

## INTRODUCTION

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This section of the “*Annali di studi religiosi*” offers a dialogue between theology and philosophy on fundamental questions of ethical, social and political action, but also on the criteria for understanding these questions. It does so by dealing with some issues that are only apparently circumscribed to the theological sphere while, in fact, they have profoundly to do with lived life and the criteria adopted to take a position on them. This is possible for two basic reasons: the first is that Christian theology remains a fundamental root of Western culture. Denying it, or belittling it because one does not adhere to its belief system or showing indifference will eventually make us only less aware and less able to use that tradition as a resource, but no more emancipated. The second, as the collected contributions show, consists in the fact that over the centuries theology has been able to question human beings about the criteria of their choices and purposes, their values, urging them to continuously reflect on their own horizons of meaning and the ultimate meaning of their lives. Theology, even before constituting a doctrinal apparatus that underpins the system of religious practices and beliefs enacted in the community of believers, is first and foremost questioning, urging us to think about and understand the relationship of human beings with God, understood as the primary source of existence.

Philosophical rationality is essential to the human capacity to interrogate, argue and articulate complex issues, preventing the gap between reason and faith from descending into ideological dogmatism. Theological reflection, however, does not necessarily coincide with

adherence to faith, just as in writing about poetics one is not necessarily (also) a poet. In its questioning, theology feeds on doubt, on the gap between what is rationally comprehensible and the immeasurability of mystery, without ever abandoning the challenge. In this it always inhabits the threshold. The essays that make up this section sustain this gap from different angles, inviting the reader to question rather than guiding him or her toward definitive, doctrinal answers. In the background, they presuppose a fundamental distinction between theology as a discourse on the relationship between man and God, a discourse that questions rather than answers; religion as a system of communal practices and beliefs that derive from theology; and, finally, faith as the personal and intimate experience of the relationship between the believer and God. These three dimensions do not necessarily coincide in a person or a community: one can be a theologian without participating in community practices or adhering to the belief system and also without cultivating a personal relationship with God. One can participate in community practices and adhere to the religious belief system without being a theologian and without cultivating a personal relationship with God. One can cultivate a personal relationship with God without being a theologian and without adhering to community religious practices and beliefs. However, theology cannot but question its influence on the emic dimension and must necessarily feed on it.

In the opening essay *The Veiled Threshold* Salvatore Rindone analyzes the relationship between ethical and emic dimensions through the analysis of the biblical image of the Veil of the Temple. After Adam's sin, in the First Revelation (Old Testament) man must remain on the threshold and cannot look beyond the veil of the Temple. In Second Revelation (New Testament) God shows Himself to man through the Son, that is, by becoming incarnate. At his death, the Veil of the Temple "was torn in two from top to bottom" and God revealed himself beyond the threshold. From this reversal of the threshold, every man is now called to cross every threshold in order to be saved: righteous/sinner (Luke 5:32), servant/friend (John 15:15), Jew/Greek (Galatians 3:28), stranger/family member of God (Ephesians 2:19). This new awareness about one's way of being in the world requires human beings to question who they are, about relationships, about how to embody

their values, about the fact that it is not always enough to act according to the norm in order to be consistent with one's faith.

In the second essay *The Threshold between Human Rational Research* Vincenzo Serpe analyzes the relationship between rational thought and listening to Revelation that characterizes the thought of Thomas Aquinas. Drawing on non-Christian thinkers (Averroes, Avicenna, Maimonides, Boethius, and Aristotle) Thomas constructs his theological reflection using both rational thought and the ability to listen to God's presence, demonstrating that these are two ways of understanding that are not in opposition to each other and both require an active role of the investigator.

At the center of the section, Pierangelo Bianco's essay *Ecumenical Theology from the Emic* mediates between theoretical reflection and the rediscovery of the emic role of the biblical text. Indeed, the author analyzes the development of the idea of an ecumenical theology based on an intratextual and emic understanding of religious truth in the postliberal theology of Hans Frei and George Lindbeck. The main idea of this approach seems to be the emancipation of theology from historiography and philosophy and, above all, the establishment of a methodological connection between the work of the theologian and that of the anthropologist. Hence, the need to rediscover the realistic narrative of the biblical text as the story of a community of faith that was born around Jesus of Nazareth.

The last two essays further develop the role of the biblical text and its interpretation in concrete contexts through the analysis of the concept of "consensus" and the role of "nonviolence" in postcolonial theological thought. In *The Biblical Imaginary in the Political Thought*, Debora Tonelli takes the relationship between theology and philosophy a step further: the space of imagination becomes the place where, thanks to a new worldview, thought can be transformed into action. The experience of "consensus" narrated in Exodus 19:1-8, in dialogue with the Spinozian interpretation, is analyzed as an expression of a praxis that has become a paradigm: from the biblical Exodus to the Afro revolution in the United States, from emancipation from apartheid to decolonial theology, numerous peoples have been inspired by the biblical narrative to regain the dignity they had been denied. Imagination

amounts to crossing the threshold where “discard” becomes emic experience of return.

In *Towards a Postcolonial Theology of Nonviolence*, Stefan Silber discusses the role of nonviolence as an expression of epistemic emancipation from the colonial experience. If Christian theology in the past colluded with the colonial experience and succumbed to both physical and epistemic violence, today nonviolence allows theology to reclaim the prophetic vision. By overcoming the opposition created by the logic of violence, based on oppression and power relations, nonviolence becomes, in the theological sphere, an instrument of self-criticism and an expression, in fact, of a third way, the one that is original and essential to theological thought itself.

In all the essays, the experience of faith poses radical theological questions that have profoundly to do with acting in the world not only in terms of the coherence between faith, religious adherence, doctrinal apparatus on the one hand and practical action on the other, but also and especially in the creation of that horizon of meaning that makes the world intelligible in the light of the relationship between God and human beings, even and especially in the gap of the incommensurability of mystery. The first three essays offer theoretical reflections on the issue and three different angles: the inversion of the threshold through the changing role of the Veil of the Temple in First and Second Revelation, the relationship between rational knowledge and listening to Revelation in Thomas, and an ecumenical theology based on the intratextual and emic understanding of religious truth. The fourth essay crosses the threshold by appealing to the biblical imagery that has exerted its influence in Western social and political history. The fifth essay, through the meaning of nonviolence in postcolonial theology, places theology in dialogue with itself, radicalizing the question about its socio-political role and the coherence between thought and the emic dimension. In its being a search and a question about God, theological thought is a narrative of man’s openness to the mystery of God and his ability to position himself within a horizon of meaning in which what remains inscrutable is not a limit but a resource of meaning.