theologian, readily suggests an object for the worshipper."<sup>129</sup> It is thus indisputable that religious imagination should be always under the control of reason since it would be without ground.

Nevertheless, theology without imagination would be a science without heart, and theology without religion would make no sense. For example, a statement "'There is a God,' when really apprehended, is the object of a strong energetic adhesion, which works a revolution in the mind; but when held merely as a notion, it needs but a cold and ineffective acceptance, though it be held ever so unconditionally."<sup>130</sup> However, it is desirable for theology to be accepted by the heart as well as by the intellect, and, as Newman famously points out, "the heart is commonly reached, not through the reason, but through the imagination."<sup>131</sup>

This basic sketch based on Newman's theory of imagination is our springboard towards the discussion of this theme in the work of twentieth-century theologians, namely Karl Rahner and Hans Urs von Balthasar, but before we proceed further, let us

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<sup>126</sup> NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 53.

<sup>127</sup> Cf. NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 95.

<sup>128</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *Faith Maps*, p. 21.

<sup>129</sup> NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 117.

<sup>130</sup> NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 122.

<sup>131</sup> NEWMAN, John Henry. *Grammar of Assent*, p. 131.

conclude the reflection on Newman's theology by an extract from his *Apologia for Vita Sua*:

I am far from denying the real force of the arguments in proof of a God, drawn from the general facts of human society and the course of history, but these do not warm me or enlighten me; they do not take away the winter of my desolation, or make the buds unfold and the leaves grow within me, and my moral being rejoice.<sup>132</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> NEWMAN, John Henry. *Apologia for Vita Sua*. London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1949, p. 217-218.

## 2.2. Karl Rahner and his Way to Imaginative Theology

The theme of art and imagination is not something which is usually immediately associated with the theology of Karl Rahner.<sup>133</sup> Nevertheless, considering his accent on human subjectivity, the potential to self-transcendence of every person and the importance of everyday experience, the fact that he devoted several essays to this theme is not accidental.

Similarly to Newman, when dealing with this subject, Rahner starts with epistemological reflections on the character of human knowledge, in order to proceed to the question concerning the knowledge of God. Nevertheless, he does not stay on this point, but he continues to reflect on the relation between theology and various kinds of art. He thus allows us the opportunity to show the way in which both verbal and non-verbal art is relevant for theology and thus suggest some concrete impacts of the theory of imagination. What is more, he prepares us also for the discussion of the concept of von Balthasar since he often crosses from the area of epistemology to the area of dogmatic theology. That is why his account serves as a useful bridge between the previous and the following author.

This is going to be mirrored also in the structure of the subchapter. After the summary of Rahner's epistemological starting points in relation to the preceding discussion of the theory of imagination, we are going to focus on the role of non-verbal and verbal art in theology.

### 2.2.1. Epistemological background

Both in his famous *Foundations of Christian Faith*<sup>134</sup> and in his leading essay on art called "Theology and the Arts," Rahner introduces his basic distinction between "the

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<sup>133</sup> Cf. THIESSEN, Gesa Elsbeth. Karl Rahner: Toward a Theological Aesthetics. In MARMION, Declan — HINES, Mary E. (eds.). *The Cambridge Companion to Karl Rahner*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005, p. 225 – 234, s. 225.

<sup>134</sup> Cf. RAHNER, Karl. *Grundkurs des Glaubens: Einführung in den Begriff des Christentums*. Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder, 1976, p. 26-33.

original level of our cognitive self-possession” and “our reflection upon it.”<sup>135</sup> In other words he speaks about “original self-knowledge acquired from what we do and what we suffer” as opposed to “our conceptualization of it.”<sup>136</sup> After the discussion of Newman’s *Grammar of Assent*, we could notice some similarities between the two levels of knowledge presented by Rahner and Newman’s concept of real and notional assent.

Rahner’s term “original self-knowledge” can be seen as corresponding to Newman’s “real assent.” Although these two terms do not entirely overlap, the resemblance is striking. The author explains that the original knowledge is the expression of “what has...been experienced and lived through more originally in the depths of existence.”<sup>137</sup> Rahner’s idea of original self-knowledge also presupposes concrete experience and subjective perspective and thus it enables the person to go further than it is allowed by the world of concepts. Only in this way can knowledge involve the whole human existence, as the author clarifies:

When I love, when I am tormented by questions, when I am sad, when I am faithful, when I feel longing, this human, existential reality is a unity, an original unity of reality and its own self-presence and self-awareness which is not completely mediated by the concept which objectifies it in scientific knowledge.<sup>138</sup>

In contrast to Newman, Rahner does not speak about imagination explicitly; however, the theory of imagination as described by other authors in this work comes to light between the lines. As we could see in the first chapter dealing with the view of Paul Ricoeur, imagination is actually the faculty which enables us to unify disparate experience of reality, and it is responsible for our self-awareness. Without imagination we cannot grasp who we are and, consequently, no other way than imaginative can address our whole being.

The counterpart of the original knowledge is the conceptualization of it. It is the “movement toward ...language, toward communication, and also toward a theoretical

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<sup>135</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *Theology and the Arts. Thought – A Review of Culture and the Arts* 1990, vol. 65, no. 258, p. 385-399, p. 386.

<sup>136</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *Theology and the Arts*, p. 387.

<sup>137</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *Theology and the Arts*, p. 388.

<sup>138</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *Theology and the Arts*, p. 387.

knowledge of itself.”<sup>139</sup> In Newman’s words, this level of knowledge would belong to the sphere of what he calls notional apprehension and interference. The conceptualization is the generalization of particulars. It distances itself from the perspective of subjective experience in order to become comprehensible for other people. Both real apprehension and original knowledge are mostly found beyond language. In contrast, notional apprehension and conceptualization relies on its communicability. As we will see, this does not concern poetic language, which has also the ability to evoke imaginative wavelength in the reader or listener.

Let us now answer the question what is, according to Rahner, the relation between original knowledge and its conceptualization. The author answers that these two elements are related but not identical. He explains the relationship between them in the following way:

It has a history whose course runs in two directions. First, the original self-presence of a knowing and free subject in the actual living out of existence strives to transpose itself more and more into concepts, into objectifications, into language and into communication with others. ...

Secondly, this tension also includes a movement in the opposite direction. Only very slowly perhaps, does a person experience clearly what he or she has been talking about for a long time, and was able to because they were shaped by a common language and instructed and indoctrinated from without.<sup>140</sup>

The latter case can be often found in the world of theology, where theologians have to reflect on subjects, with which they have perhaps no personal experience. Nevertheless, theology does not intend to stay on the level of concepts. As Newman shows, theology without religion, which is nourished by human imagination, would lose its purpose and it would become a useless science. That is why, especially with regard to theological approaches, “concepts and language must necessarily be oriented towards this original knowledge, this original experience, where what is meant and the experience of what is meant are still one.”<sup>141</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *Theology and the Arts*, p. 387.

<sup>140</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *Theology and the Arts*, p. 387.

<sup>141</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *Theology and the Arts*, p. 387.

In relation to these reflections on the character of human knowledge, an important question arises: In which way is it possible to know God? Is it not actually a contradiction to apprehend the incomprehensible? Is it possible to know something or rather somebody who transcends any attempts of human ability of conceptualization? John Henry Newman would answer that it is possible by real apprehension. Rahner comes with a different yet not contradictory solution.

Rahner denies the modern positivistic opinion that human reason is there “to know individual realities within our consciousness and their mutual functional relationships.”<sup>142</sup> For the author, the human reason has more dignified function than being a computer summarizing and conceptualizing the data found in pragmatically approachable realities. His fundamental claim is that “the human reason of intellect must be understood more fundamentally precisely as the capacity for the incomprehensible, as the capacity to be grasped by something which ever eludes our grasp.”<sup>143</sup> The author explains further:

For every time reason comprehends and understands an object, it has already transcended it into an infinity beyond. That infinity is always present as something immeasurable, precisely so and never otherwise. Whenever reason comprehends an individual object, it always silently knows that the object always is and remains more than what it has understood about it. ...When reason knows, all of its knowledge which gives expression to an individual reality is accompanied by a strange sense of just how tentative the knowledge is. It is only because we do not know that we can strive to know something; it is only because we inquire into what is unanswered and what is ultimately ineffable that we are able to hear answers, and the better the answers are, the more new questions they raise...<sup>144</sup>

The fact that “comprehension lives by the power of what is incomprehensible”<sup>145</sup> poses a question how the incomprehensible can be approached apart from admitting that it is a place of impenetrable darkness.

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<sup>142</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *Theology and the Arts*, p. 389.

<sup>143</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *Theology and the Arts*, p. 389.

<sup>144</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *Theology and the Arts*, p. 389-390.

<sup>145</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *Theology and the Arts*, p. 390.

Rahner says that if this knowledge cannot be based merely on the intellect, another faculty should play an important role too. This faculty is will and will and intellect are in a perichoretic relation. That is why

the act in which a person can face and accept the mystery of God ...without being shattered by it and without fleeing from it into all the banality of his clear and distinct ideas, the banality of looking for meaning that is based only on such knowledge and what it can master and control, this act...is the act of love in which a person surrenders and entrusts himself to this very mystery.<sup>146</sup>

This knowing by love is possible only if the two faculties are in unity. The author concludes his reflection with the words that “love (and maybe today we would also say freedom and praxis) can also be and must also be the condition which makes possible our knowledge of the true (of theory).”<sup>147</sup> This is just a brief sketch which is going to be elaborated in the chapter devoted to Hans Urs von Balthasar since he shows how the transcendentals like beauty, truth and love are interconnected in order to attach the person towards the mystery of God and the creation which points to him. The account by von Balthasar is thus also going to illuminate the relationship between these themes and the role of imagination.

## **2.2.2. Artistic Imagination in a Theological Perspective**

### **2.2.2.1. Beyond language: Non verbal Art and Religious Experience**

As we could see, according to Rahner, the knowledge of God is not merely based on human intellect, but it addresses also other human faculties. If the essence of our knowledge of God is love, it is impossible that love would emerge only by logical argumentation, but will plays an important role too. In addition, Rahner underlines the role of senses in the mediation of Christian faith. Although he does not explain the

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<sup>146</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *Theology and the Arts*, p. 391.

<sup>147</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *Theology and the Arts*, p. 393.

process in which sense perception is significant for the knowledge of God,<sup>148</sup> he points out that whole person is a religious being, including his or her sense perception. That is why Rahner claims that Christian message should not be communicated only verbally, but, although the verbal mode is essential for it, it should use also other ways of expressions.

He shows that there is a plurality of senses, but there is simultaneously one experiencing subject, and “where one is totally (insofar as this is possible at all) self-aware and self-present, all these various sense faculties must enter into action together.”<sup>149</sup> In the previous subchapter we discussed Rahner’s concept of original knowledge and the fact that original knowledge is “what has...been experienced and lived through more originally in the depths of existence.”<sup>150</sup> This is also referred to as a moment of self-awareness and self-presence. It can be therefore inferred that sensual perception is a part of this original knowledge, which is beyond language. Even though the author does not say so explicitly, we could state that nonverbal art addresses this level of human apprehension, which J. H. Newman would call imaginative.

It is interesting that Rahner does not speak about the relation between non-verbal art and faith or spirituality, but he speaks about the relation between non-verbal art and theology. The author shows that

if theology is non identified a priori with verbal theology, but is understood as man’s total self-expression insofar as this is borne by God’s self-communication, then religious phenomena in the arts are themselves a moment within theology taken in its totality.<sup>151</sup>

In the case of music, Rahner comments on Bach’s oratorio: “Why should a person not think that when he hears a Bach oratorio, he comes into contact in a very unique way with God’s revelation about the human not only by the words it employs, but by the music itself? Why should he not think that what is going on there is theology?”<sup>152</sup>

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<sup>148</sup> „We cannot here, in a philosophical and theological epistemology, explain in more detail how reality perceived by the senses is a starting point and a moment of religious experience and knowledge.” RAHNER, Karl. *The Religious Meaning of Images*. In RAHNER, Karl. *Theological investigations*. vol. 23. New York: Crossroad, 1992, p. 149-161, p. 154.

<sup>149</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *The Religious Meaning of Images*, p. 153.

<sup>150</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *Theology and the Arts*, p. 388.

<sup>151</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *Theology and the Arts*, p. 394.

<sup>152</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *Theology and the Arts*, p. 394.

Something similar is claimed also about visual art. In his essay, “The Religious Meaning of Images” Rahner says that “the viewing of images is not a mere illustration of the spoken word, but it has its own religious significance.”<sup>153</sup> For example, images referring to salvation history are not only poor people’s Bible, but they provide believers with a different experience than verbal description, as the author explains: “one irreplaceable way of getting to know a person is to see and not just to hear that person; a portrait cannot be totally replaced by a biography.”<sup>154</sup>

However, not only images representing religious themes are relevant for religious experience, as “God is...everywhere with His grace.”<sup>155</sup> The author suggests that this theme is very complex because claiming that each piece of art could have religious significance is misleading. On the other hand, it is true that an anonymous reverence of an impressionistic painting is spiritually more fruitful than viewing a religious kitsch with an explicit Christian theme.<sup>156</sup> Paintings by great artists can confront “a person in his total self in such a way as to awaken in him the whole question of existence.”<sup>157</sup> The message of non verbal art is thus not seen as something which has only an illustrative function, but it complements verbal expression and points at new dimensions of it.

In this context, we should consider the fact that also language does not consist of stripped words without any visual or musical element. If we listen to somebody, we look in his or her face and observe the gestures. Even if we read or listen to somebody on the radio, we tend to visualise not only the speakers, but also the events which they speak about. If we approach any text, from the first sight we know if we are going to read a novel, theoretical treatise, a letter or a poem. Visual element therefore cannot be neglected, because it considerably contributes to the message communicated by language.

In the same way music plays a significant role in verbal communication too. One of the most important devices of language is intonation, which can absolutely alter the meaning of a sentence. If we listen to a person speaking in a foreign language, sometimes we do not have to understand the words, but, paying attention to the music of his or her speech, we can correctly guess what the speaker means. In addition, poets,

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<sup>153</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *The Religious Meaning of Images*, p. 156.

<sup>154</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *The Religious Meaning of Images*, p. 157.

<sup>155</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *Theology and the Arts*, p. 396.

<sup>156</sup> Cf. RAHNER, Karl. *Theology and the Arts*, p. 397.

<sup>157</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *Theology and the Arts*, p. 397.

novelists and good speakers are able to use alliteration, consonance, assonance, onomatopoeia or other poetic devices to add a special tint or a new dimension to the meaning of their words.

What is more, not only the flow of speech communicates. But it is often also silence, pauses and dashes, which are sometimes more eloquent than hundreds of words. Coming to conclusion, if we imagine a language without its visual and musical aspect, would such a language be possible to communicate anything? Maybe it would help us to install a new electronic device, but it would hardly tell us anything about God, which would reach the depths of human existence.

That is why Rahner sticks to the fact that non-verbal dimension of communication including non-verbal art is an essential way of communication, and it is relevant also for theology. In Rahner's account on theology and arts, the reader realises that music and visual art is able to communicate Christian message in a similar way to words. What is more, non-verbal art can express our religious experience sometimes better than words only. Let us conclude with a statement by which the author starts his exploration of the theme:

If and insofar as theology is man's reflexive self-expression about himself in the light of divine revelation, we could propose the thesis that theology cannot be complete until it appropriates these arts as an integral moment of itself and its own life, until the arts become an intrinsic moment of theology itself.<sup>158</sup>

#### **2.2.2.2. Towards Poetic theology**

Even though Rahner sticks to the fact that non-verbal art cannot be displaced from theology and religion, words are still the most significant mode of communication of religious experience. In the essay "Priest and Poet," he shows that words are exceptional because they are the only creation of man which lives in transcendence:

The word alone is the gesture which transcends everything that can be represented and imagined, to refer us to infinity. It alone can redeem that which

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<sup>158</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *Theology and the Arts*, p. 394.

constitutes the ultimate imprisonment of all realities which are not expressed in word: the dumbness of their reference to God.<sup>159</sup>

The redemptive function of a word is what makes the means of language superior to non-verbal communication. Only words can pull out the realities from the shadow and thus they have redemptive function since all realities aim to be recognized and communicated. Karl Rahner explains the process in the following way:

The fact that I am known, recognized and loved, that is my completion. And this completion in knowledge and in love, in being known and being loved, is not merely a completion on the 'plane' of the 'intentional' but a fulfillment of the reality, of the being itself. For reality itself is, in the measure of its being, knowing and being known in unity. All realities sigh for their own unveiling. They want themselves to enter, if not as knowers at least as objects of knowledge, into the light of knowledge and of love. They all have a dynamic drive to fulfill themselves by being known. They, too, want to 'put in their word.' The word is their own fulfillment, in which they arrive at the point where all reality, because it draws its origin from eternal spirit, finds its ultimate home: in light. If these realities are persons, then this fulfillment will be realized in the exchange of the word of love which is mutually bestowed. If they are subspiritual realities, then they attain their salvation in the fact that they are lovingly spoken by all beings who are capable of knowing and loving – not by God alone.

Everything is redeemed by the word. It is the perfection of things.<sup>160</sup>

However, the author simultaneously adds that not all words are able to reach transcendence. The author points out there are also words without any mystery. They help us manage empirical world around us, but they do not have any other purpose. In contrast, there are words which are more obscure, and which are aimed to open the gates towards transcendence: "they pour out of the heart and sound forth in hymns. They open the doors to great words and they decide over eternities."<sup>161</sup> The former are called fabricated, technical, utility words, while the latter are referred to as

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<sup>159</sup> RAHNER, Karl. Priest and Poet. In RAHNER, Karl. *Theological Investigations*. vol. 3. New York: Crossroad, 1982, p. 294-317, p. 302.

<sup>160</sup> RAHNER, Karl. Priest and Poet, p. 300.

<sup>161</sup> RAHNER, Karl. Priest and Poet, p. 296.

primordial words. This distinction does not divide words into two categories, but it rather expresses the quality of their reference. In the case of utility words, their meaning is restricted; Rahner even speaks about degradation and damnation. On the other hand, the meaning of primordial words is elevated, it points at the mysteries of man and God. As an instance, the author uses the word “water.” It can be a utility word when it is used by a chemist instead of H<sub>2</sub>O; nevertheless, it can become a primordial word when it is used by a poet and it expresses deep truth concerning human existence.<sup>162</sup> The distinction between utility words and primordial words corresponds to Rahner’s distinction between original knowledge and conceptualization. Utility words are words of clear theoretical concepts, whereas primordial words are words of poets, which can capture religious experience.

These ideas remind us again of the theory of Paul Ricoeur and his concept of symbolic imagination. In this light the utility words are only descriptive while primordial words are symbolic since they signify something more than they originally express. Ricoeur says that a symbol “testifies to the primordial rootedness of Discourse in Life. It is born when force and form coincide.”<sup>163</sup> That is why symbolic words are to be found on the borderline between life and language. Thanks to their ability to signify more, they refer to the realities in the world which are not possible to be expressed by other means. As also von Balthasar is going to show later, symbolic words or primordial words according to Rahner’s terminology point at the mystery of creation which is rooted in the mystery of God. The redemptive function of a word is thus a created analogue to the redemption brought to us by the eternal Word of God.

Rahner continues stating that the possibility that primordial words transcend their meaning and can point to God is rooted in the analogy of being. Analogia entis means that “all realities have an inner connection, refer to each other, are in some way related, and can in the final analysis be understood only when we transcend them, as individual things, in the direction of the whole reality.”<sup>164</sup> After that it can happen that poets speaking about a particular human experience simultaneously reveal something about God.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>162</sup> Cf. RAHNER, Karl. Priest and Poet, p. 296.

<sup>163</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *Interpretation Theory*, p. 59.

<sup>164</sup> RAHNER, Karl. Art against the Horizon of Theology and Piety. In RAHNER, Karl. *Theological Investigations*. sv. 23. New York: Crossroad, 1992, p. 162-168, p. 164-165.

<sup>165</sup> Cf. RAHNER, Karl. Art against the Horizon of Theology and Piety, p. 164-165.

Rahner's definition of a poet is that a poet "is a man capable of speaking the primordial words in powerful concentration."<sup>166</sup> This definition interestingly mirrors a statement of T. S. Eliot, who as an outstanding poet and critic lets his reader take a brief look into a creative mind:

From one point of view, to turn the attention to the mind in this way is to create, for the objects alter by being observed. To contemplate an idea, because it is my idea, to observe its emotional infusion, to play with it, instead of using it as a plain and simple meaning, brings often curious and beautiful things to light, though it lends itself, this petting and teasing of one's mental offspring, to extremities of torturing language.<sup>167</sup>

Rahner rightly points out that "everyone pronounces primordial words, as long as he is not sunk completely into spiritual death,"<sup>168</sup> but it is the ability of a poet to use these words in such a concentrated way. As Eliot shows, it inevitably leads to "torturing language." That is why good poetry is always difficult and obscure. It speaks in a symbolic language, which is designed in the way that new meanings are created and, as Ricoeur points out with regard to metaphorical language, new ontological links are established.

However, a poet is not the only vocation connected with words. What is more, the vocation of a priest means that he explicitly serves and represents the eternal Word. In a similar way to a poet, a "priest is he to whom the primordial word of God in the world is entrusted, in such a way that he can speak this word in its absolute concentrated power."<sup>169</sup> While rejecting the donatist heresy, Rahner underlines the fact that what a priest says should spring up from his heart. After that he becomes a "faithful messenger," and "his whole humanity...represents what he preaches."<sup>170</sup> At this moment when a priest is able to touch the heart of another person, he becomes also a poet. This moment is also the final fulfilment of all poetry, because "the words of a poet are like gates, good and strong, clear and sure. But they are gates into infinity,

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<sup>166</sup> RAHNER, Karl. Priest and Poet, p. 301.

<sup>167</sup> ELIOT, Thomas Stearns — SCHUCHARD, Ronald (ed.). *The Varieties of Metaphysical Poetry*. London: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1993, p. 85.

<sup>168</sup> RAHNER, Karl. Priest and Poet, p. 301.

<sup>169</sup> RAHNER, Karl. Priest and Poet, p. 307.

<sup>170</sup> RAHNER, Karl. Priest and Poet, p. p. 313.

gates into the incomprehensible.”<sup>171</sup> Poetry alone cannot suffice. It can point to infinity, but it needs to be anchored in the reveal truth in order to fulfil this aim. That is why this longing for grasping the blurred touch of transcendence can be satisfied only by the word of God, of which a priest is a servant.

Rahner’s concept of a “faithful messenger” is an idea which the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur did not incorporate. It, nonetheless, shows that imagination alone does not suffice. In accordance with Karl Rahner, John Henry Newman shows that imagination can reach human heart only if it is accepted by real apprehension. This apprehension requires definite concreteness of the message. Karl Rahner would add that this message needs a “faithful messenger” in order to be really accepted by the listener. He also hints at the necessity to approach the world to which primordial words refer in the perspective of eternal Word of God. If it was not so, a poet would be able to point to God in the same way as a priest. Nevertheless, even though primordial words refer to God thanks to the analogy of being, they are not his full revelation. This revelation which we can find in the creation should be thus seen as directing towards the Son of God. He is the one who gives the sense and the fulfilment to all created beings.

### **2.2.2.3. Theology and Narrative**

The last theme which is necessary to mention with relation to Rahner’s account on theology, spirituality and art concerns narrative. We have shown that he finds non-verbal art and poetry essentially important for theology and human spirituality; nevertheless, we have not shown if the same is true also about novels, short stories and other narrative structures. So far, we have discussed what Paul Ricoeur would call the level of symbolic imagination, which escapes the language of pure concepts and is able to directly refer to human original experience and God. However, Ricoeur maintains that it is also metaphorical or, in a wider context, narrative imagination which enables us to approach the mystery. He speaks about a “second-order reference” or “primordial reference,” which is made accessible by the means of metaphorical language. This primordial reference is actually reached by the power of the redescription of reality. It opens our imagination to the worlds which are not reachable in other ways.

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<sup>171</sup> RAHNER, Karl. Priest and Poet, p. 316.

Nevertheless, as we are also going to show later, in the same way as symbolic imagination, metaphorical imagination can never be anchored in an objective reality unless we take into account the existence of Triunite God.

In his reflection on theology and art, Rahner does not devote so much space to narratives as to non-verbal art and poetry, but still he makes this important observation:

When I say, for example, that a person should love God, I have said something very deep in this simple statement. But uttered amidst all the superficial routine of daily life, it does not generate much understanding or appreciation of what the statement really means. But if I read some of the lyric lines of John of the Cross or perhaps a novel by someone like Graham Greene, which to be sure, cannot simple “contain” an immediate and genuine religious experience, for that is quite impossible, but which perhaps evokes in me my own experience of the religious, then the literature has accomplished something which reflexive, purely conceptual and rational theology is not able to accomplish.<sup>172</sup>

Although the author himself does not elaborate this statement any further, it spurs us to go back to Ricoeur’s theory of metaphorical imagination. In his essay “Priest and Poet,” Rahner speaks about primordial reference with regard to individual words; nevertheless, according to this quotation, we could infer that he would not object to the possibility of metaphorical utterance to refer to primordial level of existence as Ricoeur does.

Karl Rahner deliberately chose a sentence “I should love God,” which escapes any attempts of conceptualization as a phenomenon of love cannot be sufficiently scientifically described and the existence of personal God cannot be fully grasped by other means than by faith. This sentence thus refers to the intimate level of subjective personal experience and in order to be communicated to the other, it is necessary to choose the means which are able to do it. Of course to say that “we should love God” explicitly is not useless, as it is always necessary to root such a basic truth in a concept. Without its conceptualization and rootedness in dogma, religion would

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<sup>172</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *Theology and the Arts*, p. 395.

become an incoherent subjective domain. Nevertheless, if we want to address the person in his or her entirety, we need another way of communication too.

In his quotation, Rahner exemplifies Ricoeur's thesis that the power of fiction to redescribe reality can open a person to new horizons, including the horizon of God. Ricoeur says that by the means of redescription narrative connects thought and experience. It enables us to see our life in a new perspective and grasp our reality from a different point of view. As a narration works on the level of subjective concrete fictive or real stories, it serves as a model situation, which we can apply to our own being in the world. In this way metaphorical language is able to deliver us its message so that the message can become also an experience for us. That is why it can indirectly become the subject of real assent. We should not forget that Ricoeur does not only speak about "seeing-as" but also about "feeling-as." Metaphorical imagination thus addresses the person as a whole, including his or her feelings and emotions.

Coming to the conclusion, the last thing to point out is that Rahner prompts us to mention his significant observation about art in general. Even though he finds art to be an indispensable part of theology and spiritual life of people, he underlines that art does not exist for its own sake, but it is always an expression of human transcendence, which is aimed to uncover something from the reality, in which people live. That is why the author warns against an attitude which seeks the truth in the art alone without any link to reality. Rahner says that "art, real art, is always more than just that. If ever art is pursued exclusively for the sake of the aesthetic, it ceases to be art. It sinks down to the level of a poisonous narcotic banishing the fear of existence."<sup>173</sup> Rahner, similarly to William Lynch, underlines the necessity of anchoring the world of art in the world of real human experience. Art should not help us to escape this experience but it should help us to live our reality as fully as possible.

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<sup>173</sup> RAHNER, Karl. Priest and Poet, p. 316.

### **2.3. Hans Urs von Balthasar: Imagination as a Gateway to Mystery**

In the account of von Balthasar, we can find many similarities between his theory of imagination and the theories of the authors described above. Nevertheless, he comes also with a different perspective, which complements the preceding study and brings it to a satisfying conclusion.

We could say that Newman's account is more psychological and he aims to explain the way how Christian message can reach our heart. Rahner's perspective is focused on particular kinds of art and on the ability of art to communicate Christian message. Unlike the previous authors, von Balthasar comes with an elaborate project of theological aesthetics. He investigates the nature of images, the possibility of images to communicate and the kind of message which they are able to communicate. This is a part of a larger investigation devoted to the description of the nature of truth which images reveal. It leads to the consideration of its relatedness to the concept of goodness and beauty. In other words, he examines the nature of symbolic language and thus we can find several parallels between his notion and the theory of symbolic imagination of Paul Ricoeur. This is going to be the content of the first part of the following study.

After that, von Balthasar aims his effort to the conceptualization of the connection between the beauty of the world and eternal beauty of Christ. Thanks to this fact we can push our discussion of imagination from the level of epistemology towards the discussion of the relation between imagination and the very nature of God's communication with man and human response to this call. That is why the second part of the treatise is going to be devoted to the theme of the revelation of God, namely the creation, Scripture and the full revelation in Jesus Christ. This exploration is going to be concluded by the description of the nature of human response to God's invitation. In this context, we are going to illuminate the theme also in the perspective of Ricoeur's theory of metaphorical imagination, which comes with the idea of redescription and describes the role of narrative as a model. We are going to illustrate that these thoughts can contribute to the understanding of the appeal for following Christ and the personal transformation caused by conversion. In this way, we are going to show that imagination is an important operative force in the relation between God and man.

## 2.3.1. Symbolic imagination: The World of Images

### 2.3.1.1. The Nature of Images and Possible Attitudes to them

It can seem quite surprising that von Balthasar starts his reflection on the nature of images, which he considers to be an indispensable tool for understanding the world and God, pointing at their uncertainty and mistiness. This is the way in which the notion concerning the nature of images is mirrored in the author's description from the first volume of his *Theo-Logic* with the subtitle *Truth of the World*:

The images simulate something that they themselves are not: a world. They suggest the idea of essence and existence, but they are neither. They have no essence, because they are nothing but surface without depth....They float in themselves, without any unequivocal relation either to an object or to a subject. The imagination of an object or subject may have a hand in producing them, but the images themselves know nothing of this.<sup>174</sup>

This account seemingly questions our main thesis that imagination is an essential faculty for human cognition including the field of theology. How is it possible to verify something which is based on images if their nature is such? What is more, how is it possible to make use of this world for any kind of science?

Von Balthasar adds that "because the images have no depth and no essence, they also have no law. If the images alone existed, the world would be completely random."<sup>175</sup> This thesis actually leads us back to Paul Ricoeur, where we discussed the problem of metaphorical reference. We asked if imagination can refer to the truth or if it floats only in ungraspable fiction, which is unrelated to real life. Ricoeur solves this problem by the statement that imagination serves as a means to redescribe reality, and thus it helps us approach reality from a different point of view and allows us to get open to new possibilities and opportunities. Von Balthasar comes with a similar solution, as he also

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<sup>174</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I: Truth of the World*. San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2002, p. 133.

<sup>175</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 133.

puts to the centre the knowing subject, who is able to unite disparate images into a meaningful whole. Nevertheless, he simultaneously underlines that the truth is not something which is ascribed to the image by the subject, but it essentially belongs to the image.

It is true that images do not make sense by themselves. They actually do not know what they express as a computer, which, with the use of the code consisting of zeroes and ones, is able to create a letter “A” but is not able to read what it writes. It is only the person reading from the screen who can interpret the sense of the black shape on the white surface. In the same way, we can trace various colours and objects in the nature, but “it would start making sense only when it was looked at, no longer as an image, but as a landscape, as a significant whole, whose center of gravity lies entirely elsewhere than the pure image in which it appears.”<sup>176</sup>

It is thus the task of our mind, to suppose that the images which it perceives make sense. We automatically presume that the surrounding world can be interpreted in a coherent way. In other words, our mind “always already perceives in the images a perspectival depth that they do not possess of themselves and draws out of them a total form that is more than the bare outline of the naked appearance.”<sup>177</sup> It is thus the human subject, who assigns essence and existence to the world of images even though images do not possess it by themselves: “Out of itself, out of its own substance, the subject nourishes the images and bestows upon them the rank of a portrayal of the world.”<sup>178</sup>

Each reality showing itself in images has thus two levels. It immediately talks to us by its appearance, but we always suppose that there is an essence hidden behind. Von Balthasar explains that “by its very essence, being is always richer than what we see and apprehend of it. Furthermore, this mystery, as it is now our task to show, is not something ‘beyond’ truth, but it is a permanent, immanent property of it.”<sup>179</sup> While Paul Ricoeur characterizes a symbol by the ability to signify more, von Balthasar speaks in the same context about mystery.

Nevertheless, before we investigate the theme of mystery any further, let us turn attention to the knowing subject trying to find the truth, which is often confused by this “senseless puzzle of the world of images with the sense-filled mystery of the world as it

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<sup>176</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 134.

<sup>177</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 134.

<sup>178</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 135.

<sup>179</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 131.

exists in itself.”<sup>180</sup> Because the discovery of truth behind the image can be demanding, the knowing subject is often in danger of choosing a misleading path towards it. Von Balthasar thus lists two main attitudes which do not lead to the desired goal even though they provide a persuasive illusion that they do.

The first attitude reflects Newman’s idea of the restriction of human cognition to notional apprehension and Rahner’s critique of pure conceptualization. In this case “the subject sees only the abstract relation between the manifest, but inessential, world of images and the unmanifest, essential world behind the images.”<sup>181</sup> Since the subject admits that images are mere appearances without any law and guaranty of certainty, it starts to be skeptical about them and refuses to build any connection between the world of images and world as such. The subject thus focuses on the abstract world behind images and the world of images is perceived as insignificant for knowing the truth. In this context, Karl Rahner speaks even about the damnation of primordial words. Von Balthasar continues that

It is the realm of intellectual contents, of ideas and concepts, in which the subject’s interiority and reflection communicate immediately with the interiority of the object. Truth, real “understanding”, is to be found in this intercourse alone, whereas the realm of the images merely produces “opinion” that ultimately contains no truth. It is necessary to shut the gates of the senses, in order to listen within oneself to the voice of reason and to see the light of the intellect; only thus can we become free from the realm of illusion and open to the world of truth.<sup>182</sup>

This way of thinking, according to the author, is exemplified by rationalism and idealist mysticism. These systems, however, fall apart as everything is originally revealed to us by senses so arriving at the truth by rejecting the world of images is in itself contradictory.

The second danger is represented by the reverse attitude. It is the way of empiricism and the mysticism of immediate experience. These approaches are trying to find the truth in images themselves without any attempt to search for the truth behind them: “The stream of images, in which nothing can be repeated and everything comes only

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<sup>180</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 135.

<sup>181</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 136.

<sup>182</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 136.

once, the subject now takes to be the truth of being: pure change fullness is being's enduring essence, pure unreality is the form of its existence."<sup>183</sup> Because the subject cannot find the way to the essence of the image, it concentrates only on the appearance and mistakably supposes that it is sufficient. However, this approach anchors the subject in the realm of unreal dreams without any connection to the actual world. This idea mirrors Rahner's critique of pure aestheticism and Newman's refusal of a spirituality which is not rooted in dogma.

While the first attitude described by von Balthasar attempts to find the truth outside images, the second attitude wants to find the way towards the truth only in images. Both of these approaches fail to establish a persuasive link between the essence and appearance. "Both are aware that they are dealing with a mystery, but because the one seeks the truth in the conceptless image, whereas the other seeks it in the imageless concept, both arrive only at an *empty* mystery."<sup>184</sup> Ideally, neither essence nor appearance should be suppressed, but we should find a way how to establish a working connection between them.

### **2.3.1.2. The Mystery of Images in the Light of Truth, Beauty and Love**

Nevertheless, the question is how to find the link between the essence and appearance of an image? In other words, how to approach the world of images so that we would find truth behind them? Von Balthasar points out that "truth can be found only in a floating middle between the appearance and the thing that appears."<sup>185</sup> The author expresses this relation by the concept of signification. Each image is there to signify something which is under the surface. "The surface is, so to say, loaded with the whole sense contained in this depth... What is contained in the hidden center presses outward, as is nicely conveyed by the word 'ex-pression.'"<sup>186</sup> The image is thus an original expression of something beyond. It is not being as such, but it expresses being; the appearance points to the essence.

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<sup>183</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 137.

<sup>184</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 137.

<sup>185</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 138.

<sup>186</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 139.

Von Balthasar explains that “we apprehend the significant reality, then, wholly in the image, yet it is not limited to the reality of the image. In this ineliminable duality, truth begins to reveal itself as a full (and no longer empty) mystery.”<sup>187</sup> The author continues stating that

The whole world of images that surround us is a single field of significations. Every flower we see is an expression, every landscape has its significance, every human or animal face speaks its wordless language. It would be utterly futile to attempt a transposition of this language into concepts. Though we might try to circumscribe, even to describe, the content these things express, we would never succeed in rendering it adequately.<sup>188</sup>

Therefore, it is not possible to discover the meaning of Mozart’s symphony by its explanation, but it is necessary to listen to it over and over again in order to find out what it signifies. In a similar way, we cannot successfully substitute a poem by its paraphrase. In general, “concepts, in fact, always apply to more than one thing, but art reveals something having singular, incommutable significance. A thousand adjectives will never convey to one who has not heard it the slightest notion of the overture to Don Giovanni.”<sup>189</sup> Simply speaking, von Balthasar would surely agree with Newman and Rahner that imagination can never be substituted by concepts and direct experience cannot be replaced by description. The world of images in its concreteness speaks directly to our heart, while the world of concepts appeals just to our reason.

Von Balthasar reminds us again of Ricoeur’s treatise concerning symbolic imagination when he claims with regard to an artistic expression that, “at the moment when the two finite magnitudes of sense [Sinn] and image [Bild] coincided, the word became infinite – a symbol [Sinnbild] that from now on transcends the sum of its parts.”<sup>190</sup> In the chapter devoted to Paul Ricoeur, we have shown that he distinguishes between linguistic and non-linguistic stratum of a symbol. This roughly corresponds to von Balthasar’s distinction between an image and sense.

Image would mirror non-linguistic kernel of a symbol, which is bound by external reality, namely by the world of cosmos, the realm of human psyche or the restrictions

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<sup>187</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 140.

<sup>188</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 140.

<sup>189</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 141.

<sup>190</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 141.

given by the nature of poetic discourse. Linguistic kernel would reflect the level of sense, in von Balthasar's words. In Ricoeur's view, the sense of surrounding realities is mainly expressed by language, and that is why he focuses on verbal imagination and puts off the discussion of non-verbal expressions. Although von Balthasar refers to both non-verbal and verbal imagination, he also admits that "the sensible sign is now in truth absolved from the essence, inasmuch as the connection established by the immediate relation of expression is replaced by a new, arbitrary connection: linguistic creation."<sup>191</sup> Karl Rahner complements this view with his idea of a redemptive function of language.

Not only points the sense of the images beyond itself to the mystery which cannot be translated into the language of concepts, but, because of this ability, imagination spurs our desire for knowledge. In this point, von Balthasar evokes the opinion of Karl Rahner, who says that "comprehension lives by the power of what is incomprehensible."<sup>192</sup> It means that the field of mystery motivates us to know more and to ask questions, which provide us with the answers that open us to further questioning. Von Balthasar shows that it is actually the ability of images to point at mystery which nourishes our will to know more. He says that

this excess transcending all that we can grasp by conceptual analysis, delimitation, and cataloguing, this eternal 'more' belonging to every being, saves the revelation of things and the knowledge of them from immediately becoming insuperably boring. The knowing mind is by definition no longer capable of being thrilled by anything that it has thoroughly penetrated, that lies open and unveiled before it without mystery. The mind feels superior to, and looks down upon, whatever it has penetrated it this way. It has no reason to devote any further attention to this expression of sense and significance. ...Its experience is like that of a pupil with whom the teacher wants to review the same material every day, even though he has already gotten the point long ago: he is sick and tired of hearing the same thing over and over again.<sup>193</sup>

After that the author wonders how it is possible that the things which surround us everyday are still attractive for us. The reason is that their mysteriousness is always

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<sup>191</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 159.

<sup>192</sup> RAHNER, Karl. *Theology and the Arts*, p. 390.

<sup>193</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 142.

richer than we are able to apprehend. “Even when we have known a thing, it remains in some sense inexplicable, thus compelling us to look up to it with reverent veneration, sure that it is capable of further revelation, that its inner wealth has the capacity to go on infinitely irradiating new truth.”<sup>194</sup>

Von Balthasar notices that this aspect of truth springing from its dwelling in the realm of mystery is very close to the concept of beauty. He points at the capacity of a being to overwhelm “by its splendor, its indivisible integrity, and its perfect expressive power.”<sup>195</sup> The name of this kind of property of truth can be “none other than beauty...; thanks to beauty, every encounter with truth is a new event.”<sup>196</sup> In von Balthasar’s view, this kind of truth does not come from pure logic, but it is rather the matter of grace, which “surrounds every truth insofar as it is an original disclosure of being.”<sup>197</sup> It means that this truth does not come from men, but it is already contained in existing things.

Nonetheless, beauty is not the only transcendental which the truth of mystery is attached to. The author speaks also about goodness and love, which complement truth. For our purposes, let us focus on the latter. The basic presupposition of the discussion is the fact that all beings “confess their essence simply by existing: they cannot elude this ontological confession.”<sup>198</sup> In this opening to the subject, they express themselves and cannot do otherwise. That is why they give themselves at the mercy of the knowing subject. Von Balthasar shows that “in this nakedness, truth calls immediately for the protection of understanding love. The elementary act of knowledge must include an attitude of benevolence, if not of mercy, which receives the defenseless object in an atmosphere of warmth and discretion.”<sup>199</sup>

It is only because the object is capable of holding mystery that it is worthy of love. Love demands both veiling and unveiling:

Whenever man reveres the rare, the precious, the holy, he separates it out; he consecrates and removes it from the public eye; he conceals it in the cell of a sanctuary, in the penumbra of a sacred space; he snatches it from everyday

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<sup>194</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 143.

<sup>195</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 141.

<sup>196</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 141-142.

<sup>197</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 142.

<sup>198</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 207.

<sup>199</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 207.

history by investing it with a marvelous legend; he surrounds it with an air of mystery.<sup>200</sup>

The author continues pointing out that when a lover thinks that there is no mystery any more and he knows everything about the beloved, his love reached its end. Unveiling mystery is thus a never-ending task of those who love. The lovers “must enter into a sort of darkness, into a discouragement over the ever-greater mystery of the beloved, over their incapacity ever to resolve it.”<sup>201</sup> Mystery is thus a necessary prerequisite of love. In these reflections, von Balthasar gets very close to the notion of Karl Rahner, who shows that the love is the only possible way how to approach the mystery of God.

### **2.3.2. Metaphorical Imagination: The Expression of God and Human Answer to his Call**

According to the preceding pages, it might seem that the theme of imagination is connected mainly with the method of theology showing the way how to respond to human cognitive abilities as fully as possible. Nevertheless, we do not want to stay on this point, but we want to show imagination as relevant to Christology and theological anthropology as well. This is the main reason, why the account of Hans Urs von Balthasar is found to be particularly contributive since he shows that the importance of imagination is not exhausted when we discuss its relevance for the way of approaching Christian mystery, but that this theme can contribute also to our understanding of God and man and the relationship between them.

According to the approach of Paul Ricoeur, we could see that imagination does not only help us to understand the world around us, but it is an indispensable power of our self-understanding. In his account, it seems that an individual can get trapped in his or her subjective world without any objective connection. However, the faith in God enables us to escape the solipsistic world and opens us to perceive ourselves as relational beings. Our relation to God, which is analogically mirrored in our relation to

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<sup>200</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 209.

<sup>201</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 210.

the others, not only shapes but fundamentally transforms the way we understand ourselves, and, at the same time, it warrants that we do not remain close in an imaginary vacuum, but we get anchored in the objective reality of God's creation. This notion is possible only if we speak about God in three persons, and we assent to the idea that the Father sent the Son, who shows us the way to the Father by the possibility to follow him. Von Balthasar points out that "as a participation in Jesus' historical life, death and Resurrection, faith always derives from the object of faith and, therefore, faith, even in its subjective dimension, can be understood only by an objective representation of its object."<sup>202</sup>

This fact leads us to the last two theoretical questions of this chapter, which we will attempt to answer with the help of the theology of von Balthasar in the light of Ricoeur's theory. Firstly, we are going to focus on the relationship of imagination and the way in which God speaks to us. Secondly, we are going to ask how imagination shapes our self-understanding as Christians. While the part devoted to the nature of images reflects mostly what Paul Ricoeur classifies as symbolic imagination, this subchapter is going to focus mainly on metaphorical and narrative imagination. However, we should remember that the borderline between these modes of imagination is not strict and they sometimes overlap and often complement each other.

Our springboard of the following study is the beginning of the Epistle to the Hebrews: "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by *his* Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds."<sup>203</sup> There are thus three levels in which God speaks to men: his creation, the Holy Scripture and the Son. However, it should be underlined that the first two levels point always to the third.<sup>204</sup> Christ is always the centre, for whom and through whom the world was created. He is the one to whom the Old Testament points and who is the final fulfillment of the salvation history. Our aim is to show in which way imagination as described by Paul Ricoeur is topical for these kinds of revelation. At first, we are going to deal with the topic of creation. Secondly, we are going to touch the theme of the Scripture, and, after that, we are going to reach the central topic of this subchapter, which is the person of

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<sup>202</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord: Theological Aesthetics I: Seeing the Form*. Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1989, 197.

<sup>203</sup> Heb 1,1-2.

<sup>204</sup> Cf. BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 435.

Jesus Christ as a fulfillment and centre of all revelation. Finally, we are going to comment on human response to the revelation of God.

### 2.3.2.1. Creation

The most important starting point of the discussion concerning world as a revelation of God is the fact that God's creation bears an imprint of its maker's hand and points to him. The world created by God analogically reveals the truth of its maker. The world is not a chaos of incidental beings, but all beings are directed "in every respect to the unity which is presupposed in and over them."<sup>205</sup>

In the chapter devoted to the nature of images, we have shown that each being reveals only a part of itself, but its essence always remains mysteriously veiled and thus it invites the knowing subject to continuous discovery. In the first volume of *The Glory of the Lord*, von Balthasar continues that "the mystery of Being... invites the creaturely spirit to move away from and beyond itself and entrust and surrender itself to that mystery."<sup>206</sup> Therefore, the creation does not only contribute to the apprehension of the finite, but, from its very nature, it invites the knowing subject to go beyond to the realm of infinity. Although we are not able to "wholly comprehend the analogy of Being, or that the spirit can measure in itself the relationship between finite and infinite Being," we find out that we are "directed by the analogy of Being beyond"<sup>207</sup> ourselves. It means that the world of created beauty does not only serve as a useful means of talking about God, but it is in itself an expression, which reveals the truth about him.

It is thus possible that even the kind of art, which does not primarily intend to be theological, can reveal a deep truth about the world of transcendence. We are thus invited not to isolate theological themes in secular artistic expression, but our task is to contemplate them in their whole form in order to find the truth about the world, which reveals the truth of its Creator, as it is suggested also by Karl Rahner.

However, it is to be remembered that this kind of revelation is not full. Von Balthasar thus argues that

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<sup>205</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 448.

<sup>206</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 500.

<sup>207</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 450.

natural theology can only take the form of allowing all creaturely Being to become an indicative utterance about God (since everything derives from him and may thus bear his image and trace). But this positive, from-below cataphatic theology must finally lead to a comprehensive negative (apophatic) theology.<sup>208</sup>

In accordance with the concept of Paul Ricoeur, we could say that the analogy of being presupposes the metaphorization of the verb ‘to be’ in the copula between the tenor and vehicle and that the copula has an existential value. The fact that the verb ‘to be’ does not have relational but existential function is supported by the concept of the analogy of being. Nevertheless, as we speak about analogy, it is important to take into account that the metaphorical ‘is’ always includes ‘is not.’ In Ricoeur’s view, the ontological link between the tenor and vehicle is established, but the tension between the similarity and difference remains. This applies also to our speaking about God, when *via affirmationis* always needs to be supplemented by *via negationis*.

The basic problem of relying just on the created beings as a revelation of God is the fact that, on the level of creation, there is no “sustaining bridge leading from the meaning of the world to the meaning of God.”<sup>209</sup> This problem can be solved only if we find a working connection between these two levels. It means that the creation cannot reveal the truth of God fully if we do not consider the person for whom everything was created and to whom all creation points. It is therefore Jesus Christ, man and God, who in his person perichoretically connects these two natures and thus creates a unique bridge between the world and its Creator.

### **2.3.2.2. Holy Scripture**

Before we get to the Christological field, we should mention the second way how God manifests himself to man – the Bible. The theme of the role of imagination and the Bible is very broad so that we could devote to it the whole thesis. Our aim is thus to make only several brief observations. The most important opinion of von Balthasar in this regard, which is shared also by other scholars, is that it is not only the content of

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<sup>208</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 448.

<sup>209</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 448.

the Bible which is inspired, but it is the whole form, which is a part of God's revelation: "Inspiration in its totality is to be grasped only in the form, never in psychology and biography. And, therefore, if any kind of Biblical philology is to be fruitful, it must have its point of departure in form and must lead back to it."<sup>210</sup>

Von Balthasar points out that the Bible is essentially a poetic text, but the fact that God chose to deliver his word to the mankind using the power of metaphorical imagination is not a straightforward argument for admitting that it is also the form what is inspired. Some supporting arguments against this view are, for instance, that the form is related to the cultural and historical context of the origin of the texts. That is to say, in the Biblical time, the songs, hymns, prophetic texts, narratives and parables were the common means for articulating the message.<sup>211</sup>

Von Balthasar's answer to this objection is that "we must, then, always see clearly where the competence of the philological and archeological method really lies and where it must be complemented and even surpassed by a special method suited to the uniqueness of its object."<sup>212</sup> He continues to ask:

Can we grasp typologically and categorically even what different peoples, at the summit of their religions, take to be a divine revelation? Or better: Even if in the experience of such a revelation a role is certainly played by the particular character of a culture, a people, an age, an individual, does not the real event occurring actually escape all comparative classification? Is it not in every instance something absolutely unique, since it represents a ray from the very abyss of the mystery of Being, and as such it proclaims the uniqueness and incomparableness of the latter? And if a given people then brings such a unique expression of Being to the full maturity of a valid symbolic form (in stele, myth, or dramatic action), what right do we have to relativise this construct from the perspective of any typology whatever, thus necessarily robbing it of its believing soul?<sup>213</sup>

In this comment, the author underlines the essential connection between the form and the content of the Scripture. As he shows in his discussion of the nature of images,

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<sup>210</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 32.

<sup>211</sup> Cf. BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 42.

<sup>212</sup> Cf. BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 44.

<sup>213</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 500.

it is in human nature to separate out realities which we consider to be rare, precious and holy. As also Saint Ambrose shows, we create an inner sanctuary where it is concealed and honoured. Von Balthasar adds that we also separate this mystery from everyday history by retelling it by the means of a story – a myth or “a marvelous legend.”<sup>214</sup> Even though the form of the Bible is closely related to the historical and cultural context of the origin of its texts, the form is not something additional, but it reflects the nature of message it aims to deliver to the reader or to the listener.

What is more, the fact that the language of literature does not conceptualize but refers to the concrete also opens the way toward the concrete experience of the reader of the listener, as Ryken observes:

It is a commonplace that the subject of literature is human experience – not abstract ideas or propositions, but experience. The knowledge or truth that literature gives us is an awareness of reality or truth as it is actually experienced.... Instead of giving us abstract propositions about virtue or vice, for example, literature presents stories of good or evil characters in action.<sup>215</sup>

In Ricoeur’s words, literary form does not generalize but refers to a particular experience and enables the reader or the listener to redescribe their life according to this experience by the new possibility of “seeing as” or “feeling as.” What is more, von Balthasar shows that literature thus creates the space where the metaphoric and symbolic refers to the infinite mystery. Which other language is more suitable to formulate anything about God?

In order to conclude this topic, let us, for a brief moment, turn our attention to another scholar mentioned above Leland Ryken, who in his work investigates the role of the Bible as a piece of literature. In his book *How to Read the Bible as Literature* he distinguishes between two kinds of using language: expository and literary. It corresponds to our distinction between conceptualization or notional language and the expression of a concrete experience in the language of symbolic or metaphorical imagination. The author notices that the Bible effectively uses both kinds of language:

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<sup>214</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *Theo-Logic I*, p. 209.

<sup>215</sup> RYKEN, Leland. *How to read the Bible as Literature*. Zondervan: Michigan, 1984, p. 17.

The Bible contains an abundance of both expository and literary writing. One is not inherently better or more effective than the other, and we obviously need both types of writing to do justice to all sides of life and truth. The commandment “you shall not kill” is expository in its approach to moral truth. The story of Cain and Abel (Gen. 4:1 – 16) embodies the same truth in the distinctly literary form of a story (a story that implies but nowhere states that it is sin to murder someone).<sup>216</sup>

The Bible thus reflects that both kinds of languages are indispensable. It is important to say “you shall not kill,” but it is different if the statement is apprehended only by the reason or both by the reason and by the heart. The conceptualization refers to the reason and its purpose is to be apprehended by the whole community of people. Nevertheless, the individual needs to apprehend it personally and concretely and thus integrate the statement to his or her way of living. It is thus the means of the story which introduces the statement in its concreteness and in the perspective of complex human experience. It means that the literary language of the Bible is not merely decorative, but it has its important purpose. The Bible is not only a text which formulates the basic tenets of Christian religion and secures that the religion is anchored in a certain theological context, but it is also a text which nourishes personal faith in the concrete life of the believers.

### **2.3.2.3. Jesus Christ**

As von Balthasar says, “the perception of God, who is imperceptible in himself and yet has become perceptible through his grace, is realized when God comes into the world and, yes, *becomes world*.”<sup>217</sup> Although the world of images points to the mystery of its Creator and he speaks to us through the mouths of the prophets, all revelation is fully realized when God himself becomes world in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus

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<sup>216</sup> RYKEN, Leland. *How to read the Bible as Literature*, p. 18.

<sup>217</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 302.

Christ comes to the world in order to let the Father reveal himself in the Son, who becomes the heir not only of the historical revelation, but of the entire universe.<sup>218</sup>

Jesus Christ, as a concrete historical figure, uses “the whole expressional apparatus of human existence from birth to death, including all the stages of life, all the states in life, the solitary and the social situation.” In this way he is “the Word, the Image, the Expression and the Exegesis of God.”<sup>219</sup> This Word of God is not expository, but creative and imaginative. God’s Word is concrete; it refers to a particular human experience, addresses human heart and enters into a concrete story of our lives. At the same time, the Word of God encompasses much more than the language of concept is able to generalize. Jesus is a perfect *universale concretum*. He is the aim and fulfillment of the whole universe; he “perfects the whole ontology and aesthetics of created Being.”<sup>220</sup> Nevertheless, at the same time, he lives the story of a man from Nazareth.<sup>221</sup>

Even though we speak about the Word of God in singular, it does not mean that this restricts his existence to the symbolic level, as it could be indicated by the fact that symbols refer to individual words, which point to a mystery behind. Von Balthasar underlines that

in relation to the central phenomenon of revelation we can by no means speak of ‘signs’ which, according to their nature, point beyond themselves to something ‘signified.’ Jesus the Man, in his visibility, is not a sign pointing beyond himself to an invisible ‘Christ of faith’ – whether this view is nuanced more in a Platonising Catholic sense or in a criticistic Protestant manner. The image and expression of God, according to the Biblical assertion, is the indivisible God-man: man, in so far as God radiates from him; God, in so far as he appears in the man Jesus.<sup>222</sup>

From the point of view influenced by the research of Paul Ricoeur, we could say that the Word of God can be better described in terms of metaphorical imagination rather than symbolic. Jesus Christ does not show himself in a singular moment, but demonstrates himself in his whole story of life. As we could see in the first chapter,

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<sup>218</sup> Cf. BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 302.

<sup>219</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 29.

<sup>220</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 29.

<sup>221</sup> Cf. POSPÍŠIL, Ctirad Václav. *Ježíš z Nazareta, Pán a Spasitel*. Kostelní Vydří: Karmelitánské nakladatelství, 2006, p. 237.

<sup>222</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 437.

Ricoeur claims that the story is the best expression of personal identity. It thus means that God used the best way to express who he is when he decided to reveal himself in the story of a particular person. Let us also remember that a metaphor cannot be fully grasped in an isolated form, but we need the whole metaphorical network to discover its meaning. That is why metaphorical statements are usually found in the context of larger wholes.

What is more, the metaphorical relationship can be found not only in the means of Christ's revelation, but in its very nature. Von Balthasar underlines that the Word "is what he expresses – namely, God – but he is not whom he expresses – namely, the Father."<sup>223</sup> In the discussion of the nature of images, we pointed out that their appearance expresses their essence. However, in the case of Jesus Christ it is not the whole truth. Although he shares the divine nature with the Father, he is not identical with him. This tension between identity and difference leads us again to the discussion concerning the nature of metaphor by Paul Ricoeur, who points out that metaphorical "is" simultaneously implies "is not" not only on the fictional level but also on the level of ontology. Ricoeur refuses the idea that a metaphor is a reduced simile, which uses the copula "is like," so, we could say that the tension in the copula of a metaphor in linguistics in this aspect mirrors what we call perichoresis in theology.

As we have shown, the way how God speaks to us in his Son can be described rather in terms of metaphor than symbol. This spurs us to ask, if we could apply also Ricoeur's observation concerning the role of metaphor as a model. Let us start with the words of von Balthasar:

Christ, the full and perfect man, has in his own totality the experience of what God is. He is, with body and soul, the embodiment of this experience. And, as God-become-man who reveals God to man, Christ, even as God, has the experience of what man is: man, that is to say, both as God wanted him to be and also as he at the same time recapitulates in himself everything living in the world which is forgetful of God. Men are invited and, in their own way, initiated into this highest archetypal experience. This archetype is both things at once: the inimitable and what must be imitated. It determines both itself and what is alien to itself, without both things being able to come under one common head.<sup>224</sup>

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<sup>223</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 29.

<sup>224</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 304.

Examining the type of information which a metaphor can contain, Ricoeur starts to speak about models. As it was shown, he builds his theory on the essay by Max Black called “Models and Archetypes.” However, instead of talking about archetypes, which is can be misinterpreted in the light of Jungian use of the term, Ricoeur chooses to speak about metaphorical networks.<sup>225</sup> The most important observation with this regard is the fact that a metaphorical network or an archetype works in the literary contexts in the same way as a model in a scientific context. The relationship between the original domain and the archetype is that of a redescription. If we thus say that “Christ is the archetypal relationship of man to God,”<sup>226</sup> it means that this revelation is something much more than a logical argumentation and theoretical explanation. It leads us to a new discovery and new experience.

#### **2.3.2.4. Human Response to God’s Invitation**

Nevertheless, as J. H. Newman shows, the fact that God reveals himself in the best possible way does not immediately mean that this message will be apprehended by real assent. Sometimes the message does not reach the heart of a person and does not touch his or her concrete existence. Von Balthasar emphasizes that a certain disposition of the person is necessary to get open to the real apprehension of God’s message:

In order to see the form of the Redeemer, therefore, a turning is necessary: a turning away from one’s own image and a turning to the image of God. And here lies the whole problem of the representation of Jesus in images, particularly of his suffering. The turning or ‘con-version’ is the prerequisite, not only for ‘being able’ to endure this image and look at it, but the prerequisite for being able to see at all what it expresses objectively.<sup>227</sup>

It is thus the movement from our own image to the image of God what is required from us in order to be able to apprehend God’s revelation.

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<sup>225</sup> Cf. RICOEUR, Paul. *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 288.

<sup>226</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 305.

<sup>227</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 522-523.

These considerations lead us to another aspect of von Balthasar's anthropology. It shows that it is not only our response to God which is necessarily imaginative, but whole human existence can be described in terms of imagination. Man is actually created according to the image of God. Therefore, "man as a whole is not an archetype of Being and Spirit, rather their image; he is not the primal word, but a response; he is not a speaker, but an expression governed by the laws of beauty, laws which man cannot impose on himself."<sup>228</sup>

It means that everything which is said about images before is also true about man. We can thus say about man as well as about other images that man has to be communicated; he has an essence which is pointed at by the appearance but which is veiled in mystery. Together with other images he participates on the analogy of being, so the mystery concerning the truth about who he is necessarily points to God. That is why we are invited to go beyond ourselves in order to find our fulfillment because only in the depths of our mystery we can find the truth about ourselves. What is more, von Balthasar also teaches us that this kind of truth is always complemented by other transcendentals – beauty and love. In the search of the truth of ourselves, we thus find also our calling to the ultimate beauty and love.

As we are created according to the image of God, God is actually our truth and in the attachment to God we find the fulfillment of our existence: "As a totality of spirit and body, man must make himself into God's mirror and seek to attain to that transcendence and radiance that must be found in the world's substance if it is indeed God's image and likeness – his word and gesture, action and drama."<sup>229</sup>

This quotation indicates that human existence can be rather described in terms of symbolic imagination rather than metaphorical since our identity is inseparably tied to the story of our life. It is the dynamism of the narrative structure of our existence which enables us to reinterpret our life according to the archetype of Jesus Christ. Von Balthasar explains that "Christian contemplation is the opposite of distanced consideration of an image: as Paul says, it is the metamorphosis of the beholder into the image he beholds (2 Cor 3,18), the 'realisation' of what the image expresses."<sup>230</sup> In other words, the knowledge of God can never be separated from the adherence to this knowledge.

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<sup>228</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 21.

<sup>229</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 22.

<sup>230</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 485.

If the existence of man was not perceived from the perspective of a narrative, the metamorphosis into the image of God would not be full. It is not only present moment which is transformed, but the transformation touches both past and future. If human identity, according to Paul Ricoeur, is expressed by the story of life, which is in the process of continuous reinterpretation in the light of present experience, the conversion means that we redescribe our life story in the light of our experience of God, and it is consequently reflected in our plans and decisions in the future. Therefore, Christ becomes the archetype of our life, according to which we reinterpret our whole being.

The best demonstration of this process is the example of the disciples, who could comprehend their master only after he had died and risen from the dead. Jesus was with them also before, he was a part of their life and he talked to them, explained the things, showed them his example, but the disciples did not comprehend it until the Word of God was uttered in its completeness. The transformation of the disciples after the Resurrection and Pentecost did not touch only their present state, but encompassed also their past experience, as von Balthasar explains:

And yet, this content was already to be found expressed in the man Jesus, and, for all its abstraction and contemplation, the retrospective remembering and *anamnesis* of what has been seen – *the conversio ad phantasma (verissimum!)* – constitutes the basis of understanding anything.<sup>231</sup>

However, the transformation of the life of the disciples directs also to the future since it influences their motivation. In the language of theology, imaginative reflection of conversion in the future enables the disciples to modify their life according to their mission which God intends for them. Because of this reason, imagination helps us to grasp the direction of being to its eschatological fulfilment.

In a similar way, the Spirit works in each person, who is asked to see with the eyes of faith what the eye-witnesses rendered by their testimony.<sup>232</sup> Imagination is thus an important operative force, which can be addressed by the Holy Spirit, who opens our eyes to know the truth of who we are, who we were and where we aim.

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<sup>231</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 30.

<sup>232</sup> Cf. BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 31.

The last important point which is necessary to mention is the fact that the essence of an image has to be always reflected in its appearance. This is relevant also for our discussion of man as an image of God. Von Balthasar underlines that

the Christian will realize his mission only if he truly *becomes* this form which has been willed and instituted by Christ. The exterior of this form must express and reflect its interior to the world in a credible manner, and the interior must be confirmed, justified, and made love-worthy in its radiant beauty through the truth of the exterior that manifests it.”<sup>233</sup>

It means that if man is transformed according the image of Christ, this fundamental change of his essence must be reflected in his expression. That is why the man who found the truth of his existence in his attachment to God necessarily manifests this truth, beauty, love and goodness also in his action.

## **2.4. Imagination as a Theological Term: Towards a Synthesis**

The preceding lines described the way how imagination works in the concepts of three theologians –Newman, Rahner and Balthasar. We have suggested that there are some common ideas and approaches even though the ways towards them are different. We could also notice that each of our theologians comes with new thoughts concerning imagination, which complement and enrich the concepts of his colleagues. The presumption of this chapter was that, with the help of Ricoeur’s theory, we can arrive at a coherent theological concept of imagination.

In this moment we can afford to step aside from the philosophical view of Paul Ricoeur. It is because the main reason of choosing his concept was to find the way how to approach the ideas of the three theologians. None of them explicitly and extensively formulates what imagination actually is. We thus had to identify particular themes of their work which can be viewed as linked to Ricoeur’s concept, and thus we secured that the ideas are not random but they can be connected into one concise theory. The

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<sup>233</sup> BALTHASAR, Hans Urs von. *The Glory of the Lord I*, p. 28.

concept of Ricoeur thus delimited the perspective in which we approached the theological texts. In other words, it served as an interpretative tool, which proved actually useful as we were really able to find interesting links between Ricoeur, Newman, Rahner and von Balthasar. It does not mean that it would not be possible to choose another philosophical concept, but then the whole work would be different.

In this point, it is important that we know what imagination means for us. It is a tool thanks to which we understand the world around and ourselves so it can be mainly described in terms of verbal expression although non-verbal expression cannot be neglected as well. This kind of imagination is best described with regard to the theory of narrative, metaphor and symbol since they have a specific kind of reference, thanks to which we can approach the areas of the world which would be impossible to touch otherwise.

The purpose of this subchapter is to formulate in which way we can speak about imagination in theology in a continuous line of thinking. This subchapter thus does not intend to bring any new facts or observations, but it serves as a space for an attempt to reorganize the preceding theological sketches into one whole. In this way it serves also as a summary of the whole chapter.

In the work of our three theologians we could always identify the recognition of two kinds of expression. It is basically the language of concepts and the language of imagination. While the former is the result of generalization and abstraction, the latter is directly or indirectly tied to a concrete human experience.

Hans Urs von Balthasar shows that the language of pure concepts is in danger of neglecting the importance of being connected to concrete images and claiming that it is able to arrive at truth by itself. Rahner thus underlines that each concept must be oriented to concrete experience, which means that the language of concepts should be supplemented by the language of imagination. Of course, conceptualization has also its important purpose as it serves as an effective means of communication and secures that the concrete does not stand against general principles. That is why spirituality always needs to be rooted in dogma. Nevertheless, if the concept is cut off concrete human experience, it loses its sense.

The language which appeals to imagination simultaneously refers to the particular. In the words of von Balthasar, it means that we directly apprehend reality in the image, which is able to reveal mystery. Thanks to the analogy of being, the mystery of creation

reveals the truth about its Creator. In this way, we can find the truth, which cannot be paraphrased in any different way. This is actually the reason why the language of imagination cannot be substituted by the language of concepts, and why it should also be regarded as a relevant and necessary means of theological expression. This idea is mirrored also in the text of the Bible, which uses narratives and poems as its crucial modes of delivering its message.

Newman teaches that not each piece of art is the expression which can touch human heart. It should be the kind of art with which we can identify. It means that it should be related to our experience and understanding of the world. The act of assent requires the direct comprehension of the subject and predicate. In other words, if we are not absolutely familiar with their meaning, we cannot assent to them really. That is why the language of imagination can touch our heart only if it is connected to the culture which surrounds us. For example, contemporary man can hardly be moved towards real assent by a legend about heroic deeds of saints in the same way as a medieval person could be.

Newman also argues that real assent is necessary for responding to God's call fully and thus accepting Christian religion in the way that it becomes an integral part of human life. According to our view of imagination, man is an imaginative being who expresses his identity by his life story. In the flow of time, the story is repeatedly reinterpreted in the light of both direct and indirect experience. Newman and Rahner suggest that the indirect experience is mediated by the language of imagination. We are thus able to integrate the experience communicated by art in our life and redescribe our reality according to it. However, Rahner also accents the fact that the message can be successfully delivered only if the messenger is trustworthy and lives according to what he expresses.

Von Balthasar underlines that there is a concrete story according to which God invites man to redescribe his life in order to find the fulfilment of his being. It is the story of Jesus Christ, who is the way to the Father. In the moment of conversion, man redescribes his reality according to the archetype of the Son. This redescription concerns both past and future. In this way, it has also an important eschatological relevancy. Finally, von Balthasar points out that the redescription of human life according to the image of Christ does not concern only his inner self, but it should directly touch also his concrete action. In this way man becomes also a faithful messenger of God's Word, as it is showed by Rahner. After that the circle becomes complete.

We could continue to describe more particulars, but after that this chapter would be unnecessarily repetitive. It is now important that we can concretely demonstrate which theological areas are touched by the theory of imagination described in this work.

At first, we could say that the theme of imagination is closely connected to the discussion about theological method as it helps to formulate the way in which we can speak about God. After that, it concerns theological anthropology because it reflects on the nature of man and his direction towards his fulfilment in God. In addition, the theory of imagination is closely tied to Christology since Jesus Christ is a perfect image of God. Because there can be no action without imagination, our theme invites also the interest of moral theologians. Last but not least, the importance of the theory of imagination should not be neglected by practical theology since the concept of imagination which we introduce cannot be separated from the everyday practice of the believers, as we are going to show in the following chapter.

### 3. Michael Paul Gallagher and Imagination in Practice

The previous chapter was focused on the introduction of imagination in a theological context. One of the main accents was the fact that the language of theology cannot be restricted to conceptual language, but it is necessary to address also human imagination as a faculty which is able to reach the heart of a person so that the message does not stay on a theoretical level, but it leads to a fundamental change of human self-perception and, consequently, to a concrete action. Nonetheless, the whole chapter is actually written in an abstract conceptual language without any connection to the concreteness it speaks about. The aim of this chapter is to eliminate this deficiency and to present our theme in practical field. Our second goal is to highlight some of the ideas from the preceding chapter and demonstrate them in concrete examples.

For this purpose, we have chosen to base this chapter on the work of an Irish theologian Michael Paul Gallagher, mainly on the title *The Human Poetry of Faith*. The reason of this choice is the fact that, before becoming a professor of fundamental theology, Gallagher taught almost twenty years English literature at University College, Dublin. It means that the author had an exceptional opportunity to familiarize himself with the world of literature, theatre and film and this knowledge is used also in his theological reflections. He is also the author who pays attention to the relationship between faith and modern culture. What is more, this interest makes him investigate also the theme of imagination and many points which are described in our thesis correspond with his view. However, Gallagher does not stay on the theoretical level, and, rather than writing more extensive theological treatise concerning the theory of imagination, he focuses on applying the principles in practice and thus opening a modern person to Christian faith.

The book *The Human Poetry of Faith* is a perfect representative of this approach as it aims “to dig down into key experiences in order to retrieve and enrich the human foundations of faith.”<sup>234</sup> Although it is build on firm theological background, it does not use scientific language, but it is full of poems, imaginary dialogues and fictional or real stories. Gallagher thus explores the way how imaginative language can directly address the hearts of people living in the complexity of the postmodern world. As he claims that

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<sup>234</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*. London: Darton, Longmann and Todd, Ltd., 2003, p. 130.

“we face more a crisis in the language of faith rather than a crisis of faith itself,”<sup>235</sup> his work can be inspiring for those who are searching the language in which they could effectively express their faith in today’s context.

### **3.1. The Human Poetry of Faith: The Introduction of the Book**

Before we start to analyse Gallagher’s book *The Human Poetry of Faith* from the point of view of the theory of imagination sketched in the preceding chapters of this work, it will be useful to start with the summary of its content and the description of its style.

As it was mentioned, the main aim of the book is to show the reality of Christian existence by penetrating into common everyday experience of each person. Gallagher thus stays on the threshold of religious life, in which he is trying to find the moments how the Spirit leads us to the discovery of Christ.<sup>236</sup> He does not address only unbelievers but also those whose faith has faded out. He sends them the following message:

If God or religion seems in a fog for you, try another route towards the threshold of faith. You need time to listen to your own human depths, with imagination and quiet. Yes, superficial culture can block what your heart desires. A choice is required to resist the pressures and find space. If you create a more personal space, what major concerns will surface for you? Relationships and the path of love. Some sense of self-disappointment and guilt. A feeling of impotence because of the tragedies of our divided planet. A longing for stillness where some spiritual awareness could be nourished. A search for anchors with the scattered life of everyday.<sup>237</sup>

In this paragraph, the author introduces the basic structure of the book as it describes five essential moments, through which a person has to go in order to find

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<sup>235</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 130.

<sup>236</sup> Cf. GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 2.

<sup>237</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 9.

God. The first moment is friendship. The second moment is the ability of discovering our own vulnerability, which is followed by the ability to open our eyes to the pain and suffering in the world. After that the author speaks about the experience of silence and solitude in our life and, finally, he reflects on the importance of common everyday experience for our spiritual progress.

The individual themes also mirror the titles of the individual chapters. After the general introduction, the second chapter called “The Gateway of Friendship” deals with the theme of interpersonal relationships. The author shows that “in the experience of human presence and relationship we glimpse the gateway into a mystery that surrounds us – that we live and move within another Presence and are invited into another Relationship.”<sup>238</sup>

Next chapter entitled “Struggles and Shadows” shows that if we are not able to descend into the darkness of our heart, our life does not move from its shallowness and it cannot develop any further. The author claims that “some voicing of difficult truth can create new self-attitudes.”<sup>239</sup>

The fourth chapter “Cries of Tragedy” moves the perspective from a self-reflection to wider view. Gallagher speaks about the suffering in the world ranging from the aggression of football fans to the tragic situation in the developing countries. Tragedy is, however, not the final word because, in Christian context, it is an opportunity to transformation.

The fifth chapter called “Solitude and Silence” deals with the fact that silence and solitude does not always have to be a liberating and pleasant state, but it could be also a state of great anxiety. In the end of the chapter, there is a dialogue between Saint Thérèse of Lisieux and Friedrich Nietzsche. Both of these authors have an experience with spiritual loneliness and the crisis of faith, but they approach it in a different way.

The sixth chapter “River of the Ordinary” is the last point on Gallagher’s journey. It focuses on the common experience of each person with the everyday routine and activities. The author underlines that we do not live by great deeds and events, but most our time is spend on carrying out our everyday duties. In this situation we are invited to our relationship with God.

The seventh chapter serves as a summary of Gallagher’s key points and it is concluded by a prayer. After that the chapter called “Thresholds in Faith” follows to

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<sup>238</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 15.

<sup>239</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 34.

push the content of preceding chapters in the context of Christianity. The author thus shows how Christian religion responds to these fundamental needs and experience of all people and how it can be transformed by the Gospels:

As a revelation of new intimacy with God: “I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father” (John 15:15).

As a summary of healing of hurts: “Come to me, all you who labour and are overburdened, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28).

Finding Christ in all who suffer: “In so far as you did this to the least of these, you did it to me” (Matthew 25:40).

As a glimpse into the inner silence of Christ: “He went off to a lonely place and prayed there” (Mark 1:35).

As a summary of daily conversion: “A follower of mine must day after day take up one’s cross” (Luke 9:23).<sup>240</sup>

As a final conclusion, Gallagher adds a chapter entitled “Speculative Horizons: Some Theological Postscripts,” which illuminates the basic point of departure. The author deals with the themes as a crisis of faith in Europe, the role of imagination in theology and the importance of pre-religious experience. This chapter shows that although the book is designed for wider audience, it stands on firm theological foundations and follows a definite purpose.

*The Human Poetry of Faith* is a book which is written in a simple and comprehensive style, as also the author says in its introduction: “Instead of being academic, it is intended to give priority to the imaginative or poetic in all of us.”<sup>241</sup> That is why the text is full of various stories reflecting not only the real experience of the author but also fictional narratives from the world of literature, theatre and film. In Gallagher’s book, the reader can thus encounter various authors such as Jane Austen, D. H. Lawrence, George Eliot, William Shakespeare, Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Rahner, Rainer Maria Rilke and others. As we can see, Gallagher is not afraid of choosing also atheistic authors, who openly railed against Christian faith. With the help of these authors he illustrates his theses concerning

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<sup>240</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p.,127-128.

<sup>241</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 6.

individual points of discussion and shows that the chosen themes are relevant for everybody regardless of their world view.

This approach is reflected also in the structure of each chapter. After Gallagher introduces the theme usually by concrete examples and demonstration stories, he gives the space to the individual authors in imaginary dialogues. That is why we can find, for instance, Jane Austen discussing with D. H. Lawrence or Karl Rahner's debating with R.M. Rilke. Although these authors would never have an opportunity to meet, they talk in Gallagher's book as if sitting in a café. Thanks to this method, new connections between the disparate views of the authors come to light. In the conclusion of the chapters, there are is a space for the reader's meditation inspired by various quotations, short poems or brief thoughts.

### **3.2. Imagination as a Way to God**

As we could see, Gallagher's unique book *The Human Poetry of Faith* primarily appeals to the imaginative dimension of its readers. Because of that it demonstrates how our discussion of imagination can be used in practice. According to the previous chapters, we can summarize three main contribution of imagination to theology and Christian religion. The first contribution is the fact that imagination helps to open up human disposition to faith. The second significant characteristic of imagination is that it enables to approach the mystery of God. The last important point of our preceding study is that imagination in an active power in the transformation of whole human life in its entirety including the commonplace of our everyday activities.

These three points conclude our whole study. They actually summarize the principal results of the preceding lines, and they explicitly formulate in which way this work can be contributive. What is more, this subchapter is going to reflect our main theses also in its style. We are thus going to use specific examples from the world of literature to illustrate, complement and enrich the language of concepts which has been the main form of our expression so far.

However, before we start let us comment on one possible objection against our struggle which is also topical for the book *The Human Poetry of Faith*. Although Gallagher provides us an elaborate description of various literary works, the reader

should remember that the author invites them to read the novels in their full length, to meditate on the poems he writes about and to spend time watching the whole films to which he refers. Otherwise the reader would never be able to identify with the characters so the fictive stories would lack the reference to the primordial world if we use Ricoeur's vocabulary. Gallagher does not say so explicitly, but Hans Urs von Balthasar suggests that no vivid explanation or analysis of the work of art can substitute the real artistic expression. From my point of view, it might be a small deficiency of *The Human Poetry of Faith*. The author uses many analyses and commentaries of literary works, but he does not give so much space to the novelists and poets to express their themes by themselves. Therefore, it might be better if there were fewer examples, but there were more direct quotations of the particular pieces. However, this is also the pitfall of this subchapter. There is not enough space for letting the authors speak for themselves, so the examples we are going to use are rather the invitations for the reader to read and watch the works in their full length.

### 3.2.1. Opening up Human Disposition to Faith

The main intention of Gallagher in his book *The Human Poetry of Faith* is to “make Christian faith more real through exploring our ordinary but deep experiences.”<sup>242</sup> The author notices that the best way how to do it is the way of imagination. He claims that “religion too often jumps into the realm of creeds and codes. These dimensions are vital but they are not the starting point of the religious adventure.”<sup>243</sup> The book thus leaves the language of conceptualization and tells its message in a metaphorical and symbolic language. The book also abandons the use of “familiar Christian words and images, which seem tired and unalive for so many people,”<sup>244</sup> but tries to find such images which correspond to the experience of postmodern people.

Gallagher thus follows the idea discussed also by this work that there are two kinds of human expression. The first one is the expression aimed at the abstract. It is the language of notions and concepts. Although it is able to communicate the general, it is separated from real human experience. The second kind of expression is imaginative. It

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<sup>242</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 1.

<sup>243</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 3.

<sup>244</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 4.

is real, concrete and directly or indirectly connected to human experience. It is the language of both visual and verbal art; but, as we have shown on the bases of the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, it is mainly the area of verbal expression through which we understand the world around us and ourselves. That is it why it is in the centre of our attention. This is mirrored also in Gallagher's approach as he mostly refers to poetry and narratives rather than visual art.

As one of his most important starting points, Gallagher underlines the necessity of the reflection of the pre-religious experience. According to the author, it is "the whole area of openness or readiness for the word of revelation."<sup>245</sup> The pre-religious experience is influenced by surrounding culture, which sometimes blocks this basic disposition for apprehending Christian religion. This is the reason why the author underlines that faith cannot be separated from the way we live.<sup>246</sup>

One of the basic presuppositions of faith is our openness towards relationship. Faith is basically human relationship with God and when we are not able to love, forgive, trust and be trusted on the human level, we can hardly find any fruitful way how to find ourselves invited into the relationship with God.<sup>247</sup> That is why Gallagher talks about friendship in the second chapter of his book. His aim is to show that one of the most important aspects of friendship is not only mutual closeness and sharing, but "its often unvoiced tenderness and yet its capacity to last over many years."<sup>248</sup>

Nevertheless, how to explain this idea to somebody whose relationships are shallow and who does not have any personal experience of loving truly and being loved? Paul Ricoeur shows that both fictional and real narratives have the ability to redescribe our view of reality. They can change the way how we perceive the world around. John Henry Newman talks about the ability of narratives to lead indirectly to real assent and thus open our life to new experience. In a similar tone, Karl Rahner deals with the ability of narratives to demonstrate important theological truths in a way that purely rational language is not able accomplish. Hans Urs von Balthasar points out that the world of images, which points to the mystery of being, enables us to go beyond ourselves towards the other. This movement is the basic presupposition for turning to the image of God.

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<sup>245</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 133.

<sup>246</sup> Cf. GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. Faith, In SHELDRAKE, Philip (ed.). *The New SCM Dictionary of Christian Spirituality*. London: SCM Press, 2005, p. 297-298, p. 297.

<sup>247</sup> Cf. GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 15.

<sup>248</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 14.

Michael Paul Gallagher follows the same route. In order to demonstrate the dynamics of interpersonal relationships and the healing presence of God, he writes about his own experience when he helped one of his students overcome the state of depression. After that he follows to go into the field of fiction describing Jane Austen's novel *Emma*, in which Emma, the main character, has to learn to love and be loved. Emma goes through a complex experience of "purgative, illuminative and unitive stages,"<sup>249</sup> which leads her towards the new openness to the others.

The second example of the use of imagination to open up new perspectives and thus spur the readers to reevaluate their attitudes towards themselves and the world around can be found in the chapter called "Struggles and Shadows." In the context of the chapter which is focused on the necessity of entering the zone of our vulnerability, the author points out:

It is the area that religion calls sin and it is commonplace in church circle today to lament a loss of a 'sense of sin.' The trouble is that most of the Church's sin-talk has lost its roots in human experience. It comes across as moralistic and not 'real' (both in Newman's sense as personally involving and as in the contemporary phrase 'get real').<sup>250</sup>

He feels the need of showing the way how we can dive deep into ourselves and find the courage to face our life beyond surface. The author rightly notices that talking about sin is often misunderstood in our culture, but it simultaneously does not lose its significance. That is why he has to find a new language in which he could speak about this topic and touch the experience of contemporary readers.

For this purpose, he decides to illustrate his thesis by Stanley Kubrick's film *Eyes Wide Shut*. The film portrays the story of a wealthy couple (Bill and Alice) from New York, who live an ordinary way unless their certainties are shattered by a "Dante-like visit to the underworld." The plot thus continues to reveal the hidden desires of the characters which lead them to environment of drugs, profligacy, licentiousness and murders. However, only after the discovery of the hidden fragility of their own self, the husband and wife can renew their relationship. The film is full of symbols, which complement its theme. One of the key symbols is the symbol of masks and mirrors,

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<sup>249</sup> GALLAGHER Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 18.

<sup>250</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 35.

which “wake up to rivers of uncertainty and darkness flowing behind the façade of their normality.”<sup>251</sup> Other symbols appear in the beginning of the film, when, before going out, Bill is searching his wallet and Alice is looking in the mirror asking “How do I look?” It again points at the superficiality of their living. What is more, the film is set in the Christmas time so there are also many Christmas trees in the flats of the protagonists and in the public places, but most of the trees are only artificial, which suggests that the society lives in the world of empty shallow signs.<sup>252</sup>

Gallagher’s purpose was to show that we are vulnerable to sin, and unless we discover this dimension in us, we cannot be healed. However, he chooses to illustrate this point in the language which corresponds to the experience of his readers. Many people have encountered either directly or indirectly the world of shallow societies, the danger and temptation of drugs or infidelity. Simply stating that it is something which does not concern us without any deeper self-reflection means that we stay only on a superficial level and are blocked to move further. The experience which the film conveys enables us to look at our lives from a new point of view. It touches our heart because it portrays the reality in which we live. In Ricoeur’s words, it offers us a different perspective and also a safe space of non-involvement, in which “we try out new ideas, new values, new ways of being in the world.”<sup>253</sup> It redescribes our reality and thus enables us to see other dimensions of our existence. After that the story becomes also our experience, and it can be comprehended by real assent. In consequence, the message does not only change the view of our life and the world around, but it can get reflected in concrete action. It can lead to empathy with the others and, in the example described by Gallagher, “it is also a crucial step towards gentler aliveness as human beings together.”<sup>254</sup>

This example shows that the theory of imagination which was described in the first two chapters is not an empty concept, but it can be a fruitful tool for evangelization and catechesis. In other words, narrative imagination has real power to open human heart to new horizons, including the way to God. Gallagher points out that “imaginative writers have preserved a powerful honesty about these underworlds of our experience. As Alexander Solzhenitsyn once remarked, literature does not exist to put make-up on the

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<sup>251</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 31.

<sup>252</sup> Cf. GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 32.

<sup>253</sup> RICOEUR, Paul. *From Text to Action*, s. 170.

<sup>254</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 30.

face of humanity but rather to face the scars.”<sup>255</sup> We could continue with much more concrete examples from Gallagher’s book, which would show that poetry, narratives and the world of film and theatre work on the pre-religious level and prepare human heart for the real apprehension of Christian message.

### 3.2.2. Approaching God through Imagination

“We imagine ‘a personal God quaquaquaquaqu with white beard’ outside time, who from the heights ‘loves us dearly with some exceptions for reasons unknown’ and , we are told, suffers with those who are plunged in torment.”<sup>256</sup> This quotation, which Gallagher borrows from Beckett’s *Waiting for Godot* refers to the danger of the misinterpretation of Christian message when the religious language is too affirmative. In the subchapter devoted to von Balthasar, we have shown the necessity to complement positive, cataphatic theology by a negative, apophatic theology. This is also reflected by Gallagher in his book *Clashing Symbols*, where he points out, with regard to the crisis of faith in the postmodern society, that “the spiritual hunger is real, but with a floating spirituality very far from the definiteness of Christian faith and one which can even be a form of postmodern unbelief.”<sup>257</sup> What is typical of this new kind of spiritual searching is that people are suspicious of explicit general truth and direct univocal language. In Gallagher’s words,

Postmodernity is more open to the religious sense and especially the prophetic, the cosmological and the mystical or participative dimensions of religious experience. A postmodern spirituality will retrieve the wise shyness of a negative theology, reticent to explain its mystery and suspicious of cheap words. A more searching Postmodernity calls for a convergence between a sense of God as hidden (but revealed) and God as incomprehensible (but incarnate).<sup>258</sup>

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<sup>255</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 35.

<sup>256</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 112.

<sup>257</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *Clashing Symbols: An Introduction to Faith and Culture*. London: Darton, Longmann and Todd, Ltd., 2003, p. 109.

<sup>258</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *Clashing Symbols*, p. 110.

Instead of purely cataphatic spirituality, contemporary people search for apophatic religious dimension, which is addressed by living symbols and metaphors.

In the chapter devoted to the theme of the experience of tragedy, Gallagher illustrates his point on the story of Job. The question he asks is about the sense of an unexplainable tragedy in the world. In this story, Job has to listen to the interpretation of his suffering by his friends. They are confident about their point of view, but their ideas are finally false. „Their God is a wily manager who knows how to punish such falsity and hidden sin.“<sup>259</sup> They think only in the categories of punishment and reward, as if God’s way of thinking was the same as the thinking of people. Nevertheless, what is finally true is only the cry of Job coming from the depth of his soul. In God’s answer to Job’s cry, “nothing is said about suffering or about innocence or guilt. The issue of ‘why’ gives way to the issue of ‘who’ God is. A series of questions reveals the smallness of Job’s horizon and the differentness of God.”<sup>260</sup> In the moment when Job finds out that he is not able to find the answer to the question who God is, he discovers that the real answer is not in a logical explanation but in the relationship with the unknown mysterious God. For Job, God remains still incomprehensible, but he is able to feel His transforming presence.<sup>261</sup> In von Balthasar’s words, Job finds the truth in his adherence to the mystery of God.

The story of Job is one of the Biblical stories which show the importance of negative theology in the spiritual life of an individual. In the moments of real suffering and real searching for consolation, cheap words and transparent explanations are not enough. The answer is found on the level of hints and apophatic silence. This approach corresponds to the need of postmodern people, who are trying to find the answer to their feeling of desolation and loneliness in the middle of modern comfort and abundance.

The ability to signify more and thus lead us towards the incomprehensible mystery is one of the most essential qualities of the language of imagination. Hans Urs von Balthasar talks about the mystery of images inviting us to step out of ourselves and surrender to this mystery. However, these images find their expression in the primordial

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<sup>259</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul: *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 54.

<sup>260</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 54.

<sup>261</sup> Cf. GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 55.

words which are uttered in a powerful concentration by a poet, as Karl Rahner observes. The author continues that this concentration attains an absolute power when the primordial words are spoken by a poet-priest, who is a servant of an eternal Word. He does not express his message only by his speech but by his whole life, and thus he becomes a faithful messenger of God. We could add that this is also the task of all believers as they participate in the universal priesthood. Efficient talking about God thus requires the language of living symbols and metaphors uttered by a person who faithfully delivers the message not only by word but by their whole life.

Nevertheless, as apophatic theology and literature teaches us, it is also silence which is a powerful poetic device. Let us evoke a famous scene from the first act of Shakespeare's *King Lear*, where the king asks his daughters to tell him how much they love him before he divides the kingdom between them. Let us hear the answer of the first daughter:

GONERIL

Sir, I do love you more than words can wield the matter,  
Dearer than eyesight, space, and liberty,  
Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare,  
No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honor,  
As much as child e'er loved or father found—  
A love that makes breath poor and speech unable.  
Beyond all manner of so much I love you.

CORDELIA

(*aside*) What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent.<sup>262</sup>

Cordelia knows that her sisters are not honest and their speech is only ornamental and designed for the purpose to get from their father as much as possible. Cordelia, whose love is honest, cannot use the same expression as it was used by somebody who is not faithful so the words become empty. After Goneril, it is the task of the second sister to express her love. She continues in the same matter, which makes Cordelia even more uneasy. When it is Cordelia's turn she is not able to say anything more than

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<sup>262</sup> SHAKESPEARE, William. *King Lear*, p. 162.

simple “Nothing, my lord.”<sup>263</sup> Because of this answer Lear gets insulted, but Cordelia could not do anything else. Nevertheless, during the play, Cordelia’s honest and faithful love of her father is proved by action.

This Shakespeare’s story, which can never get outdated, illustrates that sometimes when the believers want to express their love of their Heavenly Father, they can use words which are in all aspects apt, but they have been misused by somebody for a wrong purpose and thus they become empty in the ears of the listeners. If it is not possible to find any other metaphors or symbols, which would point at the mystery of the message they want to convey, they have only one option – “love, and be silent.”

### 3.2.3. Imagination and the Everyday

T. S. Eliot’s famous poem “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” belongs to his best-known pieces and is commented by scholars and students all over the world. Despite of this, there is actually nothing remarkable on the character of J. Alfred Prufrock. He is an ordinary middle aged man without any interesting experience. His life is neither tragic nor romantic; he says about himself: “I have measured out my life by coffee spoons.”<sup>264</sup> The thing which is, however, noteworthy is his desire to cross to the realm of the infinite in his ordinariness. In one of the most touching passages the protagonist says:

And indeed there will be time  
To wonder, “Do I dare?” and, “Do I dare?”  
Time to turn back and descend the stair,  
With a bald spot in the middle of my hair—  
(They will say: “How his hair is growing thin!”)  
My morning coat, my collar mounting firmly to the chin,  
My necktie rich and modest, but asserted by a simple pin—  
(They will say: “But how his arms and legs are thin!”)  
Do I dare

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<sup>263</sup> SHAKESPEARE, William. *King Lear*. Surrey: R. A. Foakes, 1997, p. 163.

<sup>264</sup> ELIOT, Thomas Stearns. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* [2014-5-20].  
<<http://www.bartleby.com/198/1.html>>.

## Disturb the universe?<sup>265</sup>

In the chapter “River of the Ordinary,” Gallagher accents the necessity to “see the extraordinary...at work in the most ordinary situations.”<sup>266</sup> Eliot’s Prufrock thus does not have only the possibility to “disturb the universe,” but he is invited to do it in his commonness and everydayness in the same way as other people.

All of the theologians discussed in the second chapter would not be opposed to this statement, but they would highlight it as a necessary prerequisite of each fully lived Christian life. Paul Ricoeur shows that imagination does not always have to be in contact with the real as it does not necessarily lead to action although there cannot be any action without imagination. Nevertheless, the kind of imagination which we focus on in this work always requires being in touch with the real human experience consisting of everyday struggle with the most common things. It is the imagination which is not contemptuous of banalities. John Henry Newman claims that Christian message can be approached only through real assent which originates in concrete experience. Something similar is presented also by Karl Rahner, who, in addition, warns against pure aestheticism. Finally, Hans Urs von Balthasar underlines that only through the concreteness of images we can arrive at the mystery the images convey, and he shows that the transformation of man according to the image of God affects all stages and areas of human existence. Regardless of the fact whether the person prepares a lunch for the family or builds a new hospital in Africa, he or she lives a full life if it follows the archetype of Christ.

In an imaginary dialogue between Karl Rahner and R. M. Rilke, Gallagher writes through the mouth of the theologian:

I suffer from arthritis. I am acutely aware of it every morning as I go downstairs.  
I know it will not improve. Indeed I know the world around me is arthritic in  
countless other ways. But within these limits we have to learn to live and love.<sup>267</sup>

The striking banality of this quotation gains another context if we realize that also Christianity as such is based on the moment of Incarnation which is developed into the

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<sup>265</sup> ELIOT, Thomas Stearns. *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*.

<sup>266</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 95.

<sup>267</sup> GALLAGHER, Michael Paul. *The Human Poetry of Faith*, p. 96.

concrete story of life of Jesus of Nazareth. Theology, which can never be absolutely separated from spirituality, should not neglect this fact also in its method. Of course, the language of concepts is absolutely relevant for theological reflection, but it is the language of imagination which serves as a necessary bridge towards the real and the concrete.

## Conclusion

In the beginning of the famous novella by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry called *The Little Prince* the narrator is discouraged from his artistic carrier after drawing a picture of a boa constrictor digesting an elephant. When he showed the picture to the adults, he asked if they feel frightened. Their answer was: “Frightened? Why should any one be frightened by a hat?”<sup>268</sup>

The story demonstrates our tendency to stay on the surface of things and not to be able to get further. Nevertheless, the ability to penetrate beyond the surface is the main presupposition of spiritual growth. Jesus Christ famously said: “I assure you that if you don't turn your lives around and become like this little child, you will definitely not enter the kingdom of heaven.”<sup>269</sup> In this light, the requirement to be like a child attains a new meaning. It can be interpreted as an appeal to foster our capacity of imagination so that the Word of God can reach our heart.

It has been the aim of this thesis to underline the necessity of imaginative dimension both in the life of an individual and in the theological reflection. For this purpose, we have chosen to ground the work on the philosophical concept of Paul Ricoeur, who comes with the notion of productive imagination, which is rooted in verbal expression. It is the concept in which imagination is not only a faculty which helps us to evoke the absent images in our mental view but has a creative power.

According to Paul Ricoeur, imagination decides about the way how we see the world around us. Imagination compiles and interprets the surrounding objects and thus we create a living world from a mere environment. What is more, thanks to imagination we can grasp who we are as we express our identity by a narrative of our life story. The narrative of our life is not, however, static but it is influenced by our new experience according to which we continually reinterpret our story. In this way imagination works also with regard to Christian faith, as von Balthasar shows. When the Holy Spirit touches our heart and we respond to the call of God, we reinterpret our whole life story from the point of view of Christian message.

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<sup>268</sup> DE SAINT-EXUPÉRY, Antoine. *The Little Prince* [13.9.2013]

<[http://srogers.com/books/little\\_prince/ch1.asp](http://srogers.com/books/little_prince/ch1.asp)>.

<sup>269</sup> Mt 18,3.

Paul Ricoeur also shows that metaphorical language, which is characterized by the tension between a tenor and vehicle, cannot be considered unscientific, but it is a necessary counterpart of scientific deduction as it is able to express areas which are not accessible in any other ways. The author thus formulates the role of metaphor as a model and he shows that metaphorical language does not stay in the realm of imaginary dreams, but it has an important reference effect which cannot be attained otherwise. Metaphorical language thus allows us to see our reality in new relations and it opens the field of possibilities, which work for us as an indirect experience. According to John Henry Newman, this is one of the gateways into real assent, which is necessary for apprehending Christian message by our heart. Hans Urs von Balthasar also shows that we shape and direct our life according to Jesus Christ, who is a metaphorical model of our life.

The second kind of imagination which Ricoeur introduces is symbolic imagination. The main characteristic of symbols is the ability to signify more. In addition, it is the level of symbols which connects the linguistic and non-linguistic area. Von Balthasar shows that the ability to signify more is the ability to point to the mystery of creation. According to the concept of the analogy of being, creation thus reveals the truth about God.

In the context of symbolic language, Karl Rahner speaks about the ability of a poet to speak primordial (symbolic) words in a powerful concentration. Nevertheless, the symbolic language finds the best expression if it is uttered as directing to the eternal Word of God. It is thus the task of a priest to be a faithful messenger of God's message not only by his speech but by his life. In the perspective of the doctrine of universal priesthood this appeal is topical for all believers, whose task is to serve God in specific condition of their daily tasks.

In the accordance with the view of the rest of the authors, Karl Rahner explicitly formulates the ways how theological language should be enriched by the language of imagination. Even though he mentions narratives and poetry as a necessary counterpart of conceptual language, he does not stay only on the level of verbal expression, but he underlines that the language of theology is also the language of painting, sculpture and music. He thus underlines that God's message is not only limited to the sphere of linguistics, but it should affect all our senses. What is more, he demonstrates that not only religious art is relevant for theology, but Christian message can be communicated effectively also by secular art as God is everywhere with his Grace.

This approach is mirrored also in the work of Michael Paul Gallagher, who uses both secular and religious art to appeal to the imaginative dimension of his readers. His work serves as a concrete example of how imagination can be used for opening human heart towards Christian religion. Gallagher also illustrates in practice that the language of imagination is a useful tool for talking about God. In a similar way as poetry uses dashes and blank pages, theological language should not be only affirmative, but cataphatic theology should be complemented by apophatic theology. What is more, if we approach imagination in the right way, it can be a useful tool how to set our Christian existence in the everyday reality.

This work intends to show the importance of imagination for Christian religion and theology, but it simultaneously warns against the misuse of imagination. Imagination is presented only a tool, but not as a goal. We have repeatedly underlined that imagination should serve the real, and only then it can be useful as it leads to a concrete action. However, if imagination is used only as a narcotic which gives an opportunity to escape reality, it becomes not only useless but also dangerous. Let us remember the tragic story of Wilde's Dorian Grey, who, being driven by his obsession with searching for new and new aesthetic experience, destroys not only himself but also people around him.

From my point of view, the main contribution of the theoretical part of this work is the fact that it puts the theme of imagination, which is very difficult to be grasped, in a coherent working concept so that it presents concrete arguments and reasons why imagination should not be neglected in theology and why it is necessary to explore the theme further both in the field of theory and practice.

This work also introduces the concepts of famous theologians with a specific relation to each other, and it is an attempt to interconnect the area of literary theory and theology. It can thus be helpful for those who are looking for these links, and it can inspire the further study of this area. From the practical point of view, this thesis can serve as a study supporting concrete catechetical methods, religious education and pastoral activities.

What is more, this paper is also an invitation for those theologians who want to enrich their study by the imaginative horizon but they are afraid that it could be considered too artistic and thus unscientific. We have shown that the language of

imagination has its scientific relevancy. In the same way as mathematicians use equations, economist use graphs and architects use geometric outlines, theologians should use stories, poems or paintings to illustrate their points and to deliver their message. The reason is that, for theology, the language of imagination is not something additional, but it is a language which is essentially characteristic of this type of science. Theology is a science which is connected to a concrete religious experience, and, without this link it gets stuck in the world of dead concepts and loses its sense.

As it was suggested in the introduction, this work does not intend to be an exhaustive study of the area, but it offers only one of possible approaches. That is why the theme could be elaborated in many other ways. It would be, for instance, interesting if it was described from the point of view of a particular theological discipline, such as Christology, theological anthropology, moral theology or practical theology. In addition, the thesis highlights the necessity of interdisciplinary theological approaches, which would be able to convincingly interconnect the world of theology with the world of art.

Apart from delimiting the theme from other possible perspectives, this work could be complemented by the research of the social dimension of imagination. I believe that the study of this area would elaborate something which our work implicitly suggests – the importance of imagination for the dialogue between Christian faith and contemporary culture. I hope that I will have the opportunity to research this topic in my following study.

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