

# Byung-Chul Han and God, Theological Approach to Han's Anthropology

## Byung-Chul Han y Dios, aproximación teológica a la antropología de su obra

## Byung-Chul Han e Deus, abordagem teológica da antropologia de sua obra

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**Abstract:** Byung-Chul Han's work is very large, so it's essential to analyze it from multiple perspectives. His link with nature and contemplation show us a base to interpret him. Along with it, the role of God in his work is indisputable, therefore, theology shows us the concept of integral human ecology from which we can understand the depth of Han's work.

**Keywords:** God; nature; contemplation; ecology; integral.

**Resumen:** la obra de Byung-Chul Han es muy grande por lo que se hace fundamental analizarla desde múltiples perspectivas. Su vínculo con la naturaleza y la contemplación nos muestran una base de interpretación. Junto con ella, es indiscutible el papel de Dios en su obra, por ello, la teología nos muestra el concepto de ecología humana integral desde el cual poder comprender la profundidad de la obra de Han.

**Palabras clave:** Dios; naturaleza; contemplación; ecología; integral.

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**Resumo:** a obra de Byung-Chul Han é muito extensa, por isso é essencial analisá-la sob múltiplas perspectivas. A sua ligação com a natureza e a contemplação mostram-nos uma base de interpretação. Junto com ela, o papel de Deus em sua obra é indiscutível, portanto, a teologia nos mostra o conceito de ecologia humana integral a partir da qual podemos compreender a profundidade da obra de Han.

**Palavras-chave:** Deus; natureza; contemplação; ecologia; abrangente.

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## 1. Introduction

It is inevitable to recognize that, above all, the work of Byung-Chul Han is an anthropological reflection, even more than a sociological one, given that most of his reflections have a personal significance rather than a collective one. At this point, we should recall that for Benedict XVI, “*la cuestión social se ha convertido en una cuestión antropológica*” (Benedicto XVI, 2009, § 75), which already indicates how closely linked these matters are for the Church. However, Han's anthropological and sociological perspective has enormous repercussions in other disciplines. Even in Theology itself, given that he has been recognized as Catholic, there is a special connotation from which we can derive consequences and, above all, connections.

The human being described by Han is impacted by a pornographic vision of low self-esteem, as well as by the demands of dataism and hyperculturality and, of course, by the exhaustion that comes from self-exploitative performance. All these factors reveal aspects of the individual, even though they are analyzed from his social being.

In this context, Han continuously introduces the presence of God throughout his entire body of work; I have not found any book where there is no reference to God, which already highlights the importance of including this element in the social perspective. In fact, if we compare him with other sociological authors of recent times the contrast becomes even clearer, Baudrillard, Foucault, Zizek, Bauman, Lipovetsky, Badiou, Vattimo, etc.

Approaching Han through his Catholicism and vision of God can enrich our analysis by providing insight into the background of his statements. For that, we will first examine the role of God in his work, and then analyze aspects of contemporary theology that reveal deeper connections and richness.

## 2. The Role of God in the Work of Byung-Chul Han

As we mentioned, the first step is to examine the role that God occupies in Han's work. Although God's presence is a constant in his writings, he doesn't explicitly identify the God he references. However, we can affirm that his perspective is monotheistic and, seemingly, Christian due to his Catholic background. In his work *Loa a la tierra*, Han acknowledges that "en Corea me bautizaron en la iglesia con el nombre de Alberto. La Iglesia Católica estaba justo al lado de mi casa. Yo nací en el seno de la fe, y en él fui resguardado. Rezaba a diario el rosario" (Han, 2019e, p. 160). This is his main reference to his religion throughout his work. In fact, throughout his writings, there are multiple allusions to Christianity, both from a Catholic viewpoint and others. Recently, he even acknowledged in an interview the possibility of becoming a priest, stating, "no lo descarto" (Han, 2023a, p. 36).

For Han, it is crucial to understand that, in his view, "a la actual sociedad de la transparencia le falta aquella luz divina" (2018a, p. 76), which both reveals and conceals at the same time. This light reveals the realities of the world with its brightness while covering them with its shadow, highlighting the existence of hidden truths yet to be discovered. The problem is that this transparency, this positive society, lacks transcendence and thus the capacity for an encounter with the "other" in the lowercase sense and with the "Other" in the uppercase sense.

The need to reclaim God in this society is so significant that Han observes how "la Hiper cultura sin centro, sin Dios y sin lugar [...] conduce para muchos al trauma de la pérdida" (2019d, p. 23), inspiring, by contrast, a fundamentalism centered on place or on God. The role of God is essential as "lo irrealizable" (2019a, p. 109), as "lo indisponible" (2021a, p. 76), or as "innominado" (Han, 2021b, p. 105). Humanity needs this gravitation, a grounding in the world, from which a sense of narrative and meaning in life can emerge. Although this may lead to a *Homo doloris*, a thinker of pain and mortality who, in his suffering, seeks to abolish God for resolution, he ultimately finds access only to the scent of eternity within the essence of *Homo doloris* itself. This perspective is closely linked to concept of God by Heidegger, who "protege lo eterno, el enigma de lo que permanece y es grande. El estar arrojado y la facticidad caracterizan la relación del hombre con Dios. El hacer humano vuelve sordo a los hombres ante el lenguaje de Dios" (2021a, p. 112)—even more so if this action is one of productivity and hyperculture.

In this society of incessant noise and the digital swarm, "Dios aparece en cada silencio, que surge cuando se apagan los aparatos técnicos" revealing a capacity in humanity for listening and openness. Yet, this turning off condemns people to repetition and identity, showing that "no hay un Dios del cambio y la diferencia" Man seeks stability to reclaim God, for acceleration implies the

demise of God by removing the grounding of human actions, the anchor to their Being and Doing. This ultimately reveals a God who “se revela como Dios de la lentitud” (Han, 2019a, p. 113). Or, in Han's own terms, the God of contemplative delay—a God capable of taking things with time and distance, thereby maintaining His connection with humanity. In theological terms, this could be understood as recognizing “timing of God”.

This distance so characteristic of Han's sociology (2016), is always paired with contemplation and, with it, beauty. For him, “un juicio estético presupone una distancia contemplativa. El arte de lo terso y pulido lo elimina” (p. 13), making that *Homo doloris* he constantly references essential. The issue is that “el desencantamiento del arte es un fenómeno del narcisismo, de la interiorización narcisista. El narcisismo colectivo elimina el eros y desencanta el mundo” (2020, p. 39). This detachment from the world and from authentic love inevitably implies a detachment from transcendence and from God. This perspective is so fundamental to Han that he repeatedly emphasizes it throughout his work: “lo bello solo se muestra a la mirada larga y contemplativa” (2018c, p. 97). Ultimately, we are not seeking superficial, consumable beauty but rather the inner beauty that sparks transcendence and inspires personal storytelling. It is not a passing encounter, nor an atomization of time and experiences, but rather a gravitation.

We could deduce from his writings that, for Han, there are two major requirements for accessing God. On the one hand, distance: “sin distancia no es posible la mística” (2016, p. 15), and on the other, silence: “el silencio agudiza la atención al orden superior” (2021b, p. 97). The presence of silence and distance enables contemplation, which in turn allows access to God, the power to transcend, and the possibility of encounter. Together, these elements allow a person to discover the narrative in their life and, through it, uncover the richness of their History, understanding it as a History of Salvation.

Han also addresses the risks to encountering God. First, there is the despatialization of culture, which brings with it a sense of comparison. In this way, things begin to mix together in what could be called “supermarkets of faith,” but which more closely resembles a stew where various elements are combined and dislocated. This results in personalized blends and comparisons, in both ingredients and outcomes, forming a “Religión patchwork” (2019d, p. 76) in which individuals construct their own colorful, fragmented version of religion. This despatialization resonates with Nietzsche's insight that “comprendió que la muerte de Dios también desencadenó el fin del lugar pensado de modo enfático, comprendió que Dios era también Dios del lugar” (2019d, p. 49). This helps to clarify the implications of hyperculturality for faith: as hyperculturality loses its local roots, it must present itself as something collective and integrated if it hopes to survive as a cultural phenomenon.

A second risk is that of *windowing*, whereby hyperculture creates *windows* to view the world and be seen, though they are not doors through which one can enter. This raises the question of whether a Leibnizian God might be necessary (2019d, p. 68)—one who mediates between monads, to illuminate these windows so that they might transform into doors, enabling true communication and entry.

A third risk is that of dataism, which “conduce al totalitarismo digital” (2019b, p. 88), eliminating any imperfections that could hinder social alienation. An example of this is the disappearance of the traditional priestly class, replaced by the emergence of “sacerdotes de la opinión” (2019c, p. 34) or, simply, each person becoming a “sacerdotes de sí mismos” (2020, p. 29). This is facilitated by the transformation of human life into data, whereby individuals no longer need mediators, becoming their own sole mediator and, ultimately, even their own god.

Han, referencing the origin of the word “religion” recalls Agamben, noting how he “interpreta la religión a partir del *relegere*. Por tanto, la religión significa estar atento, despierto, es decir, velar por las cosas que son sagradas y tener cuidado de que se mantengan separadas del resto” (2019b, p. 82). Han later expands on this idea in *La desaparición de los rituales*, where he asserts that “toda praxis religiosa es un ejercicio de atención” (2020, p. 19). For Han, religion and contemplative life go hand in hand. He states that “la vida contemplativa presupone una particular pedagogía del mirar” (2019d, p. 49). This is a patient gaze, master of its impulses, capable of generating new possibilities and transforming what already exists simply by perceiving it differently—unlike those who devote their lives to activity alone, surrendering to performance and hyperproduction without pause.

It is necessary to understand that in Han's reflection it is usual to analyze the profane and the sacred. To Han, understanding religion means safeguarding the sacred, seeking within it the elements that create bonds, unite things and values, thereby giving life to a community and to a shared narrative. Han even expresses this in a very vivid way: “La religión cristiana es, en marcada medida, narrativa. Días festivos como los de Pascua, Pentecostés y Navidad son clímax narrativos dentro de una narrativa global que genera sentido y da orientación” (2019d, p. 62). The sacred, therefore, is about establishing that narrative and those connections that guide and bring meaning to life.

An interesting aspect to add to this reflection is the issue of narcissism and its potential consequences. Han asserts that “todo el mundo rinde culto al yo y oficia la liturgia del yo, en la que uno es el sacerdote de sí mismo” (2020, p. 29). Earlier, when discussing the digital swarm, we noted how this society has put traditional forms of mediation into crisis, even desacralizing the priestly figure. However, it has sanctified the priesthood of information and opinion. This loss of value, this profanation of mediation, has its consequences, as we have seen.

To conclude the analysis of the perspective of Han on God and religion, three final points remain: the role of pain as facticity, prayer as listening and attention, and, lastly, a brief comment regarding its connection with art.

Regarding pain, we have already discussed how for Han, *Homo doloris* confronts the negativity of pain and how this experience seems to lack meaning in contemporary society, though it is life itself that becomes meaningless when it attempts to exist without pain. One consequence that Han describes is how pain “se ha quedado definitivamente sin la narración cristiana, que actuaba como un narcótico o como un estimulante divino” (2021a, p. 35), this statement is not intended as pejorative, but rather as a recognition of Christianity's role in supporting humanity through the negativity of pain and in demonstrating how the presence of religion can move and transcend the individual. Han (2021a) illustrates this by pointing to the Christian mystic Saint Teresa of Ávila, stating that:

en su caso, el dolor es sumamente elocuente. La narración comienza con el dolor. La narración cristiana le da al dolor un lenguaje y transforma el cuerpo de la mística en un escenario. El dolor hace más profunda la relación con Dios. Crea una intimidad, una intensidad. Es incluso una experiencia erótica (p. 37)

This example reflects how much Han values pain's capacity to transcend and connect, acknowledging that it leads us to reality and truth. Pain forces us into facticity and gravitation, preventing positivity from overwhelming humanity and achieving a transcendent balance by facing negativity.

Another interesting example to bring these conclusions is from *La expulsión de lo distinto*, where Han describes digital media through the case of Paul Schreber. In his work *Memorias de un enfermo de los nervios* (2018c, p. 88), claims to hear the voice of God and thus procures a gramophone to “deafen” that voice, making it bearable and achieving the tranquility he longs for.

This need to listen reminds us of the necessity of prayer for mankind. Interestingly, Han twice quotes the same quotation: “la atención es la oración natural del alma” (2018c, p. 102; 2020, p. 19). In *La expulsión de lo distinto*, he attributes this quote to Malebranche, as mentioned by Walter Benjamin in his essay on Kafka. For Han, “el alma siempre está en actitud orante. Está a la búsqueda. Es una plegaria de súplica al otro, a lo completamente distinto” (2018c, p. 102). Prayer is the natural attention of the soul, yet sadly, today the soul is immersed in productivity and deafening noise, anesthetized by information overload and the dataist and consumerist demands.

And as we discussed, a final essential point in our analysis is that of art. For Han, art seems to be a continuous search, providing both inspiration and escape, much like the image of play as an expression of openness and encounter.

While Eastern thought, influenced by Zen Buddhism, is linked to the "aquí y ahora" (2018d, p. 75), reflecting its distinct immediacy and practicality, Western thought consistently seeks reflection and views the Passion as a path to the eternal. Christianity, he notes, "es una religión de la esperanza y la promesa". This perspective highlights a vision of entertainment that aspires to rise above intellectualism and dichotomies, aiming, like Haikus, to create an experience that elevates humanity. In this way, religion and more specifically Christianity, should embrace the artistic richness of its rites, presenting them not only as smooth and polished but as privileged spaces for elevation and an encounter with Passion.

In *La desaparición de los rituales*, Han (2020) quotes P. Handke:

con ayuda de la misa los sacerdotes aprenden a manejar pulcramente las cosas: sostener con cuidado el cáliz y la hostia, limpiar pausadamente los recipientes, pasar las hojas del libro. Y el resultado del manejo pulcro de las cosas es una jovialidad que da alas al corazón. (p. 15)

This meticulousness, as a manifestation of narrative care, provides elevation and demonstrates the importance of respecting ritual and the refinement of movement. Han places great value on this attention to detail as an artistic expression, as it highlights the connection with History and traditions, the narrative aspect of religion, and thus the connection with Passion. Furthermore, this attention to the details of Christian rites counters the pornographic overexposure of art, which, as we have seen, caters more to consumerism than to the elevation of the soul.

### 3. The Transcendent Role of Contemplative Delay

In his work *La sociedad del cansancio*, Han dedicates a chapter to analyzing active life versus contemplative life. For Han, it is essential to reclaim the role of contemplative life as a response to the performance-driven society and its capacity for self-exploitation. Han states that "la pérdida de la capacidad contemplativa está vinculada a la absolutización de la vida activa" (2019d, p. 47).

This absolutization of active life brings multiple consequences, one of which is the generation of a hyper-accelerated existence where people are incapable of uncovering and understanding the complexities of hyperculturality. We should recall that, when speaking of hyperculturality, Han reflects on how, in Eastern thought, the "entre" was highly valued (2019d, p. 81), as the interval or "in-between" can evoke unease, anxiety, or hope. Much depends on whether what we seek is a necessity or a source of richness. As Han expresses in another key concept, the pilgrim does not experience intervals; their journey is a transition, an evolution in which each step is experienced as change. The tourist, by contrast, does not evolve or change along the way; for them, the journey is

simply a gap between one thing and another. For the pilgrim, "la espera se convierte en pasión" (2019a, p. 59) when the wait is prolonged; however, "provoca sufrimiento" when the fulfillment of their longing is deferred. The distinction lies in waiting versus possession. The tourist, on the other hand, neither feels nor suffers; they live in the unsatisfactory, continuous consumption of time and attractions, lacking the ability to linger. An example of experiencing the interval in a meaningful way is "la época de adviento, que es un entretiempo, un tiempo de espera" (p. 62).

Today's man seeks to shorten the distances between temporal intervals, living life in a continuous leap from one activity to the next. "cuando el intervalo espacio temporal solo está ligado a la negatividad de la pérdida y el retraso, todos los esfuerzos se concentran en hacer que desaparezca" (2019a, p. 61). Here we see a negative aspect of palliative society, manifesting as an escape from suffering through acceleration.

Intervals are essential; they serve a structuring function in life that goes beyond merely preventing "yuxtaposiciones o un caos de acontecimientos desarticulados, desorientados" (Han, 2019a, p. 62). They aim to structure perception and life itself. A continuous succession or densification of events makes contemplation impossible, depriving us of the depth or inner reflection so crucial for overcoming the accelerating inertia of modern society. We seek a wisdom and an experience, a truth and a knowledge of the path we travel, enabling greater mastery over acceleration and consequently, over time.

Han describes the need to imbue time with "un aroma" (Han, 2019a, p. 67), drawing on Proust's *En busca del tiempo perdido*. The importance of aroma lies in how the sense of smell possesses "la capacidad de recordar y de despertar" (p. 70). Aroma pulls us away from *windowing* by immersing us in a scene from within, without it being merely cinematic. Aroma connects us and recalls the narrative for us.

Interpreting time from a narrative perspective presents it as something linear, framing history as a "sucesión de los hechos" (Han, 2019a, p. 79) where one occurrence serves as a prelude to the next. This can appear as a chain of events and, therefore, may seem more like a form of enslavement than a path to freedom.

But this supposed "sucesión de los hechos" plunges humans between "una alegría del ser" and "el miedo a la muerte" (Han, 2019a, p. 83). It is a death from the emptiness of meaning, from the poverty of the depth of Being, ultimately leading people to a "vegetative soul" lacking both awareness and spirit. This is the essence of the palliative society, a society that steers people toward "una vida sin muerte ni dolor que ya no es una vida humana, sino una vida de muertos vivientes" (2021a, p. 90), where individuals become incapable of facing challenges and hardships, the negativities that arise. Instead, they turn to the



anesthesia of the digital and performance-driven society to cope with the meaninglessness of their lives and the emptiness of their actions.

This digital society, where new media succeed in erasing the distance between people, includes hyperlinks, emails, and the endless array of new communication possibilities we might summarize as the options available on a smartphone. All of these have generated an implosion of space and time, of the here and now. In fact, "ya no queda ningún espacio sagrado del cual no des-alejarse" (Han, 2019a, p. 93).

For all these reasons, Han acknowledges the importance and fundamental role of the gravitational pull of the passage of time, rooted in its historical significance. In support of this, Han draws on the thesis of Heidegger in *Ser y tiempo*, where Heidegger seeks to anchor time "para que no se disperse en una sucesión de acontecimientos vacía de significado cada vez más acelerado" (2019a, p. 96). This perspective brings about a notable achievement: by endowing time with Being, with meaning, it prevents time from being lost because its very essence is time itself. Conversely, he who feels that he is wasting his time, in fact, experiencing the loss of their own Being or Meaning, this is the origin of the familiar expression, "no tengo tiempo para nada", which often reflects the emptiness or lack of meaning in their actions.

The importance of this gravitational anchoring lies in how it establishes a here and a there, a sense of "I am here now" and "I wish to be there later." In this way, the path of the pilgrim becomes part of the goal itself—it has meaning, a purpose, allowing the pilgrim to rest within the journey rather than focusing solely on the destination. This provides "ilustración de la vía contemplativa (Han, 2019a, p. 100), where the journey invites a contemplative lingering, making an end point almost unnecessary. This concept is fundamental to the thesis of the pilgrim, yet it is even more essential for attributing importance to rituals and imbuing things and beauty with meaning.

"La demora contemplativa presupone que las cosas duran" (2019a, p. 105) and, therefore, that they are not consumed, allowing for direct contemplation of their lasting quality, like a "jarra" or vessel that prevents them from spilling, dividing, or dissolving. This lingering is a form of preserving, not immobile or passive, but contemplative. For Han, these things contrast with non-things, which, like information, lose their connection to reality and become mere data without reference, existing solely in hyperreality, to the point that "lo que cuenta es el efecto a corto plazo. La eficacia sustituye a la verdad" (2021b, p. 18).

Digital society establishes walls, like those of Facebook. Walls on which we hang non-things and moments, simply accumulating information. It is essential to recognize that "solo un demorarse contemplativo es capaz de clausurar" (2020, p. 41), and thus only this contemplative delay can counteract the data-driven, additive view of society in favor of a society capable of closing

its eyes and holding memories in the heart, rather than merely accumulating information. This is closure: learning the negativity of endings, crises, and pain. "Las informaciones son aditivas, no narrativas. Pueden contarse, pero no narrarse" (2021b, p. 16), meaning it has no closure or finitude, fostering in people a constant need for search and consumptive longing. Only contemplative delay can break this cycle.

A concept parallel to contemplative delay is that of boredom. For Han, although it is not a frequently discussed concept, it plays an important role in understanding the idea of lingering. According to Han (2019a), "el aburrimiento profundo no solo surge cuando se da un tiempo vacío de acontecimientos" (p. 116) or when we sense monotony in repetition. Boredom brings us face-to-face with the emptiness of our being and existence, but it is crucial to understand that time becomes empty when it generates "ninguna gravitación que conecte y reúna".

Han distinguishes three dimensions of existence in temporal terms: "pasado (consideración), presente (atención), y futuro (intención)" (Han, 2019a, p. 118). Profound boredom is unable to find temporal reference points, which creates its sense of emptiness. This describes a loss of possibilities, the root cause of that profound boredom which stifles them. Behind this lies a loss of narrative, a loss of meaning.

It is crucial to understand how "el aburrimiento domina la brecha cada vez más grande entre el sujeto y el mundo, entre la libertad y la facticidad, entre el actuar y el ser" (Han, 2019a, p. 121). This self-exploitative dominance traps a society anesthetized by productivity and positivity. Finding a way out of this vicious cycle means finding the path back to facticity, to narrative, and to an encounter with the self. It is the path of serenity, of contemplative delay.

The end of profound boredom is only possible "cuando la vía activa, en su crítico final, integre en sí la vida contemplativa y vuelva a ponerse a su servicio" (Han, 2019a, p. 122). Han does not propose the end of the active path in favor of the contemplative one; instead, he suggests that the active path should eventually reclaim its role, where work "no sea un fin en sí mismo, sino un medio. No es digno de un hombre libre" to pursue productivity alone; dignity is rooted in the pursuit of transcendence, of contemplative delay. This pursuit, through "entrega contemplativa a la verdad acerca al hombre a los dioses" (p. 125).

A final question in our analysis of the importance of contemplative delay in the work of Han is the matter of silence. This is a recurring theme in his writings, making it essential to revisit. Our digital culture prevents us from embracing silence; in fact, for Han (2021b) the silence "es una manifestación de la negatividad", something society constantly seeks to escape (p. 99).

The thirst for information and action ultimately leads to an incapacity for contemplating in the silence so essential for true listening. It's unclear whether we avoid silence out of a need to speak or speak to avoid silence, but the result is that people become subjugated to the imperative of communication that centers only on information. This has numerous effects, but one of the most significant is the loss of rest, a hallmark of the concept of Han of the exhausted society. This loss fuels the active life, or vice versa, both of which prevent contemplation. "El reposo pertenece a la esfera de lo santo" (2020, p. 56), whereas work is part of the profane; religion requires reflection and moderation—ultimately, rest—to allow us to contemplate the correct path. However, rest here must not be understood merely as a break from work, but as a unique space for encounter, listening, openness, and contemplation. Otherwise, we profane rest by tying it to work, and in doing so, dissolve its true meaning.

Han goes so far as to cite the Old Testament to reflect on this issue: "Dios bendice y santifica el séptimo día. El descanso sabático otorga la bendición divina a la creación" (2020, p. 53). In this way, he reminds us that Christians should appreciate the message in God's rest on the seventh day (Biblia de Jerusalén, 1998 Gn 2:2). He did not rest due to fatigue, nor is the seventh day an insignificant extra; rather, rest and time for reflection are the culmination of creation, requiring time to reveal its perfection. This is a time that is not empty but does require silence, because "la escucha en silencio une a los hombres y genera una comunicación sin comunicación" (Han, 2020, p. 54). Ultimately, the deepest union occurs when silences are most meaningful. God finds joy in that silence, just as we do, uniting us in this nonverbal communication. Silence allows for full attention to what is happening, it "makes us listen," enabling contemplation. Otherwise, our relentless drive for productivity compels us toward a form of communication focused solely on absorbing information, subjecting us to a "presión que profana la vida".

#### 4. Theological deepening

We must not overlook that, in addition to his Catholic background, Han studied theology at the University of Munich, and it is inevitable to acknowledge that this education has likely influenced his reflections. Moreover, we cannot ignore that his beliefs are increasingly present in his writings. A clear example of this is how his early works contain no specific expressions of his Catholicism, while following his assertion in *Loa de la tierra*, references have repeatedly appeared in interviews and published works.

Starting from this analysis, we can uncover points in common with more recent theology, and delving into them allows us to enrich our understanding of Han's perspective. Along these lines, a careful reading of all the concepts he expresses reveals aspects closely connected to Theology. The first concept related to delay and narrative is that of Salvation History or the Signs of the Times.

According to this concept, “es deber permanente de la Iglesia escrutar a fondo los signos de la época e interpretarlos a la luz del Evangelio” (Concilio Vaticano II, 1965, § 4), so that History is interpreted as a narrative through which there is not only a beginning and an end, but also a path for the pilgrimage of the Church.

The importance of this concept in Theology is essential; even for a novice in the field, reflecting on the role of God in History becomes indispensable. Can there be a God outside of History? Is the Christian God an indifferent God? Han is well-versed in all the reflections on this question, as his studies make it inevitable. This is why his use of the concepts of narrative and delay has a close relationship with Salvation History, teaching us to perceive the interaction between God and History. For Christians, God acts in the world, but His involvement is not invasive, it is inspirational. He does not intrude, because He respects human freedom, the source of human greatness, and inspires as the source of the love that gives rise to humanity. We might say that God inspires processes and dynamics capable of transforming the world and the existing evil within it. How easy it is to see this through an optimistic view of life as a narrative, the optimistic view of suffering as a path to salvation—or, in other words, the cross as a symbol of hope. It is even easy to observe that, for Han, interpreting life as a narrative reveals that there is not only a continuous line of life but also a beginning and an end—and thus, a divine inspiration behind it.

An example is the reference to History in connection with Arendt, through whom he recognizes History as an action with a beginning. He even includes a quote of Arendt, which states that there is no beginning and action more concise and beautiful than in the words with which the Christmas liturgy proclaims, “anuncia la buena nueva nos ha nacido un niño” (Han, 2019c, p. 56).

We find a contrast in the culture of productivity, where Han observes that it “no tiene principio ni fin” (2020, p. 61) and is essentially focused on the exploitation of linear, day-to-day thinking. The narrative view of life, on the other hand, offers the beginning and end that we referenced earlier. At this point, we must return to the concept of a palliative society to understand that this society “se ha quedado definitivamente sin la narración cristiana, que actuaba como un narcótico o como un estimulante divino” (2021a, p. 35), giving people a sense of purpose, or, in other words, a destination to look toward. In starker terms, Han goes so far as to say, “una vida sin muerte ni dolor ya no es una vida humana, sino una vida de muertos vivientes” (p. 90). Accepting death as an endpoint is not only accepting life as a narrative but also embracing the deepest aspects of our being, including our vulnerability in contrast to a deified society that aspires to a limitless life.

Following this line of thought, Han introduces a second aspect: the concept of pilgrimage. This concept is deeply rooted in the Church as a pilgrim entity; it is intrinsically tied to the essence of the church from its theological foundations. We can recognize that “la Iglesia va peregrinando entre las

persecuciones del mundo y los consuelos de Dios anunciando la cruz del Señor hasta que venga" (Concilio Vaticano II, 1964, § 8). This pilgrimage involves all its members as part of the Church, as well as the Church itself as an institution. And, as the quotation reflects, it is a pilgrimage that proclaims hope beyond the cross.

But theology speaks of pilgrimage from the very beginnings of the Bible and from the very essence of Christ and his journey throughout Judea and Jerusalem. The Christian is a pilgrim just as Christ is, and for this reason, Han proposes the richness of pilgrimage cannot be understood without this ontological link to his own faith and the theological studies he has undertaken.

To this, we must add the view of Passion as a driving force rooted in the cross, which would represent a third point of connection with Han. In his work *El buen entretenimiento*, he describes the need for a capitalized *Passion*, linked to the "el buen entretenimiento", describe la necesidad de una Pasión en mayúsculas que va ligada al "rostro demudado del sufrimiento del homo doloris" (2018d, p. 12). It's true that the translator's note in the preface to the second German edition makes it clear that Han is not directly referring to the Passion of Christ, playing on the ambiguity of the term in Spanish. However, it is also true that the sense of Passion used by Han is one of "sentido sacrificial" (2018d, p. 9, note of the translator), which easily allows it to be connected to the Christian roots of the term. If we understand Passion not as an intense feeling but as a sacrificial meaning, it becomes inevitable to see it, at its core, as a positive view of the cross as a symbol of hope and resurrection, not so much for another life, but as a means of deliverance from the evils of this one.

Finally, we have two more aspects to consider, both of particular importance in the theory of Han. First, we should discuss the *via pulchritudinis* (the way of beauty), and then, integral human ecology.

Since the time of St. Thomas Aquinas, the Church has recognized the value of beauty as a path to encountering God, as it "puede abrir el camino a la búsqueda de Dios y disponer el corazón y la mente al encuentro con Cristo" (Consejo Pontificio de la Cultura, 2004, párr. 6-10). In this way, discovering beauty inspires in humankind a sense of its role within creation and a desire to seek the Creator. Moreover, encounters with beauty (both natural and artistic) enable humans to lift their gaze toward what is transcendent, to appreciate humanity's capacity to rise above and to inspire works that invite contemplation.

This contemplation, like beauty, is a fundamental element in the theses of Han, as we saw in the previous point. Beyond helping us transcend reality, we are also referring to a beauty tied to rough edges and imperfections, a concept as essential as learning to reveal and recognize the importance of the sublime as "infinitud" (2016, p. 36).

Han himself cites St. Augustine in recognizing the importance of unveiling and the need to nurture this in relation to God. He states that "según san Agustín,

Dios oscurecía intencionadamente las Sagradas Escrituras con metáforas, con una capa de figuras para convertirlas en objetos de deseo" (2016, p. 48). We can even recognize that only through the filter of the cross can humanity achieve an authentic encounter with Christ. Or, as Han might well argue, it is through the negativity of the wound of Christ that the eternal value of His salvific mystery is revealed. In this way, if humanity rejects the negativity of the wound and of suffering, "eso se puede decir también del amor" (p. 53). Therefore, to reach an authentic encounter with God-Love, only the path of the cross, only the path of beauty unveiled through the cross, allows a person to grow and discover the magnitude of the mystery.

## 5. Integral Human Ecology

But if all these concepts contain enormous richness and potential for this article. Given the topicality of the issue, I have preferred to leave for the end one of the keys to the interpretation of Han. Not only of his theory, but also of his being and feeling. For him, nature and the contemplation of it is in his most recent works one of the most important and enriching transversal keys.

The contributions made in this area are constant; from his work *Loa a la tierra* to the more recent *La tonalidad del pensamiento*, he has gradually revealed his love for plants and his small gardens. For him, life is inconceivable without music and plants, which opens an enriching view of the importance that contemplation holds as a means of transcendence, both for him and for the conclusions in his works. Han even suggests that "es una tarea urgente, una obligación de la humanidad, tratar con cuidado la tierra, pues ella es hermosa, e incluso esplendorosa" (2019e, p. 13). This care goes beyond just ecology that advocates for protecting the natural environment we inhabit. In fact, from a theological perspective, we must acknowledge that the Church increasingly promotes reflection on human existence through an integral ecology. This includes not only a love for nature as God's creation but also a love for humanity and for all that humanizes us. Here, Han's criticism of technological processes, which he frequently addresses as dehumanizing forces, becomes particularly relevant. This is why I have chosen to approach the end of this text from this perspective on Han.

Furthermore, this final point also serves as a critical framework for everything discussed earlier. While there are many similarities and commonalities with theology, at this point the distance is greater than in any other area, and, we can even say that they may be distinct, despite sharing the same roots.

For theology, the ecological vision is inseparable from the integral nature of humanity, as Papa Francisco I (2015) reminds in his *Encíclica Laudato Si* (henceforth LS), where he asserts that "no hay ecología sin una adecuada antropología" (LS, § 118). Furthermore, we must recognize that there is no

adequate anthropology without considering ecology from an integral perspective. Otherwise, we risk making a serious error, as forewarned by an earlier encyclical. As José Sols Lucia notes, “Populorum progressio promueve, sin duda alguna, un dualismo filosófico, esto es, da al ser humano una misión única, que ninguna otra criatura tiene” (Sols Lucia, 2018, p. 273). This can lead to the temptation to approach creation in a way that pits humanity against the rest of creation, placing us in a stance of domination over everything. Therefore, an integral vision of creation offers a more accurate perspective, overcoming philosophical dualism in favor of a creational unity in which God situates humanity.

In Han, the ecological issue is addressed primarily through his reflections on contemplation. In *Buen entretenimiento*, for instance, he considers the concept of luxury in Wagner and its tendency toward the unnatural—specifically, the “logro cultural de abstraer de la flor su fragancia, es decir, hacer abstracción expresamente de lo natural” (2018d, p. 53). Here, Han critiques the falsehood of a life that turns its back on nature and eagerly embraces the artificial with a consumerist zeal. However, beyond this critical moment, it is not easy to find in his extensive work statements that go further than endorsing the positivity of caring for nature. In his more recent *Vida contemplativa*, drawing on Heidegger's reflections, he suggests that “ya no se trata de que la tierra sea un recurso con el que ahora tenemos que manejarnos con más cuidado. Más bien es precioso que interioricemos el significado originario de cuidar” (2023b, p. 54). For Han, this care is directed toward a culture of admiration for natural beauty, toward contemplative delay, and, more specifically, toward an appreciation of inactivity.

However, Han omits an analysis of the impact on human integrity, focusing solely on his critique of the culture of performance and productivity, of digital culture versus the natural world. Essentially, Han is discussing an integral ecology, as outlined in Chapter 4 of *Laudato Si'* (LS, § 137-162), but he overlooks that the term “«medio ambiente» indica particularmente una relación (LS, § 139) that unites both nature and the human society that inhabits it. This relationship is rooted in the pursuit of sustainability for both nature and humanity, which is why the Pope speaks of an ecological vision within a broad framework of integrity that includes humanity.

It is true that his work is extensive and that much of what he presents throughout can be understood as a critical apparatus from which Han denounces the ills of a society that turns its back on both nature and humanity. Along these lines, Pope Francis I states, “si tenemos en cuenta la complejidad de la crisis ecológica y sus múltiples causas, deberíamos reconocer que las soluciones no pueden llegar desde un único modo de interpretar y transformar la realidad” (LS, § 63). And it is here that Han, once again—as in so many other moments in his work—falls short of offering solutions beyond a call to admire and contemplate nature.

To talk about integral human ecology, in theological terms, is to recognize what St. John Paul II already addressed in his 1992 *Encyclical Centesimus Annus*, specifically in paragraph 37, the concerning "cuestión ecológica" whose root lies in an "un error antropológico" by which humanity sees itself as master of all, thereby allowing itself to act as it pleases.

Which in Han's words, this is expressed as, "Dios bendice y santifica el séptimo día. El descanso sabático otorga la bendición divina a la creación. Pero no es una mera inactividad, más bien constituye una parte esencial de la creación" (2020, p. 53). When Pope Benedict speaks of human ecology as the fulfillment of "verdadera libertad humana" (Benedicto XVI, 2011), he envisions a model of coexistence in which humanity can enjoy all of creation on that seventh day. He describes a society capable of recognizing both what it means to be human and what it does not, acknowledging that "man has not created himself" and thus the role of God. Han echoes this idea when he discusses creation, emphasizing that the seventh day is as important as all the preceding days. It is not a day of action, but a day of "repose" (2020, p. 56) in which God contemplates all that He has created, taking time each day to recognize it as good.

This critique of aspects missing from the theory of Han on ecology is inevitably tied to his vision of suffering, narrative, beauty, and delay. Han analyzes each of these issues with insight, shedding light on the root causes of various problems by directing attention to their foundational issues. However, when it comes to ecology, he also attempts to offer a vision of a solution, which reveals the limitations of his perspective. We share the urgency and importance of the ecological question; both theology and Han recognize that its root lies in an anthropological view centered on productivity and digital culture. Yet Han's response seems confined to contemplation, without addressing the many other aspects affected by ecological issues. These include the drama of migration, the exponential growth of cities, and the impact on indigenous communities. Certainly, we can incorporate elements of Han's work into this broader critique, such as his exploration of transhumanism and the consequences of the digital swarm, as well as issues of exploitation and productivity that drive deforestation and large-scale human displacement. Even political questions find a place here when we consider the consequences of policies that prioritize economic profit over the needs of the marginalized.

If we can assert that the concept of integral human ecology "es el fruto maduro del magisterio ordinario de la Iglesia" (Tejerina Arias, 2018, p. 44), thus providing a significant contribution to the framework for reflecting on human relationships and the relationship of humanity with nature, we must also recognize that in Han's work, this remains an area yet to be deeply explored and developed. His analysis would benefit from broader integration with the many facets of modern human life.



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