

# Biblical Anthropology

A Message for  
Contemporary People

Edited by  
Marcin Kowalski

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# Introduction

The volume presented to the readers is the outcome of a symposium co-organized by the Pontifical Biblical Commission and the Institute of Biblical Studies of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin. The symposium, titled “Biblical Anthropology: A Message for Contemporary People,” which was organized online due to the pandemic, took place on October 20–21, 2021. It gathered biblical scholars and participants from all over the world: USA, Italy, Spain, Hungary, Slovakia, Germany, Denmark, Great Britain, Israel, Brazil, Colombia, and even the distant Pacific islands of Vanuatu. Taking as their point of departure the recent document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission *What Is Man? A Journey through Biblical Anthropology* (2019), the speakers reflected on topics related to biblical anthropology and their relevance for modern society.

The papers presented and the discussions held during the symposium resulted in articles that, collected in the conference volume, reflect the diversity, importance, and topicality of biblical anthropology. Some papers were published in the OnlineFirst formula and in no. 2–4 (2022) of *The Biblical Annals*, including those by Joel Atwood, Ibolya Balla, Marcin Chrostowski, Jaap Doedens, Susan Eastman, Mary Healy, Stephan Hecht, Craig Keener, Marcin Kowalski, Levente Balazs Martos, Jean-Bosco Matand Bulembat, and Andrés María García Serrano. Their papers, in a form adapted to the requirements of the conference volume, are combined here with texts by other members of the Pontifical Biblical Commission to ultimately create a unique mosaic of essays on biblical anthropology. They often refer to the notion of the image of God in a person and to the relational character of the human being, which form the golden thread of biblical anthropology, recurring regularly in the PBC document. The many other relevant topics

discussed in the volume include: hermeneutics and methodological approach to biblical anthropology; human emotions; sexuality; logic of solidarity and attitude toward the created world; historical and at the same time eschatological orientation of the human being; the essence of the human “self”; relationships between mind, body and desires; and free will. In the richness and diversity of the presented content, the authors also seek and provide answers to the question of how to communicate the truths of biblical anthropology to contemporary people, entering into dialogue with modern science without losing the specificity of the biblical message.

A key of sorts to the reading of the entire volume can be found in the text “The Hermeneutical Principles that Govern the Document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission *What Is Man?*” by Pietro Bovati SJ, chairman of the Pontifical Biblical Commission, responsible for the final edition of the PBC document. *What Is Man?* poses a fundamental question about human identity and the meaning of human life, responding to it in light of the revelation contained in Scripture. As Pietro Bovati points out, the answer to this question is given in the context of profound cultural changes and the reversal of the previously binding values, for instance in the sphere of family life and sexuality. The PBC document does not provide ready-made answers and does not propose a homogeneous “definition” of the human person, but respects the interrogative nature and variety of biblical texts that speak of us, humans. Ultimately, the entire document stresses the mystery of human existence, condensed in the question taken from Ps 8:5 – “what is man?” The subtitle *A Journey through Biblical Anthropology* is an invitation to reflect on the human being’s creaturliness, connection with the material world, relationality, and historicity, on the basis of the narrative contained in Genesis 2–3. The structure and content of the document as articulated by Bovati reflects the character of biblical anthropology. It should be open to the questions of contemporary people, taking into account both the historical-cultural nature of specific biblical texts and the overall biblical revelation about the identity and mission of the human person.

The subsequent chapters of the conference volume offer reflections on selected topics of biblical anthropology, in major part covered in the PBC document. They will be presented here in the alphabetical order by the authors’ last names, as they appear in the volume. First, Hugo Orlando Martínez Aldana in “The Kingdom of God in the Document of the Pontifical Biblical Commission *What Is Man?*” proposes

to reflect on the theme of the kingdom of God, recurring often in the PBC document. Departing from the socio-political perspective, the author refers to a number of Old Testament texts criticizing rapacious imperialism and confronting it with the rule of Christ, the Messiah. His kingdom of love, service, fraternal relationships and the sharing of material goods is an alternative to the violent and devastating imperial politics of exploitation and subjugation. Jesus' disciples not only invite others to join the inclusive, historical, and eschatological reality of the kingdom of God, but also carry it within themselves (personal dimension), opening their hearts to God's forgiveness and love.

In the next text, "Ruling the *rûah*: Emotional Experience and Expression in Ancient Hebrew," Joel Atwood proposes a fresh look at the fascinating and complex world of human emotions related to the Hebrew polysemic lexeme, *rûah*. Drawing inspiration from cognitive linguistics, the author points to the Old Testament texts in which the spirit manifests patience or impatience, arrogance and humility. Atwood argues for a departure from the simplified view according to which *rûah* is generally associated with anger, instead relating it to the inner human "self" and will.

Subsequently, Ibolya Balla in "Ephraim is a cake not turned': The Fruits of the False Knowledge of God According to Hos 7:8-16" takes up the message articulated in no. 33-34 of the PBC document: the denial of creaturliness and the illusion of being equal to God lead humanity to a dramatic end. The author illustrates this truth with the history of the fall of the Northern Kingdom, recorded in the Book of Hosea (esp. Hos 7:8-16). Failure to acknowledge God results in the humans' lack of understanding of themselves and their place in the world, paving the way to sins of a religious, moral, and social nature. Hosea's historical message, the author claims, remains valid for people of all times and cultures who aspire to be self-reliant in the fields of economy, politics or science.

Next, Marcin Chrostowski in "The Woman's Womb as a Place of God's Action and Creation" analyzes the vocabulary connected with the womb in the Old Testament, paying attention to the related action of God, who opens and closes the womb, leads to conception, shapes the human beings in their prenatal form, sanctifies, calls, and finally brings them to birth. The womb is perceived as a space where God acts as the loving Creator and the giver of life. It points to the holiness of life, which belongs in the first place to God, the Father, and should be protected as such.

In the subsequent text, “The Fruits without the Roots? Post-modern Group-Identity in the Light of Biblical Anthropology,” Jaap Doedens describes the process in which modern culture, having abandoned the universalist Judeo-Christian vision of the person as God’s creation, has moved towards tribalism and identity based on race, gender, and victim-mentality. A glance at ancient Israel, where various minorities were present (foreigners, the poor, slaves, the “sons of prophets,” and Rechabites), suggests that they could enjoy peaceful coexistence with others as long as there was a group-transcending identity and values that guaranteed the rights of individuals. Translating it into contemporary language, instead of embracing the nowadays fashionable group-identity, the Church should strongly emphasize the transcendent relationship with God which all group identities are anchored in. It also should point to individuality, not a group, as the proper level of experiencing human identity and only then invite its members to build a community that will be “the avant-garde within this old world of a coming new world where heaven and earth will intersect again.”

Next, in “Christian Experience and Paul’s Logic of Solidarity: The Spiral Structure of Romans 5–8,” Susan Eastman examines Paul’s spiral rhetoric in Romans 1–8, with particular emphasis on Romans 5–8. In Rom 5:1–5, the author identifies the message of hope concerning the new life in Christ, on the trajectory of which three essential “detours” appear: 1) the dramatized picture of life ruled by sin, which in some ways reminds the believers of their own struggle against evil (Rom 7:7–25); 2) the believers’ unity with creation, understood as Adamic humanity, in its suffering and waiting for the full liberation in Christ (Rom 8:18–27); 3) Christian lamentation in solidarity with fellow human beings who still await their redemption (Rom 8:35–36). In all three “detours,” Paul’s realistic picture of Christian life emerges, constantly exposed to the hostile forces of sin and death, and directed towards solidarity with humanity still in their grasp. This solidarity is based on Christ’s saving participation in the human fate, and proves “the participatory quality of human experience as embodied and socially embedded.” The life of believers, perceived by Paul at the junction of the old and new aeon, is a life in which the boundaries between experience in Christ and beyond him are blurred, creating the logic of solidarity not only with fellow believers, but also with those suffering under the yoke of sin. God in Christ is present in every human experience, even the most dramatic one, providing an imperative for

the Church to be present with the Gospel of hope where death and suffering still reign.

Next, Adrian Graffy returns to the PBC document in “Shared Inspirations: The Biblical Commission and Pope Francis on Ecology and Fraternity,” looking at its connection to Pope Francis’ teaching in two areas: care for the planet and solidarity with the needy. In the spirit of *Laudato si’* and *Fratelli tutti*, the recent PBC document criticizes the selfish and despotic use of earth’s resources, combined with indifference to the fate of the poorest populations and the food crisis. In accordance with papal teaching, the PBC document also condemns modern forms of slavery and calls for sensitivity to the fate of emigrants.

Subsequently, in the article “Betwixt and Between: The Letter of James and the Human Condition,” Joel B. Green ponders on the paradoxical description of the human condition in the Letter of James. While James does not ask the question that reverberates in the PBC document, *What Is Man?*, his picture of humanity can be deduced from chapter 1 of his epistle, where the apostle follows the narrative of Genesis 1–3. What emerges from his interpretation is “the hybrid nature of human life in the dispersion,” where “humans are caught between hope, faithfulness, and love, on the one hand, and, on the other hand, craving, sin, and death” (“betwixt and between”). Humanity cannot blame God for its fate, although his intentions always included putting pressure on them so that they might flourish. James rather bears witness to a pessimistic anthropology, according to which human failures are the outgrowth of personal inclinations and cravings. What makes it possible to pass through God’s trials, gaining maturity and achieving transformation, is the gift of God’s word, which – internalized, welcomed, and practiced – enables God’s people to share in his life and emulate his fidelity.

In the next text, “Homosexuality in the Pontifical Biblical Commission Document *What Is Man?*,” Mary Healy addresses the issue of how the PBC document deals with sexual ethics, with particular reference to marriage and homosexuality. Beginning with marriage, the author points to Gen 1:26–28 and 2:4–25, emphasizing the vision of human sexuality contained therein, as created with “an intrinsic orientation to spousal communion with the opposite sex that is inscribed in the human body, male or female.” It constitutes a starting point for the reflection on homosexual relations, which the PBC document considers to be a sensitive topic. Analyzing the related biblical texts, the author indicates an unequivocally negative assessment

of homosexual acts in both the Old and New Testament tradition, and ends with some hermeneutic and pastoral guidelines anchored in the PBC document and in the teaching of the Church.

Next, in “The ‘inner man’ – Fundamental Concept of Pauline Anthropology?” Stefan Hecht examines the metaphor of “inner man” that appears in 2 Cor 4:16, Rom 7:22, and Eph 3:16. Starting with Plato, who uses this expression to describe human “self” as a principle of agency and continuity, the author proceeds to discuss Pauline teachings. In the apostle, Hecht argues, the “inner self” metaphor may play the role of a fundamental anthropological concept, describing the human person immersed in the event of Christ. Using this expression, which can also be found in Philo, Paul refers to the theology of the temple (cf. 1 Cor 3:16; 6:19; 2 Cor 2:17) and combines in it the *image-* and the *spirit-anthropology* from Genesis 1–2.

Subsequently, in “Human Beings as Pilgrims on Earth in the Sermon on the Mount,” Henry Pattarumadathil reflects on the metaphor of pilgrimage, describing human condition on earth. His point of departure is no. 29 of the PBC document, which together with Matthew’s “Sermon on the Mount” pictures human wanderers, experiencing God’s care and love in their earthly journey. While walking the paths of this world, human beings perceived as pilgrims, are also on their way to the kingdom of God, where they will enjoy the fullness of glory and identity of God’s children. Christ is the guide in this pilgrimage of faith. His companionship coupled with their awareness of the purpose of the journey and of their own identity do not allow Christians to lose hope on the way, especially in the trying time of a pandemic.

Further, in “Body, Mind, and Passions in Romans: Paul’s Alternative View within His Philosophical and Religious Context” Craig Keener explores selected aspects of Pauline anthropology in Romans in their ancient context. The author examines terms and phenomena such as the body, flesh, bodily desires, thoughts corrupted by passions, or unlawful desires. Distinguishing between the body and spirit, the body and mind, or the mind and soul, Paul shows no Platonic dualism or partitive approach; his anthropology is functional and, contrary to the Greco-Roman culture, it presents a much more positive approach to desires and passions (“they must be harnessed rather than running amok”). Some of the desires in Paul, like in the Jewish authors, are qualified as illicit, and believers, though dead to sin, must oppose them. The recipe to become free from the illicit desires does not consist

in following the rational mind or the Torah, but in identifying with the Son (Rom 6:1–11), possessing the mind renewed in Christ (neuroplasticity), and in the Spirit enabling a relationship with and a life pleasing to God (Gal 5:16–17; Rom 6:11; 8:5; 12:2). The author ultimately claims that “by engaging the popular intellectual language of his contemporaries, Paul seeks to communicate his distinctly Christocentric message.”

Next, in “Divine and Human Spirit in Rom 8:16: Paul and Epictetus on Free Will,” Marcin Kowalski focuses on the phenomenon of free will in Paul, comparing it with the notion of *proairesis* in Epictetus. What connects the apostle and the philosopher are convictions that free will can exist in a divinely determined world and that human volition requires continuous education and subordination to God’s will. The elements that distinguish Paul from Epictetus are the naturalistic image of deity in the philosopher and a genuinely relational, corporeal, and emotive character of free will in the apostle. The psycho-somatic nature of human personality and will in Paul invites a dialogue between Christian anthropology and modern science, but it has to be carried out cautiously, bearing in mind different methodologies, the idea of transcendent deity, and a Christological foundation upon which the Pauline vision of freedom and free will is established.

Subsequently, Levente Balazs Martos in “Mutual Vulnerability? Asymmetric Relationships in Biblical Anthropology” focuses on “asymmetric relations” (parents and children, masters and servants, “shepherds” and “the flock,” civil authority and citizens) signaled in the PBC document (no. 230–234). The author examines their theological foundations and meaning in today’s social-ethical discourse. The asymmetry, so undesirable in contemporary culture, seems nevertheless to be an undeniable fact. It causes tension that can be fruitfully resolved by parties who take responsibility for each other in the presence of a “third.” The mediating “third” in Christian anthropology is God, who enables a creative and beneficial experience of “asymmetric relationships” and brings into them elements of mutual respect and equality.

In another Pauline essay, “Was Not the Woman Created in the Likeness of God? Pauline Midrashic Reading of Gen 1–3 in 1 Cor 11:7–12,” Jean-Bosco Matand Bulembat undertakes the rhetorical-exegetic reading of the notoriously difficult passage of 1 Cor 11:7–12. According to the author, Paul proposes here a Midrashic exposition of Gen 1–3, emphasizing the difference, complementarity, and dignity of women and men, which the believers in Corinth are called to respect. Even if called a misogynist by some contemporary commentators, Paul turns out to

be, according to the author, a promoter of women's dignity and value in the ancient and modern world.

Next, the essay by Marida Nicolaci, "Speaking about Love Relationships according to the Scriptures: Between Historical-Critical Method and Cultural Criticism," focuses on chapter 3 of the PBC document (on love between man and woman), reflecting on the way in which this sensitive topic should be addressed in an ethically responsible and culturally relevant manner. The author critically explores the methodological choices, hermeneutics, and language of the PBC document, stressing the distance between the ancient and contemporary experience of love relationships and calling for a new moral-religious language to describe them. Such a language, according to the author, should acknowledge the presence of "the recalcitrant other" in the biblical texts and, simultaneously, remain faithful to the overall anthropological message of the Bible.

Subsequently, in "The Human Person in the Eschatology according to 1 Thess 5:23," Andrés María García Serrano examines the anthropological description of the human person understood as "spirit, soul, and body" in 1 Thess 5:23, with a special emphasis on the spirit. Analyzing the Pauline passage in its immediate context, in light of other pneumatological texts by Paul and in the Fathers of the Church, the author concludes that the apostle is referring to the human spirit, assisted and inhabited by the Spirit of God. The gift of the Spirit, already stored in the believers in the form of "firstfruits" or the "first installment," revives the dormant human spirit, leading it to be fully conformed to Christ, the perfect man in Paul's eschatological scenario.

Finally, Blažej Štrba, in "Fragrance as an Expression of Reciprocal Relationship," takes up the theme of human relationships that regularly appears in the PBC document. The author examines the Greek and Hebrew vocabulary of Old Testament related to fragrance and aroma and the role they play in a person's relationship with God and with others. Olfactory metaphors emphasize the beauty, selflessness, and goodness of the relationship with the Creator which the human being enters and which is mirrored in the loving relationship between a man and a woman.

The texts that make up the symposium volume strike the reader with their richness and diversity. They include overall, holistic approaches to biblical anthropology as well as very specialized philological-exegetical, literary, and hermeneutic analyses. Their authors also undertake interdisciplinary attempts to translate the biblical message

## Introduction

into the language of contemporary social sciences, psychology, and philosophy. Some of the texts focus on the PBC document, others treat it as a starting point for reflection on the specific issues of biblical anthropology. All the above-mentioned papers testify to the potential and vitality of the biblical vision of the human being, which can be exhausted neither by the symposium organized in 2021 at the Catholic University of Lublin, nor by the present volume, which constitutes its record. Offering it to the reader, we are deeply grateful to all the authors whose texts are gathered here. Without their expertise and love for the Bible, their spirit of truth-seeking and passionate discussions, our symposium would not have taken place and the present volume could not have been produced. Its financing was possible thanks to a grant received by the Catholic University of Lublin as part of the project funded by the Ministry of Education and Science, Republic of Poland, “Regional Initiative of Excellence” (2019–2022, 028/RID/2018/19). Finally, we would like to thank the WAM Publishing House, the managers, coordinators, and proofreaders that worked on this conference volume, the cooperation with whom was exemplary and crucial for its successful publication. *Biblical Anthropology: A Message for Contemporary People* is an invitation to a continuous reflection on the ever relevant question “what is man?” The answer we find in the Bible requires translation into modern language, not because biblical anthropology is a fossil of ancient history and culture, but because it contains a key message for humanity of all times, thanks to which it can harmoniously develop and flourish.

Marcin Kowalski

The Hermeneutical  
Principles That  
Govern the Document  
of the Pontifical  
Biblical Commission  
*What Is Man?*

PIETRO BOVATI

The Pontifical Biblical Commission

Having received the task, as Secretary, of coordinating and guiding the work of the colleagues associated with the Pontifical Biblical Commission (PBC) over the last five years, I was first of all able to acknowledge the request of the Holy See that had entrusted us with the study of biblical anthropology. The ecclesial expectations regarding this matter were rooted in the acute perception of a profound cultural change, which has been under way for a long time, but which has been activated especially in recent decades due to the subversion of principles and values considered safe and inalienable in the past. In particular, the conception of the sexed human body, the family structure and its norms, the origin and end of individual life, the bursting invasion of public competence into the sphere of personal decisions, the progressive social impertinence of religious references and other instances of this nature had urged the ecclesial Magisterium, already at the time of the Second Vatican Council (see the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, no. 1–10), to undertake a process of reflection that was condensed into a simple question: “What is man?” what is, in other words, the nature, the meaning, the duty and the destiny of the human being (see the *Presentation* by Card. Luis Ladaria, p. 3 of the Italian text). That was a difficult but central question that PBC has taken on, with courageous initiative and docile listening to the Word of God.

The modern questioning, in the civil and ecclesiastical sphere, is admirably combined with what emerges from the biblical tradition as a whole, which, instead of providing clear and exhaustive answers to each question, rather invites us to undertake processes of research and continuous reflection. This is due to the nature of a “historical” product, typical of Sacred Scripture, which despite the dogmatic assumption of its divine inspiration always retains the mark of contingency and cultural limitation, inherent at the time of its composition. Furthermore, in the times of man, Revelation intervenes gradually, with a pedagogy proportionate to the consciences in their ability to understand; and thus history itself becomes an incessant communication of the divine plan and its continuous and providential intervention. Finally and more radically, it is the human being as such who is an admirable “mystery” (Ps 139:14), to be constantly investigated, discovered, and contemplated, so as to stimulate the Creator’s grateful praise and an assent to his loving project.

These general considerations determined the methodological orientation of the study activity and, consequently, the concrete shape assumed by the PBC document. On the one hand, we have set out to

preserve, in a programmatic way, the interrogative dimension of the Bible, extending it to the various aspects in which the great anthropological assumption is necessarily articulated; in fact, speaking of the human being obliges us to consider more than a few categories, such as those of flesh, life breath, psyche, heart, and so on. On the other hand, the same line of research has been applied to the different sections which the Bible is divided into, because the Torah, the Prophets, the Psalter and the sapiential writings, and then the Gospels and the apostolic literary tradition, with their disparate literary genres and different cultural backgrounds, constitute specific approaches to Revelation; indeed, within each literary form and tradition there are non-homogeneous contributions to be recognized, respected, and harmonized, without altering their characteristic profile. Each scriptural contribution thus becomes a question about what its own meaning is and what relationship each one has with the whole. It is really time, therefore, to abandon in theological discussions the system of isolated quotations, removed from their context, in order to, among other things, validate – as “scriptural proof” – a rationally prefixed discourse, the only one deemed worthy of scientific proceeding. On the contrary, it is necessary every time to assume the totality of Scripture in its complexity as the founding and constantly normative basis of every proposal of Christian meaning (Introduction, no. 7). this is precisely what was done for the subject of anthropology.

For this set of reasons, we have given the document an interrogative title (“*What is Man?*”), citing Psalm 8 to obey what Scripture itself suggests. And the subtitle, *A Journey through Biblical Anthropology*, is an invitation to take a journey, obviously without claiming exclusivity or exhaustiveness, but certainly a nourishing and fruitful journey, because it is capable of attracting and activating further contributions, with clarifications, insights, and even constructive criticism. This is the spirit, humble and daring at the same time, in which the PBC document was conceived of and drafted. In the meantime, we have received numerous favorable reviews, combined with some critical ones (which, however, were mostly dictated by a superficial and partial reading of the document, or by ideological assumptions without biblical foundation); on the whole, however, we can attest that our writing was considered a very useful manual for anyone dealing with the anthropological question in the theological and even secular fields.

In fact, one can be immediately struck by the originality of the product, certainly not only on account of the literary quality of the

formulations or the pedagogical presentation of the subject (distributed, depending on the importance, in different sections), nor of the extension of the writing, unusual in comparison to the previous PBC documents. The breadth of the discussion is justified both by the topic addressed and by the need for an in-depth analysis of the main texts, of the recurring images, of the most important stories that constitute the expressive backbone of the entire Bible concerning the human being. More relevant for the quality of the document, however, is above all the organic nature of the discussion, associated with absolute fidelity to the biblical dictate, without neglecting the most difficult, more problematic or less attractive aspects for contemporary mentality. The totality of Scripture has therefore been assumed as an adequate matrix for a correct understanding of human reality.

The cornerstone of the discussion was the choice of resorting to the founding stories of Gen 2–3, with an appropriate integration of the particularly significant contributions of Gen 1, especially for the conception of the human being created “in the likeness of God” (no. 45–53). The global approach, therefore, corresponds to a substantial degree to what is now qualified as “narrative theology.” The inaugural pages of the Bible undoubtedly constitute a normative direction, even for the Christian faith, because the divine plan for man is given there, which even Jesus (Matt 19:4) attributed decisive value to (no. 178). Despite the limits imposed by reasonable editorial restrictions, the chapters of Gen 2–3 are commented on rather accurately and, with respect to several points, also innovatively compared to traditional exegesis. The latter is not always faithful to the Hebrew text, which unfortunate anthropological conceptions are derived from (such as, for example, the idea of the precedence and therefore of the pre-eminence of the male over the female, or the consideration of the account of the sin of Adam and Eve as a historical event, the cause of a perennial transmission of the original sin; or the interpretation of God’s intervention in history as “judgment,” while instead it is always an essentially corrective and propositional discipline, aimed at reconciliation, that is, at the renewal of the covenant). The ancient interpretation, which took biblical expressions literally, believing that every narrative text of Scripture was the exact account of events that really happened, is no longer acceptable today; certain dogmatic assumptions and certain catechetical texts must therefore be revised. In particular, for Gen 2–3 it is necessary to have recourse to hermeneutic categories highlighting that it is the symbol, in its indispensable revelatory value, that constitutes the

most typical form of biblical Revelation. However, the symbol is not timeless; it is instead steeped in *history*, in a succession of intricate and enigmatic events, however necessary to enter a dynamic intelligence of the human being. “Figural” biblical theology is most respectful of Sacred Scripture. It is therefore not the isolated original moment, it is not a static figure that gives us the idea of what the creature willed by the Creator is: “it is essential rather to see the human being as the protagonist of a process, in which one is a receiver of favours and an active subject of decisions that determine the very meaning of one’s being (no. 11).” At the conclusion of the document, it is even stated that “it is the *becoming*, secret and promising [...], which is the true reality of every human being” (no. 349), so what we are has not yet been fully revealed (Col 3:3–4; 1 John 3:2). The origin and history must therefore always come together in any theological treatment.

In addition to systematically re-proposing the relevance of the biblical story correctly interpreted – in a dynamic perspective – another decisive anthropological dimension has emerged considering the nature of the human being in its relational component. “The Bible does not provide a definition of the essence of the human being [researched and formulated according to the Aristotelian and Thomistic tradition in a conceptual way], but rather an articulated consideration of what human beings are, involved as they are in multiple relationships” (no. 10). Hence, the need arises to present a human being’s relationship with God, with their neighbor and with the earth, but also with time and with the end and eternity, with work, with the economy of technological development and the realities of poverty and need that afflict history, with the law and civic and religious institutions, with the body and the spiritual dimensions that make the human being the culminating figure of the divine work, and relationship also with the history of sin and its consequences, not only negative, but also those that produce the wonderful gift of the Savior’s grace, which is also extremely significant for a truthful anthropology.

The double attention, on the one hand to the narrative aspect and, on the other, to the relational dimension, is applied according to different angles to the parts the Bible is divided into (both in the Old and New Testament). This is done by assuming, in the four chapters which the document is divided into, the thematic motives indicated precisely by the founding stories. Therefore, a priori schemes are not adopted (imposed by a specific ideological system), but a concrete obedience to the scriptural dictate is practiced, so as to respond to the mandate

to explain what “biblical” anthropology is. Form and content must coincide, without ever falling into simplification, but accepting the plurality of testimonies as an essential way of truth.

Let us then briefly present the content of the document, that is, the themes developed as a concrete exposition of biblical anthropology, following the narration of the book of Genesis point by point. The first chapter (no. 14–68) deals with the human being in their capacity as a “*divine*” creature, created by God with the dust of the ground (and therefore subject to transience), but endowed with the spiritual “breath” that makes them similar to the Creator. The second chapter (no. 69–149) illustrates the condition of *man placed in the garden* (that is, on earth), both in their condition as a beneficiary of nourishment and in their mission as a worker and guardian of creation. The third chapter (no. 150–265), the longest and most complex, has as its subject “the *human family*”: paternal and filial relationships deriving from the spousal nucleus, in addition to the fraternal dimension; each of these relational components generates problematic and unsatisfactory aspects, but also a path towards perfect communion in love, as the fulfillment of the will of the Creator. Finally, the fourth chapter (no. 266–346), starting from Gen 3, highlights the constitutive features of human *history*, from sin to the event of salvation, the conclusion not only of the discourse on man, but also the fulfillment of the whole historical event inaugurated with the creation. Any consideration of specific anthropological aspects will be usefully inscribed in this admirable framework offered by Holy Scripture, so that light is shed on each point from the complementary presence of all the other elements; moreover, the single aspect will express its truth only in the location and role that is attributed to it according to the founding texts and according to Scripture as a whole. In fact, there is nothing more wrong than extrapolating and magnifying a detail, only because elements of truth or fragments of some pastoral utility have been discovered in it.

The PBC document is essentially addressed to those who want to “think” about what man is, entering into dialogue with the nourishing contribution of the Word of God in its entirety. Scripture has not been transmitted to us to confirm how much human reason has been able to build; it is instead a gift of revelation, a fruitful matrix of authentic Christian thinking. The document of the PBC then involves in the first place the “biblical scholars,” often engaged in in-depth exegetical analyses of partial texts or themes, without adequate consideration

either of the scriptural ensemble or of the religious and spiritual purpose of the Word of God. The document likewise attracts the attention of the “theologians,” that is, all those who in the Faculties, Institutes, and places of study are deputed to the formation of transmitters of the faith. The value of the document on biblical anthropology is that of being a synthesis which, on the one hand, makes up for the fragmented arrangement of the various theological disciplines and, on the other hand, provides a solid, and in our opinion very useful, basis for establishing and nourishing the specific approach of the individual subjects taught. However, it is an “open” synthesis, in the sense that the outline, elaborated with care and highly developed on some points, calls the scholar to intervene with adequate developments and actualizations. With the appropriate mediations and with a calm and meditated reading, even the catechists and also all those who desire a comprehensive introduction to the mystery of salvation will be able to have in the PBC text a truly effective tool for the progress of their faith. Although having given great importance to the traditions of the Old Testament, where the anthropological aspect receives a broader development, the whole expository process of the document leads in fact to Christ, the new man, who constitutes “the key, the focal point and the goal of man, as well as of all human history” (as *Gaudium et Spes* says, no. 10). This is how Biblical Theology – which the PBC document intends to be an expression and model of – achieves its purpose of light and fruitfulness.



The Kingdom of God  
in the Document  
of the Pontifical  
Biblical Commission  
*What Is Man?*

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## Introduction

If it is true that God makes the way of life known to human beings (cf. Deut 30:19), the precariousness and pride of humanity nevertheless overshadows his project. In a wise fashion, the prophets had already addressed the powerful, reminding them that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom and, therefore, of life (Prov 1:7). The failure to recognize the created nature of the human being is historically manifested as an arrogant pretentiousness and even as contempt for the work of God. As Isaiah says: “Shall the potter be regarded as the clay? Shall the thing made say of its maker, ‘He did not make me’; or the thing formed say of the one who formed it, ‘He has no understanding’? (Isa 29:16)” (no. 33).

With these words, the Pontifical Biblical Commission aims to underline the paradox that accompanies a human being throughout history: a sublime being due to his status of having a divine origin is at the same time fragile and limited, capable of despising the work of God. This human tendency is most notable in those who are powerful. In this same sense, as evidenced by the PBC document, the prophet Ezekiel pronounces his oracle against the king of Tyre: “You who are a man and not a god [...] can you continue saying in front of your executioners: Am I a god? (Ezek 28:9). This contrast between the proud and the humble develops in the Bible as a logic of God’s action and an anthropological dynamic. That is to say that, on the one hand, people behave like herd animals, but on the other, God opts for the weakest, the poorest, and the simplest. This arrogant behavior of the human being with respect to God and other people shows not only their precariousness and fragility but also obscures the image of God that is the imprint of their being. The human being, called to give life and to protect it, had paradoxically proven to be a destroyer of the divine work (no. 50).<sup>1</sup>

This paradox emerges from the human heart and, what stands out especially in the proud, has accompanied people throughout history. Even when an individual wants to do good, they end up doing evil. As Saint Paul says: “I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want

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1 It seems that this unbridled maliciousness resides within the human heart: “The inclination of the human heart is evil from youth” (Gen 8:21; cf. Gen 6:5). Later, the prophet Jeremiah corroborates this reality when he says: “[t]he heart is devious above all else, it is perverse – who can understand it?” (Jer 17:9) (cf. no. 129).

is what I do” (Rom 7:19). Consequently, the presence of evil in humanity not only prevents their full realization, but also puts the Creator’s project at risk. Faced with this (rather negative) anthropological panorama, God acts positively by sending his beloved son to bestow his mercy on sinners.<sup>2</sup> Indeed, “Jesus himself declares that he has come for sinners (Luke 5:31), to ‘seek and save that which was lost’ (Luke 19:10)” (no. 342). According to the above, Jesus of Nazareth, the perfect man, knows that there is a “fix” for the human heart. And, unlike John the Baptist, he does not wait for people to approach him (Mark 1:5), but rather goes through all the regions and towns announcing that the “kingdom of God has come near; repent and believe in the gospel” (Mark 1:15).<sup>3</sup>

## 1. Socio-Political Perspective of the Kingdom of God

It has been shown above that kings are denounced in the oracles of the prophets particularly for their arrogance before God and the treatment of their subjects. Now Jesus announces a different reign: it will be God himself who assumes the kingdom, and he will do it through his chosen one.<sup>4</sup> Historically, these messianic hopes came to the fore in the period of the monarchy and concentrated on a descendant of David, as stated by the PBC document: “King David, the man according to the heart of God (1 Sam 13:14; cf. also Acts 13:22), prefiguration of the Messiah (Jer 3:15; 30:9)” (no. 58).

To this point, the PBC document refers to the explicit will of God who wants to perpetuate the kingdom of David, and it does so by

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2 In the socio-theological context of Jesus sharing the table in an intimate way with sinners, there looms the question of who will participate in the banquet of God’s Kingdom (G.L. Stevens, “Luke 15: Parables of God’s Search for Sinners,” *TTE* 56 [1997] 67–76).

3 The PBC document expresses the same in the following terms: “The call of sinners defines the task that Christ assumed (Mark 2:17; Matt 9:13; Luke 5:32)” (no. 313). “Faced with the imminence of the Kingdom, John radicalizes both its original character and foreignness to the worldly expectations of Israel, as well as the conditions to receive it: conversion and change of life” (S. Galilea, *El reino de Dios y la liberación del hombre* [Bogotá: Ediciones Paulinas 1992] 11).

4 While speaking of God is something that is common to all religions, Jesus came to reveal the true face of God (cf. John 1:18; see X. Santamaría Alegre, “El Reino de Dios y las parábolas en Marcos,” *Revista Latinoamericana de Teología* 67 (2006) 3–29 (4–8)).

means of the promise that the prophet Nathan announces to King David (2 Sam 7:8–16). Following this divine perspective, there is a turn towards the messianic hopes held by the people of Israel, who expects “the perfect image of the Lord, the ‘son of David’ (Isa 11:1; Jer 23:5; 30:9; 33:15–16; Mic 5:1–3; Matt 1:1; Rom 1:3), who with wonderful wisdom and divine power will bring blessing to the whole world” (no. 58). Following the above, one notes an articulation of and coherence between the thought of God and the desire and hope that the people of Israel have regarding the figure of the Messiah. Therefore, when Jesus presents the Kingdom of God in the Jewish context, he does not need to provide an exact definition of it. All understand the reality which he refers to, since it falls within the same symbolic network.<sup>5</sup>

Without a doubt, this messianic hope, strongly established amongst the people of Israel, forms part of the political and social history that they experienced during 500 years of monarchy. Certainly, during this period there were rulers who exercised their power according to the will of God, but there were also many who turned away from the Lord, who did not heed the prophets and in practice led the people to ruin (cf. Jer 23:1–6). In fact, the general judgement that the Bible makes on the behavior of the sovereigns of Israel and Judah during this historical period is quite negative (cf. 2 Kgs 15–17).

The greatest catastrophe for the Jews came in 587 BC with the exile in Babylon, when Nebuchadnezzar deported the last two kings of Judah, Jehoiakim (597 BC) and Zedekiah (587 BC). This historical situation further awakened messianic hopes and strengthened the confidence in God to fulfill all his promises made to King David. In the face of the rulers’ ineptitude and the catastrophe suffered, God was expected to assume power by establishing the Kingdom of God in accordance with his promises. Indeed, through the mouth of the prophet Ezekiel the Lord had declared: “I will be king over you” (20:33).<sup>6</sup>

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5 The gospels likewise do not describe in concrete terms what the reign consists of, meaning that “[w]hen Jesus spoke of this matter, without a doubt, it referred to something that, in whatever way, was familiar to his listeners” (J.M. Castillo, *El reino de Dios por la vida y la dignidad de los seres humanos*, 6 ed. [Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer 2010] 35).

6 There were other promises made along these lines in the OT as well: “The Lord will reign for ever and ever” (Exod 15:18). And Gideon says to his people: “I will not reign over you, nor will my son reign over you; the Lord will reign over” (Judg 8:23). Finally, the prophet Obadiah announces that “the kingdom will be the Lord’s” (Obad 21).

The hope for the Kingdom of God is ultimately rooted in the inability of human beings to establish a kingdom of justice and peace. As the PBC document understands it, negative experience in this respect is not only the province of the people of Israel, but of the world in general. When speaking of imperialism and the Kingdom of God, the document says that the apocalyptic writings describe the powerful manifestation of the eternal kingdom (Dan 2:44–45), of a ‘holy city,’ in which all men and women of every nation, tribe, people and language are united in love (Rev 7:9–10; 21:1–4) (no. 241).

The emphasis here is placed on two aspects: one negative with the monstrous rise of empires, based on the Book of Daniel, and another positive with the intervention of God to build an eternal kingdom, based on the Book of Revelation (7:9–10). Regarding the emergence of empires, Yuval Noah Harari posits that these originated with the agricultural revolution and he classifies it as the greatest fraud in history as it led to sedentarism and the idea of private property: this generated accumulation, territories, and territorial gods which altogether lead to geographic determinism and later to imperialism.<sup>7</sup> According to Harari, agriculture was the foundation of large-scale political, religious, and social systems. Rulers and elites who lived at the expense of the peasants’ food surpluses emerged, and it was them who promoted politics, wars, art, and philosophy.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, Harari locates the historical emergence of empires between the year 1000 BC and 500 BC, when the first mega-empires appeared in the Middle East: the Assyrian, Babylonian, and Persian ones. Most networks of human cooperation were organized for oppression and exploitation.<sup>9</sup> Harari’s interpretation concurs with that of the Book of Daniel (as will be explained shortly), but it differs in that, as the PBC document has affirmed, in Daniel a solution is

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7 Cf. Y.N. Harari, *Sapiens. De animales a dioses. Una breve historia de la humanidad* (trans. J. Ros) (Barcelona: Penguin Random House Grupo Editorial 2016) 95. The author also claims that the essence of the agricultural revolution is the ability to maintain more people in worse conditions (p. 100). Agriculture created the sedentary conditions for rapid population growth (p. 107).

8 Cf. *ibid.*, 120–121.

9 Cf. *ibid.*, 123. Israel forms part of the Roman Empire beginning in 63 C.E. For the different contexts in which Israel enters into a relationship with the Roman empire, see: R.A. Horsley, *Jesús y el Imperio. El reino de Dios y el nuevo desorden mundial* (Estella: Verbo Divino 2003) 27–74; Also cf. Equipo Bíblico Claretiano, *Les hablaba del Reino de Dios. Evangelios Sinópticos y Hechos de los Apóstoles 1* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Claretiana 2004) 60.

proposed to put an end to the rule of such empires (Dan 7:13–14). The context of this text is framed within the prophet's dream and night visions (Dan 7:1–8), in which four beasts rise from the ocean (and let us recall that in the Jewish context the sea represents the world of evil, it is hostile and chaotic). Daniel sees a lion, a bear, a leopard, and lastly a frightening and terrible beast. The beast is very strong, with large iron teeth with which it devours and crumbles; tramples with its feet what is left over, and has ten horns (Dan 7:2–8).

This is how the images taken from the animal world appear in apocalyptic language, which the PBC document makes a reference to as noted above (no. 241). Then in the same chapter the symbolism and references used by the author of Daniel are explained (Dan 7:17–27). Like Harari, the author is interpreting history. These four beasts reflect the four great empires that one after another oppressed the people of Israel. The lion stands for the empire of Babylon, whereby the city is cursed, and is the home of demons, as the Book of Revelation says (Rev 18:1–3). The bear is the empire of the Medes, voracious and always ready to attack. The leopard with four heads symbolizes the government of the Persians, who look towards the four cardinal points in search of prey. And the fourth beast, the most hideous, is the symbol of the kingdom of the Greeks, namely that of Alexander the Great and his successors (*diadocos*). Furthermore, the author of the Book of Daniel depicts the situation in which the people of Israel are living under the rule of Antiochus IV Epiphanes, a cruel and cynical man who persecuted the holy ones faithful to the law of God (cf. 2 Macc 6:1–7, 8:16).<sup>10</sup>

This is to say that Israel's own negative experience of the monarchy may be complemented with the cruelty of these foreign kingdoms that throughout the centuries have done no other than violate the rights of the peoples, resorting to violence and behaving like true wild beasts.<sup>11</sup> The seer confirms in his vision that God, conceived of as a vigilante and a punisher, does not remain passive in the face of this socio-political reality, but rather dictates a sentence: the beasts have their powers removed and the fourth is killed, cut into pieces, and thrown into the fire (Dan 7:9–12). It is at this moment that the seer notices a human figure, a son of man, to whom power, glory, and the kingdom are given: "His

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10 F. Armellini, *XXXIV Per annum: Il trionfo degli sconfitti*, Comentario del Domingo 34 del tiempo ordinario B. en <https://celebraciondelapalabra.wordpress.com/2018/11/20/cristo-rey> [access: 8.09.2021] 3.

11 *Ibid.*, 3.

dominion is an everlasting dominion that shall not pass away, and his kingship is one that shall never be destroyed” (Dan 7:14).<sup>12</sup>

It is not easy to identify the human face that comes from heaven, from the world of God, but it is possible that the author is referring to Israel itself after the suffering endured under Antiochus IV (167–164 BC), and of course, under the rule of the Seleucids, when it gained independence due to the Jewish movement of the Maccabees. This hegemony could be expected to develop in peace, with all the kingdoms subdued without oppression, because this kingdom would have a human heart, not like that of the beasts (that is, the foreign empires). But this was not the case: the Maccabees were also cruel and abused their power, resorting to oppression and slavery.<sup>13</sup>

It is evident that the Maccabees did not observe what was prescribed in the Torah, because the law regarding the king in the Deuteronomic code asked the sovereign not to become conceited, remembering that he was a brother of his subjects (Deut 17:20). The PBC document then contrasts the Jewish community of the Maccabean kingdom with the community of the new covenant: “In the community of the new covenant, brotherhood is exercised by becoming a servant of others (1 Cor 12:22–25)” (no. 264). This new covenant, already announced by the prophet Jeremiah (Jer 31:31–34), has its definitive fulfillment in the person of Jesus of Nazareth, the son of man, who initiates the Kingdom of God. Hence, in coherence with the Old Testament, and specifically with reference to the Book of Daniel, the PBC document presents the figure of Jesus in the following way: “All that the Creator had wished to give to the human creature with the ‘breath’ breathed into the nostrils of ’ādām, all that the sages had desired and the prophets had promised, what the Psalmist had admired as a wonder wrought on the ‘son of man’, all this was realized in the person of Jesus, son of Mary. A man among men, the true man” (no. 63).<sup>14</sup>

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12 Like all of the “kingdoms” of the world which seek only to aggregate more power and wealth by violating the rights of others (although by presenting it as benignity), in Rome – given the successive victories that afforded it dominion over the Mare Nostrum – the prophecies of Daniel are reread and it attributes to itself the privilege of being the “chosen people” destined to reign for eternity (F. Hubeñak, “Historia política y profecía: Roma y los grandes imperios antiguos a la luz de las predicciones del profeta Daniel,” *Hispania Sacra* 48/97 [1996] 95–119 [112]).

13 J. González et. al., *La Biblia en su entorno*, 3 ed. (Introducción al estudio de la Biblia; Estella: Verbo Divino 1996) 260–261.

14 As Jürgen Moltmann also affirms in a theological vein, God’s self-manifestation to all people, fulfilled in the highest degree in Christ, is ‘the goal of creation.’ This

The PBC document summarizes in this section what has been discussed so far and presents the figure of the son of man already present in the vision of the prophet Daniel. The document continues to expand on this concept as the evangelists, and Jesus himself, understood it: “The evangelists tell us that Jesus of Nazareth presented himself frequently as the Son of Man (Matt 11:19; 12:8; 16:13; Mark 2:10,28; etc.) (no. 39). This title denotes belonging to the human race and sharing in the same condition of fragility and mortality (Matt 8:20; 12:40; cf. also Rom 8:3; Phil 2:7; Heb 2:17; 4:15).<sup>15</sup> Along the lines of the theme developed thus far, the figure of the Son of Man presented in the Gospels shares a human condition and has a human heart. However, the Jews hoped that the Messiah would be a sovereign capable of liberating the people of Israel from foreign oppression, putting an end to all of the injustices and violence that the prophets had denounced. The PBC document stresses above all the “fraudulent trade, which involves tampering with ‘weights and measures’, which the Law seeks to maintain as a necessary guarantee of fairness (Lev 19:35–36; Deut 25:13–16)” (no. 131).<sup>16</sup>

Having pointed out this bleak and abusive panorama on the part of the rulers and those who commit injustices against the most vulnerable in society, the PBC document recalls that a human being is the image of God and that their vocation is to dominate over animals, but not over other people (no. 47). Nevertheless, the strong subjugate the weak here, the rich exploit the poor, the master abuses the slave, etc., generating a spiral of violence that leads to a fratricidal war amongst the inhabitants of the world. The PBC document is not unaware of this reality (which remains true to this day). Based on biblical tradition and the history of peoples, it sets out to outline an explanation regarding the difficulty of building a fraternal world: “Violent rivalry is a constant phenomenon visible to all; it frightens us, and even leads us to doubt God, God’s power over history and his compassion

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means, in an exclusive sense, that a human being only reaches the fullness of their being in Christianity and, in an inclusive sense, that being a Christian is equivalent to being a true human person (J. Moltmann, “El cristiano, el hombre y el reino de Dios,” *Stimmen der Zeit*, 203 [1985] 619–631 [620]).

15 Furthermore, it is with this title that Jesus responds to the High Priest when asked if he is the Christ: “I am; and you will see the Son of Man seated at the right hand of the Power and coming with the clouds of heaven” (Mark 14:62).

16 Tyre is described as a beautiful ship whose commercial success is precisely the cause of her downfall. Tyre’s excessive glory makes her so heavy that her great weight hastens her sinking (J. Vayntrub, “Tyre’s Glory and Demise: Totalizing Description in Ezekiel 27,” *CBQ* 82/2 [2020] 214–236 [214]).

for the victims (Ps 73:1–14; 94:3–7; Job 24; Lam 2:20–21): [...] What is the remedy for all this? According to what the Bible says, two ways lie ahead, that of the world and that of God” (no. 240).<sup>17</sup>

As it has been pointed out, this panorama of human history is further accentuated by the greed of empires. It seems that what happened at the Tower of Babel is relived over and over again (Gen 11:1–9):<sup>18</sup> “This is discreetly suggested already by the short story of the origin of Babel (Gen 11:1–9)” (no. 241).<sup>19</sup> It is the first imperialist project, which consists of favoring and imposing a single language as a basis for understanding, as the foundation for the construction of a community without differences. To emphasize what the Pontifical Biblical Commission says in the first part of this fragment, let me refer to Harari’s thought. According to the author, cultural diversity and territorial flexibility confer the unique character of the empire and its permanence in history. Thus, they manage to unite diverse ethnic groups and different ecological zones under a single political or religious umbrella.<sup>20</sup> Furthermore, Harari claims that an empire implies atrocious massacres of large populations and brutal oppression of the survivors.<sup>21</sup> On the other hand, the imperial language is accepted consciously or unconsciously. Today, most of us speak, think, and dream with imperial images.<sup>22</sup>

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17 This situation is so important that the PBC document goes further: “Kings, judges, priests and the rich who subvert people’s rights and gravely offend against justice (Jer 5:28; Zech 7:9–11): all are corrupt (Jer 5:1–9) [...]. History is not a place of brotherly love, but of hatred: each cave in the land is a place where violence makes its home (Ps 74:20)” (no. 258). This situation is evident in the contemporary world, it has occurred throughout human history, in antiquity and in the modern epoch. As Thomas More says, “[t]he rich scrape every day something from the daily ration of the poor not only by private fraud but also by public laws” (T. Moro, *Utopía*, [Barcelona: Altaya 1993] 130).

18 The townspeople did not live within Babel; they lived outside of it, unprotected and at the mercy of the warrior class that, with its chariots and horses, maintained dominion over them and exploited them (Z.S. Zweifel, “Los constructores de ciudades: Análisis estructural y semiótico de Génesis 11:1–9,” *Cuadernos de Teología* 9/2 [1988] 111–131. See also: D.A. Bruno, “Pentecostés Viene Después de Babel: Integración Económica, Imperio y El “Totalmente Otro,”” *Cuadernos de Teología* 24 [2005] 163–175).

19 For a study on this, see J.-L. Ska, “Una città e una torre (Gen 11,1–9),” *Il Libro Sigillato e il Libro Aperto* (Bologna: EDB 2005) 255–277.

20 Cf. Harari, *Sapiens. De animales a dioses*, 214.

21 Cf. *ibid.*, 217.

22 Cf. *ibid.*, 218. Elsewhere in his work Harari says that the universalization achieved through trade, empires, and religions resulted in situating the *homo sapiens* in the global world in which we live today (p. 264). In addition, he affirms that the

This imperial world created by people is not at all concordant with God's will. For this reason, the 'dispersion' wrought by the Lord (at Babel) is the condemnation of the imperialist dream and, at the same time, the beginning of a new and different modality of unification of human society: the Kingdom of God, the community of brothers and sisters, is built in a way that is antagonistic to the totalitarian model (no. 241). Indeed, faced with this panorama outlined by the Old Testament, one which is never far from the current reality, the words of Jesus carry particular weight: the time of hope has ended, the moment of consolation and peace has arrived, the Kingdom of God has come (cf. Mark 1:13). In other words, God has displayed his mercy on humanity in the person of Jesus of Nazareth.<sup>23</sup> Therefore, as the PBC document says, "The past is marked by sin, but the present is now made luminous by the Kingdom of God that has come closer (Matt 4:17); indeed, it has come with all the saving power of the Almighty (Luke 11:20)" (no. 341).

In accordance with this explosion of joy, emphasized by the PBC document, the chain of these voracious empires, the war of the wild beasts, has been interrupted. Now the ruling power will have to be understood within a universal brotherhood, that is, in service of and dedication for the weakest, and not in terms of abuse, exploitation, and slavery. Certainly, Jesus calls for service instead of power, for fraternity instead of enmity, for sharing instead of hoarding the goods that belong to all humanity (cf. Mark 6:35–44).<sup>24</sup> In this sense, the PBC document posits that Christianity proposes an ideal of brotherhood (cf. Deut 15:4) that must be put into practice – as a sign of the coming of the Kingdom – taking into account, however, the particular economic structures that belong to different historical periods (no. 100).

However, the PBC document also emphasizes that Christ's Kingdom is not realized according to the model of this world (John 18:36). The rulers of the earth dominate their people by oppressing and

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appearance of global problems (the melting of the polar ice caps, the destruction of the ozone layer, climate change, pandemics) undermines any legitimacy left to independent nation-states. No sovereign state will be able to rid itself of these global problems (p. 231).

23 Cf. J.M. Andueza, *La misericordia, los pobres y el reino de Dios* (Bilbao: Desclée de Brouwer 2016) 45.

24 In this way one can understand the kingdom of God as a universal vocation (J. Dupuis, *Hacia una teología cristiana del pluralismo religioso* [Santander: Sal Terrae 2000] 491).

exploiting them (Matt 20:25), and they appropriate the goods of their subjects to the point that they are converted into slaves (1 Sam 8:10–17). By contrast, the good shepherd places himself at the service of his brothers and sisters (Matt 20:28) and gives his own life for them (John 10:11,15,18) (no. 64). Here the PBC also makes a contrast between the governing of the powerful and that of the good shepherd and takes up the theme of the wild beasts from the Book of Daniel in connection with the account of the temptations of Jesus as presented in the Gospel of Mark (Mark 1:12–13) (no. 64).<sup>25</sup>

The PBC document posits that the expression “was with the wild animals in the desert” refers to the symbolic inauguration of the Kingdom of God.<sup>26</sup> In this sense, the beasts in the desert represent the oppressive powers of the world which Jesus had to face during his public life and which he contrasts with the message of the Kingdom of God.<sup>27</sup> Indeed, Jesus must confront the Roman Empire of his day (Matt 22:21; Luke 20:25) as well as those who represented political, economic, and religious power in Israel: High Priests, scribes, Pharisees, Sadducees, etc. In addition, Jesus’s disciples themselves will have to later face the same beasts: the economic powers that exploit and force entire peoples to live in misery, the senseless ideologies that induce people to commit unthinkable acts and crimes, fanaticisms, religious fundamentalisms,

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25 In a synthetic way, Saint Mark recounts the temptations of Jesus (Mark 1:12–13) without going into detail as to what they were, and neither is he interested in the particularity of the temptations, because he simply wants to show that Jesus faced all the temptations that assail man throughout his life (forty days), and that during his stay in the desert “Jesus was with the wild beasts and the angels served him” (Mark 1:13).

26 One could also think of the paradisiacal peace of the prophet Isaiah: “The wolf and the lamb shall feed together, the lion shall eat straw like the ox; but the serpent – its food shall be dust! They shall not hurt or destroy on all my holy mountain says the Lord” (Isa 65:25; cf. J. Ratzinger, *Gesù di Nazaret* [Roma: Libreria Editrice Vaticana 2007] 19). It is also thought that Mark refers to paradise, when Adam had named the animals and lived with them in perfect harmony (cf. Gen 2:19–20; cf. J.P. Heil, “Jesus with the Wild Animals in Mark 1:13,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 68/1 [January 2006] 63–78). With the beginning of his public life, Jesus would have begun to establish universal peace in the world and new relationships with nature and with animals. See also C.A. Gieschen, “Why Was Jesus with the Wild Beasts (Mark 1:13)?,” *CTQ* 73/1 (2009) 77–80.

27 José María Castillo emphasizes that the presence of the Kingdom of God, lived and taught by Jesus, provokes two effects at the same time: an overflow of enthusiasm in the great masses of people and brutal rejection in the group of leaders (Castillo, *El reino de Dios*, 36–37).

racism. These are bestial powers. As Harari puts it, despite the amazing things humans are capable of, we remain unsure of our goals and seem as unhappy as ever. We have advanced from canoes to sailing ships to steamboats to space missiles, but no one knows where we are going. Consequently, we wreak havoc on our animal partners and the ecosystem around us, seeking little more than our own comfort and diversion, but never finding satisfaction. Is there anything more dangerous than dissatisfied and irresponsible gods who don't know what they want?<sup>28</sup>

Yet the disciple of Christ behaves differently than the majority of the people. A Christian does not hate the persons that are in these powers, but shows a way of behavior different from the beasts. Hence, the need arises to welcome the gospel of Christ. If the sovereigns of the world impose their dominion with coercive force, Christ, on the contrary, exercises his power by gently attracting people (Luke 4:22; John 13:32), with his humble proposal of the truth desiring to inspire a free decision (no. 65).<sup>29</sup> Moreover, Mark says in the account of the temptations that "the angels served him" (Mark 1:13).<sup>30</sup> Angels of the Lord are those who collaborate with God's plan, who strive to carry forward the new world initiated by Christ.<sup>31</sup> During his forty days, Jesus encountered wild beasts, but also many angels on his way. The angels who cared for him are his parents, the women who assisted him during his public life, those who shared with him the values of the

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28 Cf. Harari, *Sapiens. De animales a dioses*, 455–456.

29 Jesus warns the disciples with the following words: "Whoever wishes to be great among you must be your servant, and whoever wishes to be first among you must be your slave" (Matt 20:25–28). In this sense, the Kingdom of God is brought about in the words that Mary spoke: "He has brought down the mighty from their thrones and lifted up the lowly" (Luke 1:52). The Magnificat pronounced by Mary is destabilizing in terms of the well-known ideas about God. The sovereign action of God, which positively discriminated against the victims of injustice, was good news for the humble and the hungry and a very bad omen for the potentates and the rich (J. Vitoria Cormezana, *Una teología arrodillada e indignada* [Santander: Sal Terrae 2013] 86).

30 For the different interpretations regarding the service of the angels, see A. Asu mang, "And the angels waited on him' (Mark 1:13): Hospitality and Discipleship in Mark's Gospel," *Conspexus* 8/1 (September 2009) 1–25.

31 The term "angel" does not necessary refer to a spiritual being but is any mediator of God's salvation and is applied to whomever becomes an instrument in the hands of God for the sake of human beings. Moses, who guided Israel in the desert, is called an angel (cf. Exod 23:20,23). John the Baptist is also presented by Mark as an angel (Mark 1:2; cf. X. Léon-Dufour, *Vocabulario de teología bíblica* (Barcelona: Herder 1965) 77; P. Rossano et al., *Nuevo diccionario de teología bíblica* [Madrid: Paulinas 1990] 108).

kingdom, those who were at his side collaborating in his work of salvation. In continuity with the above, the PBC document refers to two more signs of the presence of the Kingdom of God: Jesus imposes obedience upon unclean spirits (Mark 1:27) and calms the fury of the sea in the midst of the storm (Mark 4:39–41).<sup>32</sup> These actions are described as a metaphorical anticipation of the final triumph, when Christ hands over the Kingdom to God, the Father, after he has annihilated all principality, power, and might (no. 64). Let us consider these further.

First, Jesus imposes obedience upon unclean spirits. In general, spirits in the time of Jesus were understood as an energy that moves towards life or towards death. When a person acted positively, doing good, it was then said that they had a pure, divine spirit which came from God. But if they acted in some evil way, it was a sign that they were possessed by an evil spirit.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, an evil spirit provokes actions that dehumanize and negatively affect the dignity of the human being. These evil spirits, far from being external entities, are impulses that emerge from the human heart: hatred, violence, pride, greed, laziness, the drive for power, gossip, revenge, hoarding goods, etc. In this sense, Jesus lists twelve negative behaviors that come from the heart: “fornication, theft, murder, adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, envy, slander, pride, folly” (Mark 7:21–23). In any case, the unclean spirits do not identify themselves with the devil, nor with the serpent that was in Paradise.<sup>34</sup> The PBC document sheds light on this interpretation as it explains the narrative of Gen 3:1–7 (no. 297).<sup>35</sup>

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32 The PBC document also cites the account of Mark 1:21–28, which refers to the beginning of Jesus’s missionary journey in the synagogue of Capernaum. Jesus announces the Kingdom of God and calls his first disciples in order to lead them out of the world of evil (Sea of Galilee) and into the world of love, of the giving of life, of service, that is, in the new world of the Kingdom of God.

33 Illnesses, especially of a mental or psychological nature, were likewise understood to be unclean spirits: epilepsy, schizophrenia, neurosis, etc. To cure these diseases, rites, exorcisms, magic, etc. were frequently used. But Jesus acts in a different way and does not rely on any of these practices. Rather, he uses his word, that is, the gospel (Rossano, *Nuevo Diccionario de Teología Bíblica*, 109–111).

34 It is worth mentioning here Professor Roitman, who has been the curator of the Dead Sea texts for several decades. In his speech entitled “From the Serpent of Paradise to Satan: The Origin of Evil in the Bible,” he concludes that human beings tend to blame external beings or entities for everything that they do not want to assume responsibility for (A. Roitman, “De la serpiente del paraíso al satán: el origen del mal en la Biblia.” <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxTDaC8a4iFM> [access: 17.07.2021]).

35 In this same section, the document goes on to say: “Since a powerful force is envisaged, capable of taking different and multiple forms (Mk 5:9), the Christian