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A “COMPASSION OF THE FATHER” BY ALBRECHT DÜRER

Theological Aesthetics and Ethics in Iconography

“We live in a suffering world, whose suffering is rooted in a death-dealing poverty that is massive, mounting, unjust, and scandalous. Confronted with such a world of suffering one’s primary and ultimate response is – as it would be before any suffering – that of compassion.”¹

1. Introduction

In this article, I am going to deal in a first step with François Boespflug’s² analysis of Albrecht Dürer’s engraving from 1511 called ‘Trinity’ (391 x 285 mm), which is part of a very large family,³ Secondly I propose a theological-ethical interpretation of this analysis.

Albrecht Dürer was born in 1471 in Nuremberg, where he died in 1528. He became acquainted with Renaissance accomplishments in the field of perspective, cohesive compositions of pictures and depictions of bodies during trips to the upper part of Italy, to Venice in particular (1494/95 and 1505/07). Italy revealed the higher appreciation of artists to Dürer, who was on a par with carpenters and tailors

¹ Jon Sobrino, *Theology in a Suffering World. Theology as intellectus amoris*, in: Paul Knitter et al. (Eds.), *Pluralism and Oppression. Theology in World Perspective*, Lanham: Univ. Press of America 1991, p. 176.

² François Boespflug, *La Trinité, par Albrecht Dürer (gravure, 1511)*, in: *Moreana* Vol. 43, 168 43 (2006), 4, Nr. 168 and 44 (2007), 1 u. 2, Nr. 169/ 170, p. 178-203. Boespflug was professor of Religious Studies at the Roman-Catholic Faculty in Strasbourg, France.

³ François Boespflug, *Trinität. Dreifaltigkeitsbilder im späten Mittelalter*, Paderborn: Schöningh 2001, p. 201-204.

as a German craftsman. Yet, when he traveled to the Netherlands in 1520/21, being already privileged by Emperor Maximilian I, for whom he had worked from 1515 to 1519, he himself was welcomed like a sovereign. Dürer's self-portrayal as Christ around 1500 testifies to his self-confidence and expresses an acquired connection between the creating God and the artist at his mercy. Moreover, Dürer's perfected artistic skills with regard to engravings have to be mentioned. The years 1480-1520 can be considered as the climax of the production of such pictures classified as 'Compassio of the Father': in that sense, Dürer is an artist like every other artist. He borrowed extensively from the repertoire of pictures of the epoch.⁴

2. Boespflug's Analysis of the engraving

The Trinity appears as a motif in half a dozen of his works. However, the engraving from 1511 is Dürer's only work in which the Trinity is simultaneously the topic, the title and the central motif.⁵ It is an engraving made from wood for the purpose of private adoration and depicting no other human than Christ. Its quick and wide promulgation in Europe seemed not in the least to be retarded by Dürer's conversion to the Lutheran Church, so that it can be called a transconfessional reception.

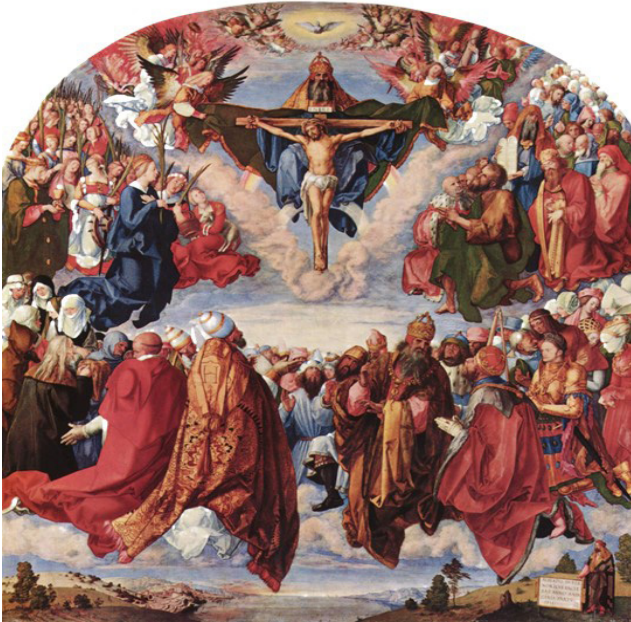
⁴ Being a son of the town's Hungarian goldsmith, he learned his father's craft and began his apprenticeship in 1486 under the painter and engraver Wolgemut. While he was on the road (1490-1494), his goal was first of all the Rhineland and then Basel, at that time the center of scholarship and book trade. In 1494, his marriage took place in Nuremberg. Back in Nuremberg, he engaged himself exhaustively with art theory, on which he also composed articles. (F.e. *Vier Bücher von menschlicher Proportion* (1528). Erwin Panofsky, *Dürers Kunsttheorie*, Berlin: Reimer 1915. Erwin Panofsky, *The Life and Art of Albrecht Dürer*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 3rd ed. 1971, p. 279).

⁵ <http://www.albrecht-duerer-apokalypse.de/images/albrecht-duerer-die-heilige-dreifaltigkeit-der-gnadenstuhl.jpg> (24.12.2020).



The fact that the engraving of 1511 is the only work of Dürer in which the Trinity is at the same time the topic, the title and the central motif is no hindrance for us to discover a constitutive and even essential element of comparison to it in the case of the Landauer altar. Of course, the differences between these two works of the artist are apparent: in the first case a monumental painting (135 x 123.4 cm without the frame) serving as a retable of a hospice chapel and portraying a diversity of people; in the second case an engraving for private worship,

depicting nobody else but Christ.⁶ Although detailed evidence concerning the creation of the engraving is unknown, that of the retable is well known. It owes its name ‘(Matthäus-) Landauer altar’ to the man who commissioned it, a metal merchant who possessed mines and a foundry in Eisleben, and lived in Nuremberg.⁷ The painting was supposed to correspond to the topics of the five glass windows of the chapel and to be ornamented with a frame with bas-relief motifs. It was Dürer’s task to manufacture them as well as layouts for the glass windows.



The two illustrations of the Trinity, which were created in the same year, have certain things in common. Among the points

⁶ https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/3/3c/Albrecht_Dürer_003.png (24.12.2020).

⁷ Boespflug *Trinité*, p. 182.

cited by Boespflug, the most interesting are the following: 1. God Father is portrayed as an old man keeping the body of the Savior between his straddled knees; 2. the dove of the Holy Ghost, which is nestling to a cloud of light, is gliding in an immobile way above the group of Father and Son; 3. the latter is surrounded by two rows of angels, which are descending from the rear part of the sky; 4. the pair of angels on the first level is holding the lappets of God's coat apart, thus revealing Christ's body; the following pairs of angels are carrying the arma Christi.⁸

First we will contemplate Dürer's engraving from a theological-aesthetic point of view, following the interpretation of François Boespflug. Among others, the following aspects of the engraving are innovative and distinctive according to him:

1. The Crucified is no longer hanging on the cross in the engraving---the cross has been entrusted to an angel at his left side---but he is leaning against his Father's right leg, being supported under the armpits by his Father's hands;

2. One can find a gesture of tender closeness, when the Father bends his head and casts down his eyes;

3. There are four winds present, which form a small group beneath God's throne at the lower part of the composition. They are arranged in a circular arc and are represented by four human heads of different ages with long hair, swollen cheeks and furrowed brows (owing to the effort of the blowing) among the clouds;

4. The central group is composed of the Father and the Son. Dürer's depiction of them seems to be an invention---or he borrowed his notion of Father and Son from a less known drawing. It has had many followers in art history. His invention consists in the parallelism and the interconnecting nature of the faces of the Father and the Son. It is underlined by the direction of the Father's gaze; in this iconographic genre,

⁸ Boespflug, *Trinité*, p. 182f.

head and gaze often show a kind of withdrawal, or they really turn away.⁹

According to the literature cited by Boespflug one can imagine that these traits led to a deep emotion and largely contributed to the European success of this engraving.¹⁰

Boespflug claims that Dürer's engraving was created for the sake of making the observer sensitive to Christ's agony so that he can take part in the '*Compassio* of the Father' for his Son, and, what is more, to give him the reassurance that he himself will be admitted to the Father's lap with *compassio* after his death. The spatio-temporal situation in which the engraving incorporates the Trinity neither refers to Scripture nor to a dogma. One can even call it a 'dedogmatized' picture of the Trinity, which is exposed to the worshippers' emotion. With regard to the special elaboration of the engraving, it seems to be clear that the Trinity is located in heaven, which is neither the intelligible heaven nor that of dogma or credo. The heaven of the picture can be characterized as the heaven which constitutes the last horizon of human history: it stays connected to the world through the four winds, which can be considered as the annunciation of the Last Judgment, a biblical topic adding a more eschatological than cosmological (the four directions) nature to the engraving.¹¹

Regarding the way 'time' is elaborated in the picture, according to the literature cited by Boespflug all evidence is in favor of the interpretation that the engraving artist puts the observer into a time *before* the Last Judgment by means of the engraving.¹² Hence, it is not a vision of the glorified Trinity, a *visio beatifica*, after the Last Judgment. The main argument for this interpretation is theological in nature and may be found in the presence of the Trinity in the form of a mercy seat. To por-

⁹ Boespflug, *Trinité*, p. 183f.

¹⁰ Boespflug, *Trinité*, p. 188.

¹¹ Gertrud Schiller, *Ikonographie der christlichen Kunst, Band 2: Die Passion Christi*, Gütersloh: Mohn, 2nd ed. 1983, p. 237. Boespflug, *Trinité*, p. 197.

¹² Boespflug, *Trinité*, p. 199.

tray Christ as the Crucified *after* the time of the Last Judgment is unimaginable.¹³ The engraving belongs to the genre ‘*Pietà of the Father*’, a suffering of the Father, or rather a ‘*Compassio of the Father*’¹⁴. The meaning of the ‘*Compassio of the Father*’ mainly consists in piety; the Father’s gesture differs radically from an ‘objective’ presentation of salvation through the cross. In the engraving, the Father’s attention is directed to Christ exclusively and intimately; there is no distance between him and his Son.

For Boespflug the heavenly scene of the engraving seems to indicate that the Father came to fetch the dead Christ without human witnesses¹⁵, as if the engraving were an invitation to an *imitatio pietatis*. The French author underlines finally that the imitation and worshipping of the Father consists in conceiving the Father as a model for an attentive and loving gaze at Jesus Christ, who has died for our sins. However, the angels’ gazes must also be taken into account. As far as one can say, they too are directed to the Savior’s face. The observer is led to Christ through the Father and the angels. He enters, so to speak, into a contemplation of an angelic nature, namely into the Father’s gaze from heaven upon the corpse of his dead Son.

3. A Theological-ethical Interpretation

So much for the presentation of Boespflug’s analysis. It seems to be evident that Dürer considered himself as somebody who was involved in the theological discussions of his time and who wanted to contribute to them with his own reflection---in

¹³ Denzinger-Hünemann 1000, p. 334f.

¹⁴ François Boespflug, La compassion de Dieu le Père dans l’art occidental (XIIIe – XVIIe siècle), in: *Le mal et la compassion. Actes du colloque de l’Association des Théologiens pour l’Étude de la Morale*, Orsay, Sept. 1989, Le Supplément 172, Paris: Editions du cerf 1990, p. 123-159.

¹⁵ Boespflug, *Trinité*, p. 185.

his case by way of his engraving.¹⁶ He intended to help the believers by making a theological locus accessible in a more attractive, and in a more salutary and therapeutic way, believing that theological reflection is able to attract attention by its own salutary potential. In following the interpretation of Boespflug it also seems legitimate to consider his reflection as a theological approach to the eschatological situation of Christianity. Theological reflection demands a form of judgment that can be found in different types of mediation concerning the salvific power of the theological message. That brings us to the following question: Why and how should theology contribute to a scholarly interpretation of a picture in a way that is not already accessible to an aesthetic or art historical approach? History of Christianity teaches us the relevance of the topic: History shows a rich tradition of compassion. Dietmar Mieth differentiates between four Christian motives¹⁷ for “*compassio*” that can be historically established:

1. The Father’s mercy,
2. the Son’s solidarity in suffering and death,
3. the Samaritan’s pity
4. “*compassio fraterna*”, that is, brotherly alliance in suffering.

We see: the term of compassion is very complex in integrating a multitude of other notions, such as mercy, solidarity and alliance in suffering, pity... This could be mentioned as one of the reasons why compassion is considered as a problematic term but it can also to be considered as the basis of its success. We find the same problems in translating the Latin *miseriordia* as compassion. That is why the term compassion should be considered in and by the ensemble of the Christian motives.

¹⁶ François Boespflug, L’art chrétien comme “lieu théologique”, in: *Revue de théologie et de philosophie* 131 (1999), p. 385-396.

¹⁷ Dietmar Mieth, Mitleid, in: Johann Baptist Metz et al., *Compassion. Weltprogramm des Christentums – Soziale Verantwortung lernen*, Freiburg: Herder 2000, p. 21.

A theological interpretation would have to be a relevant addition to aesthetical and other interpretations. Georges Didi-Huberman's approach to viewing pictures assured theological competence in interpreting images, and claimed that theology could abolish blind-alleys of other studies of pictures. In general, these studies are said to be too much orientated towards the models of the mimesis theory. Didi-Huberman emphasizes that this model undermines a theology of the picture because it refers to mimesis (mimicry) instead of imitation (following the example).¹⁸ We claim the negation of the mimesis to be a feature of the picture with regard to theological reflection: a theological interpretation emphasizes the imitational aspect of the image in the dialectics of similarity and dissimilarity also in a practical perspective of formalizing incarnation.¹⁹ This would hint at the fact that as theology a picture always countermands a mimesis theory. For in the act of composing there would already be a negation of the creation similar to the dissimilarity in the similarity, and therefore it would pave the way to abstract, modern art. The idea of putting the negation of the mimesis into relation cannot further be illuminated here; it belongs more to the field of a basic analysis of the theology of the picture. We only deal with the negation of the mimesis as a feature of the picture in regard to theological reflection. An allusion will first be made to a way of finding a theological judgment and thereafter to its fixation. Furthermore, this search indicates a perception of the piece of art that exceeds itself, which Manfred Frank expressed in the following way:

¹⁸ Georges Didi-Huberman, *Art & théologie*, in: *Dictionnaire de la théologie chrétienne*, Paris: Encyclopaedia universalis 1998, p. 88-89.

¹⁹ In following Paul Riceur, Alain Thomasset underlines the relations existing between the practical transformation of the subject, imagination and "incarnation": Alain Thomasset, *L'imagination dans la pensée de Paul Ricœur fonction poétique du langage et transformation du sujet*, in: *Études théologiques et religieuses* 80 (2005/4), p. 525-541. Alain Thomasset, *Personnages bibliques et formation éthique des lecteurs*, in Camille Focant /André Wénin, *Analyse narrative et Bible*, Leuven: University Press 2005 (BETL 191), p. 84-91.

“Owing to its inexhaustibility, the work raises questions on life and its time; it questions them; not just its own time, however, but every coming time that can be appealed to for redemption of its yet unfulfilled sense.”²⁰

The art of interpretation is to be regarded as the proprium of the theological search for a judgment. Thus, theology considers itself as being the interpretation of faith in the hermeneutic tradition. The elements for this judgment can be retrieved in the structure of the theological search for a judgment which traverses the following three ways: *via affirmationis*, *negationis* and *eminentiae*.

At this point, the thesis will be that the dedogmatizing predicate, in the particular kind of intellectual appropriation, reveals practical relevance in a dogmatic zone of insecurity.²¹ This predicate ought to correspond to the peculiarity of art owing to its own claim, since it refers to forms and their coordination: “Things become subject of a judgment of taste through the fact that they have a form.”²² This view concerns, in particular, forms that represent a sensuous pattern of arrangement and that constitute the view through their coordination. The elements for this reflection can be retrieved in the structure of the theological search for a predicate which transcends the three ways of *via affirmationis*, *negationis* and *eminentiae*:

“Negative theology (n.th.) originally means an assertion which negates what God is not and which thereby refers to God’s tran-

²⁰ “Durch seine Unausschöpflichkeit stellt das Werk Fragen an das Leben und an seine Zeit; es stellt sie in Frage; doch nicht nur eben seine Zeit, sondern jede kommende, die sich zur Einlösung seines immer noch unvollendeten Sinnes aufrufen lässt.” Manfred Frank, *Das Sagbare und das Unsagbare*, Frankfurt / Main: Suhrkamp 1993, p. 210.

²¹ Georges Didi-Huberman, Art & théologie, in: *Dictionnaire de la théologie chrétienne*, Paris: Encyclopaedia universalis 1998, p. 88-89.

²² “Es ist die Eigenschaft, eine Form zu haben, die die Dinge zum Gegenstand eines Geschmacksurteils macht.” Reinhard Hoeps, Bild und Ikonoklasmus. Zur theologisch kunsttheoretischen Bedeutung des Bilderverbotes, in: Christoph Dohmen et al. (Eds.), ... *kein Bildnis machen. Kunst und Theologie im Gespräch*, Würzburg: Echter 1987, p. 191.

scendence ('Deus absconditus'). Opposed to it is affirmative theology. Both forms of speaking about God are related to one another inextricably. This is traditionally expressed by the three approaches in the speech on God: affirmation (*via affirmationis*), negation (*via negationis*), and eminent comparison (*via eminentiae* or analogy). Together they define the full sense of n.th. The latter then describes a spiritual process in which a self-revelation---an immanence---of transcendence is presupposed, namely in a way that this presupposition, at the same time, motivates a negation of itself and of all other positions so that thereby there is a reference to the affirmation of an absolute transcendence which was actually meant. If understood in this way, n.th. is the main form of thinking and expressing religious language."²³

This theoretical-theological-appropriation by the intentionality of faith can be found in the fact that the *via eminentiae* prepares a form either of the *vita contemplativa* or of the *vita activa*, two forms of appropriation.²⁴ Consequently, the mystical *via eminentiae* results in the topos of expunging a picture with pictures (Seuse), which does not mean that the mystical life-form necessarily has to culminate in a *vita contemplativa*. In accordance with Master Eckhart, it can rather consider man himself as an active image of the divine image through the interference of the divine.²⁵ Since the active image for its part is based on the Divinity, it can therefore exceed mysticism. This structure should be suitable for an interpretation of a picture interested in connecting ethics with the picture. In this sense, the interpretative treatment of the picture strives finally for a practical search for a judgment on the elements of a judgment of taste.

At this point, it must be emphasized that the *via eminentiae* does not only aim at a vision, but also at practice or at the

²³ Josef Hochstaffl, Art. Negative Theologie, in: *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, 3rd ed., Bd. 7, Freiburg / Br.: Herder 1998, p. 723.

²⁴ See also Paul Ricœur, Jugement esthétique et jugement politique selon Hannah Arendt, in: Paul Ricœur, *Le juste 1*, Paris: Ed. Esprit 1995, p. 143-161.

²⁵ Mauritius Wilde, *Das neue Bild vom Gottesbild. Bild und Theologie bei Meister Eckhart*, Fribourg: Univ.-Verl. 2000.

search for a practical judgment. A possible form of the *vita contemplativa* is founded in the icon of the glorified Christ, in which he is present in plenitude. Against this background, the practical relevance of an eschatologically prefigured view of the engraving seems to be based on the need for salvation and on the experience of deficiency, which are realized in this engraving and which refer to (even existential) desiderata longing to be satisfied. In order to guarantee that the satisfaction of these needs will not lead to nowhere, this picture has at the same time to be connected to an idea in which this deficiency is salvaged (the glorified Christ). Thus, the form as a presupposed idea even in the interaction of the negation of the form in the new form does not play an inferior role. Consequently, the assertion “you shall recognize them by their fruits” is not the decisive criterion but an integrative part of the *via eminentiae*. Moreover, the possibility of focusing upon a *vita activa* requires a distance in order to gain a field for practice. Only a step backwards, something which dissociates from the presence of the plenitude in the *via negationis*, brings about the opening to a practical perspective. This takes place as a withdrawal into the articulation of the desideratum. It becomes obvious that this example is nourished by the eschatological ‘not yet’, which is preceded by a promise but into which deficiency as a form of the articulation of the desideratum is also included.

The engraving not only aims at an *imitatio pietatis* but also at an *imitatio paternae compassionis*. The Father’s imitation consists in the conception of the Father as a model for an attentive and loving gaze upon Jesus Christ, who died for our sins. The gaze of the angels is a similar one and so should be that of man. In that sense it would be an inverse interpretation of the verse: “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Mt 25,40). The *via affirmationis* can be found in the form of the presence of the glorified Christ, who is, however, not held in the Father’s arms as the Glorified, but in the negation, as a *via negationis*, as the dead one having been taken down from the cross. In

addition, it became obvious that the dogmatic mimetism is undermined for the sake of an eschatological edification by suggesting that the Father shows compassion for whoever exists in the interim state after the death of Christ and before the Last Judgment. The newly created constellation (*via eminentiae*) leads to the suggestion of a new attitude which cannot be reduced to the contemplation of the Glorified, the Sublime or of the Judge, but which demands an attitude of compassion in the here and now: “the appearance of the appearance in its transcendence”²⁶. The aesthetic interpretation of a theological intention is turned into a practical model of vital appropriation and offers suggestions for the believing attitude in the sense of compassion as a virtue.²⁷ Namely Thomas Aquinas emphasized the central significance of *misericordia* for moral theology by calling it the greatest of all virtues. Thomas Ryan interprets the *misericordia* in his article about Thomas Aquinas as compassion.²⁸ Accordingly, the Summa says:

²⁶ “[D]ie Erscheinung der Erscheinung in ihrer Überschreitung” Reinhard Hoeps, Bild und Ikonoklasmus. Zur theologisch kunsttheoretischen Bedeutung des Bilderverbotes, in: Christoph Dohmen et al. (Eds.), ... *kein Bildnis machen. Kunst und Theologie im Gespräch*, Würzburg: Echter 1987, p. 193.

²⁷ See about this subject: William Spohn, *Go and do likewise: Jesus and ethics*, New-York: Continuum 1999, chap. 4. Leonardo Boff, *Das Prinzip Mitgefühl*, Freiburg/Breisgau: Herder 1999. Lawrence Blum, Compassion, in: A. Oksenberg Rorty (Ed.), *Explaining Emotions*, Berkeley et al.: Univ. of Calif. Pr. 1980, p. 507-517. Hille Haker, “Compassion” als Weltprogramm des Christentums? – Eine ethische Auseinandersetzung mit Johann Baptist Metz, in: *Concilium* 37 (2001), 4, p. 436-450. Daniel Harrington/James F. Keenan, *Jesus and Virtue Ethics*, Lanham: Rowamn & Littlefield, 2005. Thomas Ryan, Aquinas on Compassion: Has He Something to Offer Today? in: *Irish Theological Quarterly* 75 (2010) p. 157-174. Alain Thomasset, Personnages bibliques et formation éthique des lecteurs, in Camille Focant/André Wénin, *Analyse narrative et Bible*, Leuven: University Press 2005 (BETL 191), p. 84-91. Alain Thomasset, *Les vertus sociales. Justice, solidarité, compassion, hospitalité, espérance*, Namur: Lessius 2015. Dietmar Mieth, *Kleine Ethikschule*, Freiburg/Breisgau: Herder 2004, p. 104.

²⁸ Ryan, *Aquinas*.

“On itself, misericordia takes precedence of other virtues, for it belongs to misericordia to be bountiful to others, and, what is more, to succor others in their wants, which pertains chiefly to one who stands above. Hence, misericordia is accounted as being proper to God: and therein His omnipotence is declared to be chiefly manifested. (...) But of all the virtues which relate to our neighbor, misericordia is the greatest, even as its act surpasses all others, since it belongs to one who is higher and better to supply the defect of another, in so far as the latter is deficient.”²⁹

Thus, the central virtue of justice is based on *misericordia*: “Now the work of divine justice always presupposes the work of misericordia, and is founded thereupon.”³⁰ Furthermore, Master Eckhart considers *misericordia* to be the best name for God.³¹ According to Oliver Davies, compassion can be called a virtue owing to the following criteria:

“In compassion one can discern an identifiable triadic structure: we are exposed to another’s distress (cognition), we feel moved by what we see (affective) and we take active steps to try to remedy it (volitional).”³²

However, we cannot find compassion in Thomas’s system of virtues. Neither is it one of the theological virtues nor of the cardinal or moral virtues. In view of this systematic shortcoming with respect to compassion, Thomas’s statement that compassion, or rather “*misericordia*”, is the greatest virtue, surprises. Despite this shortcoming, Thomas Ryan accentuates the continuing relevancy of compassion:

“There are occasions where compassion in the voluntary act of displacement and self-dispossession experiences the other as an epiphany of being. A new horizon as enhanced or enriched existence opens up, disclosing the inter-subjectivity or ‘sociality’ of

²⁹ *STh* II-II, q. 30 a. 4 co.

³⁰ “Opus autem divinae iustitiae semper praesupponit opus misericordiae et in eo fundatur” (*STh* I, 21, 4 c.).

³¹ Ryan, *Aquinas*, p. 167, note 48.

³² Ryan, *Aquinas*, p. 163.

conscienceness itself (...) – being that reveals itself in what it does.”³³

4. Conclusion

In that sense, we can agree with Merklein when he writes against the background of the New Testament eschatology that eschatological images in the sense of an aesthetic search for a practical judgment in a new constellation also contain a

³³ Ryan, *Aquinas*, p. 173. In a first approach we can point out following ethical significations of compassion: for Aquinas compassion as misericordia is seen as a virtue in the horizon of a teleological ethics, but: also as a hierarchical expression of domination. Other more deontologically orientated approaches are those of Johann Baptist Metz for whom compassion is as a kind of categorical (unconditioned) imperative (Johann Baptist Metz, *Compassion. Zu einem Weltprogramm des Christentums im Zeitalter des Pluralismus der Religionen und Kulturen*, in: Johann Baptist Metz et al., *Compassion. Weltprogramm des Christentums – Soziale Verantwortung lernen*, Freiburg: Herder 2000, p. 9-18.) and close to him Orlando O. Espin who considers compassion as a commandment (Orlando O. Espin, *Idol and Grace. On Traditioning and Subversive Hope*, New York: Orbis Books 2014). “Jesus simply placed compassion—for victims and for the poor, as well as for the impure and the sinner—at the core of his radical interpretation of Torah and of his understanding of the will of God. Nothing was more important than compassion, and nothing was to curtail, diminish, or domesticate it or explain it away. Compassion was scandalous, it could provoke violent backlash, and it might prove very difficult, but it was the only absolute because God had been compassionate towards the people of Israel when they were insignificant and enslaved in Egypt, as well as throughout their history.” But: a categorical imperative doesn’t integrate the passion-character of compassion. And: is the Christian ethics an ethics of obligation or of capacities/capabilities? Finally it seems that the virtue approach of Dietmar Mieth realizes in an original manner the subversive character of compassion in an aesthetically relevant realization (Dietmar Mieth, *Die neuen Tugenden. Ein ethischer Entwurf*, Düsseldorf: Patmos 1984, p. 18). See also: Walter Kardinal Kasper, *Barmherzigkeit. Grundbegriff des Evangeliums - Schlüssel christlichen Lebens*, Freiburg/Br.: Herder 2012. Lisa Cahill (Ed.), *Mercy*, in: *Concilium* 53 (2017), 4. In 2015/2016 Pope Francis declared the Extraordinary Jubilee of Mercy.

motivation to act.³⁴ However, this attitude should for its part also constitute the time before the Last Judgment as human praxis represents a form of interpretation.³⁵

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³⁴ Helmut Merklein, Eschatologie im NT, in: H. Althaus, *Apokalyptik und Eschatologie*, Freiburg: Herder 1987, p. 35: "Darüber hinaus sollte man nicht unterschätzen, dass gerade Bilder ein enormes Handlungspotential zu motivieren vermögen."

³⁵ Alain Thomasset, Personages bibliques et formation éthique des lecteurs, in Camille Focant /André Wénin, *Analyse narrative et Bible*, Leuven: University Press 2005 (BETL 191), p. 84-91; Dominik Bertrand-Pfaff, Intentions and Appropriations in Dürer's Trinity, in: Hans Alma et. al. (Eds.) *Visual Arts and Religion*, Berlin: Lit 2009, p. 17-22.