

Verbum vitae

Call for papers

Verbum Vitae, the Theological Quarterly
of the John Paul II Catholic University of Lublin

invites you to submit articles for the volume entitled:

Negative Theology: From Anthropomorphism to Apophaticism

Editors of the volume: Dr. Damian Mrugalski OP and Dr. Hab. Marek Gilski

1. Explanation of the topic

The earliest representations of God (or gods) in many religious traditions were associated with various kinds of anthropomorphisation. On the other hand, the earliest Greek philosophers already criticised this anthropomorphic thinking about the gods. We find such a criticism in a passage by Xenophanes (6th century BC): "But if horses or oxen or lions had hands or could draw with their hands and accomplish such works as men, horses would draw the figures of the gods as similar to horses, and the oxen as similar to oxen". An analogous tension likewise emerges in the Bible, which of course abounds in anthropomorphic images of God and yet contains statements such as: "God is not a human being" (Num 23:19); "No man can see the face of God and live" (Exod 33:20); "No one has ever seen God" (John 1:18); and finally, the famous statement: "I am who I am" (Exod 3:14). This last formulation, in the philosophical interpretation of the Bible by many Fathers of the Church, did not represent a revelation of God's name, but rather pointed to the fact that the only thing human intellect is capable of grasping about God is his existence.

Such early critiques of anthropomorphism gave impetus to later, more in-depth reflections on how, or even whether, humans might gain knowledge of God. Thus was born apophatic theology, which, according to the meaning of the Greek word *ἀπόφασις*, seeks to gain insight into God (divinity) through negation, that is, by expressing what God is *not* rather than what he *is*. We find such a theology already in the doctrines of Greek philosophers, and later in the works of Jewish and Christian thinkers and mystics of the first centuries AD. Some of them denied even any possibility of knowing the essence of God, or of adequately speaking about Him. Over time, however, negative theology gave place to cataphatic, or positive, theology.

In our own day, apophatic theology is experiencing a revival, for a number of reasons. First, at the beginning of the 20th century there emerged a growing interest in Eastern Orthodox theology, one of whose main features is precisely apophaticism. It is apophaticism,

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according to Vladimir Lossky, that distinguishes the Orthodox Church from the Western philosophical and theological tradition. Secondly, contemporary secularism and atheism, and in the same way religious and cultural pluralism, simply do not favour the development of cataphatic theology. In the opinion of many contemporary thinkers, positive theology with its "hard" theses makes interreligious dialogue practically impossible. Moreover, the exponents of the philosophical current called postmodernism, in rejecting metaphysics – which for centuries has enclosed all reality, both divine and human, within "rigid" and "enclosed" notions – try instead to speak about "what is in between", about "difference", about what has always been overlooked by the metaphysical tradition.

The editors of the *Verbum Vitae* quarterly have thus decided to take part in the ongoing debate surrounding negative theology. Topically, we are proposing a rather broad sweep, covering both the issue of the anthropomorphic representation of God in various religious traditions, and its criticism, as well as the development of negative theology throughout the centuries. Although *Verbum Vitae* is a biblical-theological quarterly, we also accept texts that present research in the fields of philosophy, religious studies, literature studies and art history, as long as the work is closely (and obviously) related to the topic at hand.

2. Deadlines and conditions

Articles may be written in Polish or in one of the Conference languages: English, German, French, Spanish or Italian.

Detailed guidelines for authors: <https://czasopisma.kul.pl/vv/about/submissions>

Deadline for submission of texts: **until the end of May 2023**.

Publication date of the issue: **September 2023**.

Texts should be submitted via the journal's website: <https://czasopisma.kul.pl/vv/>

Correspondence with the editors: verbum.vitae@kul.pl

3. Why is it worth publishing in the *Verbum Vitae* Quarterly?

The *Verbum Vitae* Quarterly is currently one of the three highest ranking theological journals in Poland. In the latest ratings of journals issued by the Ministry of Education and Science (30.12.2021), our publication was assigned a top score of **100 points**. Moreover, *Verbum Vitae* is represented in the **SCOPUS, DOAJ, ATLA** and **EBSCO** scholarly databases. The last three named platforms in fact deliver every article published in our journal in full-text PDF format to every university library in the world! This makes *Verbum Vitae* an extremely effective venue for academics to participate in the arena of international scientific dialogue.