

BERNHARD KÖRNER, *Orte des Glaubens – Loci theologici. Studien zur theologischen Erkenntnislehre* (Würzburg: Echter Verlag GmbH, 2014), pp. 265.  
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Watching current attitudes to faith, we may notice great pluralism. Among Catholics alone, there is a wide diversity of approaches. For instance, in the traditionally Catholic circles, we run up against old routine when the Creed is often uttered in an emotionless manner. Few people ask about the beginning of their faith. At the same time, there are environments where the confession of faith costs people their lives. Regardless of the circumstance, however, every Christian is called to strengthen the foundations of his faith and to deepen its understanding so that he may account for the hope he has inside [cf. 1 Pet 3:15]. Learning to form theological arguments is required here. A believer undertaking to do so moves slowly from the personal experience to certain epistemology of faith. During his search, he thus arrives at places which are fundamental to Christian faith and rational reflection on it. These places, called *loci theologici*, may become sources of believers' theological argumentation, because they are regarded as spaces of retaining and transferring faith.

In the context of the above, a question arises as to the relation between the places of personal and subjective experiences of God or faith, and the places that transfer well-founded and preserved objective Christian experience. This issue was the point of departure in a book by Bernhard Körner entitled *Orte des Glaubens – Loci theologici. Studien zur theologischen Erkenntnislehre*, published in Germany in 2014.

Bernhard Körner is an Austrian priest and theologian. He was born on 6 July 1949 in Klagenfurt in the south of Austria. In 1969-1975 he studied theology and English at the University of Graz. After ordination in 1976, he worked in Graz as a pastor and teacher of Akademischen Gymnasium. In 1979 he finished his PhD in theology. In 1991 he got his post-doctoral degree at the Eberhard Karls University in Tübingen. Since 1993 he has been full professor at the University of Graz. Currently he is head of the Institute of Dogmatics. Moreover, he is a consultant of the Congregation for Catholic Education, a correspondent of the Pontifical Academy of Theology, head of the Ecumenical Commission of the Graz-Seckau Diocese, as well as member of the Cathedral chapter in Graz. He was awarded order *pro Merito Melitensi*.

The main research fields that Bernhard Körner deals with are theological epistemology, basic questions of theology and the theology of Hans Urs von Balthasar. Thus far the works of the Austrian theologian has amounted to 13 single-authored publications: *Melchior Cano. De locis theologiacis* (1994), *Gottes Gegenwart* (2005), *Glaubenleben – Theologie studieren* (2008), *Die Bibel als Wort Gottes auslegen* (2011), *Gute Gründe für ein Leben in der Kirche* (2012), etc., 8 multi-authored ones: *Bischofsbestellung – Mitwirkung der Ortskirche? Mit einer kommentierten Bibliographie zum Thema. "Demokratie in der Kirche" von P. Inhoffen und M. Hölzl* (2000), *Über die Möglichkeit des Glaubens heute – vierzig Jahre nach Karl Rahner* (2007), *Zerbrechlich und kraftvoll. Christliche Existenz 50 Jahre nach dem zweiten Vatikanum* (2014), as well dozens of articles and lectures. Moreover, he has penned a lot of popular articles and hosted live open lectures, including live broadcasts.

The reviewed book is the fruit of many years of research carried out in the realm of theological epistemology. It is pervaded by the topics the author has tackled in other publications. Körner has written about Melchior Cano and his system of *loci theologici* on several other occasions. His academic reflection has dealt with the issue of faith as well. Both these aspects have met in the study under analysis.

The book consists of an introduction, five chapters and a conclusion. In the Introduction (p. 11-20), whose title "*Gott einen Ort sichern*" was borrowed, the author poses a provocative

question: Does God need a believer to give him room in his life, since He is always omnipresent? Answering it, he argues that the suggestion that the question contains results from the nature of faith, which consists in the remembering that God entered the historical reality of man. God, who has come to us by means of His life and activity, and the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, let Himself be limited by the frames of space and time. Therefore, as Körner notes, Christianity is a community of faith in God, who let Himself be known in a particular human reality. Events, texts and symbols that have been handed down become place of memory (*Gedächtnisorte*). As such they are more than mere sources of knowledge (*Quellen des Wissens*) – for they form what constitutes religion. At the threshold of modern times they were named *loci theologici*.

Chapter 1 (p. 21-62), entitled “Christian Faith and the Meaning of Locality” is in a way the *status quaestionis* of the book. Körner discusses therein the basic theological and culturological research that is crucial to the issues tackled in the subsequent chapters. The point of departure is the conviction that the entire world is full of holy places (*heilige Orte*), which sustain the religious memory and make the experience possible. The author recalls the religious experience of the people of Israel, to whom God made Himself known by particular events. The peak moment of God’s epiphanies was the coming of Jesus Christ. In this sense, particular circumstances of time and space, in which man lives and God makes Himself known, become places of faith (*Orte des Galubens*). According to Körner, the place (*der Orte*) is to be understood as a place in space (*Stelle in einem Raum*). These are spaces of various kinds: literary, musical, historical and biographical, spiritual, religious and theological. They help us understand Christian faith, though not completely. These spaces contain religious places (*religiöse Orte*), such as shrines and cathedrals, saints, liturgical ceremonies and statements of the Magisterium. Körner points out that the interrelations between particular places, which allow for their identification, may be given in their original form (*ursprünglich*) – as determining – or as an effect of a reflection (*durch Reflexion*) – as non-determining. He gives an example of the Eucharist as a place originally connected to the death of Jesus in its essence. In the case of the Eucharist it is a constitutive reality. A culture expert may unveil that Eucharist is linked to the rituals of other religions. Even though his research is valuable, it does not define the essence of the Eucharist.

The reflections lead the author to claim that people always live and act in certain places, and their thinking and activity is influenced by them. As for the cognition itself, the author differentiates between places that give knowledge themselves and places which provide knowledge as result of creating the context.

Chapter 2 (p. 63-91), titled “Various Places of the Knowledge of Faith,” presents a rich panorama of faith sources and their general meaning, especially in terms of the knowledge of faith and theological epistemology, and as such is full of valuable content. Bernhard Körner indicates that the places of the experience of faith and knowledge of faith, though distinct, are inseparable. There are a number of places that in a way speak of God, or make us experience God, both external and internal to the Christian Tradition and the Church. The author poses a question of how to recognise credible places, where faith may not only be experienced, but also preserved and truly found. This is the problem that lies at the foundation of Melchior Cano’s teaching about *loci theologici*. Their role is clearly different from the function of the places of faith experience. Körner goes on to recall the thought of a Lutheran theologian and philosopher of religion, C. H. Ratschow. He wrote that faith had its own scheme of understanding. The mind is a place, in which faith seeks the best understanding of itself and behaviour in the face of reservations. Believers’ task is always to comprehend what they profess. At the same time, they have to move within the place of the reason (*Ort der Vernunft*), where faith should always be retained as an option. Körner carries on reflecting upon the understanding of faith, remarking that it is also influenced by the inculturation of faith. In the process, faith faces practical challenges, which may in turn deepen its understanding; just as practising music ensures an understanding insight in it, so too faith that

is experienced brings about its deeper understanding.

Still in Chapter 2, Bernhard Körner asks about what religious experience is (*religiöse Erfahrung*). What springs to mind is that it is the experience of God (*die Gotteserfahrung*), yet it is hard to express, identify and objectify. Thus, the author suggests that we should rather talk about the experience of faith (*die Glaubenserfahrung*), which may signify any kind of experience, insofar as its importance to faith can be comprehended and expressed. Whereas the experience itself may be overwhelming and linguistically inexpressible, the knowledge gained in experience surpasses it as utterable. The methodological reflection, on the other hand, shows us that knowledge is of various degrees of significance, depending on the possibility of its acquisition and validation. As for reading out the declarations of faith and theological arguments, Körner writes that we need to take into consideration their multifaceted context. Each utterance (place) comes with a certain context and it influences this particular context, so this is where its meaning is to be sought. The place is its own first context.

Chapter 3 (p. 93-127), relevantly titled “When Places Change to Arguments,” presents an exposition of the doctrine of *loci theologici*. Körner begins by discussing the philosophical preparation of the category *loci*, commenting on the thought of Aristotle, Cicero, Boethius, Thomas Aquinas, Peter of Spain and Rodolphus Agricola. Further on into the chapter, the author focuses on the analysis of the teaching of Melchior Cano. He demonstrates that the thought based on his predecessors’ ideas matured gradually, turning into the foundation for the reflection on *loci theologici* in the centuries to come. What seems interesting is the section dedicated to the thought of Thomas Aquinas in Cano’s theory. A profound analysis of Cano’s dialectics shows that inspired as he was by Thomas, he understood the same notions differently. Körner gives the example of a conceptual pair. While Thomas sees an *inventio* (invention) as an internal argumentation of trying, Cano claims that it comes down to distilling the arguments based on the cognition of an instance or its utterance. Similarly, by an *iudicium* (opinion, proclamation, judgement) Thomas means an internal verification of new statements by showing that they follow from other scientifically-tested utterances. In Cano’s view, the notion defines a formal acknowledgement of an utterance by indicating that it is authenticated by a Church instance or authority. This juxtaposition proves different emphasis in Cano’s dialectics. The nature of the notion *auctoritas* in Cano does not primarily pertain to utterances, but to instances and its authority.

Bernhard Körner, continuing the reflection, states that at the end of neo-scholastic theology, the doctrine of *loci theologici* was forgotten. However, it has been flourishing again since the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Körner discerns its presence in the 20<sup>th</sup>-century works on methodological foundations of theology. He claims that the discussion about *loci theologici* accompanied the proceedings of the Second Vatican Council, staying in the background. The author also gives a current interpretation of the work by Melchior Cano, paying special attention to the thought of M. Secler, E. Klinger and H. J. Sander. New ways of reading Cano’s doctrine show that it is still valid. However, it must be properly understood. Among the authors, who have been conducting research on Cano’s work, Körner mentions himself as well.

Chapter 3 ends with a statement that the Cano’s theory of *loci theologici* is not centred on topics, on the study of itself, but on the study of argumentation. In this context Cano, writing about the authority of Scripture, defines it as the supreme authority not only to appreciate its importance, but also to stress that the authority of Scripture should be accepted as a relevant viewpoint (*relevante Gesichtspunkt*) in theological argumentation.

Chapter 4 (p. 129-178) aims to answer the question of the meaning of faith sources, or *loci theologici* in the future of theological epistemology. Chapter’s title “The Issue of Historicity” marks its basic assumption: what is “ahead” can only be constructed keeping in mind what is “behind.” Körner thus encourages us to have the sign of history during our journey toward the future. It comprises all that is valuable in the previous thought: the systematisation of the authori-

ty of *loci theologici*, or utterances and instances, as well as appreciation of the mind, science and history as theological places.

In this way, the author moves on to characterise the contemporary doctrine of *loci theologici*, pointing to its four fundamental dimensions: topics, pragmatics, criteriology (criticism of knowledge) and hermeneutics. Commenting on the first one, the author refers to Cano, who deemed the number of the *loci* he distinguished secondary and prone to change. According to Körner, when we expend the group of faith places, we have to bear in mind not only, as Melchior Cano did, places of true witness of faith, but also places of experience and understanding of faith. The author adds that while making references to various places, we are not only interested in ensuring the greatest safety possible of the binding elements of faith, but also in presenting their new aspects and contemporary interpretations. Recalling the last of the mentioned dimension, Körner asserts that the understanding of faith, acquired in places of faith witness, must be interpreted in light of the present situation and the so-called signs of the times. Furthermore, each experience or confession should be understood in the context of the entirety of the elements of faith as proceeding from them. Finally, the hermeneutics of places of faith requires that we read them in the light of the contemporary lifestyle and education that condition its understanding and expression.

Körner mentions a future tip that stems from these points: we are in need of expanding and diversifying the group of places of faith and faith witness. The chapter ends with a formulation of four steps that help us gain knowledge from the faith places. The first consists in examination of these places; the second one – in comparing them and describing according to mutual references; the third steps assumes reflecting on them in order to interpret and understand the contents of cognition (meaning of the place); and the fourth one entails defining the importance of the utterance of each place.

The closing Chapter 5 (p. 179-248), entitled “Interaction of Faith Places,” tackles the question of mutual references of faith places, indicating difficulties, dangers, but, above all, chances of development. Körner mentions respectively: the elements of the Tradition as the level of cooperation of various places; the ecclesiology of the Church as the *communio* which serves as the footing of the discussion about the community seen as the subject of faith transfer; the problem of understanding the authority and determining the value of an utterance; the issue of putting the content of faith into practice; and finally the question of relativism in faith and theology as the result of diversity in cognition and expression.

It worth recalling the author’s reflection concerning the last but one of the mentioned problems. It is, as it were, an attempt to walk the way of the previous reflection backwards. Körner, quoting renowned theologians, talks about the “other places” (*fremde Orte*), understood not only as Cano’s *loci alieni*, but much more broadly: as new places that crop up in the contemporary world and pose a challenge for faith, as such being the places of theology (*Orte der Theologie*). The author also summarises the thought of the constitution *Gaudium et spes* about the necessity for pastoral care understood as the Church’s orientation to the world. As Körner writes, the Council assumes that the Church does not exist beyond the world, but only within it. Society, with all its aspects, is in a broad sense the place of faith and theology. Pastoral work of the Church is always marked with the tension between the doctrine and its transfer and practice, which is specifically felt during the process of inculturation of faith. In this sense, pastoral care may be seen as an art of inculturation on a smaller scale. The clash between faith and a particular human and social reality is, however, a two-way process. It is already in the light of the given circumstances that we see what is still little known in faith or its formulae.

In the Conclusion (p. 249-254), conspicuously titled “To a Humble and Non-Egocentric Theology,” Bernhard Körner relies on the thought of Hans Urs von Balthasar, making use of the commentary by Alois Haas. Körner recalls Balthasar’s claim that God’s coming into time and space is a thought-provoking challenge that theology faces. Obviously, the author notes that the

Swiss theologian is aware of the finiteness of human thinking and cognition. Subsequently, Körner pays attention to Balthasar's method, whereby his theological reflection sets great store by the cultural context. The decisive step consists in the fact that he reads the cultural places of memory in light of the event of the Revelation, that is, above all, the event of Jesus Christ, His life, words, His death and Resurrection. Therefore, the Austrian, reiterating what the Swiss said, claims that we, first and foremost, must show Christ's face in culture and thought.

Let a brief summary of the contents of the reviewed book end here. It tackles a wide variety of ideas and issues connected with the experience and knowledge of faith, as well as epistemology and theological topics, which we cannot present in an exhaustive way here. If anyone is interested in a fuller picture of the contents of Bernhard Körner's work, we recommend the source text itself.

We must admit that both the contents of the study and its line of reasoning are interesting and quite original. Elucidating the relationship and mutual references of three kinds of places: of experience of faith, of witness of faith and of understanding and proving the faith, the author relies not only on a theory of theological cognition, but also on the study of culture, history and general methodology of sciences. The publication is valuable also due to the fact that in the Polish literature, with a few exceptions (Cz. Bartnik, J. Szymik), the subject of places (sources) of faith as the sources of theological argumentation is generally non-existent. In the first two chapters, the author writes repeatedly about the experience of faith (understood as a synonym of the experience of God), claiming that it is a means of discovering the real places of faith. Therefore, Körner's work may be of great value to those who are keen on the contemporary discussion about ability to experience God.

The novelty of the book lies in the approach to the subject of the places of faith and theological places in a broad context of the methodology of theology, heeding a number of accompanying questions. However, the issue that the book might have been enhanced by is the impact of the issues undertaken on particular theological disciplines.

The structure of the book is clear and the language is plain, which facilitates mediation of the passages we are reading. Its cover is very simple as well. A very detailed table of contents, which follows the title page, may help us to get to know, at least cursorily, the subjects tackled in the study. The book comprises a contemporary bibliography, of mainly German origin.

The reviewed book is not a textbook. Notwithstanding, it may prove appropriate for theology students who wish to improve their methodological skills on their own and for anyone who wants to deepen their knowledge of the problem of faith and theology sources.

*Maria Słocińska*

*PhD student of the Institute of Dogmatic Theology at KUL*

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