This article is a brief commentary on some theological principles which one may point out in the renowned fairy tale of Oscar Wilde The Happy Prince. I am only talking about a possibility of pointing out these principles or theological aspects of the tale, for one could doubt the existence of a theological background to the ideas that this excellent fictional work seems to suggest. This brings us to the complex issue of how one should interpret literature. I would sum up my personal opinion on the matter in the following sentences: having great respect for the writer’s background (social, educational, philosophical, theological) and his/her intentions—this is made easier if one can have any form of access to them—and, at the same time, developing the potentiality of a creative interpretive approach to reveal things unseen or untold. The latter is based on the conviction that literature and art in general is no doubt a communal good; the outcome of sharing a common cultural-literary tradition, whose existence can only be attributed to the taking part in human relationships, which foster creativity.¹


² This is not, certainly, how everyone (artists and art critics) perceive art. We could call it the traditional way of understanding art and artistic creativity, which, I think, remains timeless, for it describes the unpreventable limitations and conditions of every human action. In the works of Wendell Berry, the renowned poet, novelist and essayist of Kentucky, one could find a representative account of what we are talking about. Here is a comprehensive statement on the matter: “Thus the art, so private in execution, is also communal and filial. It can only exist as a common ground between the poet and other poets and other people, living and dead. Any poem...
Therefore, an artist’s work cannot be seen as the result of an individual inspiration, but of their ability to mark important moments and experiences of a community. In return, the community of readers or lovers of art acknowledges the value of an artistic creation as part of the commonality of its life, responding to its inner needs, quests and aspirations. On the other hand, a writer or any other artist, should be open and receptive to the possibilities presented by such an interpretive approach, showing a kind of humility towards the probable influences and consequences of their participation in community life, which could be both conscious or unconscious and unforeseen. This may be different in case that an artist wishes to arbitrarily escape any given condition and place their artistic work in the sphere of a fantastical world, only loosely or randomly connected to reality.

Oscar Wilde does not seem to embrace that kind of art, at least in the story that I am about to comment on. For Wilde’s fictional “Prince” and the “little Swallow”, the two protagonists of this melARRANT the name is the product of convocation. It exists, literally, by recalling past voices into presence [...]”. Wendell Berry, “The responsibility of a poet”, in What are we people for? New York: North Point Press, 1990, 89; see also Life is a miracle. An essay against modern superstition, Washington, D.C.: Counterpoint, 2001, 71-72, 88-89, 113.

3 See, e.g., Paul Martin, “Poetry as theology: an orthodox perspective”, The Greek Orthodox Theological Review (2007), 177-178, where Martin describes the meaning of art as “relational”, i.e. completed only when it finds a participant who is intimately involved. This approach is already theologically remarkable, as it points out the communal character of criticism, and becomes even more meaningful, when it is linked to the self-emptying, the kenosis of the divine Logos; the creation and reception of a work of art requires a self offering by both the maker and the receiver. It is through this that they may be recreated. See Martin, “Poetry as theology: an orthodox perspective”, 182. According to Anna Orchanen, Oscar Wilde seems to have had a similar point of view on the matter: “[...] For Wilde, creation and reception of art are not merely about expressing and receiving messages; rather, art and art criticism are viewed as continuous conversation. The Wildean aesthetic experience is thus multi-dimensional: it can transform the one who experiences but also make work of art fluctuate in response to those with whom it interacts”. Anna Orchanen, “Beauty as beastly: Aesthetic-Ethical Duality in Oscar Wilde’s ‘The Star-Child’”, Oscholars (2009); at http://www.oscholars.com/TO/Specials/Tales/Star_Orhanen.htm (27.3.2013).
ancholic yet powerful tale, around which a meaningful plot is structured, seem to be the means by which the writer critically views social reality. This, no doubt, presupposes his conscious participation in society which causes the need to express opinions and concerns, as well as to ask questions of great significance. This could be more accurately described as an—expressed—sense of tragic sensibility, which pervades the artist’s heart and it is exactly because of this that one may see Christian Theology—Christology in particular—emerging from *The Happy Prince*.

4 I think that Oscar Wilde’s stance towards society issues and problems, the most serious of which is human pain and suffering, as expressed in his tales, is a great manifestation of this “tragic sensibility”, a notion that I first encountered in an article by Kathryn Reklis. This quality, as defined by Reklis, could trace the attitude or spirit, underpinning the Wildean craft and, by extension, the theological foundation of stories such as the *Happy Prince*. Reklis notes: “[...] More than the overflow of spontaneous emotion, a ‘sensibility’ might be imagined as a well-worn groove through which emotions flow. Not merely the heightened capacity to feel in general, a ‘sensibility’ is more like a disposition, a formed capacity to feel or respond in particular. The tragic sensibility in Christianity, then, might be defined as formed emotional responsiveness toward the possibility of tragedy, a possibility made available through human freedom realized in the concrete particulars of historical existence. A tragic sensibility, as an inner disposition, can exist within a larger narrative that cannot properly be considered a tragedy. By a tragic ‘sense’ to Christianity, I mean the discernment or recognition within Christianity’s self-understanding of the tragic sensibility’s existence”. Kathryn Reklis, “A sense of the tragic in a Christian theology of freedom”, *Theological Studies* 70 (2009) 42.

5 Heather Kirkpatrick sets the context of Wilde’s literary effort, by portraying the Christian environment of the writer’s era and the Christological background of his theological discourse as it is depicted mainly in the *Stories*, thus offering a wide range of interpretive possibilities, which can surpass the confines of his time: “However, contrary to popular belief, his fairy tales demonstrate that Wilde neither despised the literary tradition of England nor Christian theology. Wilde sought to open the eyes of his culture to its own idiosyncrasies and hypocrisies through a medium that was beloved and understood: the fairy tale. Wilde’s fascination with the figure of Christ, also a representation of rebellion against the current religious climate, provided the framework for the theology espoused in his essays, poems, and fairy tales. Just as the physical life and death of Christ provide the means through which Christians believe salvation comes, Wilde sought to show the
Thus, in the pages that follow I will primarily examine the notions of inhabitation and domesticity, the latter enriching the former, for it could more adequately emphasize someone’s deliberate or conscious dwelling in a specific place, which entails a willingness to accept the consequences of this choice and a commitment to the unpreventable responsibilities.\(^6\) I perceive these notions in *The Happy Prince* as prerequisites to the Christological implications of its plot. Consequently, I will be viewing inhabitation and domesticity from a theological point of view and, predominantly, from the perspective of Christ’s life and work—the activity of Christ on Earth. This will lead to a brief discussion of the possibility of cultivating a culture based on the Incarnation of the Logos, i.e. the content of this great mystery and dogma of the Church, as it is preserved by the Bible and unfolded in the Christian literary tradition, as well as the works of modern theology.\(^7\) In my opinion, this endeavor can be empowered to a considerable degree, by literary works like Wilde’s *Prince*, for this story may manifest a twofold elaboration and utterance of the Incarnation: it could inspire an artist and offer a pattern for the establishment of relationship between aesthetics and a fuller understanding of grace. The physical world contains the necessary elements for the spiritual achievement of love and salvation in Oscar Wilde’s tales. His theological message does not pervert Christianity but, counter to the Victorian emphasis on traditional morality, relies on the idea of Christ’s material body as integral to the all-important concepts of salvation and grace. Heather Kirkpatrick, “The Word made flesh: Christ and the Artist in Oscar Wilde’s Fairy Tales”, *Oscholars* (2009); at http://www.oscholars.com/TO/Specials/Tales/Christ_Kirkpatrick.htm (31.3.2012).

\(^6\) I am much indebted to Wendell Berry’s works regarding the significance of domesticity and the need to foster an anti-mobile mentality in the modern world. Therefore, quoting from his works and referring to them has been necessary and inevitable.

\(^7\) As far as I am concerned, the first one to suggest this theological and, at the same time, cultural possibility was Chrysostomos Stamoulis, Professor of Dogmatic and Symbolic Theology and Christian Aesthetics at the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki in his work *Eros and Death. An attempt at a culture of Incarnation*, Athens: Akritas, 2009 (in Greek). I will refer to pages of this work, which give the concrete characteristics of an incarnational culture at a later stage.

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a better, more humane society, receptive of the Spirit’s mysterious power which may sustain and transform the whole of life.

I will now proceed to the main part of my article and argue that domesticity, the devotion to the place in which someone’s life is rooted, is uniquely depicted through the figure of the “Reed”. Wilde cleverly presents the Reed as naturally rooted in its own place while, at the same time, offers it the chance to follow the Swallow—which the Reed rejects—as if to imply that the chance of abandoning one’s habitation is always available, although the strong bonds with the local earth are impossible to severe. However, this is explicitly stated through the “Swallow’s” attitude, which gradually reveals the free giving of one’s own existence to the place and the person they love. The “Swallow” stays in place, the “Prince’s” place, because it falls deeply in love with him. Wilde shows that a place and a person become identical when someone is truly driven by love, therefore staying is the only option that might sustain two indistinguishable qualities: being in place and in love.

The loving bond between the “Swallow” and the “Prince” gives an even deeper meaning to the conscious choice of staying in a particular place: even death is preferable to the separation from the beloved; although the city—the “Prince’s” fatal place—eventually appears as the desolate realm of the previously praised and enviable young man, for death is about to foreshadow everything, that very desolate and loveless place discloses the

8 See Wilde, “The Happy Prince”, The Happy Prince and other stories, 10, 11.
10 See e.g., Wendell Berry, Hannah Coulter, s. l.: Shoemaker & Hoard, 2004, 67, 68, 113. Throughout this outstanding novel Hannah, an old widow, praises the value of these connections. Place, husband and wife become identical, through a mutual loving effort, while sensing the sustaining “greater love” of God (68) is made possible because of the interrelation between earthly and heavenly love. See also, Wendell Berry, s. l.: “Renewing husbandry”, The way of ignorance and other essays, Shoemaker & Hoard, 2005, 96, 97.
grandeur of love: it leads to a mutual death, but—through or because of that—seems to overcome the power of it, since death cannot reduce or prevent love. The “Prince” and the “Swallow” die together and even though this will remain an incomprehensible fact for the other inhabitants of the city, these two lovers will be rewarded with an everlasting acknowledgment. This is clearly stated in the last lines of the tale, where God Himself calls the “broken lead heart” of the “Prince” and the “dead swallow” the “most precious things in the city”, and thereat, offers them a special place in His eternal Paradise.

As I have noted, I perceive inhabitation and domesticity in the Happy Prince as prerequisites to the theological dimensions of the story, which are, in fact, notoriously Christological. The following

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12 See Wilde, “The Happy Prince”, The Happy Prince and other stories, 22. This is not what we could call a “happy ending”. We ought not to forget that this last scene takes place in a “no place” or an obscure “no time”; in the non-earthly realm, as God and His Angels hold the last conversation of the tale. The vindication of the Prince’s and the Swallow’s loving life and actions is hidden from the eyes of the earthly inhabitants, therefore the official ending is sad and—maybe—disappointing. The abandoned and despised protagonists benefit the city’s inhabitants, but the latter remain ignorant and ungrateful until the end. Wilde chooses not to follow the traditional path of fairytale endings, emphasizing a bitter realism instead of offering a “happily ever after” closure. The ending of the “Star-Child” is similar, since the central character who had been transformed into a virtuous figure through his suffering, which included the loss of beauty and its regaining (Wilde, “The Star-Child”, The Happy Prince and other stories, 187-204), becomes a benevolent king, “Yet ruled he not long, so great his suffering, and so bitter the fire of his testing, for after the space of three years he died. And he who came after him ruled evilly”. Wilde, “The Star-Child”, The Happy Prince and other stories, 204). Which might be the message of this literary choice, which could potentially have moral and theological implications? I am not aware of the writer’s real intention but, it could certainly be argued, that literature—and fairytales—if they are to contribute to the cultivation of social and ethical consciousness, ought not to be always pleasing and cheerful. On the contrary, they will have to open the eyes of the readers to the malice and disorder of the world while, at the same time, suggest the means for transcending them. The same goes for theology.
entry from the *Journals of Father Alexander Schmemann*, the great Russian Theologian of America, allows us to ponder over the significance and value of conscious inhabitation/domesticity; one which embraces the joys of everyday life, transforming them into a thoughtful consideration of Christ’s advent.\(^\text{13}\) Therefore, Schmemann’s words can be a link between the things I have pointed out so far in terms of how Wilde seems to observe inhabitation or domesticity and the Christological pattern, which is likely to underpin his domestic approach. Schmemann noted:

“I love my home, and to leave home and be away overnight is always like dying—returning seems so very far away! I am always full of joy when I think about home. All homes, with lit windows behind which people live, give me infinite pleasure. I would love to enter each one of them, to feel its uniqueness, the quality of its warmth. Each time I see a man or a woman walking with shopping bags, that is, going home, I think about them: they are going home, to real life, and I feel good, and they become somehow close and dear. I am always intrigued: What do people do when they do not ‘do’ anything, when they just live? That’s when their life becomes important, when their fate is determined. Simple bourgeois happiness is often despised by activists of all sorts who quite often do not realize the depth of life itself; who think that life is an accumulation of activities. God gives us His Life, not ideas, doctrines, rules. At home, when all is done, life itself begins. Christ was homeless not because He despised simple happiness—He did have a childhood, family, home—but because He was at home everywhere in the world, which His Father created as the ‘home’ of man. ‘Peace be with this house’. We have our home and God’s home, the Church, and the deepest experience of the Church is that

\(^{13}\) For an introduction to a theology of inhabitation as it may emerge from our reconsideration of both the aesthetic and the ethical dimensions of dwelling, see Sigurd Bergmann, “Space and Spirit: Towards a Theology of Inhabitation”, Sigurd Bergmann, (ed.). *Architecture, Aesth/Ethics and Religion*, Frankfurt am Main: IKO-Verlag für interkulturelle Kommunikation, 2005, 45-103.
of home. Always the same and, above anything else, life itself—the Liturgy, evening, morning, a feast—and not an activity”.

Schmemann beautifully describes “simple happiness” as contingent upon the very experience of living in a particular place; the familiarity with a homely environment, which includes the most major—spiritual and material—gifts of livelihood. For the theologian of the Russian diaspora, these joys are the outcome of a domestic way of life, not the application of predetermined rules and this leads him to Christ’s exemplary life, the Christological pattern, the Incarnation. The way he sees domesticity is thus Christ-centered and this puts forward a powerful theological understanding of it, which is, by extension, an ecclesiological one: Christ did not reject domesticity—His life and work being “grounded”, i.e. earthly and tangible, not ethereal or otherworldly—for he had a family, a home, a homeland, but the fact that he is described as homeless in the Bible confers Incarnation a wider, ecumenical meaning. This, according to Schmemann, is that Christ felt “at home everywhere in the world”, because the whole Earth is His Father’s creation bestowed to humans. The theologian (this is implied in the last lines of the above quotation but pervades the whole of it), teaches us, that we ought to experience this same sense of belonging to the world while being in place and at home. This can be made possible by actively belonging to the Church and taking part in the Eucharistic life of it.

One could naturally ask: this is fine and interesting, but does it actually relate to the story of the *Happy Prince*? Well, this is, of course, a good question and everyone is allowed to have a different—maybe a more “secular”—approach to the tale, although, personally, I have many reasons to believe that the story’s writer would be comfortable enough with a Christological one. Hence, I will

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15 See Matthew 8:20: “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head”.

16 Wilde’s own words are the most powerful evidence validating this interpretive possibility, since they clearly confess a sincere literary ambition,
put forward my own interpretation of the vividly described encounter of the “Swallow” with the “Prince”, which probably encapsulates Wilde’s domestic and Christological awareness. Schmemman’s comments on domesticity will be used as an outline for the broadening of my exegesis, so as to extend into the ecclesiological dynamics of the tale.

I will argue that the story is structured in a way which points towards the figure of Christ, His redeeming activity in the world and, simultaneously, the core dogma of the Church, the Incarnation. Let me exemplify my point by maintaining, first of all, that the Wildean “Prince” is Christ-like. This is not to imply that the writer intended to create a fictional figure of Christ, that is, a disguised God-man, but that the “Happy Prince”, this melancholic and dramatic protagonist—in many ways—reminds one of Christ. In other words, the “Prince”, throughout the story, appears as analogous to Christ, the Incarnated Logos. But this refers to the

which is deeply theological: “[…] Shall I tell you what is my greatest ambition—more even than an admission—the dream of my life? Not to be remembered hereafter as an artist, poet, thinker, or playwright, but as a man who reclothed the sublimest conception which the world has ever known—the salvation of Humanity, the Sacrifice of Himself upon the Cross by Christ—with new and burning words, with new and illuminating symbols, with new and divine vision, free from the accretions of cant which the centuries have gathered around it. I should thereby be giving the world back again the greatest gift ever given to mankind since Christ Himself gave it, peerless and pure two thousand years ago—the pure gift of Christianity as taught by Christ”. Peter Raby, ed., The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, ²1998, 100-101.

17 We could only speak about an analogy between this fictional Prince and Christ for a number of reasons, the most important of which is that this fictional hero—a non-heroic “hero”—has gradually became virtuous, conscious of the malice in the world, compassionate and merciful. This was achieved through the fact that after he had died, completely ignorant of suffering and the experience of pain throughout his life, he was set above the city (see Wilde, “The Happy Prince”, The Happy Prince and other stories, 12) and thus given the chance to experience an ethical development which he failed to achieve while being alive. This, of course, reminds of Christ’s words declaring that real life can be found only when one loses their life (see e.g., Mark 8:35) and testifies to Wilde’s ability to ingeniously elaborate the Bible’s teachings. However, from the point of view of dogmatic theology,
content or meaning of the story, while my initial argument was about its structure—that the story is structured in a Christ-like-Incarnational way. Further explanation is needed, thereat I will make the following remark, underlying Wilde’s high level of artistry: as we watch the unmoving, “rooted” (similar to the rooted “Reed”) statue of the Happy Prince, being fatefully grounded, but having the ability to overlook the whole city with its hardships and flaws; the city’s different inhabitants gossiping about him, expressing a variety of opinions on his appearance and meaning, as well as the “Swallow” coming towards and moving away from him time and again, in order to fulfill his loving wishes, we are reminded of some aspects of Christ’s presence in the world. This, this concept of ethical progress or development can only be attributed to human beings, since the Logos of God was from the very first moment a perfect, holy human and the perfect, wholly divine Son of God. To accept any sort of progress in Christ is to diminish the perfectness of His divine and human natures. See John of Damascus, Exact exposition of the Orthodox Faith, PG 94, 984D-1012C, 1033A-1077A. However, I would like to stress that Wilde, like any other author, is primarily an artist not a theologian. Theological accuracy is not something we should always ask for in works of literature. As Paul Martin puts it, “The purpose of mythology and poetry alike is to reflect in a meaningful way upon the imponderables, not to dogmatize”. Martin, “Poetry as theology: an orthodox perspective”, 192, note 21.

See Wilde, “The Happy Prince”, The Happy Prince and other stories, 9, 10, 21. It is indicative of the analogy between the “Prince” and Christ that the first comments of the people who see the “Prince’s” statue are rather positive or even idealistic, although lacking real knowledge of his true nature and condition. This reminds one of the different perceptions of Christ by the people of His time as presented by the disciples when Christ asked who did people say that He was (See Matthew 16:13-14) and His cheerful welcoming to Jerusalem with the conviction that He was “the prophet from Nazareth” (See Matthew 21:8-11). On the contrary, in the end of the story, when the Prince’s beauty had been taken away, the Town’s Councilors say that he is “shabby indeed” and “little better than a beggar”. Christ was also tortured, inglorious and deprived of human beauty when He was repeatedly mocked by the soldiers, the chief priests and even the robbers who were crucified with him. Their mocking ironically stressed that His pitiful appearance could not be that of the King of Israel or the Son of God (See Matthew 27:27-44.)

The escalation of this presence is, no doubt, the offering of His Body and Blood for the salvation of humanity and Wilde seems to imply this
I think, is a great sample of how the writer manages to interrelate the literary form/outline to the meaning it encapsulates; the first serving the latter, since the tale’s setting and structure resonates with the theological message that the author wishes to convey.

It is exactly because the “Prince” is fatefully and tragically grounded that he acquires the ability and privilege—we could call it a bitter privilege—to really see his city as it actually is: in pain, overwhelmed by inequality, ingratitude, poverty, pride and prejudice. His former life, enslaved in pleasure and carelessness had made him blind to the misery of the world. Yet his present situation, his utterly diminished freedom entails a sense of belonging to the place, which calls for a responsible behavior towards the city’s travails. As a result of a vision within limits, this leads the “Prince” to the most crucial ascertainment: “There is no Mystery so great as Misery”. Thus the “Prince’s” awareness of tragedy, by invoking the theological concept of mystery, may put forward the qualities of true inhabitation and domesticity, the ones that even the Incarnated Logos did not attempt to escape or underestimate, as the aforementioned text of Father Alexander Schmemann pointed out. The following remarks of Wendell Berry eloquently describe those qualities:

again by portraying the “Prince” as still/ unmoving: he cannot act in any other way in order to benefit those in need for an earthly salvation, but by offering the parts of his own body through the obedient service of the “Swallow”. This is a symbolism rich in meaning, on which I will further comment at a later stage.


21 It is likely that Wilde’s ascertainment about misery as a mystery can be linked to the way in which he seems to perceive suffering within a Christological context. In that regard, Kirkpatrick’s observations can be very enlightening: “Wilde was fascinated with the belief that Christ’s physical suffering and death became the catalyst for the salvation of humanity. Suffering is not only a means to a higher good but a good in itself. Wilde shows this with his beautiful descriptions of even the most tragic things […] Ultimately, the sacrificial individualism and the unity of Christ’s spiritual and physical nature, not his moral perfection, were what Wilde so admired and desired to express in his fairy tales”. Kirkpatrick, “The Word made flesh: Christ and the Artist in Oscar Wilde’s Fairy Tales”.

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If you are to wonder about the complexity and mystery of life to the greatest possible degree, you will have to endure a lasting inhabitation in an actual residency, counter to the ever moving and ever changing stance of the postmodern era. Similarly, if you are to experience tragedy (or happiness) to its fullest, you will have to stay somewhere; commit yourself to a permanent residence, in a specific place and be personally involved in its hardships, disappointments and losses, which is to take part in real community life. Escapism makes the above impossible, for it eludes the realities of community life and favors forgetfulness, whilst the conscious commitment to a community presupposes the enactment of unity between people, as the result of cultivating collective memory in each individual. Likewise, the otherworldliness—as another form of escapism—that is usually fostered by a false faith in an eerie, heavenly reality, the so called afterlife, loses the chance to confirm and practice faith in the world; live lovingly and care compassionately, making a brother out of every fellow human and thus foretasting eternity here and now.

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22 See e.g., Berry, *Hannah Coulter*, 112.


24 See also e.g., Schmemann, *The Journals of Father Alexander Schmemann (1973-1983)*, 9-12. I think Wilde’s “Selfish Giant” (see Wilde, *The Happy Prince and other stories*, 33-39) is one of the most appealing representations of this utmost pursuit, which has to become every Christian’s dream and aspiration. The powerless boy of the tale reminds of Christ’s self-surrender to a powerless and defenseless way of life. After all, He had experienced a childhood relying on the care of his parents like every other child in the world and remained defenseless and depended upon the good will of humans up until His crucifixion, death and burial. If humanity’s selfishness could be depicted as a giant, ignorant of the pain that lies next to it in so many of the “least” of human beings (the little Christs), the boy’s wounds revealed in the end of the story are the most vivid depiction of the pains and sufferings of a helpless humanity with which Christ identified Himself. Here is the real Judgment day (see *Matthew* 25:37-40), which proved the giant worthy of Paradise; an everyday opportunity and Judgment
and the “Swallow” alike could be a symbol of this kind of ecclesiastical experience. The “Prince”, as the Christ-like character, shows the way and the “Swallow” follows a path of a gradually developed love for the “Prince”—it stays in that place because of him; shares in the sympathetic life of his beloved, since being with him is the greatest privilege and reward. All the—other—beauties of the world did not matter to him anymore, for it found the beauty of love. This might be a great representation of a believer’s relationship with Christ.

Now let us come to the part of the tale which is what we could call its focal point. I am talking about the synergy between the unmoving “Prince” and the ever-moving “Swallow”, which serves and benefits the city’s inhabitants, that which progressively turns the “Swallow” into a faithful companion and co-habitant; a renouncer of the ephemeral pleasures of constant traveling. I see this account as a powerful metaphor, a symbolism of a thoroughly theological, two-sided possibility, rich in Christological and ecclesiastical implications. It lies in the fact that the “Prince’s” only choice is to offer the parts of his own body to those in need, which gives a Eucharistic perspective to the tale, as it resonates with Christ’s sacrifice on the Cross for the salvation of humanity; the offering of his own body and blood so that human beings receive a lasting life. This redeeming fact is extended into the life and experience of the Christian Church through the Divine Liturgy; the continuous commemoration of the sacrifice and the sharing in the life of the Body of Christ. But the Body of Christ is the Church as a living organism, which consists of all the partakers in the Univer-

day for Christians and Wilde’s reworking of the Christological pattern maybe at its best.

This entails a sense of thankfulness to God based on the satisfaction, offered by the loving commitment to a specific person within a common household, as Wendell Berry instructively recounts: “[...] You mustn’t wish for another life. You mustn’t want to be somebody else. What you must do is this: ‘Rejoice evermore. Pray without ceasing. In everything give thanks’. I am not all the way capable of so much, but those are the right instructions”. Berry, *Hannah Coulter*, 113.


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sal Body of Christ, whilst this crucial doctrine of Christian theology is expressed in the Divine Eucharist par excellence as a mystical function of each local church. Everything starts at home, therefore real solidarity—as the manifestation of the oneness in Christ—requires inhabitation and asks for the cultivation of the domestic qualities: devotion, sincere practice of love for the benefit of those who live next to us, which proves philanthropic activity that is blind to the misfortunes of our own place, but supports those who live miles away, to be another kind of escapism; another excuse for avoiding particular commitments at home. So here is the possibility that the Happy Prince points to: to experience a placed, practiced or Incarnated love and attain fulfillment by living lovingly in a particular place, which opens up to universality through the emphasis on an all-inclusive local life. This is of course how Alexander Schmemann described the way in which Christ saw the world, a view which is archetypal of how Christians should perceive domesticity.

As I proceed to the last part of my article, which deals with the probability of building a culture, a civilization—as it might be expressed in education, art and theology—grounded on the creative reception and elaboration of the dogma of Incarnation, I restate my initial thesis, that the Happy Prince could be considered a representative work in/of such an endeavor. In my opinion, this fictional masterpiece verifies that Christ’s advent, work and sacrifice—and the fruits of Incarnation as they are cherished in the ecclesiastical life—can inspire an artist by nourishing his/her imagination. At the same time, they may offer the foundation for the

27 *Corinth* 12:1-30; *Rom* 12:3-8.
29 There are of course numerous examples of literary works reflecting on and reworking Christology and the ecclesiastical tradition in the more recent literature. See e.g., the following excellent poems by Kyriakos Charalambides: “A story about Christ”, “An invitation to Dinner”, “George Karaiskakis’ welcome to paradise”, “Recovering senses”, “Thanos’ dog”, “The Virgin Mary of Kanakaria”, Kyriakos Charalambides, *Beyond History*, *ΣΥΝΘΕΣΙΣ τχ.3* (2013)
fostering of a different, loving and truly philanthropic ethos, lacking in our modern, disoriented society.\textsuperscript{30}

However, an attempt to cultivate a culture of Incarnation which could be motivated by works such as the \textit{Happy Prince} and other literary achievements of the poets who—in terms of a rather conventional categorization—represent the poetry of Christian Tradition, should not be restrictive or exclusive. My point here is that it is absolutely possible that there are other works, not consciously oriented towards a Christian perception of life—or a Christian culture— in which the worldview fostered by the Incarnation as well as the fruits of Christ’s advent can be pointed out. To limit the range of the quest for an incarnational utterance of life within the context of certain literary or artistic traditions, is to deprive the human longing for truth of the possibility of experiencing surprise in the fact that the ontology of the Incarnation may have infinite manifestations. Most importantly, to confine that longing is to restrict the Spirit of God, which is, by nature, unconfined and deprive yourself of the whole truth to which It alone can lead.\textsuperscript{31} A life of love and sacrifice which can surpass death, unite the heavenly and earthly spheres through the compassionate stance toward human suffering and the realization that God is among us because God was/is one of us—and in each one of us—could be the redeeming conclusion of every authentic pursuit of the meaning of life. Besides, these are the standards and qualities of a new, liberating domesticity, that which Christ put forward and called the whole world to embrace.\textsuperscript{32} Given the above,

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\end{flushright}

\textsuperscript{30} I do not wish to sound idealistic by implying that this characterizes only our times, for corruption and ethical decline has always been evident in previous years and centuries. This, of course, doesn’t mean that we ought not to stress the importance of establishing a better society in the present. Having a passive attitude on the premise that “it has always been like that” is totally wrong.

\textsuperscript{31} See \textit{John} 3:8 and \textit{John} 16:13.

\textsuperscript{32} In this last remark of my article I have been mainly elaborating the views of Chrysostomos Stamoulis on the possible characteristics of a culture

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works like *The Happy Prince* can appeal to and motivate all the people in the world and this denotes their conscious or unconscious adoption of the Christological/incarnational pattern, which seems to have inspired its writer and gave us this exceptional work of literary artistry.


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