

UDK 27-144.892:27-584

2Lafon, G.

<https://doi.org/10.53745/bs.94.5.13>

Received: 7. 11. 2024

Accepted: 20.12.2024

Original scientific paper

TALKING ABOUT GOD OR TALKING ABOUT FAITH

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Abstract

In the article, the author points out the difference between speaking »about God«, speaking about faith, and believing. Man is similar to God in his ability to communicate. From the beginning of mankind until today, there is talk about God. However, it is necessary to admit that modern Western liberal society has avoided mentioning God in public since the French Revolution or the Enlightenment. Even in theology after the Second Vatican Council, very few writings speak about God. A good example is the encyclicals of the current Pope Francis, in which he talks about justice, the preservation of the environment and the brotherhood of all people. Addressing all the people on earth, he explains how to live faith, or rather, how we can recognise our relationship to God in our relationship to our fellow man and to nature, i.e., our relationship to creation. This is not only a possibility but a necessity if we want to survive on planet Earth. In the development of Guy Lafon's theological thought, we find a development from talking about God to believing. The French thinker emphasizes that speaking about faith is necessary for a person's belief. The article ends with the assertion that God is a Person and every man is a person therefore belief binds people together.

Keywords: Talk about God, faith, Guy Lafon, liberalism, belief.

Introduction

The fact is that humans speak; we pronounce words. We communicate with each other verbally or non-verbally. The ability to communicate created man. It is the essence of our human nature. The more this ability develops, the more human we are. We can write: this ability makes us like God. The words on the first pages of the Bible, which say that God created man in his image (cf. Gen 1:26), should not be understood in the sense of physical resemblance. The

true image of God is described in the first lines of the Gospel of John: »In the beginning was the Word« (Jn 1:1). Man is similar to God in his ability to communicate. In short, what we think, we know how to tell others. We also talk about God.

In this reflection, we will talk about the human ability to speak and communicate; we will focus on talking about God. We will not hide the fact that today's society is reluctant to speak publicly about God and everything related to Him. Our goal is to show the way from talking about God to believing in God. But faith is not just knowledge about God; it is rather clinging to God's will, living according to God's commandments. The French thinker Guy Lafon, whose works we will cite, will help us develop our thoughts. We will mainly use his relational theory.

Our presentation is divided into five parts. In the first, we will present what it means to talk about God and show where debates about God lead. In the second part, we will explain that modern society doesn't like to talk about God. As we continue, it will be shown that even in modern Catholic theology, most theologians do not like to speak about God anymore; the Pope and theologians speak about faith. In the fourth chapter, we introduce an example of the passage from Talk of God to the modern discussion about faith: the relational theory of the French thinker Guy Lafon, who defined faith as a relationship and showed that each person expresses faith in relation to another. In the end, we will show that there is a danger that talking about God divides people; talking about faith from faith on the other side unites people.

1. People have always talked about God

Speaking has a double function. We speak to say something, that is, to report the news, but above all, we talk to someone to maintain a relationship with him. A verbal or non-verbal word maintains a relationship and thus keeps a person alive.¹ When one tells another person something, he is basically talking »about something«! We can say that throughout history, people have always talked about God. Historians and archaeologists repeatedly find objects or records in prehistoric excavations that talk about the religious dimension of humanity and therefore conclude that man has always been homo religious².

¹ There is no life outside of a relationship. Cf. Guy LAFON, *Le Dieu commun*, Paris, 1982, 17.

² Mari Jože OSREDKAR, Odnos kot človekova izkušnja Presežnosti, in: *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 82 (2022) 3, 570.

A believer or an unbelieving person can talk about the Transcendent: *«Il y a des gens qui affirment son existence et d'autres qui la nient. Mais les uns et les autres parlent de Dieu; et il n'y a pas de différence entre ces deux positions. La négation comme l'affirmation sont du ressort de l'entretien»*.^{3,4} Proof of this is the word »God«, which is found in the vocabulary of every language on earth. Specially, theologians, as experts on belief, speak about God. But since no one has ever seen God (cf. Jn 1:18), talking about God is basically talking about images of God that man creates for himself. The phrase »man creates for himself« can be replaced with »man recognises for himself«! The most tangible image of God is the word of God, i.e. the word that man recognises as God's. Theologians affirm that certain texts have a divine origin, that their author is God.⁵ To speak of God, therefore, means to speak of God's word. In Christian theology, we speak of the Word: »In the beginning, the Word already existed; the Word was with God, and the Word was God« (Jn 1:1).

It is not only Catholic and Christian theologians who speak about God, but talk about Him can be found in all religions and all cultures. Culture is an essential factor in the diversity of speaking about God. With a change of culture, that is, a change of a way of life and a way of thinking, the image of God changes. We can say that the relationships between individuals in a certain culture condition religious practice, especially, the image of God that believers recognise.⁶ Different cultures are, therefore, different possible ways of talking about God. Man talks about God in different times and places. Finally, we can say that the relationship with God is not defined once and for all; it must always be newly established.⁷ Therefore, the image of God must also be reinvented every time because God always reveals Himself anew. He is God who is constantly in communication, who is constantly revealing Himself and making Himself known.⁸ Every culture must discover a new form of talk about God to remain consistent with the original religious truth. And since in our environment, the culture (way of life) changes from generation to generation, each generation must also discover new ways of talking about God. Why is that so? Because the word has no meaning in itself. No one can determine

³ »There are people who affirm its existence and others who deny it. But both speak of God; and there is no difference between these two positions. Both negation and affirmation are within the scope of the conversation.«

⁴ Guy LAFON, *Le Dieu commun*, Paris, 1982, 18.

⁵ SECOND VATICAN COUNCIL, *Dei Verbum*. (18. XI. 1965), no.11. (Hereinafter: DV).

⁶ Michael Paul GALLAGHER, *Spopad simbolov*, Ljubljana, 2003, 43–52.

⁷ Guy LAFON, *Le Dieu commun*, Paris, 1982, 94.

⁸ Cf. François, MARTY. *La bénédiction de Babel*, Paris, 1990, 255–265.

its meaning either. Wittgenstein tells us that a word acquires meaning in a relationship⁹. The word »God« that I say today does not have the same meaning as the word »God« that I said yesterday because the relationships between persons in communication change. Linguists would say that the »signifiant« gets a different »signifié« in different environments. Thanks to de Saussure, it became clear that a linguistic element cannot be studied in isolation but only in relation to other elements.¹⁰

Let's not be surprised, and let's not be discouraged if different periods and thinkers in the history of Christianity understood God's word differently and spoke about it differently. Historical periods differ, each has its problems and circumstances, so the »Logos« – the Word of God is »worded« in a slightly different way in each period. The document *Dei Verbum* talks about the importance of interpreting the biblical text. Someone who says that God is »an old man with a long beard above the clouds« has identified such a God based on the circumstances in which he lives. Another will recognise Him as a kind of »ghost« without a body. The third will say that God is »love«. We call this recognition of God a revelation, the acceptance of which we will consider an expression of faith. We can, therefore, say that revelation, as a relationship between God and man, is never sealed once and for all. God reveals Himself today differently than He did a thousand years ago. The dress of truth conforms to »fashion«.

2. Modern society doesn't like to talk about God

Let's take as an example the political discussion during the preparation of the *European Constitution*. Some moralists and ethically conscious people pay particular attention to a few small things in the work of politicians who want to build the European Union. These things appear negligible to the superficial observer. But we consider them very important for the future of Europe and our civilisation. It started with the question of mentioning the words »God« and »Christianity« in its text. It ended with the realisation that nowadays, Europeans do not have any common values at all. A similar story occurred with the so-called *Berlin Declaration* that was signed by the leaders of the EU member states in Berlin on 25 March 2007 on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the Union. In an interview with German TV Channel ZDF, German

⁹ Cf. François, MARTY. *La bénédiction de Babel*, Paris, 1990, 255–265.

¹⁰ Cf. Émile BENVENISTE, *Problèmes de linguistique générale*. Vol. 2. Paris, 1974.

Chancellor Merkel said that the declaration would not mention the Christian God because »we do not want to have a provocative statement but want to emphasise what unites us«. Thus, only wordings about climate protection, open borders and the common currency were inserted into the text. Whereas the U. S. president takes the oath of office on the Bible and the motto »In God we trust« appears on dollar bills, Europe is afraid to mention God in a document that, in a few years, will only be historians' material. Believers do not mourn that the word »God« does not unite Europeans anymore. The really worrying fact is that there are no »real values« that would unite the Europeans.

It is the same in Slovenian society. We witness not only in past history but also today see cases and trends to make religion a private, hidden human activity. This has to do not only with faith as man's relationship with God, but also and especially with the values of Christian faith and religious expressions. If Christians in Slovenia, for example, raise their voice in defence of unborn children, they are marked as partisans of a totalitarian ideology that opposes the values of modern society. For example, on 15th March 2013, the Slovenian National Assembly held a public debate on »hate speech«. Some persons drew attention to the hate speech that encourages violence against unborn children. The Chair of the Commission for Petitions, Human Rights and Equal Opportunities stopped them and accused them of espousing hate speech. In Slovenia and the European continent, we can indeed speak of the emergence of secularism and secularisation.

Secularisation is usually defined as pushing God out of public life or the belief that humans can do anything without God. This definition is correct, but the essence of moving away from God is thinking that man does not need God's commandments because they limit humans. In Genesis, we read the serpent basically revokes God's prohibition and promises them a life without limits! Therefore, we can write that secularisation began with Adam or that Adam was the first liberal who ignored God's command. The 2022 Slovenian Public Opinion Survey shows that a shockingly large number of Slovenes who self-identify as Roman Catholics do not recognise the basic dogmatic positions of the Roman Catholic Church. »However, opinion polls show that only one-fifth of Slovenes live Catholicism in the way it prescribes – acknowledging dogmatic truths and regularly practising prescribed religious practice.«¹¹

¹¹ Urška JEGLIČ, An analysis of the belief in religious truths between Muslims and Roman Catholics in Slovenia and the question of identity, in: *Nova prisutnost : časopis za intelektualna i duhovna pitanja*, 22 (2024) 2, 313.

Like the first man, today's Western society also wants to be free and do everything according to its wishes and according to its mind. Opposition to the Church in a liberal society is essentially opposition to the limitations that Christian teaching places on man. The liberal modern society adopted the *Declaration of Human Rights* in 1789, with the French Revolution. This document is good in itself and valuable for society. But modern society has placed it in the place of the Decalogue; it is convinced that it does not need any commandments, not even God's, but that man only needs rights. The mere proclamation of the *Declaration* is a sign that man has taken the place previously held by God in society. At the level of social life, the secular state limited the influence of the Church and replaced religion with a rationalistic view of the world.¹² A comparison of God's commandments and the provisions of the *Declaration* clearly shows us that God sets limitations for man, but man only sets rights (for himself). Namely, three prohibitions and one duty in the *Declaration* are just the formulation of human rights expressed differently.

The Ten Commandments, which are the basic texts of the Judeo-Christian tradition, were part of the most important values of Western Europeans until the 18th century. Western society has adopted Christian values in the past, but now this society does not want to speak about God's commandments but about human rights independently of religion. Secularized society maintains that it simply does not need Christianity any more. Furthermore, Secularism has been transformed into liberalism, which strives to liberate itself from the values that have emerged from Christianity and those practised by adherents of the religion. This is evident from the examples of the legalisation of the termination of unwanted pregnancy, euthanasia and the growing confusion in the definition of family. No one knows where the process of liberalism will end. We are sure that if there are no ethical criteria (the prohibition not to kill), then people will be able to negotiate for anything that seemingly solves economic problems, even if it is, for example, necessary to remove the weak members of society. We fear that the »abolition« of God is not just the suicide of religion, but also the suicide of civilization.

¹² Nik Trontelj, Ločenost Cerkve in države v Evropi: zgodovina in sedanji trenutek, in: *Edinost in dialog* 77 (2022) 2, 21.

3. Modern Catholic theology talks about faith rather than about God

To show the transition from speaking »about God« to speaking »about faith«, we will briefly show the development that Guy Lafon, a Frenchman who places relationships at the center of his thought¹³, made in his theology. When we pronounce the word »God«, we first think of a Supreme Being, transcending man, that is to say, of an »object«. At the beginning of his theological thought, Guy Lafon also calls God »a Being«: »Dieu est un Etre qui peut entrer en rapport avec nous!¹⁴«¹⁵. Philosophers and thinkers intellectually influenced Lafon: Emmanuel Kant, Henri Bergson, Martin Buber, Emmanuel Levinas and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. It seems that in the beginning of the development of his thought, in terms of talking about God, he was most influenced by Bergson. That is why he defines Him, as we have seen, as a Being who can enter into a relationship with us. God is, therefore, not yet treated otherwise than as a being. We can imagine many things about Him, but the question always arises in the end: will God correspond to our affirmations? By remaining in this line, we will only come to declare with some certainty that God is completely different from what we can imagine of Him. The scientist or theologian thus risks making judgments, or even formulating criticisms, about the objects treated, even when it concerns God. However, under the influence of Levinas, Buber and Merleau-Ponty, Lafon notes that one can approach the problem of God in another way.

Guy Lafon has committed himself to a new epistemology. 15 years after claiming that God is a Being, he writes: »God is not a being, not even the greatest. Neither above nor below being, he is, to speak like Emmanuel Lévinas, in strict fidelity to the biblical testimony, other than being.«¹⁶ The development of his thoughts on God is part of the continuation of this affirmation. The author does not consider God alone, as he would an object and its attributes; he does not pose the question of the existence of God. It is the relationship with God that is important to him. God remains an »object« because we can still talk about Him, but as a theologian, Guy Lafon is not interested in this object being separated from the relationship that binds it to man and man to Him. For him, what happens »between God and us« is essential. By this, he means that man has the capacity to establish a relationship with God.

¹³ Cf. Mari Jože OSREDKAR, Revelation as a manifestation within human culture, in: *Bogoslovska smotra*, 90 (2020) 5, 1014.

¹⁴ »God is a Being who can relate to us.«

¹⁵ Guy LAFON, *Essai sur la signification du Salut*, Paris, 1964, 64.

¹⁶ Guy LAFON, *Esquisses pour un christianisme*, Paris, 1979, 15.

Better still, he says that man finds himself in a relationship with God.¹⁷ And this is what he wants to talk about: »It is not a question here of God but of our relationship with God.«¹⁸ And this relationship, made up of faith, hope and love, is of the order of desire¹⁹. The three theological virtues are modulated. The our desire, when we relate to God. In short, The faithfuls do not just talk about God; they address him in prayer²⁰. Today, theology, which in the past was defined as the science of God, has become the science of our relationship with God, that is, of faith.

In the relational theory of the French thinker, faith is not simply knowledge about things that are not seen, but a relationship. This is what people, me, you and him, connects with each other. Faith is a relationship, understood as a search for a partner or to identify a partner.²¹ Therefore, modern theology teaches how Christians can live from faith, that is, how we can live our relationship to God in our relationship to man and creation. If we take a cursory look at modern theological books and articles, and especially if we leaf through the encyclicals of Pope Francis, we can see that, in the same way as Guy Lafon, they do not speak about God but about justice between people, reconciliation, about nature and environment. In his first encyclical, *Lumen Fidei* (Light of Faith), Pope Francis teaches how to believe, hope and love. He builds on the work of his predecessor, Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI, completing a trilogy of encyclicals on the theological virtues-faith, hope, and love. After this one, he published two other encyclicals completely« non-theologic » in the first view. The Encyclical Letter *Laudato si'*²² touches on of caring for our common home, planet Earth Earth. This text is not intended only for Catholics but for all the inhabitants of the earth. The author invites them to think and talk about what people ought to do to preserve our planet so that it can continue to support us. In the next encyclical *Fratelli tutti*²³ the Pope emphasises that in the common home we all live as one family and proposes concrete actions to restore the world and to overcome the ills generated by the pandemic crisis, which has now become a health, economic, social, anthropological and political crisis. As

¹⁷ Lafon claims that the relationship is given to man as a gift, so he cannot enter into it, and he does not deserve to be in it because he found himself in the relationship.

¹⁸ Guy LAFON, *Le Dieu commun*, Paris, Seuil, 1982, 82.

¹⁹ Ibid, 86-90.

²⁰ Guy LAFON, *L'autre Roi*, Paris, Nouvelle cité, 1987, 169.

²¹ Cf. Mari Jože OSREDKAR, Revelation as a manifestation within human culture, in: *Bošgoslovska smotra*, 90 (2020) 5, 1016.

²² Pope Francis, *Laudato si'*, May 24, 2015.

²³ Pope Francis, *Fratelli tutti*, October 4, 2020.

any politician or philanthropist would write, he proposes brotherhood and social friendship as the ways indicated to build a better, more just and peaceful world, with the commitment of all: both people and institutions. The encyclical is in continuity with the previous *Laudato si'* of 2015, in which, as we have already written, the Holy Father, after denouncing the evils that afflict the common home due to the activities of people, proposes integral ecology as an instrument of love and respect for all (and among all) and creation. In *Fratelli tutti*, the Pope emphasises that in the common home, we all live as one family and proposes concrete actions to restore the world and overcome the ills generated by the pandemic crisis, which has now become a health, economic, social, and anthropological and political crisis: peace, because no work will be possible if nations and peoples continue to fight each other; dialogue, because each finds its completeness in the other; the strengthening of multilateralism and a no to any kind of war; the fight against the globalization of indifference; and the promotion of social inclusion. Almost at the same time as *Fratelli Tutti*, Pope Francis published a text that is not an encyclical but is very important for our topic. During his apostolic trip to the United Arab Emirates, he signed the *Document on human fraternity for world peace and living together* with the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar University, Ahmad Al-Tayyeb, in Abu Dhabi on February 4, 2019. It is a document that invites all people who have faith in God and faith in human fraternity to unite and work together to guide future generations in advancing a culture of mutual respect through awareness of the tremendous divine grace that makes all human beings brothers and sisters. Even in the most recent one, *Dilexit nos*, where Pope Francis speaks about the Heart of Jesus Christ, the message is essentially about understanding between people in general. We can say that the Pope, in his documents and speeches, emphasises environmental protection. He writes that the safety of the poor and the protection of the earth are connected. The poor suffer most when the world is abused; our indifference to the poor is reflected in our mistreatment of nature. He mentions that solidarity should be re-imagined to extend to both the poor and the earth. Pope Francis also writes about the communitarian, social, and missionary dimension of all authentic devotion to the heart of Christ, adding that Christ's heart not only leads us to the Father but also sends us forth to our brothers and sisters.

In brief, the documents do not speak directly about God and also do not only discuss social problems and environmental protection. They speak about faith. To avoid misunderstanding, the Pope still thinks about God, but the main subject of his reflections is faith. Why?

Faith is the ability to recognise a presence in a partner's absence²⁴. This means that the believer recognizes God's presence in His absence. The interpersonal relationship is, namely, the first human experience of transcendence.²⁵ In relation to man, we are not looking for a man, but we recognize in it something more. We could say that to humans and in relation to nature, people experience a relationship with God. This is the reason why Pope Francis, in his encyclicals, talks about the relationship to other people and nature. In these relationships, he recognizes the faith in God.

The relationship is changing by nature. This is why God in the relationship is always experienced in a new light, always different. The starting point of our thinking about finding God, either in history or in the person's life, is not the fact that man exists and that a God exists, but the fact that a man finds himself in a relationship with God. And since we are in relation to God, in this relationship, we are always looking for something new, always looking for a new and clearer word of God. The believer, therefore, is not a man who finds God but the one who seeks God.

4. From talking about God to believing

Up until now, we have been talking about the word »God« and man's relationship with Him. Then, a new chapter opens that no longer deals only with this relationship with God but also asks the question: How can we communicate with God?

It is not a question of »talking about God« only to be able to say something about him. The very fact of talking about Him is already important. The means that allows us to enter into communication with God is a language: *»Le rapport théologique n'existe pas sans se manifester dans le langage«*²⁶²⁷. In short, the very fact of pronouncing the word »God« puts us in conversation with Him or, better still, puts us in touch with His absence: *»Ainsi, dans la mesure où le nom de Dieu, c'est-à-dire le fait même de le nommer, nous met en son absence et nous maintient dans un rapport à Lui«*²⁸...²⁹ But why can we talk

²⁴ Mari Jože OSREDKAR, Upanje kot teološka krepost v luči relacijske teorije Guya Lafona, in: *Bogoslovni vestnik*, 81(2021) 4, 859.

²⁵ Guy LAFON, *Le Dieu commun*, Paris, 1982, 43.

²⁶ The theological relationship does not exist without manifesting itself in language.

²⁷ Guy LAFON, *Le Dieu commun*, Paris, 1982, 83.

²⁸ Thus, to the extent that the name of God, that is to say the very fact of naming Him, puts us in His absence and keeps us in a relationship with him...

²⁹ Guy LAFON, *Le Dieu commun*, Paris, Seuil, 1982, 87.

about God? Because we have heard about Him from others naturally, thus, it is impossible to pronounce His name if we have not previously entered into a relationship with the other. It is, this relationship that is the condition of the one we have with God. It is therefore, the conversation with others that brings us closer to God and establishes our relationship with God. As such, this gesture is ethical. By looking more closely at these two paths towards God, here is what we can see.

We have already noted that in the history of human societies, we have always spoken, and still, we speak of God. Therefore, God is already among us; we have already established a conversation with Him since we speak about Him. We have already said that there is no difference whether one affirms or denies the existence of God. In both cases, it is a question of conversation with God. But the mere fact of speaking about God does not include adherence to Him. It only shows that there is a conversation between God and the one who speaks or between God and the one who has heard of Him. It is always the other who reveals God to me, and the other man tells me what God wants to communicate to us. We have heard the announcement of the prophets, the apostles, the priests, and, in short, the men of religion, and concretely, in Christianity, of the Church. The others speak to me of the Other. Will I listen to Him by listening to them? So what do we do when we receive from others, when we ourselves form a discourse on God? According to Guy Lafon, we establish the conditions that allow us to go beyond the opposition of presence and absence. Indeed, the word God is, in human language, the »signifié« that men give themselves to live from this surpassing by existing theologically in faith, hope and love. But it must be emphasized that we only establish the conditions for such a transcendence. Indeed, it does not automatically follow that man, upon hearing about God, engages in this conversation; it is not automatically that he believes in it. But the conditions of faith are established. Thus, the discourse on God is a social fact that appears in the course throughout the conversation. But those who hold it still have to decide personally concerning theological existence, to accept it, or to reject it. For it is not enough to say »God« to be engaged with Him.³⁰ How, then, will this engagement be established? Lafon answers:

»Quand les fidèles d'une religion adoptent les énoncés qu'ils ont reçus de ceux qui, avant eux, ont appartenu à la même religion, quand ils récitent ces énoncés

³⁰ Cf. Mari Jože OSREDKAR, Revelation as a manifestation within human culture, in: *Bogoslovska smotra*, 90 (2020) 5, 1021.

*donnés comme originaires, ils ne peuvent être religieux, en adoptant ces énoncés, qu'à une condition : ils doivent renouveler, à propos de ces énoncés, une énonciation dans laquelle s'instaure pour eux le rapport à l'absence. Autrement dit, les fidèles d'une religion se donnent, souvent sans les choisir, des représentations particulières, à commencer, répétons-le, par celle de Dieu.³¹*³²

The most important thing is that the one who received the statement accepts it as his own and accepts the conversation created between him and the one who transmitted it to him. In this perspective, the enunciation will be a real transformation of the one who pronounces the statement. Instead of being a sentence that unfolds before our eyes, it is as if the statement became a force that enters us and changes us. Once he is in a relationship with God, man »decides« what he will do with this relationship. It is up to him to »invent religion«. Man can make the decision to associate himself with those who transmitted the statement to him, that is to say, with the others who are in the same conversation with God. In this case, it is possible to speak of religion or a religious community. Man will not give up pursuing the social conversation (that of the community) which has made him acquainted with the discourse on God and in which he himself transmits it to others. Far from seeking to escape from it, he will engage himself ever more in it. Why? Because this social conversation, in which he is with others, is also where he relates to the Other, theologically. To leave the historical and social conversation in which he is would be to suppress the exercise of this unique and double relationship.

As soon as the alliance between »believers« is established, everyone speaks of »us« and »our« relationship with God. A religion, whatever it may be, is a community work: the alliance concluded by God is not only with this or that person but with all the faithful – which creates a link between them. Guy Lafon concludes that, in religion, the essential thing is to maintain the union between the faithful. The faithful will accept all the statements and confide in all the practices by which the social discourse on God is articulated. But he will confide in them without stopping there. Because he never forgets that all this social discourse on God exists only to allow a relationship with the

³¹ When the followers of a religion adopt the statements they have received from those who, before them, belonged to the same religion, when they recite these statements given as original, they can only be religious, by adopting these statements, on one condition: they must renew, with regard to these statements, an enunciation in which the relationship to absence is established for them. In other words, the followers of a religion give themselves, often without choosing them, particular representations, beginning, let us repeat, with that of God.

³² Guy LAFON, *Le Dieu commun*, Paris, 1982, 85.

beyond of the opposition between presence and absence. In short, the faithful will go beyond all idolatry of the social discourse.

The faithful, having thus engaged in the theological relationship, will live it first in connection with the whole social body constituted by the community where he has heard of God and speaks of God. He will live theologically with others, in his religious community and it. But the faithful cannot shut himself up in this religious community. Otherwise, he would have forgotten that the relationship with the Other underlies a relationship with all others and that the relationship with the Other is underpinned by the relationship with all others. He will only encounter his Church and live there to exist there in union with the whole world.

This is how we can understand the two conditions necessary to draw closer to God. We do not know Him without language, nor without others.

5. God is a Person, and every man is a person

We have already seen that there is no other way to talk about God than to make an object out of Him. If we discuss God as an object, we necessarily come to »our« and »your« God. This relationship creates opposition between »us« and »you«. That is the reason why talk about God often divides. We put forward the thesis that faith connects the people.

We cannot talk about faith in any other way than to speak from our experience of the faith. A theologian talks about faith from his faith: he explains how he searches for God. The theologian as a believer seeks God in a relationship, in relation to another person (cf. Mt 25). Basically, the believer seeks the relationship to God in the relationship with another human. He recognises the relationship to God in the relationship to another human. This is the meaning of the definition that faith is the ability to recognise the presence of (A)another in his absence! As mentioned in the introduction, human life is inextricably linked to relationships, and there are only two dimensions in the world of relationships: presence and absence. In the case of biological death, for example, the absence seems to have overcome the presence. However, a faithful man can recognize his presence even in the absence of a fellow human being. Christians address with »you« persons who have left the material world as, for example, in the devotion of litanies, we address to them: »Saint Peter, Saint Luke, pray God for us!« And not only proclaimed saints. Our dear deceased, with whom we lived together in the material world, we also call »you« in their absence; our parents, friends... In doing so, we maintain a relationship with

them. With biological death, the relationship with departed persons changes; it is not destroyed. At the grave, the man has two options. He can »draw the line« and say: »This person has disappeared! It is the end of our connection!« In this case, absence overcomes presence; subjects no longer know each other and are not able to communicate. In fact, in this case, the man does not recognise the presence in the deceased's absence anymore and does »end« the relationship. However, an absent loved one can still be called »you«. In the absence of a person, the believer recognises his presence. So, because living means being in a relationship, life is also preserved. The fact that a person living in a material body calls an absent person »you« means that he has found himself in the faith. Thus, even to Christ, who we do not see physically present, Christians address in prayer with »You« and recognise how He addresses us in different ways. Prayer is the recognition of God's presence in his absence. The Catholic religion, to facilitate the recognition of Christ's presence in His absence, offers the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, which is a visible and effective sign of »par excellence« of His presence among us. Faith, therefore, makes it possible to recognise God's presence; recognising God's presence at the same time helps the believer maintain a relationship with God, thus helping him to maintain and deepen his faith.

The ability to recognize God's presence in His absence also enables the believer to accept a different person, a different believer, as his brother. That is why Pope Francis emphasised that it is God's will for someone to be born into a Christian family and someone else into a Muslim family.³³ A believer who accepts this has no problem recognizing the different one for his brother. Faith, therefore, unites people of different religions and beliefs.

Conclusion

Merely talking about God, outside of the relationship with God, can lead to quarrels, even wars. Throughout history, violence in the name of God has been repeated again and again. However, whenever believers tried to live according to God's will, there was dialogue and peaceful coexistence of people despite their differences. It is no coincidence that Pope Francis gives dialogue an essential place in his theology. We are convinced that the mission of theology is to lead all people to reconciliation, understanding, and a relationship with cre-

³³ Cf. Pope Francis, *Document on human fraternity for world peace and living together* (February 4, 2019).

ation that will enable humanity to survive. Even today, it is necessary to talk about God, but this talk must lead people to faith and brotherhood. Merely talking about God, however, can lead people into hatred. Talking about God from faith is how to believe or live according to God's will.

Sažetak

RAZGOVOR O BOGU ILI RAZGOVOR O VJERI

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U članku autor ukazuje na razliku između govora »o Bogu«, govora o vjeri i vjerovanja. Čovjek je sličan Bogu u svojoj sposobnosti komuniciranja. Od početka čovječanstva do danas govori se o Bogu. No, valja priznati da zapadno moderno liberalno društvo izbjegava javno spominjati Boga još od Francuske revolucije ili prosvjetiteljstva. I u teologiji nakon Drugog vatikanskog koncila nalazimo vrlo malo spisa koji govore o Bogu. Dobar primjer su enciklike sadašnjeg pape Franje u kojima govori o pravdi, očuvanju okoliša i bratstvu svih ljudi. Obraćajući se svim ljudima na zemlji, objašnjava kako živjeti vjeru, odnosno kako svoj odnos prema Bogu prepoznati u odnosu prema bližnjemu i prirodi, odnosno prema stvorenome. To nije samo mogućnost, već i nužnost ako želimo preživjeti na planetu Zemlji. U razvoju teološke misli Guya Lafona nalazimo razvoj od govora o Bogu do vjerovanja. Francuski mislilac ističe da je govor o Bogu prijeke potreban za čovjekovo vjerovanje. Članak završava tvrdnjom da je Bog Osoba i da je svaki čovjek osoba, stoga vjera povezuje ljude.

Ključne riječi: Razgovor o Bogu, razgovor o vjeri, Guy Lafon, liberalizam, vjerovanje.