

**Tonči Matulić. *Metamorphoses of Culture: A Theological Discernment of Signs of The Times Against the Backdrop of Scientific-Technical Civilization*. Zürich: Lit, 2018. 680 p. ISBN: 978-3-643-91049-3.**

The book is a monumental theological work. It is the fruit of the author's many-year theological contemplation, which is confirmed by the book's length and its in-depth thematic philosophical-theological framework. It deals with important and topical issues for the life of modern man and society. It shows relevance and a grasp of the societal issues of the postmodern time it deals with. In a theological vein, the author aims to connect, make transparent and actualize these problems theologically.

The book is divided into seven parts: in thirty chapters, the author analyses the theological view of modern times. This theological approach requires wide erudition in challenging theological fields, the author supports it with the opinions of qualified colleagues in the profession. This enormous work, as envisioned by the author, furthermore requires an acute insight into our epoch and its circumstances. In his words, it is about two things: »As first, recognition of facts is vital to substantialize meaning and significance of a theological category that is crucial to us – the signs of times... another thing we shall not take lightly. Not only bare facts, however, but also their spiritual atmosphere, and the shortest way to know this atmosphere leads through researching the underlying ideas which produced

the very facts, as well as through their critical analysis, whenever possible.« Thus, the author defines the main purpose of his work: »... this book is an attempt, though only partial and in no way complete, to arrive at a certain diagnosis of the state of mind of modern man, or at least a partial diagnosis of the spiritual situation of our times.«

The first part is a theological introduction to other parts of the book. The second part deals with historical *metamorphoses*, and the inverse ratio applies, historical-theological changes are a challenge for historical changes of culture, as theology in the signs of time represents the pivotal challenge for historical *metamorphoses* of times. The third part analyses in more detail the changes (*metamorphoses*) in societal consciousness as the signs of times, as this also influences Christian consciousness. The fourth part deals with the aspects of scientific-technological development as a deciding factor for *metamorphosis* or formation of the modern consciousness, primarily in relation to nature. The fifth part of the book deals with the change (*metamorphoses*) of ethical consciousness in the entire cultural complex of the modern era, which questions dignity of man. In the sixth part, special attention is paid to the topical bioethical phenomena. The last (the seventh) part of the book examines spiritual consciousness as theologically (the most) important and challenging *metamorphosis* of the present times. The author first analyses the key modern mindset — the technological civilization »in its true light«. Further-

more, he examines how and to what extent does the Church (or does not) identify with this civilization, and what this means. Then comes the most important: How to implement Christian directives in a sense of spiritual renewal of this culture in the complicated (changed) situation of modern culture. In order to be able to suggest this, we should thoroughly examine what spirituality means in the theological sense.

The work is theologically correct and in accordance with the settled teachings of the Church — the most important principle which directs and leads the writer of the book comes from the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican and particularly »the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World« (*Gaudium et spes*), which is a key to his theological reflection, though in some topics he goes further than the Council and supplements it with the stances of the last popes, he deepens and critically analyses the state of mind in the society and the Church. This holds particularly true for the questions of dialogue and the autonomy of earthly realities. In this sense, his theological reflection is faithful to the fundamental directives of the Catholic Church's theology.

Consequently, the work has a methodically reappearing motif – catholic-theological reflection on the identified problems. Two things are important here. Theology should be based on the living experience of a religious community. Theology should be the *theo*-logy, which follows from the former, it should be talking about God and not merely about *theo*logy, that is to say, merely a *-logy* whose subject is also God. The

author thus makes use of historical-theological and other (philosophical) insights and their development as a theological imperative for the present changed (*metamorphoses*) circumstances, which also bring a living experience of God in specifically more demanding and primarily very differentiated circumstances. These backgrounds provide the author with a basis for the well-founded and modern analysis of these circumstances. Authors who do not share the basic theological insights will sometimes of course have problems with such argumentation, but that is exactly the author's point and he can, as a rule, defend it anthropologically. He is namely of the opinion that the theological insight is important for life and survival of man and nature, and he explains the ways in which it is important. The treatments of individual problems are thus derived from these fundamental directives.

The author throughout abides by the ethical imperative – to preserve man as the fundamental lodestar of theological anthropology, which has been degraded by the modern civilization, which is the main subject of the author's analysis. The author thus constantly actualizes events, he, for example, analyses the work of Dawkins and his amoral and anti-Christian approach to man, which has been blown out of proportion by media. Yet he also refuses to accept the simplifications of modern theoretical and practical atheism as proposed, for example, by the convert A. McGrath. In this sense he is critical also of the Church, which sometimes simplifies subtle problems of the present atheism and consumer civilization. He also draw a line when it comes to

democracy in the Church and the modern society. Although he advocates the anthropological stance, he is well aware that autonomy in the Church has its limits.

He warns that it is very difficult to build upon the values which are supposed to preserve the society if the society no longer knows friendship in a classical sense of the word. Friendship on the basis of the Christian heritage has, of course, foundations in God, Christians are on the basis of this heritage thus called to perform their prophetic role of yeast in the (post)modern society which tend to reduce itself to business relationships.

The author's opinion of modern scientific-technical development, whose problem is absoluteness of technology and the dominant role of »instrumental mind«, is very clearly expressed. With many prominent authors, such as Hans Jonas and Charles Taylor, he intelligibly demonstrates the present gap or discrepancy between the technical and the instrumental mind and appeals to the responsibility of believers to comprehend and react to this situation. The problem is the dominance of technology over ethics, which also affects the sensitive questions of modern man: biotechnology, poverty etc. The author also deals with the topical bioethical questions of abortion, sterilization and contraception very sensibly and in accordance with the Church's teachings.

After Moltmann and Metz, Matulić also advocates the theology of technology which will minutely investigate the role and possibilities of technology in the modern world and, above all, the possibilities for its »spiritualization«.

As said, the exhaustive (penultimate) part of the book addresses the problems of man in the light of bioethical issues. The author is not so much interested in general philosophical or theological premises – though he manages to purposely include them in the book – as in their applicative or practical possibility in life, i.e. in regard to bioethical issues. He is convinced that Christian ethics provides (and should provide) anthropologic insights to modern bioethics. Faith and reason cannot contradict one another, in the Christian heritage they complement one another, so any autonomy which is not open to the Absolute is simplification and leads to one-sidedness and distortion of man. This requires also a comprehensive societal approach, otherwise the society isolates and limits man to its certain indoctrinated needs and purposes. Advocating the sanctity of life and campaigning against abortion are thus hypocrisy from the religious standpoint if they are not accompanied with action to improve conditions in a society and thus remove causes of abortions. Biotechnology is undoubtedly a new revolution which is open to technological approaches to life. With the classical authors who deal with this problem, Matulić establishes that life cannot be discussed only technically. For the centuries of industrial revolution, there has been some uncertainty about man, this was well diagnosed by Max Scheler. Anthropocentrism is merely a simplification of the approach to man, which was further augmented by emotivism, which was criticized by A. MacIntyre. Emotivism says that emotions are the only criteria of ethical action. From the point of view of bioethical issues, the author mainta-

ins that postmodernism is in this field problematic, as it narrows the value and dignity of man. That is why the author neglects other numerous aspects of the postmodern approach to reality, especially the postmodern criticism of the modern and its absolutist system, which dogmatically blocks the subject's life experience. Matulić advocates the wholeness of man's dignity, upon which the normative approach to the phenomenon of life in general and human life in particular is based. However, the reduction of bioethical normativeness to mere observing of life is completely amiss. Normativeness is deeper and exceeds mere positive scientific experiential reachability; life is multilayered, it is analogue and cannot be defined as a machine, and ethics has thus, according to Jonas, »in general much to say about technology or that technology is subjected to ethical considerations, which comes from the simple fact that technology is exercise of human capacities, i.e. it represents one form of action, and every human activity is subject to moral questioning«. Consequently, there is no neutral science, and science also builds on starting points and has to take into account the integrality, wholeness and complexity of (human) nature. The questions of biotechnology require a normativeness which cannot be derived or provided merely from the empirical fact of life, because it is exposed to arbitrary manipulation, and some broader foundations are involved, these are not implied by empirical facts. The pressing issue of bioethics is today the medicinal/pharmaceutical field, which increasingly instrumentalizes physicians and patients as it exerts pressure on the clinical practice of physicians and turns

it into a supermarket...« (656). The ethical problem is thus posed by the reduced possibilities for consent of patients to medical procedures. We face boundless expansion of profit and conditions are created to sell as much as possible, be it tobacco or pharmaceutical products. Behind this logic is the mechanistic image of man. Such image is even more evident in case of genetic practice, which already in the past enabled racist excesses (of Nazis and others), while today it gains momentum by the so-called genetic engineering. The author points out a very pressing problem of Croatia – it has no appropriate counseling services which would provide the people concerned with some comprehensiveness of knowledge, and they are consequently even more exposed to manipulations. In the last chapter the author very convincingly points out the problem of death, which is today regarded as a problem to be solved merely technically. Modern man understandably remains without help when it comes to the fundamental issue of suffering and death. Physicians are in such conditions becoming an integral part of the technocracy that governs man. It is not about personal but personist (Laura Palazzani) view of man, which is used by philosophy with a prefix *neo-*, it is a philosophy which places the material aspect of man above his spiritual aspect, or reduces (narrows) the latter to the former, and thus applies very one-sided (subjective) criteria to judge man. Characteristic of such movements is proclaiming the end of the old ethics and announcing a new one, yet these predictions lack real, well-founded reasons. They are sooner non-ethics than new ethics.

The last part is a spiritual vision of the world and its criticism. This criticism is not only a criticism of the modern economism, materialism and similar orientations, but also a criticism of the solutions proposed by »spiritual« orientations and even movements within the Church, like the charismatic and other movements which believe that their simplified action will overcome the situation. The author's criticism is directed also to the Church and other responsible institutions, so that they may become aware of the complexity of the situation and take measures accordingly. This task is particularly complicated in transitional countries, where the Church in its endeavors for Christian living face organizational problems as well as obstacles of mentality. Matulić is nevertheless convinced that only renewal of spiritual life offers the appropriate contribution which Christians can give to the modern world, they are also called to this task, they can and should properly train themselves to perform it. The author wonders whether members of the Church can without appeal give a blessing to the entire modern civilization, and asks to what extent are Christians personally eager to point to alternatives, out of our faith. These alternatives are not possible without raising the awareness of theology of the cross and of its place as the recognition of normal and comprehensive image of man as made in the image of Jesus Christ, he is the path of the Church and the path of the world (John Paul II). Such theological definition of course requires a different (deepened and spiritual) approach from the Church when dealing with these important phenomena of the modern civilization.

## Evaluation

From the point of the present situation of man and his survival, Matulić's work is a comprehensive, topical and profound analysis of man's situation today and the spirit of his times. This is provided by the author's thorough analysis of the problems of man and society, as well as by the inclusion of some authors who discuss man's personal and societal condition today. We entirely agree with the author's finding that humanity is today at a turning point that has not been experienced in the entire history from the beginnings of humanity until now. The precariousness of these times comes from human unwillingness to actually recognize this situation and also from the unwillingness to operatively confront it, which means that humanity should take measures so as to change this situation. The biotechnological developmental possibilities and ecological problems of these changes reveal fairly serious problems for the survival of humanity. The first kind of problems concerns man's inwardness, the second kind his outwardness, yet man's reaction is in both cases irresponsible and unsound. Matulić very convincingly deals with the first problem, with this he at times suggests the second one. It is understandable that he advocates a Christian opinion, which implies responsible treatment of the topic, yet at the same time in the last part also points out that the Church and Christians in many ways do not show sufficient presence of mind, willingness and qualification to appropriately address this question. The author's approach to the analysis of these problems of humanity is completely competent and internationally comparable, what is more – he treats

them in a manner which enables anyone who follow his thoughts to realize the situation we are currently in.

The author of course speaks from a theological standpoint, his answer is thus either catholic-theological and at the same time also personally involved, which allows the readers to (dis)agree with such solution to the problem. On the other hand, however, such opinion convincingly suggests to the readers and enable them to form their own opinions about the problems and to look for directives needed to approach the solutions to these problems of modern man.

Some definitions or directions will perhaps make the readers think that the author too easily applies Christian-ethical logic. Perhaps they will miss more meta-ethical clarity, which is in view of the modern directions, also very precisely suggested by the author, not an easy task, especially not in the countries in the so-called transition. Even ethics itself, as established by the author of the book, still lacks appropriate ethical instruments for such demanding problems. It thus seems that the author's argument for his Christian-ethical opinion is sometimes too apodictic, and he presents it as a logically consistent theological opinion, which may put off the readers in the said circumstances. Reading this rich and exhaustive analysis of the state of modern mind is worthwhile also because the very consistency of theological thought forces the readers to form their own opinions. The problems the author deals with nowadays demand precisely this, and the author with his writing purposely decided to address them in an involved manner and enabled such

critical examination also to the readers. Such explaining, on the other hand, has its objective power, which will become evident to many readers only in future, although well-read spirits may be already capable of this insight, some people judge these things differently, yet most of them agree on complication and urgency of solving these problems, although they do not yet see the possibilities of solving them. The sooner these insights emerge, the sounder will be man's conscious approach to the question of his survival. Christian thought in the documents of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican in this sense brings an unambiguous message for the society and the Church, and, as the author points out particularly in the last part, it is of course the task of all who understands this to follow the spirit and initiate changes. Changes could be only the fruit of *metanoia* – conversion, on the basis of which can emerge spiritual *metamorphoses* which will change the flow of events. The work has in this sense an eschatological dimension and can be understood well, as the author cites convincing reasons for his opinions, which, however, in the postmodern conglomerate of opinions and disinclination to Christian standpoints hardly find their way into suitable dialogical discussion and particularly do not readily lead to understanding and adoption of these reasons. Regardless of this, the author's reasons are valid, and they will enable the readers a quick insight into the situation, although the readers will first have to go through partly demanding stringing of thoughts and reasons, which are today quite accessible even to moderately educated readers, this

can be assumed due to the internet culture and educational opportunities. I believe that the work is particularly topical for educated Christians, so they will not miss the *kairos* (the signs of times) about which the author speaks.

The texts are in general written in a very fluent, vivid language, at places the author speaks from personal experience and testifies theologically, which will attract the readers. Thoughts are strung together very logically, consistently, they are topical and relevant,

the author sometimes surprises with his personal insertions. The readers who will take this demanding but topical work will not only enrich their spiritual-theological knowledge, but also enable themselves for a more critical approach to the modern flows and the solutions of the problem of man in the so-called postmodern society.

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Translated by Primož Trobevšek

**Roberto Perin. *The Many Rooms of This House: Diversity in Toronto's Places of Worship since 1840*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2017. 428 str. ISBN: 978-1-4875-2017-5.**

Predavatelj na oddelku za zgodovino na Glendon Collegeu, York University Toronto, Roberto Perin je obsežno monografijo namenil pregledu zgodovine bogoslužnih prostorov v Torontu, prestolnici kanadske province Ontario in cilju številnih priseljencev vse od sredine 19. stoletja dalje. Kot ugotavlja že na prvih straneh svoje raziskave, so bili obredni prostori pomembna vez skupnosti, v njih so se ljudje različnih splov, starosti in stanov redno srečevali. To so bila tudi zbirališča priseljencev in pomagala so jim, da so se vključili v novo, pogostokrat nenaklonjeno okolje. Monografija je pregled vzpona in izginjanja verskih navad na širšem območju

Toronta v zadnjih 160 letih, obsega namreč ne le predstavitev sedanjega stanja različnosti, temveč tudi popis skupnosti, ki so izginile, z njimi pa njihovi prostori.

V nasprotju z drugimi raziskavami se Perin ni posvetil preučevanju ene Cerkev ali verske skupnosti, ene razsežnosti verskega življenja ali mesta določene skupnosti v Velikem Torontu, njihovim političnim ali drugim vidikom, temveč je raziskal nastajanje obrednih prostorov, to je poslopij, njihovih voditeljev in skupnosti, ki so se v teh prostorih zbirale. Če je do srede 19. stoletja med mesti v Kanadi prednosti in značilnosti glavnega mesta še imel Montreal, se je tedaj kot osrednje stičišče začel afirmirati Toronto, gospodarsko hitro rastoče pristanišče, kjer so se naselili številni novi prebivalci, med temi mnogi trgovci in obrtniki. Toronto je bil vedno mesto pri-