

## THEOLOGY TODAY: NEW CRISES AND NEW VISIONS

I would like to deal with two topics. The first of these offers some reflections on theology and the Church, that is, theology as it grapples with the future of the Church. The second concerns theology and society, that is, theology as it is challenged by the so-called project of modernity.

### I

For many, the last Council seemed to belong to the past even before it was concluded. I myself was once of this opinion. I was mistaken. The question: how to be faithful to the inheritance of the Second Vatican Council is a life-and-death question for the Church. This becomes clear when we look at the Church as a whole, and when we are on our guard against ethnocentric fallacies. If I am not mistaken, then there are two different, even seemingly opposed visions of the future of the Church which are currently engaged in a struggle with one another. These competing visions are becoming ever more focused upon the question of how to be faithful to the last Council. Will a backward glancing vision which longs for a pre-Reformation Western Christianity attain dominance? Or will a vision dominate which tries to save the irreplaceable tradition of the Western Church in conjunction with the innovations within the emerging churches? Will a defensive or an offensive strategy for saving traditions prevail? A traditionalist or a nontraditionalist handing on of the Council?

Presently, Rome seems to be putting all signals on hold, "playing it safe." Does playing it safe, however, mean to favor a course of immunization, that is, pastoral finger-in-the-dike strategies? Or can there not be something like an offensive tutiorism by which I mean the saving of Christian identity through courageous self-reform of the Church? Not only the Church but society as well desires to play it safe. We are skeptical of great visions and we are reluctant to initiate major changes. Could not the Church in such a situation demonstrate her authentic noncontemporary nature by realizing her reformational potential? Is not timely self-reformation a grace, when opposed to the danger of being changed by the anonymous pressure of contemporary consensus?

It would be superficial to describe these two competing visions with the antagonism between conservative and progressive points of view. Such a comparison gives the false impression that the offensive strategy would succumb to a traditionless "aggiornamento" or to a traitorous subjection to the "Zeitgeist." The paradigm for an offensive handing on of the Council is not undialectical modernization or liberalization but radicalization, that is, the attempt of the Church to lay hold of its roots.

In this sense the last Council can be viewed as "the beginning of a beginning" (Karl Rahner) which challenges today's theology. Some years ago I maintained that faithfulness to the Council demands a "second courage" on the part of theologians. I have two theses to clarify this offensive paradigm.

**First Thesis:** The last Council aims at the transition from a culturally mono-centric Western Church to a culturally polycentric world Church. This binds contemporary theology to be on guard against ethnocentric fallacies and to develop the consequences of this transition.

What is the import of the experience that the Church no longer simply "has" a Third World Church but "is" a Third World Church with its origins and its constitutive history in the West (and in Europe)? In order to at least hint at the theological importance of this development I would like to divide hypothetically the previous ecclesial and theological history into three epochs: At first, a relatively short foundational epoch of Judeo-Christianity; secondly, a very long epoch within a more or less homogeneous culture, namely the period of Christianity which developed out of the Hellenistic context and the Western and European culture and civilization which up to our time is connected with it; and finally, the epoch of a worldwide cultural polycentrism in Church and theology which is currently manifesting itself. The Church has arrived at a transition from an Occidental European Church, which actually could only simulate a world Church, to a worldwide Church with a culturally polycentric character. Only in this worldwide Church is there a historical clarification as to what is intended with this apostolic mission with which we are confronted in the first church history—in the Acts of the Apostles: You shall be my witnesses even to the ends of the earth (Acts 1).

The Second Vatican Council opened the way for this transition to a polycentric world Church. Let me briefly mention some elements of the Council which point to this conclusion:

- The first Council with native bishops from the nonwestern world
- The major local churches once again attain their autonomy within the universal Church
- The use of the vernacular languages in the reformed liturgy
- Impulses in the doctrinal statements of the Council:

The Decree on Religious Freedom with its principle of tolerance: the Church proclaims itself as a religious institution of freedom which in its proclamation of the gospel renounces all prior power which would negate this freedom.

The Decree concerning the Relationship to the Non-Christian Religions which for the first time were positively evaluated and were not merely apologetically delimited.

The statements in the Pastoral Constitution on the Church, in which, perhaps still defused and rather implicit, an understanding of the world is at work which begins to break with the over-identification of the world with the Occidental European world.

When we take these elements into account, we see that theology and the Church are facing the end of their more or less cultural monocentrism. Of course, this end does not mean the dissolution into an arbitrary, contextual pluralism, nor the enthronement of a new non-European monocentrism in the Church and in theology.

The historical development of the West remains inherent to the new cultural polycentrism of the Church and of theology. Nevertheless, we are concerned here with reciprocal inspiration in developing the life of Church and theology. Theology can no longer divide the situation of Church and theology in two parts. This has, in my opinion, several consequences.

I would like briefly to clarify this polycentrism with respect to the situation in Latin America. Even though one may suggest that Latin America is not the best example of cultural polycentrism within the Church, because it is too close to European culture, we should not forget that mutual inspiration and creative assimilation between the various cultures is possible only if they are not completely alien and distant from each other. If we analyze the present struggle within the Latin American churches we find that in principle they do not represent a contrast between an orthodox position eagerly and uncompromisingly defending the traditions of the Church on the one hand, and on the other a liberation-church more or less suspected of false teachings and of being influenced by strange political ideology. Rather these wranglings reflect the painful transition from a Eurocentric to a culturally polycentric Church of the world.

I would like to outline the consequences of this new polycentric situation for Western theology. First of all, the social antagonism in the world is pulled into the center of ecclesial and theological interest. Conditions which are in direct opposition to the gospel, such as exploitation, oppression, racism, become a challenge for theology; they demand the formulation of faith in categories of nonviolent resistance and change. Thus theology becomes political out of its own logos. Secondly, European theology has to understand itself within the horizon of a history of guilt. While Western theology should not indulge in neurotic self-accusations, this history of guilt should not be forgotten either. Frequently, we protect ourselves against it by all types of defense mechanisms: for example, with the help of a "tactical provincialism" with which we try to safeguard our church and political life against global influence; or when we talk of the countries of the Third World as our underdeveloped partners, but hardly ever as our victims. The theological sensitivity to the new culturally polycentric world Church will teach us to judge ourselves and our own history with the eyes of our victims. Thus theology in the new paradigm must become a politically sensitive theology of penance and conversion. I have critically described a Western Christianity which closes its mind to this experience as "bourgeois religion."

Finally, our Western theology faces the challenge of a new awakening in and from the poor churches of the world. Theology has to make public this charismatic shock within the universal Church. As I see it, there is a threefold reformatory thrust:

- The development of a new ecclesial model in the so-called basic communities which are in connection with the bishops and thus are included in the apostolic succession.
- The concentration on discipleship, resulting in a politically sensitive spirituality with a preferential option for the poor. In specific distinction to other world religions, as a Christian one can be too pious and too mystical! The one and undivided discipleship of Jesus always contains a mystical and a situational political

element. They mirror one another, and that is specifically Christian!

—The theological impulse concerning a new vital unity of redemption and liberation in which the experience of resistance and suffering returns to the experience of grace. In facing this challenge Western Catholic theology must not forget one thing: There is something like a European dilemma of Catholicism. The Catholic Church accompanied the European history of modern times more or less defensively. It did not really productively participate in the so-called history of modern freedom, especially not in the development of civic Enlightenment. Most of the time it exclusively opposed these processes. The overcoming of this Catholic dilemma in the late European situation, at least for me, points beyond the Occidental-European monocultural church life toward a world Church which learns how to call for and to represent the grace of God as an undivided liberation of humankind and which is willing to pay the price for this historic conjugation of grace and freedom.

One of the central questions for Church and theology today is: Will we understand the socially divided and polycentric world as that learning-space in which we find many signs of a Christianity, which, in the face of great danger, lays hold of its roots? This question guides my interest in the handing on of the impulses of Vatican II.

Before I present my second thesis, I would like to touch on some questions which arise in the context of this first thesis.

First: The transition to a polycentric world Church makes possible and also demands a clarification of the constitutive truth of Western Christianity. We are here not paying tribute to a stylish anti-European attitude, nor to a cheap criticism of so-called eurocentrism. Especially in the face of this cultural polycentrism, we can recognize that the Western inheritance has its roots in two cultures, in two traditions. It is not only the Greek Hellenistic inspiration, structured and developed in the Roman legal framework, but also the inheritance of Palestine, the Jewish tradition, which gave birth to Western Christianity. It is not only the God of Athens but primarily the God of Jerusalem who has to put his stamp on that Western Christianity which remains constitutive for a culturally polycentric world Church. Did not the recent instruction of the Holy Office concerning some questions of liberation theology one-sidedly overemphasize the Hellenistic tradition with its historic dualism? Has not the God of Moses been forgotten in favor of the God of Plato? I will return to the actuality of the Jewish elements in Western Christianity in the last part of my address.

Second: The polycentrism thesis implies a number of specific problems. For instance, I presuppose that there actually still is this kind of cultural polycentricity in the world. In other words I have to assume that this polycentricity is not already affected in its roots by that profane westernization of the entire world, which we call technological development or technological civilization—in short by the world conquest accomplished by Western rationality. Is there still enough cultural identity and resistance to the global process of Western secularization? Is not every liberation of these non-Western countries in the last analysis merely a liberation into the arms of Western civilization? Especially with respect to the African and Asian cultures there arise problems for theology insofar as these cultures are al-

ready expressions of great world religions. The polycentrism thesis, therefore, also demands a new paradigm for the dialogue with non-Christian religions.

Third: How can Christian universalism be understood so that it does not imperialistically absorb these religions and cultures, but rather acknowledges them in their own dignity, as the Second Vatican Council teaches? In my critique of Karl Rahner's abstract universality in his theory of "anonymous Christianity" I propose a narrative-practical expression of this Christian universality which avoids the dangers of intellectual imperialism. The abstract universalism in the theory of anonymous Christianity can be demasked in view of the Jews: the Jews can never be viewed as anonymous Christians because, according to Paul, Israel as such belongs to Christian eschatology.

**Second Thesis:** The Second Vatican Council aims at a transition from a Church of dependents to a Church of agents or subjects, (that is from a *Kirche für das Volk* to a *Kirche des Volkes* or from a *Betreuungskirche* to a *Subjektkirche, eine Kirche mit einer subjekthaften Basis*) and this transition demands from theology that it not only respect the teaching office of the Church but also the teaching authority of the faithful.

The formulation of the thesis itself calls for a brief semantic clarification. I have not found an adequate English term to translate the German word "Subjekt." "Subjekt" is not equivalent to person or individual. Rather, "Subjekt" connotes the person insofar as it is individualized by means of social and historical intersubjectivity. This implies a constitutional and chronic vulnerability of the individual. In this sense, the word "subject" does not refer to the isolated individual, the monad who only afterwards made sure of his existence with other subjects. Experiences of solidarity with, antagonism towards, liberation from and anxiety about other subjects form an essential part of the constitution of the religious subject, not afterwards, but from the very beginning.

Normally the principle of collegiality is considered to be the most wide-reaching thrust of the Council with regard to inner-ecclesial renewal. Although I recognize the importance and the practical relevance of this principle, my thesis suggests a different starting point. I begin with the fact that *Lumen gentium* tends toward a definitely subject-oriented understanding of Church. The dominant images are neither of the Pauline and patristic type, such as *corpus Christi* (the mystical body) the wine and the branches or the ark, nor of the modern type such as *Ursakrament* or *sacramentum mundi*, though the latter play a definite part in the document. Instead the biblically rooted image of the people of God on their pilgrimage through history is central. Such an image is centered upon the people faced with historical experiences of suffering and struggle and thus it points toward what I call a subject-oriented vision of the Church, that is, a vision in which *all* the faithful insofar as they are Church are called to become subjects. Together with this understanding of the Church the Council emphasizes the active role of the faithful in articulating and developing the authentic witness to the gospel. The Council treats the faithful not as merely passive recipients of ecclesial teaching but rather as active subjects in the Church insofar as the teaching of the Church is based on the witness of the whole of the people of God (cf. *Lumen gentium* 12, 37; *Dei verbum* 10; *Apostolicam actuositatem* 2, 3; *Gaudium et spes* 43).

I would like to point to another line of argumentation of the Council which converges with this subject-oriented thrust. In the Decree on Religious Freedom the Council proclaims the transition from the dignity of truth to the dignity of person in truth. The abstract subordination of the person to a truth without a subject is abandoned for a subject-oriented basis of truth. The struggle for the dignity of the subject in the Church is not understood as being freed from the truth but as being freed for the truth of the gospel. (*Nicht Befreiung von der Wahrheit, sondern Befreiung zur Wahrheit des Glaubens*). This statement also points toward a subject-oriented understanding of the Church.

The Council does not speak expressly of a teaching authority and a teaching competence of the faithful. It speaks expressly only of the teaching office that is imbedded in the entire organism of the people of God. I also do not speak of the magisterium of the faithful but of their teaching authority which remains in the background within the usual division of labor in the Church. This usual division of labor may be expressed—perhaps all too briefly—thus: the bishops teach—the priests serve—theologians clarify and defend the teaching and train those who serve. And the people? They are for the most part the “object” of this teaching and serving Church. The image of the Church implied in this division of labor is that of the Church of dependents (*Betreuungskirche*). Theology working in terms of this division of labor reproduces *volens nolens* this system of dependency or a system of services. The image of the Church of dependents is not simply canonical and it is already overcome in the ecclesial vision of Vatican II. The statements of the Council point to an understanding of the Church in which the Church as a whole is a learning and a teaching Church. In virtue of their lived faith (*sensus fidelium*) an authentic authority is attributed to the faithful. They are considered as active subjects of their faith and of its theologically relevant expression.

That we are dealing here with an authentic renewal can be demonstrated through a brief historical reflection. Already in the New Testament one can see a tension regarding the determination of the decision makers in the Church: The Pastoral Epistles, on the one hand, emphasize the competence of individual church officials, whereas the rest of the New Testament favors the entire community as the bearer of the decision-making responsibility in the Church. After the first several centuries the teaching authority of the community is gradually absorbed by the teaching office of the bishops. In the Middle Ages there is a teaching authority alongside of the teaching office of the bishops. But this teaching authority is heavily intellectualized, it is the teaching authority of the experts, that is the *Doctores*. This intellectual teaching authority, based on the knowledge of experts, is strengthened in the processes of modernity, especially in the Enlightenment, and thus consolidated an understanding of the teaching authority which is based on an opposition between experts and people. The vision of the Second Vatican Council transcends this model of the dependency of the faithful. This has consequences for theology, for ecumenism and for the present societal struggle for the dignity of the subject.

#### A

As far as theology is concerned I see primarily two consequences. The first of these deals with an appropriate understanding of orthodoxy. For theology which

reproduces, however sublimely, a Church of dependents, the orthodoxy of the people can only be explained by a theory of *bona fides* or in particular by a theory of *fides implicita*. Full and explicit knowledge of faith is after all a *practical knowledge!* In its distinctive character, it is incommensurable with an elitist idealistic gnosiology. It is possible to speak of an arcane knowledge in the case of a full knowledge of faith, but this *arcanum* can not be the *arcanum* of a philosophical gnosis but must be the *arcanum* of a practical knowledge. It can not be the *arcanum* of a Socrates, but must be the *arcanum* of Jesus, in other words, the practical arcane-knowledge of following Christ.

Christian orthodoxy is in its essence not an elite form of orthodoxy in which the little ones can only participate *bona fide* or *fide implicita* (Luke 10:21 and Matt. 11:25). The contents of faith and their teaching are themselves practical. The idea of God to which Christian orthodoxy binds us is itself a practical idea. The stories of exodus, of conversion, of resistance and suffering belong to its *doctrinal* expression. The pure idea of God is, in reality, an abbreviation, a shorthand for stories without which there is no Christian truth in this idea of God. This also applies to christological orthodoxy. At its core is once again practical knowledge. At its center is not an idea to which one must assent, but a story, not an entertaining story but rather a dangerous one, a story not only to be told but to be lived. Its saving truth is revealed only in this living practice. The infallibility of the whole Church which Vatican II emphasizes, means that the Church will never betray this practical knowledge.

From this follow two consequences. 1) Christian orthodoxy is not simply an arcane knowledge of the magisterium or a knowledge of experts which molds the faithful into passive recipients and thus prevents them from being living subjects of the faith. In addition, it becomes clear that the teaching authority of the faithful must be recognized and developed because they belong to the guarantors of this type of orthodoxy. The modes of expression of the faithful must be cultivated. Theirs is neither the doctrinal language of the shepherds nor the argumentative language of the experts, but rather the narrative language, the oral history or other modes of expression which are not simply deficient modes of expressing orthodoxy.

There are examples in the present situation of the Church for the recognition of the practical teaching authority of the faithful. Here I am not only thinking of the Latin American basic communities in which the people in connection with their bishops and theologians attempt to formulate creedal statements which reflect their practical faith. If I am not mistaken, the recent attempts of the American bishops to develop their pastoral letters through an exchange with the believing communities point in the same direction. For me, it is symptomatic that Rome, as far as I have heard, had problems not so much with the contents of these letters on peace and the economy, but with the procedures by which these letters came to be.

2) Naturally, I know that this "consulting the faithful in matters of doctrine" implies great problems that Newman did not pursue further as he maintained in his famous *Rambler* article that during the Arian controversy not the bishops, but the faithful in spite of the bishops saved orthodoxy. What do we understand today under Newman's term "the mass of the faithful"? How do we determine today

the convictions of the faithful? Demoscopically? A public opinion poll in *Time Magazine*? Would we then learn more than mere suburban middle-class values and expectations? More than, let me say, the diffuse and vague opinions and options brought about by the turbulent pluralism of our hearts and minds? On the one hand, this pluralistic situation allows us to recognize the meaning and necessity of a magisterium: In an ever more mobile and historical world a truth which is based on memory and tradition can not be saved without institutionalization. On the other hand, there is a twofold danger. First, all truths of faith are accessible only in a magisterially and ecclesiologically encoded fashion. For example: already Vatican II, as opposed to Vatican I, teaches the central truths of the faith not in themselves, but as elements of ecclesiology. The danger of an ecclesiologically narcissism emerges which forgets that the center of the Church is never the Church herself. Second, in the face of this pluralistic situation the Church of dependents stabilizes itself once again and thus the temptation to explain everything in terms of the *fides implicita*, which according to Newman induces indifference in the intellectuals and superstition in the masses.

What are we to do? For me, this is one of the key problems of the Church and of theology today. I know of only one way: We can go beyond the Church of dependents only when the dependents transform themselves. We can not beg for authority of the faithful from the hierarchy. Have the faithful not interiorized the paternalistic Church to such an extent that they think everything connected with church renewal ultimately depends on one thing: on change happening to those who take care of them, which means above all the pope and the bishops? The fact is, a dependent people has to transform itself, and not just behave like a people being taken care of. Is not much of the usual criticism of the Church just another expression of the interiorized paternalistic Church? Is it not fixated to an inordinate extent on authority, and, if possible, on papal authority? On the contrary! If things are to get better in the Church, it will depend before everything else on the faithful themselves. The faithful should believe themselves capable of a greater measure of the gospel and require it of themselves. They should therefore overcome, at least within themselves, that lack of repentance and self-criticism which they deplore in the Church, especially in regard to the church hierarchy.

Therefore, it is of special importance for theology to watch for symptoms of this transformation and to stabilize them. It is important to theologially reflect upon the emergence of a new model of ecclesial life which is appearing today alongside the traditional types of the paternalistic and services Church, namely the basic community church with its new culture of communication and solidarity. This basic community church is neither a passing fad, nor an adaptation from the Third World, it is instead a legitimate ecclesial expression of the conciliar truth which calls for a subject church with a legitimate teaching authority of the faithful. Naturally this new type of ecclesial identity has many pastoral and theological implications and raises a series of questions regarding currently prevailing church ordinances which I can not consider here.

Instead, I must turn to a further consequence for theology which flows from my second thesis. The transition to a subject church and to the recognition of a teaching authority of the faithful aims at a widening and a differentiation of the agents of theology and a new paradigm of theological activity. This new theolog-



ical activity corresponds to the emerging type of ecclesial identity. In comparison to our academic theology this type is marked by a certain theological poverty, sometimes even by a refusal of the prevailing theology. This ought not to be grounds for us to simply ignore this new type of theology. The literary genre of this theology is not the theological textbook but a kind of report or logbook, the literary manifesto of new paths with the Church and in the Church. Naturally this kind of theology does not wish to replace academic theology but to supplement it in that this new theology, for example, forces upon the collective memory of the Church, the often unspoken yet concrete experiences of discipleship, the sorrow and the struggle of the people.

Allow me to name some important elements of this type of theological activity. First, this type demonstrates that the primary subjects of critic in the Church are not the theologians but the believers. In this sense, I understand, for example, the grass-roots theology in the poor countries as an attempt to make public the cry of the poor so that it reaches the ear of the whole Church and its magisterium. When the Latin American bishops in Puebla interpret their teaching as the voice of the voiceless, then they recognize something like a teaching authority of the poor and of the voiceless in the Church. In order that this representation of the poor by the bishops does not become a religious instrumentalization of the poor and of their suffering-derived wisdom, this theology has to see to it that these poor themselves increasingly become subjects of their life, their history and their very fragile world of religious symbols.

Second, this new theological activity helps to formulate and develop short formulas of faith. Such short formulas can not, in my opinion, be dictated by theological master thinkers. Christian faith can not be compressed into a doctrinal formula without a subject. Its center lies rather between doctrine and praxis: in what we call, with an abbreviation, discipleship. Therefore, there are short formulas of faith only when teaching and life, doxography, and biography are pressed into one. This new theological paradigm can already provide examples of this. I have already mentioned the attempts of the basic communities to spell out their faith-experience in creedal statements.

Finally, this theological activity could offer the whole Church and her magisterium new accents in the proclamation of church teaching. For example, the Church could learn perhaps that her proclamation to today's world must not center primarily upon the justification of the sinful people in the face of the almighty and good God (represented by the Church), but must center upon the justification of God in the face of a creation torn and disfigured by suffering and injustice which cries out to heaven, that is, must center upon the theodicy question.

My support for this new theological activity can not be a matter of romantic idealization or archaic reductionism. The classic form of theology serves, for example, to integrate the new experiences in the Church and the new praxis into the total memory of the Church; it thus prevents these experiences from remaining merely sporadic and ultimately disintegrating. It confronts these new experiences with all the reserves of experience and faith which are laid up in the Church; it thus mediates to the grass roots that support of tradition without which there is no truly Christian experience and no consistent resistance. It also takes care—as ac-

ademic theology—that the “base of the church” does not descend to the cognitive isolation of a sect.

Nevertheless, I would like to clarify one point which makes the teaching authority of the faithful especially important for us as academic theologians. Our theological argumentation today is more and more confronted with scientific theories which are no longer innocent over and against theology and the Church. These theories see themselves, though with variant degrees of explicitness, as so-called metatheories of religion and theology. For them, theology can be analyzed and subsumed within a more general theoretical system. It is the system of evolutionary logic which considers religion as an important stage within the evolution of humankind, albeit one which has already been surpassed.

Theology's response to such theories can not be to seek a foundation and justification in a further attempt to produce a more general “pure” theory from its own resources. In order to avoid the risk of a speculative infinite regression, which would inevitably have to be broken off arbitrarily at some point, it must look for its basis in terms of a return to the subjects of faith and their practice. This return would only then be regressive and undifferentiated if there were no authentic intelligibility of the praxis of the faithful, an intelligibility which can not be replaced by theological reflection. In order to set this intelligibility free academic theology must transcend the system of the Church of dependents in which the faithful must remain silent or merely reproduce a predetermined theology.

## B

This second thesis has further relevance in two areas: first of all an ecumenical relevance. It is obvious that the recognition of the subject church and of the teaching authority of the faithful in the Church is an important step toward the self-reform of the Church. And this self-reform is itself a necessary step in the growth of Christian unity (if one does not consider the ecumenical question just a question of gnosiology, but as a question of practical change of the churches).

The second area of relevance: In the development of this inheritance of the Council theology enters into the struggle against the so-called death of the subject in the project of modernity. There is, on the one hand, the danger of a placid death of the subject. Modern scientific knowledge is *per definitionem* not founded upon a subject-oriented basis of knowledge. The human being as a subject is treated as an anthropomorphism. Thus the talk about the death of God is followed today by the talk about the death of the subject in so-called postmodernity. There are also symptoms, on the other hand, for a dramatic death of the subject. Wherever, as in the Marxist countries, the difference between state and society, public and private is denied in principle, the subject as an individual can then only be understood as a potential saboteur of this order. But also in the West there is already a discussion concerning the successor to the human being as subject. As you know, *Time Magazine* has already portrayed this successor on its cover: the robot, a smoothly functioning machine, a computerized intelligence which can not remember because it can not forget, that is, an intelligence without memories, without pathos and morals, in short, without an identity as a subject.

## II

My concluding reflection focuses on theology in the face of the so-called project of modernity, insofar as the undialectic continuation of this project results not only in the death of the subject but also in the death of history, both of which are an encoded form of the death of God. Over and against this tendency within late modernity theology has to mobilize that dangerous memory which has its source primarily in the proscribed or misunderstood apocalyptic tradition. That is, in a word, my proposal. One of the key elements of my theological enterprise is the attempt to recapture the sense of the unsettling apocalyptic question whose proscription is the presupposition of the project of modernity. In concluding, I would like, therefore, to hand this question over to you. I know that it contains a challenge to the theological adventure of being noncontemporary. In order that this experience of being noncontemporary does not degenerate into mere blind or aggressive backwardness, but rather remains creative, we dare not leave it to the fundamentalists and traditionalists.

The fact that even theologians and preachers use the apocalyptic symbols today as free-floating metaphors and project them unto the present fears of nuclear world catastrophe does not demonstrate their present relevance, but shows, in my opinion, how repressed and misunderstood they are. Not because the apocalyptic question is considered relevant today, but because its seeming actuality confirms how forgotten it is, the apocalyptic question must be posed anew. Allow me to attempt this.

"Who is close to me is close to the fire, who is far from me is far from the Kingdom." I understand this noncanonical word, transmitted to us by Origen, as an abbreviated commentary on the apocalyptic of the New Testament. It is dangerous to be close to Jesus, yet only in the face of danger shines the vision from the Kingdom of God, which through him has come closer. "Danger" apparently is a basic category in which to experience his life and his message and to define Christian identity. The lightning of danger illuminates the entire biblical landscape, especially the New Testament. Danger and peril are found everywhere in the New Testament. In John we read: "Remember the word I said unto you: The servant is not greater than his Lord. If they have persecuted me they will persecute you" (John 15:8f.). And in Paul: "We are troubled on every side, but not distressed; we are perplexed but not in despair, persecuted but not forsaken; cast down but not destroyed" (2 Cor. 4:8f.). How can we understand the New Testament, if in our interpretations the presence of danger is systematically disregarded, in other words, if we do not apply a hermeneutic of danger, if we erase the horizon of danger or paint it over—that horizon which holds together the whole New Testament panorama?

What is behind our modern critique of the apocalyptic symbols of danger and crisis? Is it the will towards enlightenment of the uncomprehended power of myth in this tradition, or is it perhaps the will to evade the dangerous Christ and so to contain the danger, or at least to push it aside into the practically extraterritorial realm of individual death? Most likely both of these are at work. Above all we cannot forget this evasion and there are many attempts to interpret the whole of

history after Christ as a maneuver to evade the dangerous Christ. In the context of this evasion arises a Christianity—and I say this not in a denouncing manner but rather with a touch of sadness and helplessness—there arises a Christianity fashioned after a bourgeois homeland religion, rid of danger but also rid of consolation. For a Christianity which is not dangerous and unendangered also does not console. Or am I grossly mistaken? In some regions of today's Christianity I see emerging counterimages to such a placatingly "bürgerliche Religion." For example, in those poor churches which understand their faithfulness to Christ also as liberation, and as liberation seek it in the face of the greatest danger. This church is connected with early Christianity by the red thread of martyrdom and by the power of a temporal expectation in God's faithfulness. Who could possibly doubt that here a clearer concept breaks forth of what it means to be close to Jesus, to be close to him of whom it should be said: "Who is close to me is close to the fire"?

The fatal disease of religion and theology is not naiveté, but rather banality. Theology can become banal whenever its commentary on life serves only to repeat that which without it—and often against it—has already become part of modern common consent (modern commonplace). The naiveté of theology lies in ambush for these commonplaces. It does this, for example, by lingering with texts and images such as those in the apocalyptic traditions and by holding its own in the face of them at least a bit longer than modern consent and the anonymous pressure of modern civilization allows. Theology does not seek specifically to reconcile itself with its traditions by the use of thousands of subtle modifications, but rather to spell out its tradition as dangerous, subversive memory for the present.

Religion, in pointing to the apocalyptic symbols, wants to scandalize (interrupt, provoke) the dominant understanding of the human being in modernity, and to resist this understanding at least for one brief moment. It seeks to interrupt that image of the human being which is prevalent today within all blocks: the Faustian-Promethean human being. It seeks to interrupt that concept in which the coming human being is designed without the dark background of sorrow, suffering, guilt and death. The rebellion of the apocalyptic symbols is turned against the human being empty of secrets, incapable of mourning and therefore incapable of being consoled; more and more unable to remember and so more easily manipulated than ever; more and more defenseless against the threatening apotheosis of banality and against the stretched out death of boredom; a human being whose dreams of happiness finally are nothing but the dreams of an unhappiness free from suffering and longing.

Religion, in pointing to the apocalyptic symbols, wants to interrupt (scandalize) the dominant understanding of time and history in modernity and to resist it at least for one brief moment. This resistance, this kind of interruption of our common consent, is even more difficult to understand and practically not able to be freed from the suspicion of being deviant. No wonder that most theologians agree with the modern consent and that they see in these apocalyptic texts and symbols nothing but the projection of archaic fears.

Whenever religion hands down (passes on) these texts and symbols and perceives in them elements of a dangerous memory, it does not do it in order to com-

ment on the course of world history with an apocalyptically infused gloating, but in order to discover the sources of our modern fear.

It may be that the archaic human being was always endangered by the feeling of an imminent end of his life and world (and we can see something of this also in the present fear of catastrophes). But, in my opinion, for modern man there is not primarily a fear that everything will come to an end, but more deeply rooted a fear that there will be no end at all, that our life and our history is pulled into the surging of a faceless evolution which finally rolls over us all, as over grains of sand on the beach.

There is a cult today of the makeable—everything can be made. There is also a new cult of fate—everything can be replaced. The will to make is undermined by resignation. The cult of the omnipotent control of man's destiny on the one hand, and the cult of apathy on the other belong together like two sides of the same coin. Man's understanding of reality, which guides his scientific and technical control of nature and from which the cult of the makeable draws its strength, is marked by an idea of time as a continuous process which is empty and evolving towards infinity and within which everything is enclosed without grace. This understanding of reality excludes all expectation and therefore produces that fatalism that eats away our soul. We, therefore, are already resigned to this even before society has been able to introduce us successfully to this resignation as a form of pragmatic rationality. This understanding of time generates that secret fear of identity which can be deciphered only with great difficulty because it is successfully practiced under the ciphers of progress and development, before we may, just for a fleeting moment, discover it at the base of our souls.

This timeless time is the secret Lord of late modernity. The great utopias become stranded on this timeless time. In the East as well as in the West today, politics are characterized by a lack of great visions. Short-term strategies prevail over long-term ones. The secret fear of timeless time is the cause for that phenomenon which has been called the cynicism of late modernity: the cult of apathy in which people exercise the art of alibi: They do not want to take on dangerous responsibilities, they play possum, they stick their heads in the sand in the face of danger or they become voyeurs (spectators) of their own downfall. For me, these are symptoms of an evolutionary poisoned lassitude about history. How could Christianity subject itself to the anonymous pressure of the post-histoire in late modernity and thus move from the field of history to that of psychology without losing its own identity?

Has not a type of bland Christian eschatology, that is an eschatology without apocalyptic sting, prepared the way for this timeless time? Has not this eschatology, in the name of the triumph of Christ, cleansed time of all its contradictions and ironed out all catastrophes? Has it not interpreted all dangerous and catastrophic downfalls as the soft echo of a departing thunderstorm? Has it not contributed to an understanding of time as an empty and surprise-free endless continuum, as a timeless time in which the second coming of Christ can not even be conceived? However, because we as Christians believe in a saving end of time, we can and must dare to have an authentic historic consciousness, that is the confrontation with the abyss, with radical discontinuity. We can and must risk a

memory which remembers not only what has succeeded but also what has been destroyed, not only what has been achieved, but also what has been lost and in this way is turned against the identification of the semantic potential of history with the victory of what has become and already exists. This is a dangerous memory. It saves the Christian continuum. And it demonstrates that the *memoria passionis* in its anamnestic solidarity with the defeated, with the past sufferings, becomes a universal category, a category of rescue: saving the dignity of history and of the human subjects acting and suffering in history.

The biblical God has always allied himself with those, who according to an endless evolution and its pressure of selection, should have no history, no future. This is true from the alliance of God with the weak, insignificant tribes of Israel to the alliance of God with the defeated Jesus of Nazareth on the cross. I do not see how we can hinder the absorption of history, which is always God's history with us, into a timeless time without reclaiming the apocalyptic dimension of our Christian eschatology. That is why I hand on to you the question of an as yet undisclosed, a suppressed truth in the apocalyptic symbols.

Thank you for your patience!

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