

theol

EUROPEAN  
JOURNAL OF THEOLOGY

JOURNAL  
EUROPÉEN DE THÉOLOGIE

EUROPÄISCHE  
THEOLOGISCHE ZEITSCHRIFT



ZA 8543

II(1993):1

110  
26. NOV 1993

1/zid



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**INDEXING:** Articles are indexed in Religion Index One: Periodicals (RIO); book reviews in Index to Book Reviews in Religion (IBRR); published by the American Theological Library Association, 820 Church Street, 3rd Floor, Evanston, Illinois 60201. The indexes are also available online through BRS Information Technologies and DIALOG Information Services.

**LES INDEXES:** Les index des articles se trouvent dans Religion Index One: les périodiques (RIO); les critiques de livres dans Index to Book Reviews in Religion (IBRR); publié par l'American Theological Library Association, 820 Church Street, 3rd Floor, Evanston, Illinois 60201. On peut aussi obtenir les index directement en utilisant les services de recherche documentaire BRS Information Technologies et DIALOG Information Services.

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Typeset by Photoprint, Torquay, Devon.

Printed in Great Britain for Paternoster Periodicals,  
P.O. Box 300, Carlisle,  
Cumbria, CA3 0QS U.K.  
by BPCC Periodicals Ltd, Exeter.

ISSN 0960-2720



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Rates / Diffusion et abonnements /  
Erscheinungsweise und  
Abonnement**

The European Journal is published by  
Paternoster Periodicals twice annually.

Le Journal Européen est publié par  
Paternoster Periodicals deux fois  
par an.

Die ETZ erscheint zweimal jährlich bei  
Paternoster Periodicals.

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Brunnen Verlag, Gottlieb-Daimler Str. 22,  
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Jahresbezugspreis: DM 39,-

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1 year NKr 160.00

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Gordon McConville, (General Editor/Rédacteur en chef/Herausgeber)

## • Hope

Our time is one of far greater uncertainty than many had hoped just a few years ago, an uncertainty that is close, in places, to despondency. To say so is not, I believe, to indulge routinely in a pessimistic view of the world. For there is something special and unusual about the vacuum brought about, or just exposed, by the disappearance of old certainties. There has been a particular disappointment in the passage from high hope to disintegration and fear. A headline in a German newspaper, shortly before the time of writing, says simply: 'Germans are no longer rejoicing in their unity'. This example shows perhaps more poignantly than any other the stark contrast between former optimism and present pessimism. Yet it is only a part of something more widespread that affects us all. The phase of history which we are witnessing has cruelly demonstrated the helplessness of human beings and the fragility of the systems by which they seek to make life livable. The exposure of the fraudulence of one system has not led to the triumph of the other, but if anything laid bare its own spiritual bankruptcy.

For the present malaise in our societies is certainly spiritual. The imperatives of practical administration have run headlong into both the ghosts of the past and fundamental questions about what is right and wrong in the relationship between people, and peoples. It is as clear as it has ever been that if there is to be hope there must be a transcendent dimension to it. Yet it must also be a hope that enables people to face the future in a realistic way.

The biblical revelation answers precisely to the present need, because it provides a way to face the future realistically, yet without despondency. Where human beings crave certainty and find that it may not be had, the Bible speaks of what may properly be known and gives a way of coping with what may not.

A key text is Deuteronomy 4. Central to this great passage is God's self-revelation to his people. The crucial factor in the revelation is that God may not be seen (vv. 12, 15), with its corollary in the prohibition of representing him by any form (vv. 15ff.). What is specially guarded by God's refusal to be 'imaged' is his transcendence, his freedom; he must not be entrapped in the world. His presence is not limited to any particular time or place. This message can be hard to hear for any

society that imagines that in it the 'end' of history has been reached.

Yet Dt. 4 also stresses God's presence in the world. Indeed its specific concern is to show the relationship between God's transcendence and his presence. No god is closer to a people than Yahweh is to Israel (v. 7). At Horeb he spoke from heaven, but let the people 'see his great fire' on earth (v. 36). Again, 'the LORD is God in heaven above and on earth below' (v. 39).

This concept has implications for how God's activity in history is to be understood. Israel meets God in different places: in Egypt, where he leads them out of slavery; at Horeb, where he enters into covenant with them (Dt. 5:2-3); at Moab, where the covenant is renewed (Dt. 29:1), and in the land which God promises to them (Dt. 27:1-8). In turn, the life in the land will end with an exile in yet another place (Dt. 28:64-68). And even that is not the end, because the possibility of restoration to the land is open, on condition of repentance (Dt. 30:1-5). Covenant, therefore, occurs in a historical encounter that is ever newly realised. It follows that God's presence with Israel on earth, is thoroughly consistent with historical change. And Israel would indeed know all the vicissitudes that a nation could suffer in the centuries of its imperfect obedience to the covenant.

The same point emerges from one of the book's most characteristic features, namely the law about sacrifices (Dt. 12:5, 11, 14 etc.). This is often called the law of 'centralisation', and considered to be a politically conservative, 'statist' measure. In fact, the law of sacrifice is a firm rejection of the Canaanite solution, namely the irrevocable, mythological attachment of the god to a single place. The refusal to disclose the name of a 'place' is consistent with the idea of encounter with God as subject to the conditions of a historical relationship, and to the vitality of the covenant. All particular arrangements for the cultivation of the covenant have the temporariness and contingency of history. By such a theology, Deuteronomy affirms both the transcendence of God and his presence in real, ordinary life.

For there must be particular arrangements. Deuteronomy promulgates laws that address certain situations, and allows that there will be particular places of worship, including a temple at Jerusalem. If Deuteronomy points us into an open future, it also knows that there are present



responsibilities which cannot be avoided. The kingdom of God is among us, yet also coming.

Christian hope does not avoid or minimise the hard experiences and dilemmas that are around us. On the contrary, the gospel obliges us to grapple with them, to initiate, espouse, support every good and practical means to every good end. This means that as Christians we should avoid the prevalent cynicism about politics. Of course, there is healthy criticism. But we cannot excuse ourselves from the responsibility to think creatively about the management of human affairs by a shrug of the shoulders at the failure of others.

Along the way, we shall grieve where there is

grief and rejoice where there is joy; we shall admit to perplexity, even anger; and we shall take the risks and share the unknowns that the world feels keenly.

There is a paradox in the Christian understanding of history. History is created and governed by the God who cannot be contained in any temple made with hands, yet who is present in its every stage. We are therefore irrevocably committed to our fellow human beings in the needs which we share with them, even as we look for the 'end' that is to come with the kingdom of God. Incisive Christian witness lies in this paradox. It is in the hardness of life that Christian hope flourishes. But in the gospel there is no despondency.

## Espérance

Nous vivons dans un climat d'incertitude bien plus marqué que ce à quoi l'on pouvait s'attendre il y a quelques années. Par endroits, l'incertitude engendre jusqu'au désespoir. En m'exprimant ainsi, je ne pense pas me laisser entraîner par une certaine habitude des considérations pessimistes sur la situation du monde. Le vide laissé par la désintégration des certitudes du passé a en effet quelque chose de très particulier. On est brusquement passé de l'espérance la plus exaltée à la désillusion et à la crainte. Un journal d'outre-Rhin titrait récemment: 'Les Allemands ne se réjouissent plus de leur unité retrouvée'. Un tel exemple montre d'une manière saisissante comment, en quelques mois, l'optimisme a cédé la place au pessimisme. Et ce n'est là qu'une manifestation d'une attitude générale qui nous affecte tous. La période de l'histoire que nous traversons prouve toute l'impuissance des êtres humains et la fragilité des systèmes destinés à rendre l'existence à peu près vivable. La mise à jour du caractère illusoire du communisme n'a pas abouti au triomphe de la démocratie, mais a révélé la faillite spirituelle de cette dernière.

Car le malaise qui prévaut actuellement dans notre société est indubitablement d'ordre spirituel. Les instances auxquelles s'impose la nécessité d'agir se sont trouvées confrontées à la résurgence de vieux démons du passé, en même temps qu'à des questions fondamentales sur ce qui est juste ou répréhensible dans les relations entre les peuples et entre les individus. Plus que jamais il est clair que si une espérance positive doit émerger, elle doit avoir une dimension transcendante. En même temps, elle doit permettre aux gens de considérer l'avenir d'une manière réaliste.

La révélation biblique répond précisément à ce besoin. Elle considère l'avenir de façon réaliste, sans tomber dans le désespoir. Alors que les hommes ont soif de certitude, et constatent qu'ils ne peuvent l'obtenir, la Bible nous parle de ce que nous pouvons savoir et nous révèle le moyen de faire face à l'inconnu.

On trouve au chapitre 4 du Deutéronome un texte crucial à cet égard. Il a pour thème central la révélation que Dieu donne de lui-même à son peuple. Un élément fondamental de cette révélation est qu'on ne peut pas vraiment voir Dieu (vv. 12, 15). Il en découle l'interdiction de représenter Dieu par une image (vv. 15ss). En refusant d'être représenté, c'est sa transcendance et sa liberté que Dieu veut préserver. Il ne peut pas être emprisonné dans le monde. Sa présence n'est pas liée à un temps ou à un lieu déterminé. Ce message est difficile à accepter pour une société, quelle qu'elle soit, qui s'imaginerait que le but final de l'histoire a été atteint avec elle.

Pourtant, ce même texte du Deutéronome souligne aussi la présence de Dieu dans le monde. Il a même pour but de montrer ce qu'implique la transcendance de Dieu pour ce qui est de sa présence. Aucun peuple n'a un dieu qui soit aussi proche que Yahvé l'est d'Israël (v. 7). A Horeb, Yahve a parlé du haut du ciel, mais il a fait voir 'son grand feu' sur la terre (v. 36): 'Le Seigneur est Dieu, en haut dans le ciel et en bas sur la terre' (v. 39).

Voilà qui a des implications pour notre compréhension de l'activité de Dieu dans l'histoire. Les Israélites rencontrent Dieu en divers lieux: en Egypte, où il les délivre de l'esclavage, à Horeb, où il conclut une alliance avec eux (Dt. 5:2-3), dans les plaines de Moab, où l'alliance est renou-



velée (Dt. 28:69), et dans le pays qu'il leur promet (Dt. 27:1-8). En son temps, le séjour des Israélites dans le pays prendra fin, et ils seront exilés en d'autres lieux (Dt. 28:64-68), mais même cela ne constituera pas la fin de l'histoire d'Israël. Car la possibilité de son retour et de sa restauration est prévue, à condition qu'il se repente (Dt. 30:1-5). La relation d'alliance se vit comme une rencontre avec Dieu qui se produit dans l'histoire et qui se renouvelle au cours de l'histoire. Il s'en suit que la présence divine auprès d'Israël est pleinement compatible avec les fluctuations de l'histoire. Et de fait, à cause de ses transgressions de l'alliance, Israël allait connaître, au cours des siècles, toutes les vicissitudes qu'une nation peut rencontrer.

La même idée apparaît dans la loi sur les sacrifices qui est l'un des éléments les plus caractéristiques du livre (Dt. 12:5, 11, 14...). On y voit souvent une loi centralisatrice, émanant d'une politique conservatrice et 'étatiste'. En réalité, cette loi a pour but de s'opposer fermement à la pratique cananéenne fondée sur une conception mythologique qui lie irrévocablement la divinité à un endroit donné unique. Le refus de dévoiler le nom du 'lieu que le Seigneur choisira' est en accord avec la notion d'une relation avec Dieu qui se vit dans l'histoire, et dont les modalités sont fonction des situations historiques et de la vitalité de l'alliance. Toutes les mesures prises pour cultiver la relation établie par l'alliance portent la marque du caractère temporaire et contingent de l'histoire. En exposant cette théologie, le Deutéronome affirme tout à la fois la transcendance de Dieu, et sa présence dans la vie concrète de tous les jours.

Ces mesures particulières sont nécessaires. Ainsi le Deutéronome contient des lois qui régissent des situations précises. Il n'exclut pas l'existence de sanctuaires particuliers, comme le temple de

Jérusalem. Si le Deutéronome nous place devant un avenir qui reste ouvert, il prend aussi en compte le fait qu'il y a des responsabilités présentes qui ne peuvent être éludées. Le Royaume de Dieu est déjà parmi nous, et il est cependant aussi en train de venir.

L'espérance chrétienne n'évite ni ne minimise les rudes expériences et les dilemmes auxquels nous sommes confrontés. Au contraire, l'Évangile nous oblige à nous y attaquer, à créer, à adopter et à soutenir tous les moyens utiles et bons pour atteindre tout objectif valable. En tant que chrétiens, nous devrions donc éviter cette attitude systématiquement négative qui prévaut envers la politique. Bien sûr, une saine critique est souhaitable. Mais il est de notre responsabilité de réfléchir de façon créative aux moyens de gérer les affaires du monde, et nous n'avons pas le droit d'éluder notre responsabilité en haussant les épaules devant les échecs que d'autres connaissent.

Chemin faisant, nous saurons être affligés avec les affligés, et nous réjouir avec ceux qui sont dans la joie. Nous partagerons les perplexités, et même parfois la colère, de nos contemporains. Nous accepterons les risques, et ressentirons avec eux les incertitudes qu'ils ressentent de façon aiguë.

Les chrétiens considèrent l'histoire de façon paradoxale. Elle est produite et dirigée par le Dieu qui ne peut être enfermé dans des temples construits par les hommes, et qui pourtant est présent à toutes les étapes de l'histoire. Nous sommes donc solidaires des autres hommes, dont nous partageons les besoins, tout en vivant dans l'attente des fins dernières qui viendront avec le Royaume de Dieu. Le témoignage chrétien réside dans ce paradoxe. Notre espérance fleurit au sein de la vie quotidienne et de ses difficultés. Mais l'Évangile nous préserve du désespoir.

## Hoffnung

Unsere Zeit ist von einer viel größeren Unsicherheit gekennzeichnet als einige noch vor wenigen Jahren vermutet hätten; einer Unsicherheit, die manchmal an Mutlosigkeit grenzt. Dies zu behaupten heißt nicht, so glaube ich, daß man sich in der üblichen Schwarzmalerei ergeht. Denn das durch das Verschwinden von alten Sicherheiten entstandene, oder vielleicht auch nur offenbarte Vakuum hat etwas Besonderes und Ungewöhnliches an sich. Der Übergang von einer Phase großer Hoffnungen zu einer Phase des Zerfalls und der Angst ist mit einer besonderen Enttäuschung behaftet. Kurz

vor dem Schreiben dieses Kommentars war folgende Schlagzeile in einer deutschen Zeitung zu lesen: 'Die Deutschen freuen sich ihrer Einheit nicht mehr.' Vielleicht eindringlicher als alles andere zeigt dieses bewegende Beispiel den starken Gegensatz zwischen dem früheren Optimismus und dem jetzigen Pessimismus. Und doch ist dieses Beispiel nur Teil eines weit verbreiteten Phänomens, das uns alle betrifft. Der Abschnitt der Geschichte, den wir jetzt erleben, hat schonungslos aufgezeigt, wie hilflos die Menschheit ist und wie zerbrechlich die Systeme sind, mit deren Hilfe sie versucht, das



Leben zu meistern. Die Enthüllung der betrügerischen Natur des einen Systems hat nicht zum Siegeszug des anderen geführt, sondern hat, wenn überhaupt, nur die eigene Substanzlosigkeit offenbart.

Das Übel, woran unsere Gesellschaften kranken, ist unbestritten geistiger Natur. Die Erfordernisse der täglichen Verwaltung machen eine Auseinandersetzung sowohl mit den Gespenstern der Vergangenheit als auch mit der Frage von Recht und Unrecht in den Beziehungen zwischen Menschen und Völkern unausweichlich. Jetzt tritt genauso deutlich wie schon immer zu Tage, daß Hoffnung, wenn es sie überhaupt geben sollte, eine transzendente Dimension haben muß. Und dennoch muß diese Hoffnung die Menschen auch in die Lage versetzen, der Zukunft realistisch entgegenzusehen.

Die biblische Offenbarung bietet gerade auf dieses Bedürfnis eine Antwort, denn sie zeigt die Möglichkeiten der Zukunft realistisch auf, ohne doch der Mutlosigkeit zu verfallen. Während der Mensch sich nach Sicherheit sehnt und doch die Erfahrung macht, daß sie nicht erreichbar ist, spricht die Bibel von dem, was zu Recht erkannt werden darf und bietet eine Möglichkeit an, das zu bewältigen, was verborgen bleiben muß.

Ein Schlüsseltex in dieser Hinsicht ist 5. Mose 4. Der Schwerpunkt dieses wunderbaren Textes ist die Selbstoffenbarung Gottes gegenüber seinem Volk. Entscheidend bei dieser Offenbarung ist die Tatsache, daß die Gestalt Gottes nicht gesehen werden darf (V.12, 15) – mit dem folgerichtigen Verbot, sich ein Bildnis von ihm zu machen (V.15ff.). Durch diese Weigerung Gottes, sich 'abbilden' zu lassen soll vor allem seine Transzendenz, seine Freiheit geschützt werden. Er darf nicht in dieser Welt gefangen werden. Seine Gegenwart ist nicht an Ort und Zeit gebunden. Von einer Gesellschaft, die davon ausgeht, die Geschichte sei mit ihr am Ziel, kann diese Botschaft nur schwer verstanden werden.

5. Mose 4 betont jedoch auch die Gegenwart Gottes in der Welt. Das Hauptanliegen des Textes ist sogar, die Spannung zwischen der Transzendenz und der Präsenz Gottes darzustellen. Kein Gott hat eine engere Beziehung zu seinem Volk als Jahwe (V.7). Am Horeb sprach er zwar vom Himmel, aber auf Erden hat er dem Volk 'sein großes Feuer gezeigt' (V.36). Und wiederum 'der Herr ist Gott oben im Himmel und unten auf Erden' (V.39).

Dieser Gedanke hat Konsequenzen für die Art und Weise, wie Gottes Handeln in der Geschichte verstanden werden soll. Israel begegnet Gott an unterschiedlichen Orten: in Ägypten, wo er sie von der Sklaverei befreit; am Horeb, wo er den Bund mit ihnen schließt (5. Mo 5, 2–3); in Moab,

wo der Bund erneuert wurde (5. Mo 29, 1) und in dem Land, das Gott ihnen verheißt (5. Mo 27, 1–8). Dann wiederum wird das Leben in jenem Land wieder ins Exil an einem anderen Ort führen (5. Mo 28, 64–68). Und selbst dort ist das Ziel noch nicht erreicht, denn eine Rückkehr in das Land wird in Aussicht gestellt, vorausgesetzt es erfolgt eine Umkehr (5. Mo 30, 1–5). Der Bundesschluß Gottes findet daher immer im Rahmen einer geschichtlichen Begegnung statt, die immer wieder neu realisiert wird. Daraus folgt, daß die Gegenwart Gottes mit Israel auf Erden mit geschichtlichem Wandel völlig vereinbar ist. Und Israel sollte in der Tat alle erdenkbaren Höhen und Tiefen erleiden, die eine Nation in Jahrhunderten mangelhafter Bündnistreue erfahren sollte.

Derselbe Gedanke ist auch in einem der Hauptmerkmale des Buches ersichtlich: nämlich im Opfergesetz (5. Mo 12:5, 11, 14 etc.). Dieses wird oft als 'Zentralisierungsgesetz' bezeichnet und als eine politisch konservative Maßnahme angesehen. Tatsächlich aber stellt das Opfergesetz eine eindeutige Absage an die kanaanitische Lösung dar, nämlich die unwiderrufliche mythologische Bindung des jeweiligen Gottes an einen bestimmten Ort. Die Weigerung, den Namen eines 'Ortes' zu offenbaren, paßt zu der Vorstellung, eine Gottesbegegnung sei den Bedingungen einer geschichtlichen Beziehung und der Vitalität des Bundes unterworfen. Alle besonderen Anordnungen zur Pflege des Bundes sind von der Vergänglichkeit und Unberechenbarkeit der Geschichte geprägt. Das Deuteronomium bekräftigt durch eine solche Theologie sowohl die Transzendenz Gottes als auch seine Gegenwart im normalen Alltag.

Denn besondere Anordnungen muß es geben. Das Deuteronomium verkündet Gesetze, die sich auf bestimmte Situationen beziehen und erlaubt besondere Kultstätten, einschließlich eines Tempels in Jerusalem. Wenn das Deuteronomium uns in eine ungewisse Zukunft hineinweist, weiß es jedoch auch von gegenwärtigen Verpflichtungen, denen man nicht ausweichen kann. Das Reich Gottes ist zwar mitten unter uns, aber auch im Kommen.

Die christliche Hoffnung weicht den schweren Erfahrungen und Dilemmas um uns herum nicht aus und verharmlost sie nicht. Im Gegenteil verpflichtet uns das Evangelium dazu, uns mit ihnen auseinanderzusetzen und den Einsatz aller guten und praktikablen Mittel zu jedem guten Zweck in die Wege zu leiten, zu verteidigen und zu unterstützen. Das bedeutet, daß wir als Christen uns der herrschenden Politikverdrossenheit nicht anschließen sollten. Natürlich gibt es auch gesunde und konstruktive Kritik. Aber angesichts des Versagens anderer dürfen wir uns



nicht einfach mit einem Achselzucken unserer Verantwortung dafür entziehen, über die Verwaltung menschlicher Angelegenheiten kreativ nachzudenken.

Unterwegs werden mir mit den Trauernden trauern und uns mit den Fröhlichen freuen; wir werden uns zu unserer Ratlosigkeit und sogar zu unserem Zorn bekennen und wir werden uns auf die Risiken einlassen und die Ungewißheiten teilen, die die Welt so schmerzhaft verspürt.

Das christliche Verständnis der Geschichte schließt ein Paradoxon ein. Die Geschichte wird von dem Gott geschaffen und regiert, der nicht in

einem von Menschenhand geschaffenen Tempel eingeschlossen werden kann und doch in jedem Abschnitt der Geschichte gegenwärtig ist. Wir sind also unwiderruflich unseren Mitmenschen verpflichtet in den Nöten, die wir mit ihnen teilen; selbst während wir Ausschau nach dem 'Ziel' halten, das mit dem Reich Gottes kommen wird. Der Schlüssel zu einem wirksamen christlichen Zeugnis liegt in diesem Paradoxon. Gerade in dem Dunkel des Lebens gedeiht die christliche Hoffnung. Denn im Evangelium gibt es keine Mutlosigkeit.



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- **The Church as a Prophetic Community and a Sign of Hope**
- *L'Église comme communauté prophétique et signe d'espérance*
- *Die Gemeinde als prophetische Gemeinschaft und als Zeichen der Hoffnung*

**Miroslav Volf**, Professor, Evangelical Theological Faculty, Osijek, Croatia

## SUMMARY

*I. In various Christian communities, reflection on the nature of the relationship between the church and the world has converged around the idea of the church as a 'sign'. The Protestant Reformation understood the church to have a prophetic role; and the church as sign and instrument of salvation, born within the Roman Catholic Church, began to be accepted in Protestantism post Vatican II.*

*The ambiguous role of churches in Europe during years of oppression obscured the church's 'sign' function despite the positive role of churches in the 1989 revolution. Churches cannot be worshipping communities alone: only prophetic communities can truly worship, and only worshipping communities can be truly prophetic. (In what follows, 'church' means the various churches, especially at the local level).*

*II. The prophetic ministry of the church is 'to relate the gospel to the critical events and issues of the day' (WCC paper on Unity/Renewal). However, there is a danger of reduction of prophetic proclamation to social critique, and of mimicry of secular critiques.*

*The theological foundation of the sign-character of the church is its relation to the new creation. This is easily obscured by the inconsistency of Christian's lives. But past failures should not lead to despair; rather, it is necessary to establish a better theological basis for thinking of the church as a sign.*

*III. God's new creation is the mutual personal indwelling of the Triune God and God's glorified people in the new heavens and the new earth. The historical life of the church should manifest its future unity with God, as an expression of the present experience of the Holy Spirit as the power of the new creation.*

*The church should neither be confused with nor separated from the new creation: not separated, because it receives its life from the Spirit of creation; not confused, because the new Jerusalem is an eschatological city. The church anticipates the new creation; it is not the first fruits of it.*

*IV. We need to clarify the language of 'sign'. 'Sign', like 'anticipation', conveys both the difference and the connection between the church and the new creation. The church is the kind of sign that is intrinsic to the thing to which it points—like 'signs' in John's Gospel.*

*The church as sign also mediates the new creation. Catholic ecclesiology stresses the sacramental character of the church as sign; this must be qualified: the Holy Spirit alone gives faith. Protestant theology prefers the socio-ethical model of the church as 'sign'.*

*There should be no misplaced optimism about what the church is and can do. In the church, the old has become new without however ceasing to be the old. Yet the church's 'homelessness' in the world is paradoxically no impediment to its character as a sign of hope. The church is not to speak of itself as a sign, but to be it.*

*V. OT prophecy is a stimulus to 'sign' language; essentially, prophecy is declaring the word of God. OT prophecy is not transferable as a whole to the church; yet the activity of the church in the world takes place in the power of the same Spirit. The manner of OT prophecy is instructive.*

*Prophecy itself is a sign (Acts 2:17); there is a union between the church's being and its speaking. There are two consequences: first,*



since the spirit of prophecy is given to the whole church, no single pronouncement can be the 'last word'; second, its prophecy has the form of 'witness'.

The prophetic message calls both to friendship with God and to do justice; this is clear from the association of worship and justice in the OT. Neither evangelism nor social critique can stand alone. There is need for dynamic relation to God and sympathy with people; for a revival of a 'tearful tradition'—'orthopathy'.

While there is a need to challenge the privatisation of religion in modern public life, yet the first mission of the prophet is to the church—to help it understand itself in the pandemonium of the world.

VI. A 'communication model' of prophecy is inadequate. Rather, the church itself needs to have vision, its own understanding of the message, which it must always itself hear anew. The first need of the church as prophetic community, therefore, is to pray: *veni creator Spiritus*.

## RÉSUMÉ

1. Dans diverses communautés chrétiennes, les réflexions menées au sujet des rapports entre l'Église et le monde ont abouti à la notion de l'Église comme 'signe'. La Réforme protestante a compris que l'Église avait un rôle prophétique. L'idée que l'Église était un signe et un moyen de salut, une idée née au sein de l'Église catholique romaine, commence à être acceptée dans les milieux protestants depuis Vatican II.

Le rôle ambigu des Églises en Europe pendant des années d'oppression a obscurci la fonction de signe que doit avoir l'Église, malgré le rôle positif des Églises dans le revirement qui s'est produit en 1989. Les Églises ne peuvent pas être des communautés où l'on se borne à l'adoration; seules des communautés qui jouent un rôle prophétique peuvent vraiment adorer le Seigneur, et seules des communautés vouées à l'adoration peuvent jouer un rôle vraiment prophétique (par 'Église', nous entendons les diverses Églises, en particulier sur le plan local).

2. Le ministère prophétique de l'Église consiste à 'mettre en lumière les implications de l'Évangile pour les événements et les problèmes importants du jour' (déclaration du COE sur l'unité et le renouveau). Il faut cependant prendre garde au danger de réduire la proclamation prophétique à une critique sociale, et de se contenter d'imiter les critiques faites par les gens du monde.

Le fondement théologique du caractère de signe de l'Église se trouve dans sa relation avec la nouvelle création. Les inconséquences dans la vie des chrétiens obscurcissent trop souvent ce fait. Mais les défaillances du passé ne

doivent pas nous amener à désespérer. Il faut plutôt nous attacher à poser un meilleur fondement théologique pour considérer l'Église comme un signe.

3. La nouvelle création de Dieu est faite d'une communion entre le Dieu trinitaire et le peuple de Dieu glorifié, dans les nouveaux cieux et la nouvelle terre. La vie de l'Église dans l'histoire devrait manifester quelque chose de son unité future avec Dieu par l'expérience qu'elle fait dès à présent de la puissance du Saint-Esprit comme agent de la nouvelle création.

Entre l'Église et la nouvelle création, il ne doit y avoir ni confusion, ni séparation: pas de séparation, parce que l'Église reçoit sa vie de l'Esprit créateur; ni de confusion, parce que la nouvelle Jérusalem est une cité eschatologique. L'Église est une anticipation de la nouvelle création: elle n'en est pas les prémices.

4. Nous devons clarifier la notion de 'signe'. Ce terme, comme le terme 'anticipation', implique à la fois la différence et le lien qui existe entre l'Église et la nouvelle création. L'Église est un signe lié d'une manière intrinsèque à la réalité signifiée, comme les signes dans l'évangile de Jean.

En tant que signe, l'Église est médiatrice de la nouvelle création. L'ecclésiologie catholique insiste sur le caractère sacramentel de l'Église en tant que signe. Ceci appelle des réserves: c'est l'Esprit seul qui communique la foi. C'est d'un point de vue socio-éthique que la théologie protestante considère l'Église comme un signe.

Il ne devrait pas y avoir d'optimisme déplacé quant à ce qu'est l'Église et ce qu'elle peut accomplir. Dans l'Église, ce qui était ancien est



devenu nouveau, sans cesser d'être ancien. Paradoxalement, le fait que l'Église soit 'étrangère dans le monde' ne l'empêche pas d'être un signe d'espérance. L'Église ne doit pas parler d'elle comme signe; elle doit en être un.

5. Le rôle des prophètes dans l'A.T. nous engage à parler de signes. La prophétie est essentiellement une transmission de la Parole de Dieu. On ne peut pas transférer sans autre à l'Église le ministère prophétique de l'A.T. Pourtant, l'activité de l'Église dans le monde s'exerce par la puissance du même Esprit. Ainsi, la manière dont s'exerçait le ministère prophétique de l'A.T. est instructive pour nous.

La prophétie constitue elle-même un signe (Ac. 2:17). Il y a union entre l'être de l'Église et sa parole. Il en résulte une double conséquence: d'abord, puisque l'Esprit de prophétie est donné à l'Église tout entière, aucune déclaration particulière ne peut constituer le 'dernier mot'; d'autre part, la prophétie consiste en un témoignage.

Le message prophétique appelle à la réconciliation avec Dieu et à l'exercice de la

justice. D'ailleurs, adoration et justice sont étroitement associées dans l'A.T.

L'évangélisation et la critique sociale ne peuvent pas être mises en oeuvre l'une sans l'autre. Il faut une relation dynamique avec Dieu et de la sympathie pour les hommes. Il faut renouer avec une tradition qui inclut des larmes, ce qu'on pourrait appeler une 'orthopathie'.

Il est nécessaire de contester la tendance moderne à considérer la religion comme une affaire privée; cependant, le premier devoir du prophète est de s'adresser à l'Église, pour l'aider à comprendre ce qu'elle est au sein d'un monde livré au désordre.

6. Aborder le rôle prophétique sous l'angle d'un modèle de communication est inadéquat. Il convient plutôt que l'Église elle-même ait une vision, qu'elle comprenne, elle la première, le message qu'elle transmet et qu'elle doit toujours entendre à nouveau. Le premier besoin de l'Église, en tant que communauté prophétique, est donc de prier: 'Viens, Esprit créateur'.

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

I. In verschiedenen christlichen Gemeinschaften sind die Überlegungen über das Verhältnis von Gemeinde und Welt auf den Gedanken hinausgelaufen, der die Gemeinde als 'Zeichen' versteht. Die protestantische Reformation hatte einen Blick für die prophetische Rolle der Gemeinde. Die Kirche als Zeichen und Mittel der Erlösung zu verstehen, ein Gedanke aus der römisch-katholischen Kirche, diese Sicht gewann im Protestantismus erst nach dem 2. Vatikanischen Konzil an Akzeptanz.

Die zweideutige Rolle der Gemeinden in Europa während der Jahre der Unterdrückung verdunkelte die Funktion der Gemeinde als 'Zeichen' trotz der positiven Rolle der Kirchen während der Revolution von 1989. Die Gemeinden können nicht nur anbetende Gemeinschaften sein: Nur prophetische Gemeinschaften können in Wahrheit anbeten, und nur anbetende Gemeinschaften können in Wahrheit prophetisch sein. (Im Folgenden meint Gemeinde/Kirche die verschiedenen Arten von Gemeinden, besonders auf der örtlichen Ebene.)

II. Das prophetische Amt der Gemeinde 'hat die Aufgabe, das Evangelium in Beziehung zu den kritischen Ereignissen und Fragen des Tages zu setzen' (Schrift des ÖRK zu Einheit/Erneuerung). Hierbei besteht die Gefahr, daß die prophetische Verkündigung zu sozialer Kritik reduziert wird oder nur säkulare Kritiken nachahmt.

Die theologische Grundlage des Zeichencharakters der Gemeinde besteht in der Beziehung zur neuen Schöpfung. Dies wird leicht verdunkelt durch die Ungereimtheiten im Leben von Christen. Aber Fehler der Vergangenheit sollten nicht zur Verzweiflung führen; vielmehr ist es notwendig, eine bessere theologische Grundlage aufzubauen, wenn man von der Gemeinde als Zeichen denkt.

III. Gottes neue Schöpfung ist die gemeinsame persönliche Innwohnung des dreieinigen Gottes und des verherrlichten Volkes Gottes in dem neuen Himmel und der neuen Erde. Das geschichtliche Leben der Gemeinde sollte die zukünftige Einheit mit Gott sichtbar machen, und zwar als Ausdruck der gegenwärtigen Erfahrung mit dem Heiligen



*Geist als der Kraft der neuen Schöpfung.*

Die Gemeinde sollte weder mit der neuen Schöpfung verwechselt noch von ihr getrennt werden. Nicht getrennt, weil sie vom Geist der Schöpfung Leben erhält. Nicht verwechselt, weil das neue Jerusalem eine eschatologische Stadt ist. Die Gemeinde antizipiert die neue Schöpfung, sie ist nicht deren erste Frucht.

IV. Wir müssen den Begriff 'Zeichen' näher klären. 'Zeichen' wie 'Antizipation' tragen beides in sich, sowohl den Unterschied als auch die Verbindung zwischen Gemeinde und neuer Schöpfung. Die Gemeinde ist ein Zeichen solcher Art, daß sie in Übereinstimmung ist mit dem, worauf sie eigentlich hinweist — ähnlich den 'Zeichen' im Johannesevangelium.

Die Gemeinde als Zeichen vermittelt auch die neue Schöpfung. Die katholische Ekklesiologie betont den sakramentalen Charakter der Gemeind als Zeichen; dies muß eingeschränkt werden: der Heilige Geist allein gibt Glauben. Die protestantische Theologie bevorzugt, das sozio-ethische Modell von der Gemeinde als 'Zeichen'.

Es sollte keinen falschen Optimismus im Blick auf das geben, was die Gemeinde ist und was sie tun kann. In der Gemeinde ist das Alte neu geworden, wenngleich es auch nicht aufhört, das Alte zu sein. Und dennoch ist die 'Heimatlosigkeit' der Gemeinde in dieser Welt paradoxerweise doch kein Hindernis für ihre Rolle als Zeichen der Hoffnung. Die Gemeinde hat nicht von sich selbst als Zeichen zu sprechen, sondern es zu sein.

V. Die alttestamentliche Prophetie stimuliert diese 'Zeichen'—Begrifflichkeit. Im Wesentlichen ist Prophetie Verkündigung des Wortes Gottes. Die alttestamentliche

Prophetie läßt sich nicht als Ganzes auf die Gemeinde übertragen. Dennoch geschieht das Handeln der Gemeinde in dieser Welt in der Kraft des gleichen Geistes. Die Art der alttestamentlichen Prophetie ist daher aufschlußreich.

Die Prophetie selbst ist ein Zeichen (Apg 2, 17). Hier gibt es eine Einheit zwischen dem Wesen der Gemeinde und ihrer Verkündigung. Dies hat zwei Konsequenzen: weil erstens der Geist der Prophetie der ganzen Gemeinde gegeben ist, kann keine einzelne Äußerung das 'letzte Wort' sein; zweitens hat die Prophetie die Form eines 'Zeugnisses'.

Die prophetische Botschaft ruft sowohl zur Freundschaft mit Gott auf als auch zum gerechten Handeln. Dies wird deutlich aus der Verbindung von Gottesdienst und Gerechtigkeit im Alten Testament. Weder Evangelisation noch Sozialkritik können alleine stehen. Es braucht die dynamische Beziehung zu Gott und Mitgefühl mit den Menschen. Es braucht die Belebung der 'tränenreichen Tradition'—'Orthopathie'.

Während es nötig ist, die Privatisierung der Religion im modernen öffentlichen Leben zu hinterfragen, so gilt doch der erste Auftrag des Propheten der Gemeinde: ihr zu helfen, sich im Höllenlärm dieser Welt zu verstehen.

VI. Ein 'Kommunikationsmodell' für Prophetie ist unzureichend. Vielmehr braucht die Gemeinde selbst die Vision, das eigene Verständnis der Botschaft, welche sie immer wieder neu hören muß. Das größte Bedürfnis für die Gemeinde als prophetische Gemeinschaft ist deshalb das Gebet: Veni creator spiritus (Komm, Schöpfer Geist).

**1** In various Christian communities, theological reflection on the relation between the church and the world has increasingly in recent decades revolved around the double notions of 'prophecy' and 'sign'. The convergence is a significant ecumenical achievement, since these notions touch the very heart of what the church is and what its mission in the world should be.

Over against theologies in the Middle Ages, which tended to lock up the prophets in the past by thinking of them exclusively

as precursors of Christ, the Protestant Reformation rediscovered the prophetic dimensions of the present ministry of the Word, and hence also the prophetic calling of the whole church. Zwingli in particular stressed what has been aptly termed 'the universal prophethood of the Christian church' (H.-J. Kraus).<sup>1</sup> Under the influence of the Christology and ecclesiology of the Reformers, at Vatican II the Catholic Church applied Christ's threefold ministry of Prophet, King, and Priest to the church<sup>2</sup>—the trilogy



is even the organizing principle of the new Canon law—and thus ascribed the prophetic ministry to the whole people of God.<sup>3</sup>

The understanding of the church as a sign and instrument of salvation—'veluti sacramentum seu signum et instrumentum'<sup>4</sup>—was born within the Catholic Church and at Vatican II became a part of its official teaching. The idea that the Church is a sign and instrument was not completely foreign to the Protestant tradition, but there it played a marginal role, partly because of well-known Protestant hesitations about the word 'sacrament'.<sup>5</sup> A conscious and broad reception of this idea in Protestant circles began under the direct influence of formulations of Vatican II at the *Fourth Assembly of the WCC* at Uppsala (1968). The *Sixth Assembly of the WCC* at Vancouver (1983) made the theological exploration of the church as an effective 'sign' a central part of its programme on the Unity of the Church and the Renewal of Human Community.<sup>6</sup> Though the term 'sacrament' as applied to the church is still suspect in Protestant circles because of its possible implications for the nature of the instrumentality of the church,<sup>7</sup> the idea of the church as 'sign and instrument of salvation' has become current in Protestant ecclesiology.

With the Catholic rediscovery of the prophetic role of the whole church and Protestant rediscovery of the sign-character of the church a broad ecumenical consensus seems to be emerging on the relation of the church to the world: the church should be thought of as a prophetic community and an effective sign of hope.

2. The theological wisdom enshrined in the consensus of 'all the saints' notwithstanding, my first reaction when asked to speak on the church as a prophetic community and a sign of hope was to write a paper on why the church should cut back on such self-congratulatory talk. The invitation to speak came at the time of the inglorious ending of the Seoul conference on Justice, Peace, and the Integrity of Creation (March 1990).<sup>8</sup> The intention of the organizers of the Seoul conference was for a word to go out from Seoul 'that the world could not fail to hear' (C. F. von Weizsäcker). But the prophets, divided amongst themselves, were

struck with dumbness and a self-styled sign of hope turned into a cause for despair. The convergence on the great issues of the day at the global level sufficed only for pronouncing some impotent platitudes. One might object that this description is too bleak a picture of what actually took place at the conference. But if one is to judge by press reports (at least in Germany), this is what the world *has heard* from Seoul.

When the Seoul fiasco was in the making another event took place which pumped new blood into the talk about the church as a prophetic community and a sign of hope. The event was the drama of the '1989 revolution'. In it the Eastern European churches were assigned some of the key roles. It would be too much to claim that these churches carried out the revolution; it was a revolution of Gorbachev and of the Eastern European peoples, not of the churches. Indeed, with some notable exceptions, the indigenous churches were silent in the face of economic, political, and cultural oppression; they were 'worshipping' communities, not prophetic communities. Moreover, their silence spoke often of complicity. Yet it also spoke of protest against a seemingly omnipotent oppressor. In spite of the ambiguity of their social role during the years of communist rule, the worship and life of the Eastern European churches were prophetic and the oppressed peoples of these countries recognized in them communities of living hope, at least in a time of revolutionary crisis.

There are, of course, worshipping communities that remain irrelevant for the problems of the world and there are prophetic communities which are more successful than the Seoul conference was. The above two examples are not meant to suggest that we should side with the worshipping communities against the prophetic communities. We do not need to choose between the liturgical forms of Christianity and activist ones. Indeed, *only prophetic communities can truly worship and only worshipping communities can truly be prophetic*. One of the purposes of the present article is to develop this thesis. This is also what we should learn from the double experience of churches striving to be 'prophetic' but failing to have an impact on the world and of



churches hindered from exercising 'prophetic' ministry but being thrust into the forefront of the struggle for liberation.

I will first critique the explicit or implicit dominant understandings of prophetic ministry of the church and its function as a sign (Section II). Taking as my starting-point reflection on the relation between the church and the new creation (Section III), I will then suggest how our thinking about the role of the church in the world—its living before the world and speaking to the world—can be recast to avoid the criticisms noted (Sections IV–V). In conclusion I will ponder what it takes for the church to be a prophetic community and a sign of hope.

Before proceeding, let me make two remarks, one terminological and one about the scope of this essay. First, sociologically *the* church is a fiction. Only multiple concrete Christian churches actually exist and can interact with the world. When I speak in the following in the singular about 'the church' I mean always this plurality of churches: *they* are prophetic communities and signs of hope to the extent that each of them individually and in relation to the others is a prophetic community and a sign of hope. Theologically I believe that the primary locus of ecclesiality is the local church.<sup>9</sup> So the 'church' means to me above all a concrete local community of believers. But I suspect that nothing in the argument here changes if one wishes to place the primary locus of ecclesiality on a level higher than the local church.

Second, churches are obviously not the only Christian groups that are prophetic. Much too often they complacently blend in with their surroundings. So the prophetic Spirit finds a domicile among the groups that live on the fringes of ecclesiastical life, challenging both the unjust world and the chameleon-like churches. If I reflect here only on the churches as prophetic communities and signs of hope, this is not to encourage the arrogance of the church but to challenge its frequent infidelity.

## II

1. In the article 'Der prophetische Auftrag der Kirche' the former general secretary of

the WCC, Philip Potter, suggested that we understand the prophetic ministry of the church as the proclamation of the gospel to the world in its significance for the present and the future. Prophetic ministry is rooted in the word of God as it was revealed in God's mighty works in the history of salvation and in the covenant with God's people for the sake of all the peoples, and its purpose is to apply the word of God to the great problems of the world today.<sup>10</sup> There might be some disagreement on what these central problems are but there is a basic consensus on the purpose of prophetic ministry: Its point is 'to relate the gospel to the critical events and issues of the day'.<sup>11</sup>

Two related tendencies bespeak the malaise of Christian prophetism today. The one is the reduction of prophetic proclamation to social critique. Consider the following description of the Christian prophetic critique by R. R. Reuther:

The theology of prophetic critique [...] locates God and the spokespersons for God on the side of those victimized or despised by the social and political elites. The word of God comes as a critique of these elites, calling them to reform their ways in order to be faithful to divine justice or else threatening them with a revolutionary intervention of God in history that will overthrow their power and bring in a new world, where justice and peace will be established.<sup>12</sup>

These remarks purport to express the gist of Christian prophetism. But take the word 'God' out and they become nothing other than a program for left-wing secular social critique. My point is not to call into question the need for Christian social critique, for this, as I will argue later, is an essential dimension of Christian presence in the world. I also do not wish to deny that Christians need to be on the side of the victimized and despised (not least on the side of women suffering under the oppressive patriarchal structures of societies), for I too advocate the preferential option for the poor. Reuther is right, a theology designed to tickle the ears of the social elites—what she brands 'sacred canopy theology'—is a reduction of theology to mere ideology of the oppressive status quo. My point is not to call into question her concern, simply to indicate



that there is very little prophetic about the critique Reuther seems to be calling the church to exercise—unless one wishes to define prophecy as slightly angry social ethics which has taken a religious short-cut.<sup>13</sup>

Christian social critics would have less need for prophetic labels if there were not so much *mimicry* in their pronouncements. Christian prophets tend to forge their messages by clothing the ideas of their favorite secular social critics in religious garb. What Jeffrey Stout observes about theology in general is certainly true of Christian social critique: it has 'often assumed a voice not its own and found itself merely repeating the bromides of secular intellectuals in transparently figurative speech'.<sup>14</sup> Of course, Christians can and should learn from non-Christians. Social analysis, for instance, can provide them with tools for understanding the mechanisms of oppression. But 'there is no more certain way for theology to lose its voice than to imitate that of another'.<sup>15</sup> In any case, if the word 'prophet' is appropriate, then it should describe those secular critics, not Christian theologians who merely echo their ideas.

2. In the 'Report of the First Consultation of the Unity/Renewal Study' of the WCC on the church as mystery and prophetic sign we find the following description of the sign-character of the church:

They [the followers of Christ] are gathered in the church, which is sent into the world in order to be a foretaste of what the world is to become, the first-fruits of the new creation. [...] Accordingly the church is called to be and serve as that part of humanity which is prepared and empowered by the Holy Spirit to witness to and proclaim the kingdom in and for this world through word and deed, life, suffering and dying. [...] To the degree in which this happens the church is, through the Holy Spirit, an effective sign, an instrument of God's rule in this 'aion'.<sup>16</sup>

The theological foundation for the sign-character of the church is its relation to the new creation: The church is an effective sign of God's rule to the extent that it is the first fruits of the new creation, because only as such can it be 'the foretaste of what the world is to become'.<sup>17</sup>

But the taste of the church has seemed bitter to the world's palate. The would-be appetizer for the feast of the Kingdom turns rather noisome and people walk away from the table in disgust. The churches are too much like the old and sinful creation—there is too much idolatry, immorality, religious intolerance, racism, sexism, and exploitation in them—for the world to take them as the first fruits of the new creation. Much too often they resemble more closely the demonic kingdom than the Kingdom of God.<sup>18</sup> Nowadays, the churches more readily admit the inconsistency of their lives than the sterility of their 'prophetic' utterances. Hence whenever the church is called a sign of hope one will find an accompanying confession of the disobedience and divisions which obscure the sign. But if there is any sincerity to such a confession, some narcissism must lie behind the churches' pointing in the same breath to themselves as effective signs of hope, 'the foretaste of what the world is to become'. A bit more humility about what the churches *are*—and not simply about how they behave—would be called for.

3. One way to ward off the above criticism would be to stop talking about the church as a prophetic community and a sign of hope. Instead of aspiring to make prophetic pronouncements about the great issues of the day, one would then limit oneself, say, to coolheaded Christian social critique. But can the Christian church which was built on the foundation not only of the apostles but also of the prophets give up the prophetic ministry without denying itself (cf. Eph. 2:20)? Indeed, can a religion which believes in a personal God who acts in history for the salvation of all people dispense with prophets as God's spokespersons? Instead of giving up on prophetic ministry we need a better theological foundation for understanding its nature and for its exercise. Putting Christian prophetism on firm ground will help make Christian social critique more recognizably theological and thus rescue its reputation as a serious conversation partner in a pluralistic debate about the fate of our world.

What about the pretentiousness of the talk about the church as a sign of hope? Should it lead us to abandon the notion of the church as a sign or would it suffice to



recast the notion in a different mould? At first glance, exegetical data do not encourage the use of the term 'sign' for the church. Of the 77 usages of *sēmeion* in the New Testament not a single one refers to the church. When the term 'sign' is connected with the church, it designates something the church *does* (healings [cf. Acts 2:43; 5:12] or speaking in tongues [1 Cor. 14:22]), not something the church is. But what is the import of this exegetical finding for ecclesiological reflection about the sign-character of the church? The answer depends on the nature of the relation between the church and the new creation.

### III

Both the life of the church before the eyes of the world and its message to the world have their ultimate point of reference in God's new creation. By the term 'new creation' I am referring to the eschatological reality that the Old Testament prophets envisaged (see Isa. 65:17ff.), that Jesus announced and inaugurated through his whole ministry (see Lk. 4:18ff.), and that the writer of the Revelation describes as the ultimate destiny of God's people and God's world (Rev. 21–22). In the present section I will first indicate the nature of the eschatological new creation, and its relation to the present, that is, analyse it as a reality that God gives human beings through the Holy Spirit and that God calls them to anticipate through personal and social action. I will then investigate more specifically the relation between the new creation and the church.

1. God's new creation is the mutual personal indwelling of the Triune God and God's glorified people in the new heavens and the new earth.<sup>19</sup> This follows from the description and the location of the New Jerusalem (which describes the people, and not the place where the people live) in the book of Revelation.<sup>20</sup> First, the whole city is described as the Holy of Holies filled with the presence of God and of the Lamb (cf. 1 Kings 6:20). At the same time God and the Lamb are portrayed as the temple in which the Holy of Holies (i.e. the people) are situated (cf. Rev 21:22).<sup>21</sup> Thus the saints dwell in God and the Lamb just as God and the Lamb

dwell in them. The eschatological vision of Revelation suggests that the purpose of all God's dealings with human beings is for them to enjoy fellowship with the Triune God. Second, the New Jerusalem—the people of God—is located in the new heavens and new earth which are freed from transience and from all evil (cf. Rev 21:1; 22:1–5). There can be no eschatological bliss for God's people without eschatological *shalom* for God's world.

The historical life of the church should image its eschatological future in the new creation. The eschatological mutual indwelling of the Triune God and the people of God is the final fulfilment of the high-priestly prayer of Jesus: '[. . .] that they may be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us' (John 17:21). The prayer of Jesus, however, was not only a prayer for the final destiny of the churches, but also for their communal life on the way to this destiny. Hence it is the calling of the church to manifest in this world its future unity with the Triune God. Because the people of God will live in God's new world, striving to deepen fellowship with God and with one another must go hand in hand with resistance to godless and inhuman conditions in the world and an active concern for the integral well-being of the world. Sanctification in the personal life is incomplete without transformation of the world.

The historical life of the church is, however, not a mere imitation of its eschatological future; it is rather an expression of the present experience of the Holy Spirit as the power of the new creation. In the first epistle of John we read: 'that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ' (1:3). Through faith in the 'Life' which was with the Father (1 John 1:2), the Spirit gives birth to the fellowship between the believing people and the Triune God and places these people in fellowship with one another. Birth by the Spirit, which makes people Christians, is a birth 'from above' (John 3:3), but it takes place here below: It is a new birth of people who live in this world and with this world make up the



good creation of God. Hence the new birth of persons through the Spirit must be seen as the beginning—ambiguous but nonetheless real beginning—of the rebirth of the whole cosmos (cf. Matt. 19:28; 2 Cor. 5:17),<sup>22</sup> and Christians' action in the world through the power of the Spirit as a historical anticipation of the new creation.

2. From the above understanding of the relation between the church and the new creation it follows that the church should neither be confused with nor separated from the new creation. Stated in such a general way, this conclusion sounds like a rather inconsequential commonplace. It needs unpacking to be made fruitful for reflection about the sign-character of the church and its prophetic ministry.

The church may not be *separated* from the new creation. The new creation is in fact the primary point of reference for ecclesiology.<sup>23</sup> The church can be the church only because it receives its life from the Spirit of God who is the power of the new creation. The church does not, of course, have a monopoly on the Spirit of God. The same Spirit who is present in the church (*regnum gratiae*) is also active in the world (*regnum naturae*) with the goal of transforming both into the new creation (*regnum gloriae*); through the Spirit the resurrected Christ is the giver of life to the whole world (cf. 1 Cor. 15:45).<sup>24</sup> The activity of the Spirit in the world does not, however, obliterate the distinction between the church and the world. For churches are the communities of those who, in response to the prompting of the Spirit, have believed in Jesus Christ as their Saviour and who confess him as their Lord, communities of those who through the Spirit have personal fellowship with the Triune God and with one another. This is the prerogative of Christians. For this reason the New Testament speaks of them alone as having received the Spirit as the firstfruits and the down-payment of the new creation (cf. Rom. 8:23; 1 Cor 1:22). It is this special presence of the Spirit of the new creation which distinguishes the church from the world.

The presence of the Spirit of the new creation in the church should not, however, lead us to *confuse* the church with the new creation. The temptation simply to identify

the church with the kingdom of God or the new creation is not too great at present; the difference between the two strikes us as quite glaring. But there are tendencies to see the church as an enclave of the new creation, as its preliminary stage or its 'earthly realization'.<sup>25</sup> Over against such tendencies we need to be reminded that the new heaven and the new earth are not a human creation—not even an ecclesial creation—and that the New Jerusalem is an *eschatological* city 'coming down out of heaven from God' (Rev. 21:1f.).

To describe the experience of the eschatological new life in the church it seems best to use the language of *anticipation*. Anticipation is not yet fulfilment, not even partial fulfilment; it is the presence of the future *under the conditions of history*.<sup>26</sup> Inherent characteristics of history as distinct from the eschaton are transitoriness and sinfulness. In the framework of history one can partly prevail over transitoriness and sinfulness but can never fully overcome them: The body can be healed, but it dies and must await the resurrection of the dead; Christians need not be enslaved to sin, yet the struggle between the Spirit and the 'flesh' remains. To say that the church is the anticipation of the new creation is, therefore, to say in one and the same breath that the Spirit of the new creation is indwelling the church and that the church remains inescapably marked by the transitoriness and sinfulness of history.<sup>27</sup>

It is sometimes thought that the language of anticipation is identical with the Pauline language of 'first-fruits' and 'down-payment'.<sup>28</sup> Yet we would do well to distinguish the two. It is striking that Paul never calls the historical mediations of the new creation 'first-fruits' and 'down-payment,' but reserves these terms for the *mediator*; the Spirit of God which Christians have received, not the results of the Spirit's activity in the life of Christians and in the world, is the 'firstfruits' and the 'down-payment'.<sup>29</sup> The point of the Pauline ἀπαρχή language is to underline the *identity* in kind between the first instalment and what follows (cf. Rom. 11:16).<sup>30</sup> Therefore, in addition to the Spirit given to Christians by Christ, only the resurrected Christ can appropriately be called 'the first-



fruits of the new creation' (cf. 1 Cor. 15:20, 23). For the church to usurp this title is not only unbiblical but also plays into hands of an *ecclesia gloriæ* that is at best ridiculously unrealistic and at worst maliciously ideological.

The church is not the firstfruits of the new creation, but it is the community of those who have tasted the firstfruits of the new creation. It can therefore hope with certainty for the 'glorious liberty of the children of God' and of the whole creation (cf. Rom. 8:21ff.); the church can also live as a sign of this hope before the world and speak of this hope to the world. As it lives before the world the church anticipates the new creation through its being and actions (Section IV); as it speaks to the world the church announces the new creation through its prophetic proclamation (Section V).

#### IV

'Sign' is one of those accommodating words whose slim core-meaning can be saddled with a wide variety of connotations. It is therefore well capable of fostering convergence between diverse ecclesiological traditions. But its strengths are at the same time its weaknesses. The price of the ecclesiological convergence around the term 'sign' seems to be confusion. I will attempt to bring some clarity to the subject by laying a theological and biblical basis for the ecclesiological use of the term 'sign' and by reflecting on the disputed issue of the instrumentality of the church. Then I will draw some implications from the sign-character of the church for the nature of its presence in the world.

1. Talk about the church as a sign is theologically rooted in the character of the church as the anticipation of the new creation. In fact, the meanings of the terms 'anticipation' and 'sign' as they apply to the church largely overlap. The difference between them lies in the perspective from which they mark the church in its relation to the new creation: The language of anticipation describes the being of the church as (it should be) lived out by the Christian community; the language of sign describes it as (it should be) perceived by the world.

Like 'anticipation', 'sign' implies both the difference and the connection between the church and the new creation. Just as anticipation is not yet fulfilment, so the sign is not what it signifies. The identity of the signifier with the signified reality would destroy the signifier in its specificity. To call the church a sign is, therefore, to say something negative about the relation between the church and the new creation. It is to deny their identity.<sup>31</sup> At the same time, the term 'sign' underlines the positive relation between the church and the new creation. The function of the sign is to point to the signified reality. With the risk of simplification we can say that the signs fulfil that function in two distinct ways: they can be extrinsic to the reality to which they point (like road signs) or they can be intrinsic to it (like a love letter). The church is this latter kind of a sign: It points to the new creation by being its present realization under the conditions of history; it signifies by *sampling*.<sup>32</sup>

The Johannine use of *sêmeion* corroborates this theological understanding of the term 'sign' and it is there that we need to turn for exegetical support for the notion of the church as a sign.<sup>33</sup> In John's Gospel signs are eschatological events that are 'special demonstrations of the character and power of God'.<sup>34</sup> Their purpose is not only to strengthen the faith of believers but also to elicit faith in unbelievers. To understand them properly means to apprehend Christ by faith.<sup>35</sup> Yet not all who see the signs understand them as signs; they mistake the signifier for the signified reality (cf. 6:26ff.) and hence never come to faith in Christ (cf. 12:37). To say that the purpose of signs is to elicit faith does not mean to spiritualize the signs. For they have this function as 'partial but effective realizations of [...] salvation'.<sup>36</sup> Precisely because they partly embody what they signify they can point to the fact that Christ gives 'life to the world' (6:33).

How do we get, however, from the signs that Christ did to the church as a sign? John's Gospel expects the disciples to do the kind of miracles that Christ did (14:12). Presumably their miracles would be signs of eschatological salvation too. But by proceeding this way, we arrive only at the signs that the church does, not to a sign that the



church is. Is there warrant in John's gospel for speaking about the church as a sign? In his high-priestly prayer Jesus prays 'that they may be one [...] so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me' (17:21). The unity of believers with one another and with the Triune God is not only a present anticipation of eschatological salvation but also has in relation to the world the same effect as the signs do: it elicits faith in Christ. It seems, therefore, legitimate to apply sign terminology to the unity of the believers. The Johannine writings suggest basically the same understanding of the sign-character of the church as does reflection on the church as anticipation of the new creation.<sup>37</sup>

2. Beyond pointing to the new creation and anticipating it in history, the church as a sign also *mediates* the new creation. Although this third dimension of the sign-character of the church is dominant in the ecumenical debate,<sup>38</sup> there is little agreement about the instrumentality of the church with respect to its being and actions.<sup>39</sup> Two distinct but not exclusive positions seem to prevail: the sacramental one in which the church mediates the salvation in Jesus Christ to persons and the socio-ethical one in which the church strives to anticipate the new creation in the structures of the world.

Catholic (and in its own way Orthodox<sup>40</sup>) ecclesiology stresses the sacramental understanding of the church as a sign. In *Lumen gentium* the traditional sacramental language is applied analogically to the Church: '[...] the Church, in Christ, is a kind of sacrament—a sign and instrument, that is, of communion with God and of unity among all men and women'.<sup>41</sup> It is inherent in an instrument that it is unable to act on its own. Just as sacraments are the acts of Christ so also is the church as an effective sign a 'tool in the hands of Christ who is properly speaking the subject of all the action of the Church'.<sup>42</sup> Yet at the point of the impartation of salvation in Catholic theology the church is not simply a passive instrument in Christ's hands. We are told that 'she gives birth' to a new and immortal life to the children conceived by the Holy Spirit.<sup>43</sup> The church does more than only anticipate eschatological salvation and

testify to it by word and deed; it also co-operates with God in *imparting* this salvation.<sup>44</sup>

Does not this Catholic understanding of the church as an effective sign attribute to the church what belongs to the Holy Spirit alone? Unlike the sacraments, the church cannot impart what it signifies. The church as the mother is not different from the community of the sisters and brothers. The church is, therefore, an effective sign of God's salvation in the same sense in which each of its members individually and communally is a sign.<sup>45</sup> It can elicit faith by embodying the life of the new creation, but the Holy Spirit alone can give the faith. It can, and indeed it must, testify to the new life, but the Spirit alone can conceive the new life and give birth to it.

In Protestant circles the socio-ethical understanding of the church as an effective sign prevails.<sup>46</sup> The church is the vanguard of the new creation called to anticipate the new creation in the world through social action. This is, of course, true as it stands: A church which was not an anticipation of a new humankind under the rule of God's Spirit would cease to be a church, and a church that did not strive to make the structures of this old creation reflect God's coming new creation would deny its vocation.

Yet we should not fall prey to a theologically misplaced optimism that breeds arrogance about what the church is and what it can do in the world. The old creation is not merely a location where the church, as the vanguard of the new creation, lives. The old creation is also part and parcel of what the church *is*. The statement 'The church is not the new creation', does not simply mean that the behaviour of the church often conflicts with the demands of the new creation. It means what it says: In its being, the church is a mixed reality; the old has become new, without, however, ceasing completely to *be* the old.

In relation to the church's activity in the world we should, therefore, not take anticipations of the new creation to be its realization, not even its partial realization. Although the Spirit is already working in history using human actions to create provisional states of affairs which anticipate



the new creation in a real way, these historical anticipations are as far from the consummation of the new creation as earth is from heaven. The consummation is a work of God alone through which God will transfigure and glorify the creation together with what human beings have done in it in anticipation of the new creation. The new creation is, therefore, fundamentally a gift and the primary human action in relation to it is not doing but prayerful 'waiting' (cf. 2 Pet. 3:12; Matt. 6:10).<sup>47</sup> It is as this waiting and praying people of God that Christians are called to cooperate with God in anticipation of the eschatological transformation of the world.

3. The church signifies, I have said, by sampling: It is a sign of the new creation by being its anticipation in the old creation. It follows that the church can be a sign of hope for the world only if it is a stranger in the world. Being a stranger is not simply a posture which the church takes in relation to the world; it is rooted in the very being of the church as anticipation of the new creation. Because the kingdom of Christ is 'not of this world' (John 18:36), the world cannot be the commonwealth of Christians (Phil. 3:20); they can only be 'aliens and exiles' in it (1 Pet. 2:11). This has nothing to do with a dualistic depreciation of the world. For though the kingdom of Christ is not of this world, it is a kingdom for this world; the new creation does not come about through a replacement of the present creation by a new one, but through its transformation. This gives the homelessness of the church in this world a strictly eschatological character.

Since the church should not desire to fly from the world but should strive to bring the eschatological new creation to bear on this world, being a stranger in the world always involves conflict with the world. The conflict is not simply between one supplier on the market of individual and communal life-projects and others. It is a conflict between light and darkness, justice and arbitrariness, life and death (with the firing-line running often not simply between the church and the world, but also through both church and world).<sup>48</sup> This is why there can be no church without martyrdom. The very new life that God gives the church sets it in opposition to the oppressive powers of the world and there-

fore on the road to suffering (cf. 1 Pet. 4:2-4,12).<sup>49</sup>

The eschatological homelessness of the church in the world and its resulting suffering are not impediments to the church's being a sign of hope for the world. They are a precondition of it. The celebrated tension between the eschatological identity and historical relevance of the church is a false one for the simple reason that relevance presupposes identity. A church that has become part of this world will at best be able to give the world lessons about ideological and institutional survival, possibly even about success. But it will never be a sign of living hope. Hope is born where the Spirit of the new creation is seen at work in the conflicts of the church with the spirits of this world (or in the 'prophetic withdrawals' of the church from the world<sup>50</sup>). Following in the footsteps of its Lord, the church needs to go the way of the cross in the power of the Spirit. The cross is the sign of the church; the church under the cross is a sign of hope for the world.<sup>51</sup>

4. The sign-character of the church is not a part of the church's message to the world. The church is not called to proclaim itself as a sign; it is called to *be* a sign before the watching world. For the church to direct attention to itself as a sign of hope would not only be arrogant in relation to the world but also misplaced in relation to its own character as a sign. The purpose of the sign is to point to the reality it signifies, not to itself; the sign confirms itself as a sign by pointing away from itself. Moreover, if the church signifies by sampling, then the reality of the church as a sign is none other than the reality of the new creation anticipated through the presence of the Spirit. The church has nothing of its own to which to draw the attention of the world.<sup>52</sup> Like the light of the moon, the light of the church is not its own light, but a reflection of the Light that has come into the world to enlighten every person (cf. John 1:9).<sup>53</sup>

When we encounter in the New Testament the exalted designations of the church as 'the light of the world,' 'a city set on a hill' (Matt. 5:14; cf. 1 Pet. 2:9-10) they appear in statements in the second person plural directed to the church, not in statements in



the first person plural directed to the world. These designations are not the self-congratulatory and self-commendatory talk of an established church. They are words of comfort and challenge to a persecuted church. If the light shines it will be seen, and if a city is on a hill it will be noticed. The more the church becomes a sign of the new creation, the less it will need to clamour self-advertisingly for the attention of the world. It will then have the inner strength to let the nations be drawn near to it, saying: 'Come, let us go up to the mountain of the Lord, to the house of the God of Jacob; that he may teach us his ways and that we may walk in his ways' (Isa. 2:3; cf. Isa. 25:6-8; Mic. 4:1ff.).<sup>54</sup>

It is not a task of the church to talk to the world about itself. This, of course, does not mean that it should not talk to the world at all. Rather, as the church is called to point the world to the new creation through its being, so the church is also called to point to the new creation through its speaking. As a sign of hope the church is called to exercise prophetic ministry.

## V

The ecclesiological popularity of the word 'prophetic' owes much to the positive emotional charge that it draws from the venerable tradition of the Old Testament prophets. Emotional connotations are an important dimension of religious language, but they must feed on its denotative content whose ingredients come from the biblical traditions. Guided by the above reflection on the relation between the church and the new creation (Section III) I will draw some implications from the biblical prophetic traditions—from the Old Testament prophets and from Jesus—for the way in which the church should address the great issues of today. But first we need to look at the gap that separates biblical prophets from us today and search for a way to bridge it.

1. When one compares prophecy in the biblical traditions and in the church today one gets the impression that the only thing they have in common is the designation. Except in the Pentecostal and charismatic segments of the Christian church (which are

too often blind to the socio-economic dimensions of Christian prophecy), prophecy today means either the interpretation of the word of God for the church (in more conservative circles) or its application to the problems of the world accompanied by righteous indignation (in more liberal circles). The prophetess and her activity seems to stand at the centre of the prophetic ministry: her task is to activate the deepest symbols of the community in order to challenge the 'regnant consciousness' and sinful and oppressive practices. In the biblical traditions the accent is rather different: God and God's message to the sinful structures and individuals stand at the centre. Both in the New and the Old Testament the prophets understand themselves to be declaring the word of God imparted to them directly by God.<sup>55</sup> The reflection of the prophets on religious tradition and their observation of the historical situation—the prophets were keenly aware of both!—were, of course, informing their prophetic message. But this message was not perceived as a result of their own intellectual efforts but as the word coming from God.

If we presuppose this biblical understanding of prophecy, is it valid theologically to speak of the church as a prophetic community? Can we learn from the prophets anything about the church's presence in the world? In the New Testament the gift of prophecy (a gift of receiving messages directly from God) is but a specific expression of the broader phenomenon of prophecy that applies to the whole Christian community. The gift of the Spirit which the church received on the day of Pentecost was the fulfilment of the Old Testament promise that all God's people will know God as immediately as the prophets did (cf. Num. 11:16ff.; Jer. 31:34). In the new eschatological community the Spirit has been poured out 'on all flesh' and the *whole* community has become a prophetic community (Acts 2:17f. as an interpretation of Acts 2:1ff.). In this sense the Spirit that the whole church received at Pentecost can appropriately be described as the 'Spirit of prophecy'.<sup>66</sup> The Spirit of the new creation is the link between the specific gift of prophecy and of the prophetic calling of the whole church because the Spirit is the origin of both.



The church as a whole is not prophetic in the strict biblical sense of the word. We cannot therefore simply transpose the phenomenon of biblical prophetism to the Christian community. Yet because the activity of the church in the world takes place in the power and under the guidance of the Spirit of prophecy, the church can learn from the biblical prophets more than just a few important socio-ethical norms. It can also learn something about the way in which it should assert itself in the world. On the assumption that one can speak about the *prophethood of all believers*, in the following paragraphs I will take the biblical prophetic traditions as the basis for reflection both about the content of the church's message to the world and about the nature of its prophetic existence.

2. The Spirit of prophecy has been poured out 'in the last days' as a sign of the dawning of the new age (Acts 2:17). It is the same Spirit—the first fruits of the new creation—that constitutes the church as an anticipation of the new creation. There is therefore an indissoluble union between the church's being and its speaking: the sign-character of the church and its prophetic ministry have their origin in the present gift of the Spirit and their norm in the vision of the promised new creation. In its prophetic proclamation the church speaks of the same reality from which it lives as a sign of hope.

Two important consequences follow from the nature of the prophetic ministry and its relation to the being of the church. First, since the 'Spirit of prophecy' is given to the whole community, a prophetic pronouncement cannot be 'the last word after which no discussion is possible'.<sup>57</sup> Rather, each prophetic statement is subject to the continual discernment of the whole Christian community (cf. 1 Thess. 5:20f.).<sup>58</sup> Unlike Old Testament prophecy, Christian prophecy is essentially a *communal phenomenon*. (This is true even in the case of the gift of prophecy). Second, since the church as a prophetic community can bring to bear on the problems of the world only that same reality in which it itself 'lives and breathes', its prophetic proclamation has to take the form of witnessing.<sup>59</sup> Authentic Christian prophetic criticisms can be made only if framed by the proclamation of what God has done in Christ

and what God promises to do in the world on the one hand, and the testimony to what God has done in the church on the other (cf. 1 Pet. 2:9f.). Without this element of witness, prophecy degenerates into arrogant and impotent moralizing.

3. The Spirit of prophecy is the Spirit of the new creation. The prophetic message addresses the issues of the world from the perspective of the promised new creation. Given the nature of the new creation (see Section III), the prophetic message must include both a call to friendship with God and the summons to do justice.<sup>60</sup> In the grand summary of the prophetic proclamation about what constitutes good life—a summary that finds a clear echo in the teaching of Jesus (cf. Mk. 12:28–31) and of Paul (cf. Rom. 13:8–10)—Micah combines both appeals: God requires human beings 'to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God' (6:8).

Justice can be described as the ordering of the social relations which secures for each person life with dignity and integration into the community.<sup>61</sup> Doing justice is therefore particularly required with respect to the poor and marginalized, 'fatherless', 'widow', and 'sojourner' (cf. Deut. 10:18). It presupposes both exposing the unjust and oppressive social arrangements and suggesting alternative visions of social life.<sup>62</sup> Doing justice is essential but not sufficient, however. By adding to the requirement to do justice the requirement to 'love kindness', Micah points beyond the way of just social arrangements to the way of personal, non-legislable love. Social institutions need to satisfy the requirements of justice—not only of compensatory but also of communitarian justice—but people also need to learn to do acts of kindness to one another. For without personal expressions of love there is no humane society.

The Old Testament prophets were far more than simply inspired social critics. They were concerned with Israel's relation to Yahweh just as they were with justice and kindness; indeed, they were concerned with justice and kindness *because* Israel's relation to Yahweh mattered to them. The two concerns, of course, overlapped. For the prophets believed that to know Yahweh is to strive for justice (cf. Jer. 22:13–16) and that worship without justice is no worship at all but the detestable idolatry of



seeking to sanctify injustice religiously (cf. Isa. 1:11–17; 58:6–7).<sup>63</sup> Justice is not simply the secular outworking of religious faith but an integral part of that faith: 'The one who oppresses a poor person insults his Maker, but the one who is kind to the needy honours him' (Prov. 14:31; cf. James 1:27).

Yet for all their criticism of false worship, the prophets never condemned the cult as such. Indeed, they considered it the way of entering into and maintaining communion with God.<sup>64</sup> Justice and kindness are not the only requirements of God. Yahweh desired also to 'walk with' Israel. Israel was to love Yahweh (cf. Deut. 10:12ff.) and when she 'went after other gods' Yahweh was yearning for God's estranged people (cf. Jer. 2:1–13). 'Life for Israel was understood as fellowship with Yahweh who had entered a covenant with this people, and the fulfilment of Yahweh's commandments was to be an expression of this fellowship. Hence keeping the commandments can be described as loving Yahweh'.<sup>65</sup> Because the relationship to Yahweh is so central, prophetic proclamation must contain the announcement of God's 'forgiving expurgation of previous sin' and 're-creation of a people' able to walk with God observing God's ordinances (cf. Jer. 31:31ff.; Ezek. 36:25ff.).<sup>66</sup>—not least the requirements to 'do justice' and 'love kindness'.

The two prophetic demands for walking with God and for doing justice and kindness are inseparable but they cannot be identified with each other. We should neither be so socially naive as to believe that when people have peace with God social arrangements will take care of themselves, nor so theologically blind as to assume that when people live in peace with one another they thereby live in peace with God. Prophecy can neither be replaced by evangelism nor dispense with it. They belong together because personal fellowship with God and the new world in which every tear shall be wiped away are two aspects of the single reality of the new creation. Prophecy is the social (and ecological) dimension of evangelism and evangelism is the personal dimension of prophecy.

The content of the prophetic message—be it the critique of idolatry and the call to fellowship with God or the denunciation of oppression and the call to justice—leads the prophet into conflict with the people to whom the message is

addressed. The message of the prophet which draws its content from the revelation of the new creation and is inspired by the Spirit of the new creation is directed *against* the old creation: '[. . .] *against* the whole land, *against* the kings of Judah, its princes, its priests, and the people of the land' (Jer. 1:18). When the new is challenging the old, the old has often no intention of giving up its privileged position without a fight. The prophetic call to conflict results in prophetic suffering. For this reason suffering was considered a basic lot of a prophet.<sup>67</sup>

4. A prophet stands in a twofold relation: to God, from whom the prophet brings the message, and to people, to whom God's message is addressed. What is the nature of each of these relations? In the biblical traditions one becomes a prophet by responding to the call of God and one acts as a prophet by receiving messages from God. But the prophet's relation to God encompasses much more than the receiving and dispatching of God's messages. God teaches the prophet also to 'feel for himself God's intimate attachment to Israel; he must not only know about it, but experience it from within'.<sup>68</sup> And the prophet talks to God too. He may lament before God, pouring out his suffering, anger, and longing for God (cf. Jer. 11–20) or sing praises to God (cf. Jer. 20:13).<sup>69</sup> The prophet is a prophet only because he is involved in a dynamic relationship with God. Spirituality is the soul of prophetic existence.

Christian prophets today have difficulty interlacing spirituality and social involvement. The problem is neither the lack of desire to combine the two in daily life nor to find theological models which do not separate the two.<sup>70</sup> But all such attempts and models flounder over the contemporary deep-seated feeling that God is absent from the world. The prophets of old had a vivid sense of God's designs in history: empires were a tool in the hand of Yahweh (cf. Isa. 7:18–20). Modern technological culture, whose goal is 'to know everything in order to predict everything in order to control everything',<sup>71</sup> has made it difficult to hold seriously to the belief that God governs history and that the salvation of the world can, let alone must, come from God. And the more distant God is from the world, the more absent God will be from our involvement in the world. Only a fresh discovery of God's presence and



activity in history will erase a deep seated sense that worship is irrelevant to doing justice.<sup>72</sup>

A dynamic relationship with God is one pole of prophetic existence. The other is the prophet's identification with the people. Prophetic conflict with the people did not smother prophetic sympathy for the people. 'The prophet not only was a man concerned with right and wrong. He also had a soul of extreme sensitivity to human suffering'.<sup>73</sup> In Jeremiah in particular, the denunciation of misdeeds and announcement of judgment are accompanied by deep anguish over peoples' blindness and hard-heartedness and the suffering that is coming upon them: 'O that my head were waters, and my eyes a fountain of tears, that I might weep day and night for the slain of the daughter of my people!' (9:1; cf. 4:19f.; 8:18ff.).

The 'tearful tradition' of Jeremiah—but also of Jesus (cf. Lk. 19:41f.) and of Paul (cf. Rom. 9:1ff.)—has virtually disappeared from Christian prophetism. Sorrow has been suppressed by anger. Prophets have become too much like technicians. They explain oppression by one cause—effect nexus and expect liberation from another. Oppression is a moral problem, but they counter it with a technical solution. Technicians are not overly given to sorrow; if the solutions they propose are not accepted or if the mechanisms they design do not function the way they expect, they do not grieve, they are angry. The biblical prophets did grieve because the mechanisms of evil did not blind them to the mystery of evil. The mechanisms of economic, social, racial and sexual oppression need to be exposed and replaced by the structures of justice. But what can be done about the evil hidden in the depths of the human heart? Our strongest weapon against the mystery of evil is tears in the presence of God.

The community of Christian prophets 'desperately needs a revival of orthopathy'<sup>74</sup>—the experience of the personal presence of the Holy Spirit that makes them love both God and God's world. Orthopathy does more than furnish prophets with inspiration and motivation for promoting justice. It aids them also in understanding how one can bring the word of God and the situation into an effective interface. Prophetic social critique is not simply an applied 'science'; it is also an art. It is therefore

'not enough to have commands and general norms, and even living examples and models, for our decision-making. It is also necessary to possess those skills and sensitivities which the New Testament writers associate with the gifts of the Spirit'.<sup>75</sup> Good prophets are masters of the Christian socio-ethical art. And this art can be learned only in the school of the Spirit who draws prophets into the passion of God and enables them to identify with the suffering of God's world.

5. The prophet's parish is the whole world because the new creation is a universal reality. Inspired by the Spirit of the new creation and guided by the vision of the new creation, prophets need to speak to all dimensions of human existence—from personal to ecological—and direct their message to all locales in which human beings live—from neighbourhood to global community. Powerful social forces hinder prophets in the exercise of their universal calling. Religion is not disappearing from the modern societies as was expected not long ago, but it is increasingly being pushed away from the macroworld of the public square into the microworld of the private life: it is allowed to play a role, but only in the 'spiritual ... homeland for separate spiritual development set up obligingly by the architects of secular society's apartheid'.<sup>76</sup> One of the most important tasks of Christian prophets in the contemporary world is to work on dismantling the 'secular society's apartheid'.

The primary responsibility of Christian prophets, however, is not for the world but for the people of God. Though the Old Testament prophets were called to prophesy against nations and kingdoms (cf. Jer. 1:9), the focus of their message was the destiny of Israel.<sup>77</sup> Correspondingly, the critique of the church is the first task of Christian prophets:<sup>78</sup> they need to tear down the church's religious garmenture that masks its idolatry (wealth and power!) and oppression (racism, sexism, exploitation!) and challenge the church to adorn itself with robes of righteousness and holiness (cf. Eph. 4:24); they need to announce to the church hope in a loving God who forgives and recreates, and threaten it with the judgment of a holy God.

As P. Tillich said, in the prophetic Spirit of the new creation the church has 'in itself the ultimate criterion against itself'.<sup>79</sup> But as it



pays heed to its own prophets, the church should not self-sufficiently close itself up to criticism from the world. The activity of the Spirit of the new creation is not limited to the church. This is why one can speak with Tillich of 'reverse prophetism'—'an unconsciously prophetic criticism directed toward the church from outside'.<sup>80</sup> It is the task of Christian prophets to help the church discern the voice of God's Spirit even in the pandemonium of the world.

The point of prophetic care for the church is more than just self-beautification of the church. It serves the mission of the church in the world. For the credibility of the church as a sign of the new creation is the presupposition for the plausibility of its prophetic message. The more the church anticipates the new creation in its life and its structures, the more its message will recover the creative force of the prophetic word of God which does not return empty but accomplishes God's purposes (cf. Isa. 55:10f.).

## VI

1. Contemporary theological reflection about the mission of the church in the world seems to follow what might be described as a 'communication model'. The relation between the church and the world is that of a sender to a recipient. The recipient—the world—needs to grasp the prophetic message of the church and perceive the church as a sign of hope. In order for that to happen, the sender—the church—needs to take care to transmit the message so that it is understood and to signify the new creation in such a way that hope is born. The essential elements of this 'communication model' remain intact, of course, when the relation between the church and the world is taken to be a two-way street. The word most commonly used to describe such a relation between the church and the world is 'dialogue', and its very use underlines that one is dealing with a communication situation—only that now recipient and communicator alternate places; the communication (*legen*) does not occur simply from one partner to the other, but between (*dia*) them.

In the communication model the basic problem for the church in relation to the

world is a hermeneutical one. What the church needs is penetrating social analysts who are able to understand both where the world is going and over what problems it is stumbling, it needs creative theologians who know how to translate the Christian message into contemporary cultural languages, skilful and daring prophets who can make the Christian message speak to the great issues of the day. And finally the church needs imagination to know how to symbolize the Christian message in its structures and its life. If the church had all of this, it would be a prophetic community and a sign of hope in the world—so the model suggests. But is the communication model right?

2. No doubt the model is right in what it affirms. Transcultural mission—whether it takes place diachronically or synchronically—is possible only by translating and applying the message in new contexts. The prophets of old were not only conditioned by the traditions but they also 're-interpreted and applied [them] to their own times',<sup>81</sup> notwithstanding their belief to be direct spokespersons for God. The need for creative reinterpretation and fresh application of the Christian message is greater today than ever before. Technological and cultural developments are increasingly widening the gap between the world of the biblical traditions and contemporary situations. Without the church doing its hermeneutical work with skill and imagination its message will not be heard and its sign-character will not be recognized. The communication model rightly underlines this.

But the communication model is wrong in what it leaves out—or at least seriously neglects. It seems to operate tacitly with two mistaken assumptions, one with respect to the recipient and the other with respect to the sender. A genuinely *prophetic model* of the relation between the church and the world will have to discard both of these assumptions. In relation to the recipient the model assumes that the basic problem is a lack of understanding: the world has not grasped the message, it has not recognized the sign, and hence does not respond. Enlightenment, it is expected, will bear fruit in changed behaviour. But this is certainly false. The realism of the biblical traditions



is sobering. The Old Testament prophets not only experienced an 'unchanging pattern of failure' of their proclamation; they were, almost paradoxically, called to failure: the message itself made the people obdurate (cf. Isa. 6:9ff.; Ezek. 2:1ff.; Matt. 13:10ff.).<sup>82</sup> So also, precisely when the church is seen to be what it really is does the world often refuse to cleave to it as a sign of hope, and instead tries to get rid of it as a thorn in its own flesh (cf. 1 Pet. 4:4).

In relation to the sender the communication model assumes that the church has the message (but fails to translate and communicate it successfully) and that the church is the 'first fruits of the new creation' (but fails to present itself as such before the world). In an important sense this assumption is right: the church *has* the message and it *is* anticipation of the new creation. But it would be false to conclude that the dominant concern of the church should be communicating the message and presenting itself as a sign of hope. As J. V. Taylor observed, what turned a person into a prophet 'was not eloquence but vision, not getting the message across but getting the message'.<sup>83</sup> Similarly what makes the church into a sign of hope is not its effort at signifying hope, but the reality of its being anticipation of the new creation. Yes, the church *has* the message, yet it needs to receive the message always anew as a living word to be addressed to the dying world. Yes, the church *is* an anticipation of the new creation, yet it needs to grow in unity and in sanctity in the divided and unjust world. The efforts of the church to communicate and to signify will be futile if it does not *listen* to the voice of the Spirit and strive to be *renewed* into the likeness of the Triune God.

3. The prophetic model of the relation between the church and the world assumes that the mission of the church in the world can be sustained only by the same Spirit of the new creation whose presence makes the church to be the church. To be a prophetic community the church needs the Spirit, who will make its sons and daughters prophesy, its young men see visions and its old men dream dreams (cf. Acts 2:17ff.). To be a sign of hope the church needs the Spirit who will cause flesh to come upon its dry bones, put

breath into it, and make it live (cf. Ezek. 37:6). To sustain its passion for God and its passion for the world even when the ears of the hearers are heavy and their hearts are fat the church needs the Spirit of love who creates hope (cf. Rom. 15:13, 30). And to break the walls of resistance to its message communicated by word and deed the church needs the Spirit who 'will convince the world of sin and of righteousness and of judgment' (John 16:8). The first task of the church as a prophetic community and a sign of hope will therefore be to pray: *veni creator Spiritus*.<sup>84</sup>

- 1 See G. W. Locher, 'Prophetie in der Reformation. Elemente, Argumente und Bewegungen', in *Charisma und Institution* (ed. T. Rendtorff; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1985), 102–109.
- 2 For a nuanced historical account of the *munus triplex* of Christ in its relation to the church see L. Schick, *Das dreifache Amt Christi und der Kirche. Zur Entstehung und Entwicklung der Trilogien* (Europäische Hochschulschriften, 171; Frankfurt a. M.: Peter Lang, 1982).
- 3 See H. Legrand, 'La réalisation de l'Église en un lieu', in *Initiation à la pratique de la théologie* (ed. B. Lauret and F. Refoulé; Paris: Cerf, 1983), 3:145–345, 205f.; H. Legrand, 'A Response to "The Church as a Prophetic Sign"', in *Church, Kingdom, World. The Church as Mystery and Prophetic Sign* (ed. G. Limouris; Faith and Order Paper 130; Geneva: WCC, 1986), 145–151, 146f.
- 4 *Lumen gentium* 1; see also *Lumen gentium* 9, 48, 59; *Ad gentes* 1, 5; *Gaudium et spes* 42, 45.
- 5 See E. Jüngel, 'Die Kirche als Sakrament?' *ZThK* 80 (1983), 432–457, 436ff.
- 6 See G. Gassmann, 'The Church as Sacrament, Sign and Instrument. The Reception of this Ecclesiological Understanding in Ecumenical Debate', in *Church, Kingdom, World. The Church as Mystery and Prophetic Sign* (ed. G. Limouris; Faith and Order Paper 130; Geneva: WCC, 1986), 1–17.
- 7 See A. Birmelé, *Le salut en Jésus Christ dans les dialogues Œcuméniques* (Labor et fides 141; Paris: Cerf, 1986), 203–253, 277–315.
- 8 For a brief but perceptive theological assessment of the conference see R. J. Sider, 'Reflections on Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation', in *Transformation* 7, no. 3 (1990), 15–17.
- 9 See M. Volf, 'Kirche als Gemeinschaft. Ekklesiologische Überlegungen aus freikirchlicher Perspektive', in *EvTh* 49 (1989), 52–76.



- 10 See P. Potter, 'Der prophetische Auftrag der Kirche', in *Ökumenische Positionen. Der prophetische Auftrag der Kirche, Kirchen und Christen in politischer Verantwortung, den Frieden fördern* (Bad Boll: Evangelische Akademie Bad Boll, 1981), 11–18.
- 11 'Report of the First Consultation of the Unity/Renewal Study', in *Church, Kingdom, World. The Church as Mystery and Prophetic Sign* (ed. G. Limouris; Faith and Order Paper 130; Geneva: WCC, 1986), 163–175, no. 40.
- 12 R. R. Reuther, 'Religion and Society: Sacred Canopy vs. Prophetic Critique', in *The Future of Liberation Theology. Essays in Honor of Gustavo Gutiérrez* (ed. M. H. Ellis and O. Maduro; New York: Orbis Books, 1989), 172–176, 173. My comments here are not a critique of the whole of Reuther's wide-ranging work but only of this article.
- 13 Calling a discourse 'prophetic' is, of course, not simply a matter of linguistic preference. The label 'prophetic' tends to give human speech-acts an aura of special authority. A social critic who understands herself as a prophetess desires to be taken as a 'spokesperson for God'—that is, as more than someone who just expresses her own opinion about the truth of a matter. Sometimes a social critic will clad herself in prophetic garb in order to place one's critique outside the realm of general moral discourse—so that one does not need to specify the presuppositions of one's moral judgments, justify ethically concrete moral decisions in complex situations and reflect on alternative proposals. But even if the prophetic label is not used to immunize a particular social critique from criticism, it is certainly meant to add plausibility to the social critic's message, at least in Christian circles. This is what I mean by saying that social critique which disguises itself as prophetism is 'taking a religious short-cut'.
- 14 J. Stout, *Ethics After Babel. The Language of Morals and Their Discontents* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1988), 163.
- 15 Stout, *Ethics*, 165.
- 16 'Report', nos. 30, 24.
- 17 Cf. also W. Pannenberg, 'The Kingdom of God and the Church', in W. Pannenberg, *Theology and the Kingdom of God* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1969), 72–101.
- 18 See P. Tillich, *Systematic Theology III: Life and the Spirit, History and the Kingdom of God* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 375.
- 19 On the relation between the church and Trinity see M. Volf, 'Kirche', 70ff.
- 20 For the following Interpretation of Rev 21:1–22:5, see R. H. Gundry, 'The New Jerusalem. People as Place, not Place for People', in: *NovT* 29 (1987), 254–264.
- 21 It is sometimes suggested that the absence of the temple from the New Jerusalem indicates that the church is something provisional (cf. W. Pannenberg, 'The Kingdom of God', 76). It is not difficult to see the theological reasons for this view, for it allows for people to become part of the eschatological new creation without having to become members of the church. But the view can find support in Rev. 21:22 only either if one confuses the senses of 'church' as building and as people, or if one makes the false assumption that the church can exist only when it can be distinguished from the larger society. The point of the statement that there will be no temple is that in the new creation there will be no distinction between sacred and secular realms, since all the people will be the Holy of Holies and God and the Lamb will be the temple in which the Holy of Holies is placed.
- 22 On 2 Cor. 5:17 see P. Stuhlmacher, 'Erwägungen zum ontologischen Charakter der *kainē ktisis*', *EvTh* 27 (1967), 1–35; U. Mell, *Neue Schöpfung. Eine traditionsgeschichtliche und exegetische Studie zu einem soteriologischen Grundsatz paulinischer Theologie* (BZNW 56; Berlin: Walter der Gruyter, 1989). On the whole issue see J. Moltmann, *The Church in the Power of the Spirit. A Contribution to Messianic Ecclesiology* (trans. M. Kohl; New York: Harper & Row, 1977), 278ff. On the holistic soteriology implied in such holistic eschatology see M. Volf, 'Materiality of Salvation: An Investigation in the Soteriologies of Liberation and Pentecostal Theologies', in *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 26 (1989), 447–467.
- 23 See Pannenberg, 'The Kingdom of God', 73ff.
- 24 See M. Volf, *Work in the Spirit. Toward a Theology of Work* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), chapter IV. On the relation between realms of grace, nature, and glory see J. Moltmann, 'Christsein, Menschsein und das Reich Gottes. Ein Gespräch mit Karl Rahner', in *Stimmen der Zeit* 203 (1985): 619–631, 626 (though I am not always able to follow Moltmann in the way he determines the relationship of the three to each other).
- 25 E. Käsemann, 'Zur ekklesiologischen Verwendung der Stichworte "Sakrament" und "Zeichen"', in *Wandernde Horizonte auf dem Weg zu kirchlicher Einheit* (ed. R. Groscurth; Frankfurt a. M.: Otto Lembeck, 1974), 119–136, 133. Although Käsemann sharply criticizes the pretentiousness of using the term 'sign' to describe the church, he fails to measure his own notion that the church, as *regnum Christi*, is the earthly realization of the coming rule of God against the same standard. On confusion between the Church and the reign of God see H. Küng, *The Church* (Garden City: Image Books, 1976), 135.



- 26 Cf. Moltmann, *The Church*, 193. Cf. also J. Moltmann, *Politische Theologie—Politische Ethik* (Fundamentaltheologische Studien, 9; München: Kaiser, 1984), 162.
- 27 One must distinguish the anticipations of the new creation in the church and in the world. Only in the church is anticipation of the new creation characterized by peoples' confession of faith in Jesus Christ and their conscious allegiance to him as Lord, and does it entail, according to the New Testament, liberation of Christians from the power of sin (cf. Rom. 8:1ff.), notwithstanding the reality of the permanent struggle against sin in their lives. In the church, therefore, the problems of transitoriness and sinfulness are not (or at least should not be) on the same level: the power of sin has been broken but death as the last enemy has not yet been overcome (cf. 1 Cor. 15:26).
- 28 So 'Report', no. 30. Cf. Moltmann, *The Church*, 193 and Moltmann, *Politische Theologie*, 162, not only of the anticipations of the new creation in the church but also in the world. Moltmann seems, however, to be reading his formally correct concept of 'anticipation' into the biblical concepts of the 'firstfruits' and 'down-payment' rather than letting these biblical metaphors inform his concept of anticipation.
- 29 Paul explicitly states that the Spirit is the down-payment (cf. 2 Cor. 1:22; Eph. 1:14). The case of the phrase 'the firstfruits of the Spirit' is somewhat less clear, but 'most agree that the genitive is exegetical (the firstfruits which is the Spirit)' (J. D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1–8* [WBC 38a; Dallas: Word, 1988], 473).
- 30 This can be seen from the use of *ἀπαρχή* to describe the resurrected Christ in relation to those who 'have fallen asleep' (1 Cor. 15:20, 23), and the first converts of a particular region in relation to the whole church that is later to be established (cf. 1 Cor. 16:15; 2 Thess. 2:13 [some manuscripts]).
- 31 So Gassmann, 'The Church', 13. A similar claim is made about the implications of the term 'sacrament' as applied to the church in Roman Catholic ecclesiology by H. Meyer ('Kirche als "Sakrament"' [Paper presented at the 24. International Ecumenical Seminar of the Institute for Ecumenical Research, 3–12 July, 1990, Strasbourg], 6f.) and H. Legrand ('Koinonia, Church and Sacraments. A General Catholic Outline' [Paper presented at the Roman Catholic/Pentecostal Dialogue, 1–8 August, 1987, Venice], 17ff.).
- 32 So N. Wolterstorff, 'The Bible and Economics: The Hermeneutical Issues', in *Transformation* 4, no. 3/4 (1987), 11–19, 18. Similarly K. Barth: Because the sanctification of the whole humanity which took place *de jure* in Christ is experience *de facto* in the church, the church can be called the 'preliminary portrayal' ('die vorläufige Darstellung') of this universal sanctification (KD IV/2, 695ff.).
- 33 Whatever theological justification and ecumenical usefulness the exegetical grounding of sacramental theology with reference to *mustērion* in Eph. 3:2ff. might have, it does not seem helpful to seek exegetical ground for the sign-character of the church in this text (so seemingly W. Pannenberg, *Thesen zur Theologie der Kirche* [2nd ed. rev.; München: Claudius Verlag, 1974], 39f.; Moltmann, *The Church*, 202ff.; 'Report', no. 39). One gets to the notion of 'sign' in Eph. 3:2ff. only if one has read it into the text because of the text's later association with sacramental theology which defines sacrament as 'sign and instrument'. Paul's point seems to be that the *mustērion* does not speak by itself, but that it needs to be proclaimed so that 'all people' might be 'made to see' (Eph. 3:9) (against R. Schnackenburg, *Der Brief an die Epheser* [EKK 10; Zürich: Benziger Verlag, 1982], 139 and with M. Barth, *Ephesians. Introduction, Translation, and Commentary on Chapters 1–3* [The Anchor Bible 34; Garden City: Doubleday, 1974], 342). That does not mean that the content of the mystery (the creation from Jews and Gentiles of the one people of God in Christ), when lived out before the world, may not be a sign to the world. But the sign-character of the church cannot be established on the basis of what is said about the *mustērion*, at least not the sign-function of the church in relation to the human world (as distinct from 'the principalities and powers in the heavenly places' [cf. Eph. 3:10]).
- 34 Cf. C. K. Barrett, *The Gospel According to St. John. An Introduction with Commentary and Notes on the Greek Text* (2nd ed.; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1978), 76.
- 35 Barrett, *John*, 75.
- 36 Barrett, *John*, 76. On signs as embodiments in the Old Testament see G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology II. The Theology of Israel's Prophetic Traditions* (trans. D. M. G. Stalker; New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 96f.
- 37 Although without the explicit use of the sign language, Matt. 5:14ff., 1 Pet. 2:12 and Phil. 2:15 express the same understanding of the church in relation to the world.
- 38 See Gassmann, 'The Church', 14. Gassmann does not differentiate clearly between the meanings of sign as 'anticipation' and 'effective mediation'. If we want to avoid conceptual confusion about the church as a sign, we should not only carefully distinguish between these two senses of the word 'sign' but also make further distinctions within the understanding of sign as 'effective mediation'.
- 39 The sense in which the proclamation of the



- church is an instrument of the realization of the new creation seems less disputed.
- 40 See J. D. Zizioulas, 'Le Mystère de l'Église dans la tradition orthodoxe', in *Irénikon* 60 (1987), 323–335, 332ff. His reflection on the church as 'une icône du Royaume à venir' (332) in this article should be read, of course, in the light of his eucharistic ecclesiology (see J. D. Zizioulas, *Being as Communion. Studies in Personhood and the Church* [Crestwood: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1985]).
  - 41 *Lumen gentium* 1.
  - 42 See W. Kasper, 'Die Kirche als universales Sakrament des Heils', in *Theologie und Kirche* (Mainz: Grünewald, 1987), 237–254, 242.
  - 43 *Lumen gentium* 64.
  - 44 So A. Birmelé, *Le salut*, 228. On the issue of the church's cooperation in the impartation of salvation see also J. Kardinal Ratzinger, *Theologische Prinzipienlehre. Bausteine zur Fundamentaltheologie* (München: Erich Wewel Verlag, 1982), 42, where he stresses that being received into the church as a visible community of believers is a dimension of faith itself. It follows that faith is not only a gift of God but at the same time a gift of the church.
  - 45 Cf. Volf, 'Kirche', 68. See also 'Perspectives on Koinonia. The Report from the Third Quinquennium of the Dialogue Between the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity of the Roman Catholic Church and Some Classical Pentecostal Churches and Leaders 1985–1989', no. 94.
  - 46 One can encounter a similar understanding of the church as an effective sign in Catholic circles. Latin American Liberation Theology is a case in point. On the soteriology of Latin American Liberation Theology as it relates to the world see Volf, 'Materiality', 454ff.
  - 47 See Volf, *Work*, 100.
  - 48 See J. Moltmann, *Der Weg Jesu Christi. Christologie in messianischen Dimensionen* (München: Kaiser, 1989), 226. Cf. also J. Moltmann, 'Dient die "pluralistische Theologie" den Dialog der Weltreligionen?' in *EvTh* 49 (1989), 528–536.
  - 49 See E. Peterson, 'Zeuge der Wahrheit', in *Theologische Traktate* (München: Kösel-Verlag, 1951), 167–224, 175. In his 'Von den Konzilien und der Kirche' Luther spoke of persecution as *a nota ecclesiae* (cf. WA, 50, 642, 1ff.).
  - 50 On 'prophetic withdrawals' see Tillich, *Systematic Theology III*, 383.
  - 51 Similarly Käsemann, 'Sakrament', 130.
  - 52 For this reason it is not sufficient to say that the church should not impose itself on the world but offer 'herself to the world for reception' (J. Zizioulas, 'The Theological Problem of "Reception"', in *Bulletin of Centro pro Unione* 26 [Fall 1984], 3–6, 4). The church is offering the new creation as God's gift, not itself.
  - 53 So repeatedly Catholic theologians interpreting *Lumen gentium* no 1. See H. de Lubac, *Geheimnis aus dem wir leben* (Einsiedeln: Johannes Verlag, 1967), 33ff.; J. Ratzinger, 'Warum ich noch in der Kirche bin', in H. Urs von Balthasar and J. Ratzinger, *Zwei Plädoyers* (München: Kösel-Verlag, 1971), 57–75, 67.
  - 54 On Israel as a sign to which nations come of their own accord see von Rad, *Theology II*, 249.
  - 55 For the Old Testament see W. Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline* (trans. D. E. Green; Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978), 102. For the New Testament see D. E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Michigan: Eerdmans, 1983), 338.
  - 56 For exegetical considerations see M. Turner and D. Mackinder, 'Prophecy and Spiritual Gifts Then and Now', in *Christian Experience in Theology and Life. Papers Read at the 1984 Conference of the Fellowship of European Evangelical Theologians* (ed. I. H. Marshall; Edinburgh: Rutherford House Books, 1988), 16–54, 17ff. For a more theological development of the theme see G. Vandervelde, 'The Gift of Prophecy and the Prophetic Church', in *The Holy Spirit. Renewing and Empowering Presence* (ed. G. Vandervelde; Winfield: Wood Lake Books, 1989), 93–118.
  - 57 H. Berkhof, 'Zwischen Prophetie und Weisheit', in *EvKom15* (1982), 242–245, 243.
  - 58 On the importance of congregational discernment see J. D. G. Dunn, 'The Responsible Congregation (1 Cor. 14:26–40)', in *Charisma und Agape* (1 Ko 10–14) (ed. L. de Lorenzi; Benedictina, 7; Rome: Abtei von St. Paul vor den Mauern, 1983), 201–236.
  - 59 On the general character of Christian religious speech as witnessing see J. Fischer, 'Behaupten oder Bezeugen? Zum Modus des Wahrheitsanspruchs christlicher Rede von Gott', in *ZThK* 87 (1990), 224–244.
  - 60 For reasons of space I leave out the whole ecological dimension of the prophetic proclamation of the church. It would not be difficult to show both exegetically and theologically that Christians need to place the concern for the protection of creation alongside the concern for justice.
  - 61 See J. P. Wogaman, 'Toward a Christian Definition of Justice', in *Transformation* 7, no. 2 (1990), 18–23.
  - 62 On both tasks as aspects of prophetic ministry see W. Brueggemann, 'Voices of the Night—Against Justice', in W. Brueggemann et al., *To Act Justly, Love Tenderly, Walk Humbly. An Agenda for Ministers* (New York: Paulist Press, 1986), 5–28, 6ff.



- 63 Liberation theologians in particular have stressed this point. See G. Gutiérrez, *A Theology of Liberation. History, Politics and Salvation* (trans. C. Inda and J. Eagleson; New York: Orbis Books, 1974), 195f.; J. P. Miranda, *Marx and the Bible. A Critique of the Philosophy of Oppression* (trans. J. Eagleson; New York: Orbis Books, 1974), 35–76.
- 64 See A. Heschel, *The Prophets* (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 195ff.
- 65 E. W. Nicholson, *God and His People. Covenant and Theology in the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 215. The importance of the relationship of Israel to Yahweh explains why some prophets locate Israel's sin more 'in particular offences against sacral orders' and less in 'transgression of the social and moral commandments' (von Rad, *Theology II*, 224).
- 66 Von Rad, *Theology II*, 235.
- 67 See von Rad, *Theology II*, 259.
- 68 Heschel, *Prophets*, 117.
- 69 On prophetic existence see J. Goldingay, *God's Prophet, God's Servant. A Study in Jeremiah and Isaiah 40–55* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1984).
- 70 See, for instance, N. Wolterstorff, *Until Justice and Peace Embrace* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1983), 146–161; L. Boff, 'Mystik und Politik: Kontemplation im Befreiungskampf', in L. Boff, *Aus dem Tal der Tränen ins Gelobte Land. Der Weg der Kirche mit den Unterdrückten* (trans. H. Goldstein; Düsseldorf: Patmos-Verlag, 1982), 214–227; J. Sobrino, *Spirituality of Liberation. Toward Political Holiness* (transl. R. R. Barr; Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1985).
- 71 O. Guinness, 'Mission in the Face of Modernity. Nine Checkpoints on Mission Without Worldliness in the Modern World', [A paper for the Plenary Session on the Impact of Modernization presented at Lausanne II in Manila, July 11–20, 1989], 5.
- 72 For a discussion of some problems and solutions see P. C. Hodgson, *God in History. Shapes of Freedom* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1989). Hodgson ends up affirming what from my perspective amounts to the absence of God from the world: what God 'does' in history is to give, disclose, and in some way be, the 'normative shape' of the transformative praxis (205). Given this understanding of God's action in history the integration of doing justice and prayer is impossible, for the simple reason that on such a view prayer, to which supplication and thanksgiving are essential, is not possible. You can hardly petition a God who relates to history only as the 'normative shape' of historical praxis (in spite of Hodgson's passing remark to the contrary [237]).
- 73 Heschel, *Prophets*, 120. See also Goldingay, *God's Prophet*, 31ff.; W. Brueggemann, *Hopeful Imagination. Prophetic Voices in Exile* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1986), 32ff.
- 74 R. J. Mouw, 'Life in the Spirit in an Unjust World', in *The Holy Spirit. Renewing and Empowering Presence* (ed. G. Vandervelde; Winfield: Wood Lake Books, 1989), 119–140, 140. Mouw rightly pleads for the integration of orthodoxy, orthopraxy, and orthopathy.
- 75 Mouw, 'Life', 140.
- 76 Guinness, 'Mission', 8.
- 77 Cf. Zimmerli, *Old Testament*, 103.
- 78 So also W. Huber, 'Prophetische Kritik und demokratischer Konsens', in *Charisma und Institution* (ed. T. Rendtorff; Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus Gerd Mohn, 1985), 110–127, 118f.
- 79 Tillich, *Systematic Theology III*, 381.
- 80 Tillich, *Systematic Theology III*, 213.
- 81 Von Rad, *Theology II*, 4.
- 82 Von Rad, *Theology II*, 206, 41.
- 83 J. V. Taylor, *The Go-Between God. The Holy Spirit and the Christian Mission* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1979), 69.
- 84 I want to thank Dr. Judith Gundry Volf for her critical reading of a draft of this paper and for valuable suggestions about improving the style. The responses to my paper by Dr. Elizabeth Barnes and Dr. Paul Simmons and also the general discussion at the conference on 'The Church as Community: Being the People of God' at the Southern Baptist Theological Seminary in Louisville (October 1990) have helped me state my position with greater clarity. I wrote the paper while a Humboldt fellow in Tübingen, and I delivered some sections of it for the Chavasse Lectures at Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, November 1990.



- **Jesus und die Götter – Synkretismus einst und jetzt**
- ***Jesus and the gods***
- ***Jésus et les autres dieux***

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## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

*Der gegenwärtig populäre Dialog mit anderen Religionen hat weithin unverkennbar synkretistische Tendenzen. In der Theologie beruft man sich dabei auch auf Jesus und die neutestamentliche Christologie. Diese biblische Legitimation des Synkretismus hält aber näherer Überprüfung nicht stand. Sowohl Jesus als auch die Apostel haben an dem Ausschließlichkeitsanspruch des Gottes Abrahams, Isaaks und Jakobs festgehalten*

*und daran, daß ewiges Heil nur im glaubenden Anschluß an Jesus Christus erreichbar ist. So erweisen sich auch das sog. 'theozentrische' Religionsverständnis P. Knitters wie auch die These vom in allen Religionen Heil wirkenden 'kosmischen Christus' (J. Sittler) als biblisch nicht begründet.*

*Christliche Liebe gebietet zwar unbedingt Toleranz im zwischenmenschlichen Umgang, gleichzeitig aber auch das unverfälschte Zeugnis vom Heil allein in Christus.*

## SUMMARY

*The current trend towards dialogue with other religions contains unmistakable syncretistic elements. Although a theological appeal is made to Christ and NT Christology, this allegedly biblical warrant for syncretism does not bear closer scrutiny. Both Christ and the apostles upheld the exclusive claims of the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob and maintained that eternal salvation is only attainable*

*through believing faith in Jesus Christ. Thus both the so-called 'theocentric' understanding of religion (P. Knitters) and the premise of the 'cosmic Christ' (J. Sittler) effecting salvation in all religions are devoid of any biblical basis.*

*Although Christian love calls unequivocally for tolerance in personal relationships, it also calls for clear testimony to the fact that salvation can be found in Christ alone.*

## RÉSUMÉ

*Le dialogue contemporain avec les autres religions, très populaire, a incontestablement des tendances syncrétistes. Dans certains cercles de théologiens, on en appelle, à cet égard, à Jésus et à la christologie du N.T. Cette légitimation biblique du syncrétisme ne résiste pas à un examen sérieux. Tant Jésus que les apôtres ont maintenu fermement les prétentions exclusives du Dieu d'Abraham, d'Isaac et de Jacob, et ont déclaré que le salut éternel ne peut être obtenu que dans un attachement confiant à Jésus-Christ. Dans ces conditions, la*

*compréhension religieuse dite 'théocentrique' de P. Knitter, tout comme la thèse d'un 'Christ cosmique' oeuvrant au salut dans toutes les religions (J. Sittler), apparaissent comme non fondées du point de vue biblique.*

*L'amour chrétien consiste à manifester une attitude de tolérance inconditionnelle dans nos rapports humains, mais, en même temps aussi, à rendre un témoignage non falsifié à Jésus-Christ comme seul Sauveur.*



## 1. Synkretismus jetzt und einst

Im März 1970 fand in der libanesischen Stadt Ajaltoun eine sog. Konsultation zum Thema 'Dialog zwischen Menschen lebendigen Glaubens' statt. Veranstalter der Konsultation war der ÖRK. Neben 28 Vertretern christlicher Kirchen nahmen auch 20 repräsentative Anhänger anderer Religionen teil: Buddhisten, Hindus und Muslim. Die Leitung der Tagung lag in der Hand des damaligen Direktors der Hamburger Missionsakademie, Prof. Margull. Einer der Initiatoren dieser Begegnungstagung, der schiitische Moslem Dr. Askari faßte im Schlußmemorandum die Erfahrungen der Konsultation u.a. in folgende Worte:

*'Der Dialog als inneres Zeichen der Hoffnung brachte für die meisten von uns eine neue . . . , eine interreligiöse Spiritualität, die ich im gemeinsamen Gebet am deutlichsten verspürte. Wer immer das Gebet oder die Andachtsübung leitete, Christ oder Moslem, Hindu oder Buddhist, spielte dabei keine Rolle. Was im Gebet selbst gesprochen wurde, war nicht unbedingt wichtig . . . Was wir aber wirklich spürten, das war unsere gemeinsame menschliche Situation vor Gott und in Gott. Wir wurden in eine neue Beziehung zu Gott, zu uns selbst und zu den anderen geführt. Und vielleicht ist es diese neue Beziehung, auf die sich die ganze Menschheit zubewegt.'*<sup>1</sup>

Daß man miteinander sprach, ist selbstverständlich eine gute Sache. Warum auch nicht? Aber es blieb ja offensichtlich nicht in der Unverbindlichkeit des Gedankenaustauschs. Man betete und meditierte miteinander (wobei zu bedenken ist, daß rechte Meditation etwa im hinduistischen oder buddhistischen Sinn nicht nur ein Reflexionsvorgang ist, sondern eine existentielle Erfahrung). Frage: was geschah hier eigentlich, wenn der Christ in das Gebet des Hindu, der Moslem in das des Christen einstimmte? Zu wem redete er da eigentlich? Und was geschah dabei mit der bisherigen persönlichen Beziehung des Christen zu Jesus?

Im Februar 1991 fand in Canberra/Australien die VII. Vollversammlung des ÖRK statt unter dem Thema 'Komm, Heiliger Geist, erneuere die ganze Schöpfung'.

Im Zusammenhang ihres Hauptreferates zelebrierte die junge presbyterianische Theologieprofessorin Chung Hyung Kyung aus Korea eine konfuzianisch inspirierte Anrufung der Geister Verstorbener. Und im Referat selbst erhob sie die in koreanischer Religion als Gottheit verehrte Erleuchtete Kwan In zum Vorbild eines künftigen weiblichen Christus:

*'Ihre mitleidende Weisheit heilt alle Formen des Lebens und befähigt diese, zum Ufer des Nirwana zu schwimmen. Sie wartet und wartet, bis das ganze Universum, Menschen, Bäume, Vögel, Berge, Luft und Wasser erleuchtet werden. Zusammen können sie dann ins Nirwana eingehen, wo sie in ewiger Weisheit und ewigem Mitleiden in Gemeinschaft leben.'*<sup>2</sup>

Was einst in kleinem Kreis in Ajaltoun sozusagen versuchsweise gewagt worden war, vollzog sich nun in Canberra in großer Selbstverständlichkeit und fast ganz ohne Widerspruch, in Gegenwart und unter Beteiligung der offiziellen Vertreter aller dem ÖRK angeschlossenen protestantischen und orthodoxen Kirchen.<sup>3</sup> Wieder stellt sich die Frage: Was geschieht da eigentlich, wenn—wie hier—nicht nur konfuzianische und buddhistische Gedanken mit christlichen verbunden werden, sondern darüber hinaus auch—wie hier geschehen—in einer christlichen Versammlung offenkundig heidnische Riten vollzogen werden?

Die Antwort aus religionswissenschaftlicher Sicht ist: es handelt sich eindeutig um ein synkretistisches Phänomen, d.h. um Vermischung verschiedener Religionen miteinander. Die grundlegende Voraussetzung einer solchen Religionsmischung ist, daß der, der sie vollzieht, die Wahrheit auch der fremden Religion für sich akzeptiert. D.h.: Die Gottheit, mit der es die andere Religion zu tun hat, ist, bei aller geschichtlich bedingten Verschiedenheit der mit dem Glauben an sie verbundenen Vorstellungen, letztlich doch die gleiche transzendente Wirklichkeit, mit der man es in der eigenen Religion zu tun hat.

Der Begriff des Synkretismus ist, jedenfalls in diesem Verständnis, ein verhältnismäßig junger Begriff. Das Wort selbst zwar ist alt. Es stammt aus der griechischen Antike und spielt wahrscheinlich auf eine Eigenart der



Kreter an: normalerweise lagen sie im Streit miteinander; wenn aber ein Feind von außen kam, hielten sie fest zusammen—und das nannte man dann eben Synkretismus (syn-zusammen). Noch in der Zeit der protestantischen Orthodoxie im 16./17. Jh. konnte man diejenigen evangelischen Theologen, die um des gemeinsamen Gegensatzes zum Katholizismus willen sich über die inner-protestantischen Unterschiede hinwegsetzen wollten, 'Synkretisten' nennen. Erst im vergangenen Jahrhundert kam es zu der engeren Bedeutung von 'Synkretismus' im Sinne der Vermischung von Religionen.

Der Begriff in diesem Sinn also ist jung, das Phänomen aber, das er bezeichnet, ist uralte. Es begegnet uns, in sozusagen klassischer Form, schon bei den alten Griechen. So schildert der griechische Historiker Herodot (5. Jh. v. Chr.) die ägyptische Götterwelt, indem er die einzelnen Gottheiten mit solchen der eigenen Religion gleichsetzt:

*'Von Osiris behaupten sie (die Ägypter), er sie unser Dionysos . . . Ammon bedeutet . . . auf ägyptisch Zeus'.<sup>4</sup>*

Beide Völker verehren also eigentlich die gleichen Gottheiten—nur—der anderen Sprache entsprechend—unter anderem Namen. Vor allem die Zeit des sog. Hellenismus, also die Zeit der durch das Weltreich Alexanders d.Gr. vorangetriebenen gegenseitigen Durchdringung griechisch-römischer und orientalischer Kultur, war zugleich eine Zeit des Synkretismus.

Nur eine Religion widersetzte sich, aufs Ganze gesehen, hartnäckig der synkretistischen Überfremdung: die jüdische.<sup>5</sup> Als dann aber eine aus dem Judentum entstandene religiöse Gruppierung, die Anhänger des als Gotteslästerer hingerichteten Juden Jesus, sich der Aufnahme von Heiden öffnete, lag die Vermutung nahe, daß es sich hier doch um eine synkretische Religionsbildung handeln könnte. In der neueren Theologie war es vor allem die sogen. religionsgeschichtliche Schule (z.B. der Alttestamentler H. Gunkel<sup>6</sup> und der Neutestamentler R. Bultmann<sup>7</sup>), die das Urchristentum ausdrücklich als synkretistische Religion charakterisierte. Sollte dies etwa bedeuten, daß die Wurzeln des modernen christlichen Synkretismus bereits in den Anfängen des Christentums zu finden sind? Wie stand

eigentlich Jesus selbst zu der Frage der Wahrheit anderer Religionen?

## 2. Jesus und die Götter

Auf den ersten Blick stößt unsere Frage nach dem Verhältnis Jesu zu anderen Religionen bzw. Göttern ins Leere. Denn nach allem, was wir von Jesus wissen, spielten andere Religionen im Leben Jesu überhaupt keine Rolle. Sie kommen schlicht nicht vor. Es gibt nur eine Stelle in den Evangelien, an der möglicherweise der Name einer heidnischen Gottheit erwähnt wird. Aber in dem Wort Jesu 'Ihr könnt nicht Gott dienen und dem Mammon' (Mt. 6,24) steht der Name Mammon kaum für eine bestimmte Gottheit, sondern mehr nur symbolisch für die geradezu dämonische Macht, die Geld über den Menschen gewinnen kann.<sup>8</sup> Es handelt sich hier also um sog. Quasireligion,<sup>9</sup> nicht wirkliche Religion. Das Judentum aber war ja für Jesus keine fremde, sondern seine eigene 'Religion'. Der Gott der Juden, der Gott Abrahams, Isaaks und Jakobs, war ganz selbstverständlich auch der seine (Mt. 22, 31f). Jesus weiß sich dementsprechend zunächst auch ausschließlich zu dem Volk dieser Religion gesandt, zu den 'verlorenen Schafen des Hauses Israel' (Mt. 15, 24) und sendet seinerseits auch seine Jünger zunächst nur zu ihnen (Mt. 10, 5f).

Wenn andererseits aber Jesu Blick doch zunehmend auch auf die Heiden gelenkt wurde (vgl. eben Mt. 15, 21–28, u.ö.), so hatte diese Ausweitung seiner Sendung nichts, aber auch gar nicht mit Synkretismus zu tun. Ganz im Gegenteil: Jesus hielt unverrückt fest am Bekenntnis zu dem Gott Abrahams, Isaaks und Jakobs (Mt. 22, 32), dem Gott des Mose (Mt. 5, 17) als dem einen, wahren, allein anzubetenden Gott (Mt. 4, 10). Aber es wird zugleich deutlich, daß Jesus nicht nur als Jude den Heiden gegenübersteht, sondern als der eine Sohn Gottes allen Menschen (Mt. 11, 27 'Niemand kennt den Sohn, nur der Vater; und niemand kennt den Vater, nur der Sohn'). Und er ruft sie, in dieser seiner Vollmacht und Kraft seines Leidens für die Sünden der vielen, auch der Heiden, alle zu sich und damit zu Gott (Mt. 11, 28f; vgl. Phil. 2). Das heißt: der Ausschließlichkeitsanspruch, den Jesus hier



erhebt, steht unverkürzt in der Linie, in der dem Gottesvolk des Alten Bundes die Verehrung anderer Gottheiten untersagt war (Ex. 20, 2).

Erst als dann die Jünger Jesu wirklich 'in alle Welt hinausgingen', rückte die Konfrontation mit heidnischer Religion und ihren Göttern in den Mittelpunkt der Verkündigung. Dem Ruf des Evangeliums folgen, das hieß jetzt ganz selbstverständlich, in der von Jesus vorgezeichneten Linie, sich von den heidnischen Göttern abzuwenden. Sie sind nicht wirklich Götter (Gal. 4, 8), sondern Götzen (1. Th. 1, 9; 1. Kor. 8, 4ff) oder Nichtse (Apg. 14, 15), ihnen folgen und damit jede heidnische Religion ist Ausdruck menschlicher Sünde und Verlorenheit (Röm. 1). Wer Jesus nicht hat, hat auch Gott nicht (Eph. 2, 12). Dieser Erkenntnis entsprach es dann auch, wenn die Apostel, alle anderen Heilswege ausschließend, verkündeten; Es ist in keinem anderen Heil als allein im Namen Jesus (Apg. 4, 12).

Nur an einer Stelle scheint Paulus eigentümlich inkonsequent zu sein: In der Rede vor den Philosophen von Athen berichtet er, daß er in der Stadt einen Altar gesehen habe, der 'dem unbekannten Gott' gewidmet sei (Apg. 17, 23). Eben den, meint er nun, verkündige er ihnen. Ist das nicht ein klassischer Fall von Synkretismus? Wenn der Gottesdienst der Athener an diesem Altar dem Gott gilt, den Paulus verkündet, dienen sie da nicht schon längst eben diesem Gott? Ja, tatsächlich, sie tun es! Denn es ist ja der Gott, der auch sie geschaffen hat, und zwar so geschaffen, daß 'sie Gott suchen sollten, ob sie ihn wohl fühlen und finden möchten' (V. 27). Aber genauso wie Paulus den Juden, die doch wirklich um Gott eifern, sagen muß, daß sie es 'mit Unverstand' tun und in ihrer Gesetzesfrömmigkeit ihre eigene Gerechtigkeit aufrichten (Rm. 10, 2f), so hier den Athenern: Ihre Verehrung des 'unbekannten' Gottes geschieht eben in Unwissenheit (Apg. 17, 23, 29), nur Umkehr und Glaube an den Auferstandenen retten sie aus dem kommenden Gericht (V. 30f).<sup>10</sup>

Daß das Neue Testament diese Ausschließlichkeit Jesu bezeugt, ist also unbestreitbar. Höchst umstritten aber ist heute, ob diese Ausschließlichkeit Jesu wirklich so zu verstehen ist, daß sie auch heute noch

wesentlicher Bestandteil des christlichen Bekenntnisses sein muß.

Der amerikanische Theologe Paul Knitter vertritt—in Übereinstimmung mit vielen anderen—folgende These:

Der eine Gott, neben dem es keinen anderen gibt (oder: die eine transzendente Wirklichkeit, das Absolute), ist in allen Religionen am Werk. Sein Reich wächst in allen Religionen. Es geht nicht um vereinerleiende synkretistische Vereinigung von Religionen als Ausprägungen menschlicher und nationaler Individualität zu einer Welteinheitsreligion, sondern darum, daß—wenn auch unter dem Namen der Gottheiten der verschiedenen Religionen—der eine Gott zur Herrschaft kommt:

*'Allah wird erkannt und gepriesen werden; Krishna wird in der Welt handeln; die Erleuchtung wird vorangebracht und vertieft werden, und die Menschen werden das Reich Gottes verstehen und fördern.'*<sup>11</sup>

Knitter nennt dies ein 'theozentrisches' Verständnis der Religionen.<sup>12</sup>

Wie aber ist diese Sicht der Religionen vereinbar mit dem historischen Anspruch des Neuen Testaments auf die Ausschließlichkeit des Glaubens an Jesus?

Knitter antwortet:

1. Auf Jesus selbst kann sich dieser Ausschließlichkeitsanspruch nicht berufen. Er wußte sich zwar als endzeitlicher Prophet, mit der Frohen Botschaft von Gottes naher, endgültiger Herrschaft beauftragt. Als solcher wußte er sich persönlich auch in einem innigen Vertrauensverhältnis zu Gott, wie es in der 'Abba-Vater-Anrede' zum Ausdruck kam. Aber dies Verhältnis Jesu zu Gott fiel keineswegs grundsätzlich aus der jüdischen Frömmigkeit heraus. Es schloß keineswegs einen Anspruch darauf ein, ein konkurrenzlos einzigartiges Verhältnis zu Gott zu haben.<sup>13</sup>

2. Die Wendung zur Exklusivität vollzog sich erst bei den Jüngern Jesu. In der Begegnung mit ihm machten sie eine tiefe, ihr Leben verändernde Erfahrung: 'Wohin sollen wir gehen? Du hast Worte des ewigen Lebens, und wir haben geglaubt und erkannt, daß du der Heilige Gottes bist' (Joh. 6, 68f). Ihre persönliche Erfahrung kleideten sie in die Sprache des Bekenntnisses. Diese neigt grundsätzlich zur Exklusivität. Auch Lie-



beserklärungen unter Menschen formulieren gern exklusiv: 'Du bist die beste Mutter der Welt.' Keiner, der so redet, wird daran Anstoß nehmen, wenn jemand anders sich mit den gleichen Worten auch zu seiner Mutter bekennt. Solche Bekenntnisse klingen wohl exklusiv, sind aber, nach Knitter, imgrunde nicht so gemeint. Im strengen Sinn exklusiv wird eine solche Aussage nur dort, wo sie nicht mehr als Ausdruck persönlicher Beziehung und Erfahrung, sondern also objektive Feststellung verstanden wird. So sind auch die Namen und Titel, mit denen Jesus im Neuen Testament bezeichnet wird, bis hin zum Bekenntnis der Gottessohnschaft oder gar der Gottheit Jesu, nur Aussagen über die Funktion Jesu im Leben der Jünger: sie bringen nur zum Ausdruck, was die Jünger in der Begegnung mit Jesus erlebten:

*'... die gesamte Christologie des Neuen Testaments, alle Titel und Proklamationen für Jesus (haben) ihren Ursprung im individuellen und gemeinschaftlichen Erleben Jesu als Erlöser'. Wir müssen begreifen, daß diese Interpretationen 'in einer Art Urknall-Erfahrung wurzeln, die das Leben der Menschen verwandelt hat—die Erfahrung von etwas, was man Erlösung, Heil, Befreiung nennen kann. Diese Menschen trafen in ihrer Begegnung mit diesem Mann auf die Macht und die Wirklichkeit Gottes, eine Wirklichkeit, die sie befähigte, anders zu empfinden, zu verstehen und zu handeln als zuvor.'*<sup>14</sup>

Erst wo christologische Bekenntnisse als sog. metaphysische Aussagen über das gottheitliche Sein Jesu verstanden werden, wo wir annehmen, daß mit Jesus wirklich die zweite Person der Gottheit Mensch wurde, für die Sünde der Menschheit starb und auferstand, da entsteht jene heute so Anstoß erregende Exklusivität des christlichen Zeugnisses. Sie wird, meint Knitter, in der Urchristenheit deshalb noch ausdrücklich zu exklusiven Bekenntnisformeln wie 'Es ist in keinem andern Heil' zugespitzt, weil die Christen als kleine Minderheit in einer ihre Identität bedrohenden Umwelt lebten. So wurde die exklusive Bekenntnissprache zugleich aus soziologischen Gründen zur 'Überlebenssprache'.<sup>15</sup>

Nun wäre es grundsätzlich tatsächlich denkbar, daß die christologischen Titel des Neuen Testaments erst in nachösterlicher Zeit

von der christlichen Gemeinde gebildet wurden, als Ausdruck dessen, was einst sie in der Begegnung mit dem prophetischen Prediger und vollmächtigen Weisheitslehrer aus Nazareth erlebt hatte. So gibt es in den Briefen des Neuen Testaments sicher manche christologische Aussage, die sich so in den Evangelien noch nicht findet (etwa die Aussage über die Hohepriesterschaft Jesu nach der Ordnung Melchisedeks, Hebr. 7). Andererseits aber ist doch die Behauptung, daß die ganze neutestamentliche Christologie erst nachösterlich sei, sicher historisch unhaltbar. Wort und Weg Jesu ist ohne sein Messiasbewußtsein historisch unverständlich (Mt. 16, 16f; 26, 64).<sup>16</sup> Ebenso ist nach dem Zeugnis der Evangelien deutlich, daß Jesus sich als den Menschensohn wußte, den Gott zum Weltrichter bestimmt hat und dem deshalb jetzt schon die Vollmacht zur Vergebung der Sünden übergeben ist (Mt. 9, 6; 25, 31).<sup>17</sup>

Weiter ist es historisch unmöglich, den Glauben an die Menschwerdung des Gottessohnes und seine Auferstehung vom Tode nur aus innerer religiöser Erfahrung der Jünger heraus zu erklären, die die Jünger dann mit Hilfe zeitgenössischer Vorstellungen in mythischer Sprache zum Ausdruck gebracht hätten.

Nach dem Bericht der Evangelien stehen am Anfang des Zeugnisses von Inkarnation und Auferstehung weder individuelle innere Erfahrungen noch irgendwelche religiöse Ideen, sondern bestimmte Ereignisse: Der historische Grund des Inkarnationsglaubens (Joh 1; Phil. 2) liegt in bestimmten, betont in das Weltgeschehen einbezogenen Ereignissen, wie sie uns in den sog. Geburtsgeschichten berichtet sind (Mt. 1–2; Lk. 1–2, vgl. Gal. 4, 4). Diese Ereignisse weisen zwar z.T. zurück auf bestimmte alttestamentliche Weissagungen. Sie sind in ihrer schlichten Konkretheit aber nicht aus jenen Weissagungen sozusagen herausgesponnen.<sup>18</sup> Erst recht aber hat der Glaube an die Auferstehung Jesus festen historischen Grund in den Ereignissen, die uns in allen Evangelien und bei Paulus (1. Kor. 15) in einer auch nach dem Urteil kritischer Historiker ernstzunehmenden Weise überliefert werden.<sup>19</sup> Die Urchristenheit ist, wie Petrus sagt, nicht klugausgedachten Mythen gefolgt, sondern dem, was vertrauenswürdige Menschen mit ihren Augen gesehen



und mit ihren Ohren gehört haben (2. Pt. 1; vgl. 1. Joh. 1).

Noch weniger überzeugt schließlich die Behauptung Knitters, die sog. exklusivistische Bekenntnissprache des Neuen Testaments sei 'Überlebenssprache'. Es gab im weiten römischen Reich eine Fülle von großen und kleinen Kulturen und auch Kultgemeinschaften (z.B. in den Mysterienvereinen). Keiner von ihnen fühlte sich vom staatlich geförderten und später auch geforderten Herrscherkult in seiner Existenz bedroht. Wenn die frühen Christen nur ihre soziologische Identität hätten bewahren wollen, dann hätten sie ruhig am Kaiserkult teilnehmen und sich alle die furchtbaren Verfolgungszeiten der ersten drei Jahrhunderte ersparen können. Tatsächlich ging es ihnen aber in ihrem Nein zum Kaiserkult nicht nur um ihre soziologische Identität, sondern um die Treue zu dem Gott, den sie in Christus als den allein wahren Gott erkannt und dem allein zu dienen sie sich verpflichtet hatten.

Nicht religiöse Phantasien und psychische oder soziologische Zwänge stehen am Anfang des Christentums sondern Fakten: Worte und Ereignisse, die sich so kein Mensch gewünscht und ausgedacht hat, sondern die denen, die es uns überliefert haben, vorgegeben waren, sie selbst überraschend und ihnen sozusagen 'in die Quere' kommend. Und zwar Worte und Ereignisse, die nach ihrer eigenen Aussage die ganze Menschheit definitiv betreffen (ephapax = ein für alle-mal, Hebr. 1, 1, vgl. 7, 27): 'Also hat Gott die Welt geliebt, daß er seinen eingeborenen Sohn gab, damit alle, die an ihn glauben, nicht verloren werden, sondern das ewige Leben haben.' Diese Worte im Johannesevangelium (3, 16) sind doch nicht anders zu verstehen als so: Der eine Gott, der die ganze Welt geschaffen hat (und als ihr Schöpfer von ihr unterschieden und ihr schlechthin überlegen ist), hat angesichts dessen, daß die Welt sonst in ihrer Sünde verloren ginge, seinen Sohn Mensch werden und am Kreuz als 'Lamm Gottes' (Joh. 1, 29) für die Sünde der Welt sterben lassen (das ist ein einmaliges, historisch fixierbares Geschehen) mit dem Ziel, daß Menschen an ihn, den so von Gott Gegebenen, glauben, und das alles, weil sie sonst hoffnungslos verloren wären, im Glauben an ihn aber, und offenbar nur so, gerettet werden können und ewiges

Leben haben, also Gemeinschaft haben mit dem einen, wahren Gott.

Nun wird von anderen aber noch ein anderer Einwand gegen die Exklusivität des Heils allein in Christus vorgebracht:

Man sagt: Wir wollen ja gar nicht bestreiten, daß Gott sich wirklich in Christus offenbart hat. Aber er tat dies keineswegs nur in Jesus, dem uns bekannten geschichtlichen Christus, sondern auch vor und neben ihm im sog. 'kosmischen' Christus. Bereits im Jahr 1961 vertrat der amerikanische Theologe Joseph Sittler auf der 3. Vollversammlung des ÖRK in Neu Delhi in einem aufsehenerregenden Vortrag eine solche 'kosmische Christologie'. Er tat dies allerdings in einer für heutige Begriffe noch sehr zurückhaltenden Weise. Im Anschluß an Paulus (Kol. 1, 15–20) führte er aus, daß es keinen Bereich des Kosmos gibt, der nicht von Anfang an unter Christus steht: denn durch ihn und auf ihn hin ist alles geschaffen (V. 16).<sup>20</sup> Paulus sagt dies im bewußten Gegensatz gegen in die Gemeinde eingedrungene dualistische Irrlehre, nach der der Kosmos beherrscht oder gar geschaffen sei von nichtgöttlichen 'Herrschaften und Gewalten'.<sup>21</sup> Dem Zeugnis des Paulus entspricht auch das des Johannes: Das Wort war im Anfang bei Gott, und alles ist durch dasselbe gemacht (Joh. 1, 2f) Und daraus folgert Johannes die allerdings aufregende Erkenntnis: 'In ihm war das Leben und das Licht der Menschen.' (V. 4, vgl. V. 9 'der alle Menschen erleuchtet'). Diese Aussage könnte auf den historischen Jesus bezogen sein.<sup>22</sup> Es könnte aber auch gemeint sein: Schon als das Wort, durch das Gott die Welt gemacht hat, als Schöpfungsmittler, war es das Licht aller Menschen, vor und unabhängig von Wort und Werk Jesu.<sup>23</sup>

Aber selbst wenn man sich dieser Auslegung anschließt, so ist es doch kurzschlüssig, wenn man, wie es dann später geschah (Khodre,<sup>24</sup> Panikkar<sup>25</sup>), aus diesen Aussagen folgert, daß Christus auch als Urheber und Mittler des Heils außerhalb des Bereichs der biblischen Botschaft, also auch in anderen Religionen immer schon ('schlafend') gegenwärtig und wirksam ist. Oder wenn ernsthaft von einem anderen Referenten von Neu Delhi, dem indischen Theologen Devanandan, erwogen wird, ob nicht um dieser Gegenwart Christi willen die Religionen der Völker in der Fülle der



Zeiten weiterbestehen und so neben und unabhängig von der Evangeliumsverkündigung zum von Gott gesetzten Ziel kommen, wenn Gott 'alle Dinge zusammenfaßt in Christus' (Eph. 1, 10).<sup>26</sup> Eine solche Deutung wird sich allerdings nicht auf Johannes berufen können, denn dieser fährt fort: 'Und das Licht scheint in der Finsternis, und die Finsternis hat's nicht ergriffen' (Joh. 1, 5). Eben deshalb aber blieb es nicht bei dieser Gestalt der Offenbarung. Vielmehr wurde das Wort Fleisch, erschien als die konkrete menschliche Gestalt Jesu, an einem bestimmte historischen Ort (V. 14), und allein im Glauben an ihn entscheidet sich, ob jemand Kind Gottes wird (1, 12). Ebenso bleibt aber auch Paulus bei dem präexistenten Wirken Christi als Schöpfungsmittler nicht stehen. Vielmehr sind die Aussagen darüber nur der Hintergrund für die Botschaft von dem einmaligen geschichtlichen, Versöhnung schaffenden Werk Jesu am Kreuz (Kol. 1, 20), und nur der an ihn Glaubende hat Anteil an dieser Versöhnung (V. 22f). Die Aussagen über Jesus als Schöpfungsmittler stehen nicht in Konkurrenz zu seiner alleinigen Heilsmittlerschaft, sondern begründen nur ihre definitive und universale Gültigkeit.

### 3. Christlicher Synkretismus?—weder einst noch jetzt!

Synkretismus einst und jetzt: auch bei Jesus? auch in der Gemeinde Jesus heute? Wir haben gesehen, daß die Bibel diese Frage eindeutig verneint und wir sie mit ihr verneinen sollten.

Mit dieser Haltung macht man sich heute wenig Freunde. Toleranz ist das Gebot der Stunde—im zwischenmenschlichen Bereich mit gutem Recht. Aber Wahrheit muß Wahrheit bleiben. Auch das gebietet die Menschlichkeit. Die Frage ist nur, wie wir mit der Wahrheit umgehen: ob lieblos-aggressiv oder verständnisvoll, ob arrogant-borniert oder demütig und am anderen inter-essiert. Die Art, wie wir mit Andersdenkenden umgehen, muß äußerst duldsam sein. Eine Toleranz aber, die die selbst erkannte rettende Wahrheit zurückhielte, wäre die größte Lieblosigkeit.

1 H.J. Margull/St. Samartha, Dialog mit anderen Religionen, 1972, 26.

- 2 ORK, 7. Vollversammlung, Dokument Nr. PL 3.3, vorläufige Übersetzung S.7.
- 3 Der Heidelberger Missionswissenschaftler Th. Sundermeier versucht nachträglich sogar eine—verharmlosende—Rechtfertigung: die angerufenen Geister seien für Frau Chung nur 'Ikonen' für menschliches Leiden, der animistische Ritus sei bloßes folkloristisches 'Happening' gewesen (Th. Sundermeier, Inkulturation und Synkretismus. Probleme einer Verhältnisbestimmung, in: EvTheol 52/1992, 192–204, hier: 205f).
- 4 Herodot, Historien II, 42.
- 5 M. Hengel, Judentum und Hellenismus, 2. Aufl. 1973, 464ff.
- 6 H. Gunkel, Zum religionsgeschichtlichen Verständnis des Neuen Testaments, 1910.
- 7 R. Bultmann, Das Urchristentum im Rahmen der antiken Religionen, 1962, 163ff ('Das Urchristentum als synkretistisches Phänomen').
- 8 M. Hengel, Eigentum und Reichtum in der frühen Kirche, 1973, 32.
- 9 P. Tillich, Das Christentum und die Begegnung der Weltreligionen, 1964, 11f.
- 10 H. Burkhardt, Wiederkehr der Religiosität?, 1990, 35f. (2. erweiterte Auflage 1993 unter dem Titel: Ein Gott in allen Religionen?)
- 11 P.F. Knitter, Ein Gott—viele Religionen. Gegen den Absolutheitsanspruch des Christentums, 1988, 195.
- 12 Knitter a.a.O. 67ff ('Das theozentrische Modell').
- 13 Knitter a.a.O. 107f.
- 14 Knitter a.a.O. 108f. Dabei ist mit 'Macht und Wirklichkeit Gottes' nur die Stärke des Gottesbewußtseins Jesu gemeint, vgl. a.a.O. 76.
- 15 Knitter a.a.O. 122.
- 16 Vg. A. Schlatter, Der Zweifel an der Messianität Jesu, in: ders., Zur Theologie des Neuen Testaments und zur Dogmatik, hg. von U. Luck, 1969, 151–202.
- 17 Vgl. J. Schniewind, Das Selbstzeugnis Jesu nach den ersten drei Evangelien, in: ders., Der Herr der Welt, hg. von O. Michel, 1983, 3–20; I.H. Marshall, Ursprünge der neutestamentlichen Christologie, 1985.
- 18 Vgl. zur Geburt Jesu: D.F. Wright (Ed.), Chosen by God. Mary in Evangelical Perspective, 1989.
- 19 Vgl. zur Auferstehung Jesu: H. Hempelmann, Die Auferstehung Jesu Christi—eine historische Tatsache? 1982.
- 20 J. Sittler, Zur Einheit berufen, in: Neu Delhi Dokumente. Berichte und Reden auf der Welt kirchenkonferenz 1961, hg. von F. Lüpsen, 1962, 300–311.



- 21 E. Lohse, Die Briefe an die Kolosser und an Philemon, 1968, 83–85.
- 22 Th. Zahn, Das Evangelium des Johannes, 6. Aufl. 1921 (ND 1983), 58–85
- 23 F. Godet, Kommentar zu dem Evangelium des Johannes, 4. Aufl. 1903 (ND 1987), Bd. II 28f; W. Lütgert, Johanneische Christologie, 2. Aufl. 1916, 82f (nicht im Sinne des stoischen Gedankens der Immanenz des Logos, sondern der Offenbarung Gottes 'durch das, was er von der Schöpfung ab tut'); vgl. C. K. Barrett, The Gospel according to St. John, 7. Aufl. 1967, 134f.
- 24 Vgl. Margull/Samartha a.a.O.140f.
- 25 Vgl. Knitter a.a.O.83.
- 26 Vgl. P. Davanandan, Zu Zeugen berufen, in: Neu Delhi Dokumente, 276–286.



- **Church, Nation and State according to the Norwegian Bishop Eivind Berggrav**
- *L'Église, la nation et l'état selon l'évêque norvégien Eivind Berggrav*
- *Das Verständnis von Kirche, Nation und Staat nach dem norwegischen Bischof Eivind Berggrav*

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## SUMMARY

Bishop Eivind Berggrav (1884–1959) is well known as a leader of the Norwegian 'Kirchenkampf' against nazism during the second World War and as an outstanding ecumenical leader after the war. In this article one of his favourite themes is presented, namely the relationship between Church, nation and state.

The first aspect to be presented is the question whether the Church is 'national' or 'supra-national'. In August 1938 Berggrav gave an address on this theme at a meeting in Norway of the International Council of the 'World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches', an ecumenical organization which had been involved in efforts to bridge gaps between nations since 1914.

Although Berggrav stressed the ecumenical character of the Church, he also underlined that the Church has an important national aspect. In his address he therefore criticized those who would only talk about the 'supra-national' Church without national limitations. Against this abstract notion he underlined the consequences of incarnation. God wants me to show my solidarity with the actual situation of my nation with its limitations, and humility, Berggrav claimed.

Still, in order not to be misunderstood, Berggrav maintained that nationality in itself is nothing divine, but a very human element which is used by God as an instrument. Implicitly he therefore criticized the German nationalism by saying that the national as a means can never be regarded as the goal. The Lordship of Christ is the principle which

reveals the difference between a sound respect for the nation and perverted nationalism.

In the following years Berggrav's concept of Church, nation and state was tested several times, especially during the second World War. The article presents two important cases, Berggrav's peace initiative, 1939–1940, and his leadership during the Norwegian Church struggle.

Berggrav's peace initiative was founded on the principle of understanding and reconciliation between nations. It seemed quite clear to him that a peace mission had to treat the two parties in a similar way. Reciprocity and impartiality are necessary presuppositions for a successful peace mission, he thought. His own initiative shows that he himself tried to follow this fundamental principle.

The Norwegian Church struggle had two main aspects. First, the Church stood up against injustice and discrimination; secondly it fought for its own freedom from a totalitarian state. The strategy of Bishop Berggrav was to unite Church and people in a common front against the Nazi regime, by defending justice and conscience, and by condemning injustice and violence.

Berggrav's reflections upon Church, nation and state express a deep concern for the Church's responsibility in political and national affairs. Still, Berggrav in no way identifies Church and nation, no more than he identifies Church and state. Berggrav's main concern was not the national state, nor the Church as an institution, but the sovereignty of God.



## RÉSUMÉ

L'évêque Eivind Berggrav (1884–1959) est bien connu comme le champion de la résistance de l'Église norvégienne contre le nazisme pendant la seconde guerre mondiale, et comme une figure de proue du mouvement oecuménique d'après guerre. Le présent article est consacré à l'un de ses thèmes favoris: les relations entre l'Église, la nation et l'état.

Le premier point à considérer est la question de savoir si l'Église est 'nationale' ou 'supra-nationale'. En août 1938, Berggrav a donné une conférence sur ce thème lors d'une rencontre en Norvège de 'l'Alliance mondiale pour le développement de l'amitié internationale par les Églises', une organisation oecuménique qui s'était associée aux efforts accomplis depuis 1914 pour rapprocher les nations.

Tout en insistant sur le caractère oecuménique de l'Église, il soulignait aussi l'importance de son caractère national. Dans son allocution, il critiquait donc ceux qui ne reconnaissaient qu'une 'Église supra-nationale', sans aucunes limitations nationales. A l'encontre de cette notion abstraite, il relevait les conséquences qui découlent de l'incarnation. Dieu veut qu'avec humilité, je me montre solidaire de ma nation dans ses limitations, et ce, dans la situation concrète qui est la sienne, déclarait-il.

D'autre part, afin de n'être pas mal compris, Berggrav affirmait que la nationalité n'avait rien de divin en soi, mais que c'était un élément très humain dont Dieu se sert comme d'un instrument. Implicitement, il critiquait ainsi le nationalisme allemand, en disant que la nation doit être vue comme un moyen, et jamais comme une fin. La seigneurie de Jésus-Christ révèle la différence entre un respect légitime pour la

nation et un nationalisme pervers.

Dans les années qui ont suivi, les idées de Berggrav sur l'Église, la nation et l'état ont été testées à plusieurs reprises, surtout pendant la seconde guerre mondiale. L'auteur mentionne deux exemples, l'initiative de Berggrav en faveur de la paix, en 1939–1940, et son rôle dominant dans la lutte de l'Église norvégienne pendant la guerre.

Son initiative en vue de la paix était basée sur le principe de la compréhension et de la réconciliation entre les nations. Il voyait clairement qu'une telle mission ne pouvait réussir qu'en traitant les deux parties de façon semblable. La réciprocité et l'impartialité étaient des conditions nécessaires au succès de cette démarche en faveur de la paix. Son initiative montre qu'il s'appliquait lui-même à suivre ce principe fondamental.

Le combat de l'Église norvégienne avait deux aspects principaux. Primo, l'Église s'opposait à l'injustice et à la discrimination; secundo, elle luttait pour sa propre liberté vis-à-vis d'un état totalitaire. La stratégie de Berggrav consistait à unir l'Église et le peuple en un front commun contre le régime nazi, pour défendre la justice et la conscience, et pour condamner la violence et l'injustice.

Les réflexions de Berggrav démontrent son intérêt passionné pour les responsabilités de l'Église dans le domaine politique et national. Cependant, Berggrav est loin d'identifier l'Église avec la nation, pas plus qu'avec l'état. Il n'était pas préoccupé en premier lieu par l'état ou la nation, ni même par l'Église en tant qu'institution, mais il voulait honorer la souveraineté de Dieu.

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Bischof Eivind Berggrav (1884–1959) ist bekannt als ein Führer des norwegischen Kirchenkampfes gegen den Nationalsozialismus im 2. Weltkrieg und als eine herausragende ökumenische Persönlichkeit nach dem Krieg. In diesem Artikel wird eines seiner Lieblingsthemen dargestellt, nämlich das Verhältnis von Kirche,

Nation und Staat. Zuerst wird die Frage behandelt, ob Kirche 'national' oder 'supranational' ist. Im August 1938 sprach Berggrav zu diesem Thema vor dem Internationalen Rat des Weltbundes für die kirchliche Förderung internationaler Freundschaft, einer ökumenischen Organisation, die seit 1914 darum bemüht war,



die Kluft zwischen den Nationen zu überwinden.

Obwohl Berggrav den ökumenischen Charakter der Kirche betonte, unterstrich er auch die Tatsache, daß sie einen wichtigen nationalen Aspekt habe. In seiner Ansprache kritisierte er also diejenigen, die nur von der supranationalen Kirche sprachen, ohne einen nationalen Charakter anzuerkennen. Im Gegensatz zu diesem abstrakten Begriff von Kirche unterstrich er die Folgen der Inkarnation. Gott will, daß ich in Demut und Bescheidenheit meine Solidarität mit der tatsächlichen Situation meines Landes zeige, behauptete Berggrav.

Dennoch unterstrich Berggrav, um nicht mißverstanden zu werden, daß die Nationalität an sich nichts Göttliches sei, sondern ein sehr menschlicher Faktor, den Gott als Werkzeug gebraucht. Damit kritisierte er implizit den deutschen Nationalismus mit der Behauptung, die Nation könne nie als Ziel verstanden werden. Die Herrschaft Christi sei der Grundsatz, der den Unterschied zwischen einem gesunden Respekt vor der Nation und einem pervertierten Nationalismus offenbare.

In den darauffolgenden Jahren wurde Berggravs Vorstellung von Kirche, Nation und Staat mehrere Male und ganz besonders während des 2. Weltkrieges auf den Prüfstand gestellt. In diesem Artikel werden zwei besondere Fälle dargestellt; Berggravs Friedensinitiative von 1939–1940 und seine

Führung während des norwegischen Kirchenkampfes.

Berggravs Friedensinitiative gründete in Prinzip der Völkerverständigung und der Versöhnung. Ihm war es klar, daß eine Friedensinitiative beide Parteien gleich behandeln muß. Wechselseitigkeit und Unparteilichkeit sind seiner Meinung nach die notwendigen Grundlagen für eine Friedensmission. Seine eigene Initiative in dieser Hinsicht zeigte, daß er selber bemüht war, nach diesem Grundsatz zu handeln.

Der norwegische Kirchenkampf hatte zwei Hauptaspekte. Erstens bezog die Kirche Stellung gegen Ungerechtigkeit und Diskriminierung, und zweitens kämpfte sie um ihre eigene Freiheit von dem totalitären Staat. Durch die Verteidigung der Gerechtigkeit und der Freiheit des Gewissens sowie die Verurteilung von Ungerechtigkeit und Gewalt wollte Bischof Berggrav Kirche und Volk in einer gemeinsamen Front gegen die Naziherrschaft vereinigen. Berggravs Gedanken über Kirche, Nation und Staat spiegeln eine tief empfundene Besorgnis um die Verantwortung der Kirche in politischen und nationalen Angelegenheiten wider. Dennoch setzt Berggrav Kirche und Nation genauso wenig gleich wie Kirche und Staat. Berggravs Hauptanliegen war weder der Nationalstaat noch die Kirche als Institution, sondern die Herrschaft Gottes.

‘A Christianity which is not national becomes a mere religion but not a real Christianity.’ This somewhat provocative thesis was put forward by the Norwegian Bishop Eivind Berggrav (1884–1959) in an address to international Church leaders at an ecumenical meeting in Norway, August 1938.<sup>1</sup>

On several occasions Bishop Berggrav, who is well known as a leader of the Norwegian ‘Kirchenkampf’ against nazism during the second World War and as an ecumenical leader after the war, elaborated the relationship both between state and Church and between nation and Church.<sup>2</sup> Some of the most important examples of this reflection will be presented in the following.

## 1. The Church—national or ‘supra-national’?

Berggrav gave his address in 1938 at a meeting of the International Council of ‘World Alliance for Promoting International Friendship through the Churches’, an ecumenical organization which had been involved in efforts to bridge gaps between nations since 1914.

In 1938 the organization held its first international meeting in Norway. More than 100 church leaders from different countries attended the conference, and Eivind Berggrav was one of the leading participants. In his address he discussed a very urgent



theme: 'The national and supra-national Character of the Church of Christ'.<sup>3</sup>

This subject had been important to Berggrav for many years, at least since the first World War.<sup>4</sup> During the war Berggrav had been acquainted with a very influential church leader, the Swedish Archbishop Nathan Söderblom. Berggrav was one of the participants in a church conference in Uppsala in 1917 for the neutral countries.<sup>5</sup> Söderblom was the leading personality at the conference, and in the following years Berggrav established a close friendship with the Swedish church leader. After Söderblom's death in 1931 Berggrav was often recognized as his 'successor', and the phrase 'Söderblom complex' has even been used to explain Berggrav's dependence upon the famous Archbishop.<sup>6</sup>

Berggrav's ecumenical involvement started as a protest against a situation where Christians in different nations were separated and lost contact because of political conflicts or war. The pain he felt by observing how personal friendships could be destroyed as a result of political divisions, affected him very strongly, and since then he always underlined the responsibility for creating an atmosphere of peace and reconciliation between nations as well as between churches. The Church proclaims a message which is strong enough to bridge the gap between enemies and to replace hatred with understanding and love, he said.

Although Berggrav thus stressed the ecumenical character of the Church, he never denied that the Church has also an important national aspect. In his address in August 1938 he strongly emphasized this, criticizing those who would only talk about the 'supranational' Church without national limitations. Against this abstract notion he underlined the consequences of incarnation:

This national element in Christianity is based upon the Incarnation: God uses the form of human limitation in order to come close to men. He cannot use ultra-spirituality. He does not want any supra-nationality; He wants me to show my solidarity with the actual situation of my nation in all humility.

It was easier for Bishop Berggrav to say this than it would have been for the German or British church leaders who attended the

meeting. A little country like Norway could not be accused of having imperialistic ambitions, nor was it dominated by an extreme nationalistic ideology.

Still, Berggrav felt it necessary to avoid misunderstanding. In his second thesis he maintained that nationality in itself is nothing divine, but a very human element which is used by God as an instrument. Implicitly he therefore criticized German nationalism, by saying that the national, as an instrument, can never be regarded as the goal: 'Wherever nationality is made a value in its own right, it does away with God'.

On the other hand, when the nation is not perverted by a nationalistic ideology, but perceived as a limited means of God's activity in the world, it is possible to see the connection between Christ and nation, Berggrav claimed, arguing that the fact that Christ was a Jew belongs directly to the Gospel:

He never raised Himself above His nation. It is impossible to think of Him using the word 'supranational' of Himself. He was not an essential extract or sublimation of the best things in humanity. But what he was, said, did and lived *in* His truly human existence came to such an extent out of eternity that eternal life was kindled by it *in* men.

The same perspective comes from a theological reflection upon the Holy Spirit. The Spirit created no Esperanto, Berggrav said, 'every nationality heard the Lord in its own speech'. Human limitation and variation is not to be viewed as a purely negative phenomenon, but as an opportunity for God to show the richness and completeness of his mercy:

The nations present the riches of God to us at the same time as they set human sinfulness clearly before our eyes. The miracle of God is that He creates disciples and witnesses for himself through this nature. The nations and the national Churches form an orchestra of the manifold life of humanity with one and the same key and main theme: eternity and the lordship of Christ.

The Lordship of Christ is then the principle which reveals the difference between a sound respect for the nation and perverted nationalism. When Christ is Lord, it follows from this that neither the Church as an institution, nor the nation, can be my goal



or the focus of my devotion, Berggrav says. Where the nation desires to be the lord, Christ is betrayed. Therefore, oppositions to the nation will arise, because the nation is limited and belongs to the flesh. But this problem is not to be overcome by means of supra-nationality:

On the contrary: a supra-national train of thought is a flight from the sins of my own nation, just as an unduly spiritual train of thought is a flight from my own fleshly nature.

The Church is the body of Christ, a means of incarnation, according to Berggrav. This means i.a. that it is 'called to live close to the heart of the nation, to speak its speech, to identify itself with its limitations'. That which binds all Christians together is not an abstract supra-nationality, but the eternal redemptive act of Christ and sonship of God through Him.

## 2. The Church and conflicts between nations—Berggrav's peace initiatives 1939–1940

In the following years Berggrav's concept of Church, nation and state was tested several times, especially during the second World War. Here two important cases will be presented, Berggrav's peace initiative 1939–1940 and his leadership during the Norwegian Church struggle.

Already in September 1939 Berggrav started to carry out a peace initiative with the ambitious aim of creating a climate for negotiations which could put an end to the war.<sup>7</sup> In the first weeks after the war broke out, his initiative primarily aimed at establishing contacts with leading circles within the Nordic countries. In this period he gave many addresses in Norway, Denmark and Sweden, stressing the historical role of the Nordic countries as mediators between the warring sides. Besides, he wrote a letter to his three episcopal colleagues in the other Nordic capitals, suggesting a joint Church initiative for peace. An important part of his plan was to influence the leading Nordic political leaders and the Scandinavian kings, especially the Norwegian King Haakon.

Berggrav's ideal was a 'positive' neutrality and active peace politics. When he saw that

the politicians refused to play an active part, he claimed that the Church had to play a 'political' role.

Berggrav's main political concept was that of 'reconciliation'. In his pamphlet *Nordens innsats* (The task of the Nordic countries), which he wrote in the autumn 1939 shortly after the outbreak of the war, he describes the task of the 'Conciliator'. He must try to create a good atmosphere, as a background for the meeting between the two struggling parties. This meeting must be characterized by reciprocity and confidence.<sup>8</sup>

Berggrav's peace initiative was founded on the principle of understanding and reconciliation between nations. It seemed quite clear to him that a peace mission had to treat the two parties in a similar way. Reciprocity and indiscrimination are necessary presuppositions for a successful peace mission, he thought. His own initiative shows that he himself tried to follow this fundamental principle.

One of the immediate results of Berggrav's initiative was a Nordic Church conference in Oslo on 22–23 November 1939, with about 30 participants from Finland, Sweden, Denmark and Norway. This conference was summed up in three different resolutions, signed by Berggrav, Eidem, the Danish bishop H. Fuglsang-Damgaard and the Finnish professor E. Gulin. The first resolution was 'A call to the Christians of Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden', where the Christian duty to work for peace and reconciliation was underlined.<sup>9</sup> The conference also sent 'A Greeting to the Christians in the warring countries'. Here the task of working for 'a constructive peace, a peace based on the Christian principles of truth, justice and brotherhood' was stressed.<sup>10</sup> Thirdly, the conference decided to invite representatives of Christians in belligerent countries to meetings—separately at first—with corresponding representatives of the Northern countries.

Berggrav's critics have often claimed that he was motivated by a certain pro-German attitude. In the years after Versailles Berggrav had indeed shown a strong sympathy for the German people and had described the Versailles Treaty as unjust. Through his frequent visits in Germany he



had also established close friendships with many Germans.

Therefore it was not surprising that Berggrav could be regarded as pro-German. On the other hand, he had also close friends in Britain. Berggrav himself has claimed that his attitude was neither pro-German nor pro-British but 'pro-human'.<sup>11</sup> With these words he reveals the main reason for his peace initiative, the fear of total war. For Berggrav total war would be a more serious threat than the Hitler régime.<sup>12</sup>

There is also another aspect of Berggrav's thought which his critics could interpret as pro-German. In the thirties he had been influenced by the Oxford 'Group'-movement, as a result of which he began to speak about 'reconciliation' between nations in a way that could be mixed up with a pro-German attitude.<sup>13</sup> Berggrav's political attitude was rather privatized, and this prevented him from making a realistic analysis of the ideological differences between democracy and dictatorship. Perhaps the weakest point in Berggrav's peace initiative was his failure to recognize this difference. His privatized attitude to politics prevented him from having a realistic view of the situation.

Still one has to admit: Berggrav's peace initiatives at the beginning of the second World War represent a huge mental and intellectual effort. In his attempts to open new possibilities for a peaceful solution Berggrav felt a deep personal responsibility to try all possible means. What he learned in these months also became useful when the Norwegian Church struggle started during the German occupation.<sup>14</sup> The experiences which were won during his peace mission also made it easier for him to find realistic solutions as an ecumenical leader in the post-war period.

### 3. Church, nation and state in the Norwegian 'Kirchenkampf'

Eivind Berggrav is one of the few truly great figures of recent church history. He was very prudent and very courageous, a Christian with a deep and simple faith and at the same time a man of great immediacy who could effortlessly come close to people.<sup>15</sup>

These words, written by the famous German

bishop Hanns Lilje, characterize Bishop Berggrav's leadership during the Norwegian Church's struggle against nazism in the second World War. Throughout the world Berggrav became a symbol in these years of Christian resistance to Nazi oppression. He was not a Norwegian figure only, but a world figure and a true ecumenical leader.

In order to understand the Norwegian Church's struggle during the war one has to bear in mind that the Norwegian Church was, and still is, a typical national Church and a State Church, which in temporal matters is subject to the Parliament and the King, who exercises his power through the Ministry of Church and Education. In the forties, nearly 97 per cent of the population belonged to the Evangelical Lutheran State Church.

During the first months after the German invasion of Norway, on 9 April, 1940, the Norwegian people, as well as the Church, was shocked and confused. The German occupying power promised the Church religious freedom, and until 25 September the Church was left in peace. In these months the Church carried out a policy of cautious collaboration with the Germans on the basis of the Geneva Convention. But in September, through a coup of Reichskommissar Terboven, Norway's free and democratic constitution was destroyed, and it became obvious that the Germans did not intend to respect elementary human rights. The King and the Government were dismissed, the political parties dissolved, and Vidkun Quisling's political party, *Nasjonal Samling* (National Union), was declared by the Germans to be the only legal, 'governmental' party. With the aid of the Norwegian national socialists the occupying power tried to incorporate Norway in to the German Nazi system.

It was immediately clear to the Church that the situation was dangerous and that precautions had to be taken. In October 1940 a general mobilization of the entire Norwegian Christian people was brought about by the foundation of a Joint Christian Council of the Norwegian Church (*Kristent Samråd*) during a meeting in Oslo. It was a manifestation of Christian unity at a most critical time for Church and people. The council



embraced the greater part of the Christian Church in Norway, with such men as Berggrav, who had been appointed Bishop of Oslo three years earlier, the conservative Professor Ole Hallesby at the Free Faculty of Theology, and Ludvig Hope, an outstanding leader of the radical laymen's movement. For everyone who knew of the deep-running division in Norwegian Christianity, this was a remarkable experience. Bishop Berggrav also built up a network of contacts with the small free churches in Norway, including the Roman Catholic Church. He created an ecumenical climate and strengthened the Christian Church as a universal body.

One principle dominated Berggrav's conscious program as leader of the Norwegian Church: The Church must be united and strong. All unnecessary disagreements and all hidden suspicions ought to be avoided. Within the Council, all new problems relating to the German occupation were discussed, and it was here that all important decisions were made. Berggrav emerged as a leader of both this group and the college of bishops. In the Norwegian consciousness and in the press of the free world, Berggrav became the symbol of the Norwegian Church's opposition to the Nazi occupation.

The Norwegian Church struggle had two main aspects. First, the Church stood up against injustice and discrimination; secondly, it fought for its own freedom from a totalitarian state. The strategy of Bishop Berggrav was to unite Church and people in a common front against the Nazi régime, by defending justice and conscience, and by condemning injustice and violence. After the war, Berggrav himself described this strategy in the following way:

In the beginning it was difficult for us to declare war, as Nazism never showed any hostility towards the Church or Christianity. On the contrary, the quislings proclaimed 'protection of the fundamental values of Christianity'. (...) It was clear that the Church would not join battle—more precisely that it would not be able to muster all its forces, rank and file, in an effectual combat on Christian ground, unless essential Christianity were in evident danger. Within the Church there was also fear lest we should be involved in a political struggle. What made the situation clear was a quite unexpected issue: *Justice*. (...)

The Germans had said to the Church: 'Do not attempt to discuss law in general, or the law of nations (...) The Church should keep to the Gospel', a line of argument which was not altogether without response from ecclesiastical circles: 'So long as they do not hinder us from preaching the Word of God, the Church is not endangered'. That which decided us was the experience of *lawless society*—something which had never even entered our imagination—and we were enlightened by the Word of God and by the confession of our Church, that Right and Justice belong to God's own order in the world. Our Lutheran confession in its article 16 thrice repeats the words that all authority shall be *de jure*—an authority of Justice and Right. How often have we not felt thankful that our Lutheran confession contained those clear, strong words! (...) In this way God awoke His Church. We came to see that Right and Justice have more than merely human value. Justice belongs to God. In September, 1940, we included in our church prayer the words of Jesus about those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake (Matt. v. 10). Persecution for righteousness' sake was what we experienced among our people. And then the Christian conscience was set on fire.<sup>16</sup>

In the urgent situation during the occupation, it became evident for Berggrav that a close contact between the Norwegian Church and the Norwegian people was necessary to establish a broad common front against the unjust state. His strategy includes reflection upon the character of the Church as a national Church, as a Church of the people. His ideal was a Church which was involved in the daily life of people and took part in the sufferings and the joys of the nation. Some of Berggrav's speeches from these years were filled with national enthusiasm which can only be rightly understood in the context of the German occupation of a small country:

Norway—as it lives in God's mind—that is what we are called to realize. This country will also be our children's country. In times to come Norway's name will be the candle where God puts his light.<sup>17</sup>

In December, 1940, all the members of the Supreme Court of Norway laid down their office. This was a protest against the violation of international law and the rights of Norway. At a meeting with the seven bishops of Norway, the Chief Justice said: 'Henceforward it is the Church that must represent



the law'. Thus, the bishops' Pastoral Letter of January/February, 1941, concerned matters of justice and human rights. This letter came as a liberating word to the Norwegian people, for here were church leaders speaking out boldly against the violations of justice which had taken place. The bishops discussed the question of the legitimacy of the state, claiming that the Lutheran confession presupposes that the state is a just state, which maintains law and justice. They also underlined the Church's responsibility to speak out against injustice:

When the authorities permit acts of violence and injustice, and exert pressure on our souls, then the Church becomes the defender of the people's conscience. (. . .) Despite all its human shortcomings the Church has been given authority to spread His law and Gospel among all peoples. The Church can therefore never be silenced. Whenever God's commandments are set aside by sin the Church stands immovable and cannot be directed by any authority of the State.<sup>18</sup>

During 1941 there were several controversies between the bishops and the authorities. In the summer of 1941 the Nazis launched their so-called 'Crusade against Bolshevism', hoping that the Church would join the campaign against 'godless' Communism. They were however disappointed, because Berggrav on behalf of the bishops refused to give their support. Day after day the most insulting attacks were made on Berggrav in the quisling press, but he remained firm against all pressure.

In February, 1942, the conflict between the Church and the Nazi state became still more apparent. At the same time, a crisis of far reaching dimensions had arisen in the schools. On 5 February the Quisling 'National Government' decreed that all teachers must become members of the Nazi 'Teachers' Front', and another decree established compulsory membership of the National Unity's (Nazi) Youth Movement for all children between the ages of ten and eighteen. These measures were met by protests from the Norwegian teachers, and the bishops strongly supported them in a sharp letter to the authorities, claiming that the fundamental relationship between parents and children is a 'sacred institution', 'a

fundamental ethical relationship which persists inviolable and sacred for all homes'. 'He who seeks to force the child out of the ties of parental responsibility and to break the divine right of the home, immediately imposes the most extreme strain on the parents' conscience', the bishops said, and maintained:

As the guardians of the Church we recognize it as our duty to stress this plainly and unambiguously with reference to the task you have been given of helping to draft a law intended to permit the forced mobilization of all children from the age of nine or ten upwards, and their subjection to influences which innumerable parents must regard as intolerable in relation to the obligations laid upon them by their conscience.<sup>19</sup>

On 24 February, 1942, the bishops declared that the time had come to 'cease administrative co-operation with a State which practises violence against the Church'. They addressed letters of resignation to the authorities, laying down their administrative offices as bishops although maintaining the right to exercise the 'spiritual vocation' given them by ordination at the Lord's altar.

Both the Church and the Norwegian people supported the bishops. On Sunday, 22 March, a declaration was read in practically all churches in Norway, saying that the ministers were only prepared to continue in office if the view of the Church regarding the education of the youth and other matters was respected.

On Easter Sunday, 5 April, the Church broke completely with the state. During the service that day the document *Kirkens Grunn* ('The Foundation of the Church: A Confession and Declaration') was read.<sup>20</sup> This document was produced by the Christian Joint Council, though drafted principally by Braggrav. It was stated that the present situation had forced the clergy to present their confession about the foundations of the Church.

This was done in six paragraphs. First, the document testifies that the Holy Scripture is the only basis and guide for Christian life and Christian teaching, that God's Word must be free and that the servants of the Church cannot receive directions from outside as to how God's Word should be



interpreted in a given situation. The document also declares that the ordination of a minister is essentially a life-calling. In a third paragraph it is said that, because of its sacred unity as a true Evangelical Church, the Church has to oppose any coercion of conscience.

The last three paragraphs take the form of a declaration. The fourth paragraph says that, according to the Constitution, the Christian upbringing of the child is a matter of concern for the whole Church together with the Christian school and the Christian home. In the fifth paragraph it is said that the Church has to distinguish clearly between the worldly State and the spiritual Church. It is a sin against God if the State begins to tyrannize over the soul and tries to dictate what people should believe, think and perceive. In the last paragraph it is maintained that despite the fact that the Norwegian Church is allied with the state, it is, as a Church of Jesus Christ, independent and spiritually free in all sacred affairs.

Almost 800 Norwegian pastors, 93% of the clergy, followed the bishops and resigned from office. The authorities soon imprisoned Bishop Berggrav and other church leaders, but because of the strong position which the Church had among the Norwegian people, the Nazi authorities had to avoid stronger measures against the Church.

After a short spell in prison, Berggrav was interned in his own cottage in Asker, outside Oslo, guarded by the Norwegian State Police. His captivity lasted for three years. His circumstances were admittedly totally different from those who were in prison or concentration camps. He enjoyed a considerable measure of communication with the outside world by means of secret messages and the visits of colleagues. Yet this was a period of difficulty and extreme stress.

Berggrav, however, used this time of imprisonment well. In the three years he wrote seven books. One of his most important books, *Man and State*, bears the stamp of being written during the occupation.<sup>21</sup> It is characterized by a concern about the tendency towards state regulation of all life, not only in a dictatorship, but also in the democratic state. Berggrav asserts that only a sense of the sacredness of justice can pre-

vent the state from coming under demonic control.

This book also contains a critical examination of the dualistic tendency in Lutheran confessional theology concerning the so-called 'Two Kingdoms', the spiritual and the secular. Berggrav underlines the independence of the Church over against a totalitarian state and the right to remind the state that it also stands under the rule of God. The just state acts in accordance with law and justice. When the state rules without law and becomes unjust, the Christian has not only the right, but also the duty to disobey, Berggrav said. This 'conditional' understanding of the state is an important theological contribution to the international debate on political ethics.

#### 4. Church, nation and state—under God's sovereignty

Berggrav's reflections upon Church, nation and state express a deep concern for the Church's responsibility in political and national affairs. Still, it should be emphasized that Berggrav in no way identifies Church and nation, just as little as he identifies Church and state. Although, all through the war, he underlined the common task of the Church and the people in the struggle against the Nazi state, he still knew that there is an important distinction between Church and nation. The struggle of the Church starts in the Gospel, in the centre of the Christian faith, but it takes place in the life of the people, as the place where the violations of God's sacred law are manifested concretely through injustice, brutality and discrimination.

After the war, Eivind Berggrav wrote an article on 'The Task of the Church in the Field of International Affairs'.<sup>22</sup> Here he spoke about the 'prophetic' task of the Church, calling for a world-wide responsibility based on a solidarity with humanity in general which extends to political and international matters. Berggrav's main concern was not the national state, nor the Church as an institution, but the sovereignty of God:

Confronted by a situation like today's—men bewildered as to how far God has a will and a place in human history, increasingly inclined



to conceive of society in terms of biology and technology ruled by naked facts and naked forces—the Church's duty must be to tell the nations of God's sovereignty in all human affairs.

- 1 See the following biographical works on Berggrav: Odd Godal, *Eivind Berggrav: Leader of Christian Resistance*, London 1949; Sven Stolpe, *Eivind Berggrav: Bischof von Norwegen*, München 1951; Alex Johnson, *Eivind Berggrav: God's Man of Suspense*, Minneapolis 1960; Günter Gloede, 'Eivind Berggrav: Der Mann des Gewissens', in: Gloede (ed.), *Ökumenische Profile: Brückenbauer der einen Kirche*; Bd. 1, Stuttgart 1961, pp. 244–252; Helge Fæhn, 'Berggrav, Eivind Josef', in: *TRE* 5, pp. 602f.; Per Voksø (ed.), *Eivind Berggrav 1884–1984: Brobygger og kirkeleder*, Oslo 1984; Gunnar Heiene, *Eivind Berggrav: En biografi*, Oslo 1992.
- 2 See Torleiv Austad, 'Eivind Berggrav and the Church of Norway's Resistance Against Nazism', *Mid-Stream. An Ecumenical Journal*, 26 (1987), pp. 51–61; Gerald W. Erickson, *The Ecclesiology of Eivind Berggrav: Obedience to God*, Dubuque 1979 (Diss., Aquinas Institute of Theology); Gunnar Heiene, 'Das Staatsverständnis Eivind Berggravs', *Die öffentliche Verantwortung der Evangelisch-lutherischen Kirche in einer Bekenntnissituation. Das Paradigma des norwegischen Kirchenkampfes*, Erlangen 1984 (Veröffentlichungen der Luther-Akademie e.V. Ratzeburg, Band 7), pp. 54–69; 'Ecumenist of Our Time: Eivind Berggrav', *Mid-Stream. An Ecumenical Journal*, 26 (1987), pp. 40–50; *Den menneskelige stat: Antropologi og politikk hos Eivind Berggrav*, Oslo, Menighetsfakultetet 1991 (diss.); Arnd Heling, *Die Theologie Eivind Berggravs im norwegischen Kirchenkampf. Ein Beitrag zur politischen Theologie im Luthertum*, Hamburg (Diss.).
- 3 See Berggrav's manuscript, WCC Library, Geneva: D 2/2, Box 12.
- 4 See Eivind Berggrav, 'Der Kampf um den Frieden innerhalb der Kirche Norwegens 1914–1919', *Die Eiche* 7 (1919), pp. 224–238.
- 5 See Eivind Berggrav, 'Uppsala-kommentar', in: *Kirke og Kultur* 25 (1918), pp. 49–60. To the conference in Uppsala 1917, see Ruth Rouse/Stephen Charles Neill, *A History of The Ecumenical Movement 1517–1948*, Geneva 1986, pp. 526–528.
- 6 Per Voksø (ed.), p. 18; see also Eivind Berggrav, 'Nathan Söderblom, Genie und Charakter', Tor Andrae (ed.), *Nathan Söderblom*, Berlin, 1957, pp. 233–286.
- 7 See Gunnar Heiene, 'Bischof Berggravs Friedensinitiativen am Anfang des zweiten Weltkrieges', *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 4 (1991/1), pp. 138–151.
- 8 See Eivind Berggrav, *Nordens innsats*, Stockholm 1939, also printed in Eivind Berggrav, *Forgjeves for fred: Vinteren 1939–40*, Oslo 1966, pp. 24–55.
- 9 'Til kristenheten i Norden', printed in *Forgjeves for fred*, pp. 165–167.
- 10 Printed in *ibid.*, pp. 163–165.
- 11 See 'Ad spørsmålet tyskvennlig', unpublished manuscript 30.3.1943, Eivind Berggrav Archive, Oslo, Box 123.
- 12 See Eivind Berggrav, 'Krigens lov', *Kirke og Kultur* 45 (1940), pp. 65–83 (especially p. 73).
- 13 See Berggrav's letter to Bishop George Bell 25.5.39 (Copy, WCC Archive, Geneva, 'WCC in process of formation', Box IX, 4), where he criticizes the attitude of the Western powers: 'Peace seems to be identified with welfare of the entente powers, peace is "status quo", peace is our righteousness, the axis-governments are the enemies of peace. Of course they are—in many respects. But what does Christianity tell about our enemies? Shall we encircle them and unite against them spiritually? They feel that we are condemning them without recognizing our own sins and without recognizing right and justice in their claims. . . . Christ wishes us to cross the human frontiers and barriers, not to build a Maginot-line of Churches.'
- 14 See Torleiv Austad, 'Der Widerstand der Kirche gegen den nationalsozialistischen Staat in Norwegen 1940–1945' *Kirchliche Zeitgeschichte* 1 (1988/1), pp. 79–94.
- 15 See 'Bishop Eivind Berggrav—A Centenary', *Bulletin, United Bible Societies*, No. 136/137 (1984), p. 29.
- 16 Eivind Berggrav, *The Norwegian Church in its International Setting*, The Burge Memorial Lecture, April 30th, 1946, London 1946, pp. 7–9.
- 17 'Er sjelen fri, skaper den et fritt folk', *Kirke og Kultur* 45 (1940), p. 261.
- 18 Quoted from *The Norwegian Church Struggle*, London 1943, p. 17f.
- 19 Quotation, *ibid.*, p. 29f.
- 20 See Torleiv Austad, *Kirkens Grunn. Analyse av en kirkelig bekjennelse fra okkupasjonstiden 1940–45*, Oslo.
- 21 *Staten og mennesket*, Oslo 1945; *Man and State*, Philadelphia 1951.
- 22 *The Ecumenical Review*, II/4 (1950), pp. 333–341.



- **A New Direction in Christian Apologetics: An Exploration with Reference to Postmodernism**
- *Nouvelle orientation de l'apologétique chrétienne*
- *Eine Neue Richtung in der Christlichen Apologetik: Eine Untersuchung zum Post-Modernism*

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## SUMMARY

*This essay explores the implications of post-modernism for apologetics.*

*With reference to the work of Alasdair MacIntyre and George Lindbeck, the first section deals with one aspect of the criticism of modernity that seems to be particularly important for apologetics: the post modern stress on the need for indwelling an existing tradition as a necessary condition for all reasoning. This postmodern rediscovery of the historical character of all human reasoning challenges the Enlightenment-axiom that in all manifestations of human culture only those truths are acceptable as a foundation of human reasoning to which are directly accessible all sane humanity. Thus postmodern thought reveals a central lack in the main stream of apologetics after the Enlightenment.*

*The second section asks if this stress on the historical character of human reasoning entails, instead of absolute knowledge, absolute relativism. This is only so, however, if epistemological foundationalism is true, which says that truth should be found at the beginning, the foundation, of human reasoning. But this epistemological foundationalism cannot be true, because it cannot adequately describe the phenomena of communication and human knowledge. Therefore another account of*

*human knowledge is proposed which understands it on the analogy of the reading of a book. According to this analogy our opinions about the traditions of others and about reality itself are determined by our historical situation from the start, but can be corrected more and more in the process of 'reading' respectively the other tradition and reality itself.*

*The last section suggests guidelines for a Christian apologetic, which validates the historical character of reasoning, and will hold up against the criticisms made of liberal apologetics. Basically the apologist presents the Christian faith as the only possible hermeneutical perspective from which we can adequately understand and deal with reality. The apologist asks for a 'leap of faith' to the Christian perspective, and for conversion to overcome the sinful bias against it. But Christian anthropology, as presented, for example, by Blaise Pascal, shows that on the basis of creation we can expect to find many pointers to God in non-Christian traditions. The sinful estrangement of people in these traditions, furthermore, can be used to urge them to make this leap into the arms of Christ, because this estrangement leads them into aporias and inconsistencies in their lives and worldviews.*

## RÉSUMÉ

*Cet article examine les implications de la pensée post-moderniste pour l'apologétique. En rapport avec les écrits d'Alasdair MacIntyre et de George Lindbeck, la première partie traite d'un aspect de la critique du modernisme particulièrement important pour l'apologétique:*

*l'insistance des post-modernistes sur la nécessité d'être intégré à une tradition existante comme préalable à tout raisonnement. Cette redécouverte de l'enracinement historique de tout raisonnement remet en question l'axiome cher aux protagonistes de l'époque dite des*



'lumières', selon lequel les seules vérités dignes de constituer la base d'un raisonnement sont celles qui s'imposent directement à toute pensée humaine normale. Cette approche post-moderniste révèle que le courant principal de l'apologétique à partir du siècle des lumières présente une lacune fondamentale.

Dans la deuxième partie, l'auteur se demande si cette insistance sur l'enracinement historique du raisonnement ne conduit pas à remplacer l'absolutisme par un relativisme absolu. Ce serait le cas si le foundationalisme épistémologique — selon lequel la vérité doit être posée dès le départ, comme fondement de tout raisonnement —, était juste. Mais cette théorie épistémologique n'explique pas de façon satisfaisante le phénomène de la communication et de la connaissance humaines. C'est pourquoi l'auteur propose une autre voie pour rendre compte de l'acquisition par l'homme de la connaissance, en se fondant sur une analogie avec la lecture d'un ouvrage. Selon cette analogie, nos opinions à l'égard d'autres traditions que la nôtre et de la réalité elle-même sont déterminées au départ par notre situation historique; mais elles peuvent être infléchies progressivement au cours de la lecture d'un

texte provenant d'une autre tradition, ou lorsque nous nous trouvons face à la réalité elle-même.

La dernière partie donne des lignes directrices pour une apologétique chrétienne qui, à la fois, tient compte de l'enracinement historique du raisonnement, et résiste aux critiques de l'apologétique libérale. L'apologète présente la foi chrétienne comme la seule perspective herméneutique qui permette de comprendre la réalité et d'y faire face d'une manière adéquate. Il invite son interlocuteur à faire le saut de la foi pour adopter l'optique chrétienne, et à se convertir pour vaincre les prédispositions pécheresses qu'il entretient à l'encontre de la foi chrétienne. L'anthropologie chrétienne, telle qu'elle est conçue par exemple chez Blaise Pascal, montre que, sur la base de la doctrine de la création, nous pouvons nous attendre à rencontrer, dans les traditions non chrétiennes, bien des éléments qui pointent vers Dieu. En outre, en mettant en lumière l'aliénation coupable de ceux qui ont adopté ces traditions, on peut les encourager à se jeter dans les bras de Jésus-Christ, parce que cette aliénation les amène à des apories et des inconséquences dans leur vie et leur conception de la réalité.

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## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieser Aufsatz untersucht die Implikationen der Postmoderne für die Apologetik. Mit Bezug auf die Werke von Alasdair MacIntyre und George Lindbeck befasst sich der erste Teil mit einem Aspekt der Kritik an der Moderne, der für die Apologetik besonders wichtig zu sein scheint: nämlich mit der postmodernen Betonung der Notwendigkeit eine bestehende Tradition existentiell erfahren zu haben als Voraussetzung für alles logische Denken. Diese postmoderne Wiederentdeckung des geschichtlichen Charakters aller menschlichen Vernunft stellt das Axiom der Aufklärung in Frage, wonach in allen Formen der menschlichen Kultur nur jene Wahrheiten als Grundlage der menschlichen Vernunft gelten können, die allen rationalen Menschen direkt zugänglich sind. Damit offenbart das postmoderne Denken eine grundlegende Schwäche in den Hauptströmungen der Apologetik der Zeit nach der Aufklärung.

Im zweiten Teil wird die Frage gestellt, ob

diese Betonung des geschichtlichen Charakters der menschlichen Vernunft anstatt zu absoluter Erkenntnis zu einem absoluten Relativismus führte. Dies wäre nur der Fall, wenn der epistemologische Grundsatz stimmte, daß Wahrheit schon in der Voraussetzung der menschlichen Vernunftserkenntnis zu finden ist. Dieser epistemologische Grundsatz kann jedoch nicht stimmen, denn er ist nicht in der Lage, das Phänomen der Kommunikation und des menschlichen Wissens adäquat zu beschreiben. Also wird ein anderes Modell der menschlichen Erkenntnis vorgeschlagen, basierend auf der Analogie des Lesens eines Buches. Nach dieser Analogie wird unsere Meinung über die Traditionen anderer und die Wirklichkeit an sich zuallererst von unserem eigenen geschichtlichen Hintergrund bestimmt. Jedoch kann sich diese Meinung bei der 'Lektüre' durch die Auseinandersetzung mit der anderen Tradition und der Wirklichkeit selbst verändern.



*Im dritten Teil werden Richtlinien für eine schichtlichen Charakter der Vernunft festhalten und der Kritik der liberalen Apologetik und der Kritik der liberalen Apologetik standhalten.*

*Im Grunde genommen stellt die Apologetik den christlichen Glauben als die einzig mögliche hermeneutische Perspektive dar, durch die wir die Wirklichkeit adäquat verstehen und bewältigen können. Der Apologet fordert einen 'Glaubensschritt' zu einer christlichen Perspektive und verlangt eine Bekehrung, um die sündige Neigung gegen*

*diese Perspektive zu überwinden. Die christliche Anthropologie, wie sie z.B. von Blaise Pascal vertreten wurde, zeigt, daß wir schöpfungsmäßige Hinweise auf Gott in vielen nichtchristlichen Traditionen finden können. Aber diese durch die Sünde bedingte Entfremdung der Menschen in diesen Traditionen gibt dazu Anlaß sie aufzufordern, diesen Glaubensschritt auf Christus hin zu machen, weil diese Entfremdung in Aporien und Widersprüche in ihrem Leben und in ihrer Weltanschauung führt.*

**W**e live in a post-modern world. This is now seen as almost an evident fact, a truism. Its theological and ethical consequences have begun to be explored. But what of its implications for apologetics? In what way can traditional apologetics, often grounded in assumptions which post-modernism has rendered questionable, respond to this new situation? What are the new opportunities? And what are the new problems?

An exploration of the apologetic implications of this cultural shift towards postmodernism is of central importance for the apologist.<sup>2</sup> First, this is because an apologist who speaks to her culture should reckon with the fact that large areas of this culture are exchanging their modern concepts and ideals for post-modern ones. Secondly, because modernism is still an important aspect of our culture, the post-modernists provide the apologist with valuable insights into the weaknesses of the Enlightenment ideology. Thirdly and most importantly, the critics of modernity can open the eyes of the apologist to aspects of the Enlightenment culture, which are not so much beyond discussion as was first thought and to which many apologists might have given in too soon.

The article will be divided into three main parts. First, I will sketch one aspect of the criticism of modernity that seems to be particularly important for apologetics: the post-modern stress on the need for indwelling an existing tradition as a necessary condition for all reasoning. This post-modern stress

stands over and against the Enlightenment ideal of providing absolute standards and methods for reasoning, which are free from all distorting influences from the relative world of historical traditions. Secondly, can this stress on the historical character of reasoning be taken seriously without a change from the Enlightenment evil of absolutism to the alternative evil of absolute relativism? An argument for combining the postmodern insight into the inescapability of the historical character of reasoning with a critical epistemological realism will form the foundation for the last section. There we will draw some guidelines for a Christian apologetic, which validates the concrete historical character of reasoning and will hold up against philosophical and theological criticisms of liberal apologetics.

### **The Historical Character of Human Reasoning**

As the term *postmodernism* indicates post-modern thinking understands itself in opposition to modernity, the culture which roughly started with the Enlightenment. A broad cultural movement such as the Enlightenment can always be described in more than one way, because it can be viewed from more than one perspective. For our purpose it is particularly apt to describe the cultural programme of the Enlightenment in terms of universality and tradition: in science and philosophy, in all manifestations of human culture, only those truths are acceptable as a foundation for human reasoning which are



directly accessible to all sane humanity, without reference to any specific tradition or historical reality. The different Enlightenment philosophies, which could be as radically opposed as rationalism and empiricism, all shared this fundamental view as to what the basic structure of human knowledge should be. This new Enlightenment perception of human knowledge had enormous power, also in the area of religion and theology. First, it seemed to provide the only possible way of judging competing traditions. And after the sixteenth century religious wars between the Roman and Protestant traditions it became highly desirable to overcome those differences. Secondly, the adherence to the universal and necessary truths of reason seemed morally superior to the view that one's chance to know the truth was dependent on the arbitrary contingencies of history.<sup>3</sup> Thirdly, there was a strong ideological bias against tradition in an age which strenuously tried to distinguish itself from its past.<sup>4</sup>

Liberal Enlightenment theology, as it developed in this context, sought to meet this situation by constructing a theology which would fit these general standards and methods of reason. We might call this liberal theology in essence 'apologetic' theology, because its aim was to be acceptable to 'the cultured among its despisers' (Schleiermacher). However, this apologetic method was not confined to liberal circles. Many more conservative theologians, who based *systematic theology* more on the authority of Scripture, essentially perceived *apologetics* in this liberal way: the only possible apologetic must start from a universally shared starting point.<sup>5</sup> Some apologists think of this universal starting-point or method as metaphysical, others as historical, moral or psychological. This, however, does not make an essential difference to the overall pattern.<sup>6</sup> This type of reasoning places you in an awkward dilemma. Either you water down Christianity to make it look like and reinforce the Enlightenment ideals (the typical liberal approach) or, if you are more conservative, you try to water down the prevailing standards of reasoning, but effectively lose your main link with your contemporary culture.

In this context it is clear why Barth's attack on apologetics had such a devastating lucidity and force: if the Christian faith is so alien to natural human standards and to our culture as Barth brought out, we would do better to give up apologetics and stop apologising for the difference.

But not only this type of apologetics came under attack. Its background in the cultural programme of the Enlightenment did too. As a very recent example of such postmodern criticism I want to use Alasdair MacIntyre's *Whose Justice? Which Rationality?*<sup>7</sup> MacIntyre is a postmodernist in a broader, mainly negative sense, which encompasses all sorts of fundamental criticisms of the Enlightenment project. The term can also be used in a narrower, positive, sense to indicate a group of philosophers with certain linked alternative ideas on rationality, language and so on. The names of Foucault and Derrida are clearly attached to this second group. MacIntyre clearly dissociates himself from this second group, especially because of its relativistic character (352f.). But his criticism of liberalism is both very acute and apt for our topic.

MacIntyre criticises the liberal search for rational standards and methods, which are themselves outside and above historical contingencies. He gives an historical overview of the rise, fall and interaction of some of the main traditions concerning rationality, particularly practical rationality, of our Western philosophical tradition: the Aristotelian, Augustinian, and Humean tradition. It appears that those different forms of practical rationality clearly arose in reaction to specific social circumstances and questions, and that the scope of their reasoning is determined by these concepts grown in a particular soil. Added to this phenomenological approach to rationality, which reveals it to be something different from the Enlightenment view, MacIntyre makes a great deal of the failure of Liberalism itself. The liberal ideal for rational standards and methods to be shared with all mankind proved a failure, 'so that there emerges no uncontested and incontestable account of what tradition-independent morality consists in and consequently no neutral set of criteria by means of which the claims of



rival and contending traditions could be adjudicated' (334). So 'in the course of that history liberalism, which began as an appeal to alleged principles of shared rationality against what was felt to be the tyranny of tradition, has itself been transformed into a tradition' (335). For as the liberal cannot fulfil his promise of adequately rising above traditions, the choice for liberalism is as much a matter of historical background as is the choice for other traditions.

Both preceding and following the general criticism of modernity, there is criticism of the same sort going on in theology. The general scene being as varied as in philosophy, here also one group can be labelled 'postmodernist' or 'postliberal' in a narrower, positive sense. 'Postliberal theology'<sup>8</sup> only got its name in 1984 with the publication of George A. Lindbeck's *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age*,<sup>9</sup> of which the concluding chapter is entitled: 'Toward a Postliberal Theology'. Lindbeck distinguishes three basic theories of doctrine, theology, and religion. The first, the so-called 'cognitive-propositional' model views doctrinal and theological statements as propositional descriptions of an objective ('extratextual')<sup>10</sup> reality. This model was generally accepted in pre-modern orthodoxy. According to Lindbeck it is wanting, because it is intellectualist and literalist. But his main concern is with the liberal approach, identified as 'experiential-expressivist'. According to this theory true religion, doctrine, and theology are symbolic expressions of universal religious experiences. Lindbeck's criticism of this theory follows the general lines of postliberal reactions to liberalism: there is no universal religious experience common to all humanity. Religion does not spring from some universal experience. The intratextual world of a particular religion forms the perspective which makes the experience of the believer possible. Therefore religious experience is, from its earliest stages, determined by a particular religious framework. For the third theory of doctrine, the 'cultural-linguistic' theory proposed by Lindbeck himself, he borrows the 'intratextual' approach to religion from recent students of religion in the social sciences. What both the cognitive-

propositionalists and the experiential-expressivists have in common is the search for the truth of religion in a primary reality outside the texts, institutions, and life of the religious community, be it in propositional correspondence with a metaphysical reality or as symbolic expression of some primary religious experience. According to Lindbeck's approach the meaning of doctrinal statements and religious practices is not derived from an extratextual reality, but is intratextual. They only have their meaning in the context of the sacred texts and institutions of the religion itself and of the life and experiences engendered by it. It is not the universal and neutral experience of the liberals, which provides the interpretative framework for religion and theology. We relate to the extratextual world in the opposite direction through a conceptual framework engendered by our tradition.<sup>11</sup>

If Lindbeck and MacIntyre are right when they state that there are no neutral and universal methods, standards and experiences and no neutral rationality outside specific traditions,<sup>12</sup> as I believe they are, the implications for apologetics, shaped in a liberal culture, are vast. But first we should ask if from a postliberal perspective there is any place for apologetics at all. If all rationality and all experience are shaped by particular traditions, is there any real sense in which the Christian tradition can be said to be true in such a way that the apologist's pleading with non-believers makes sense? Among post-liberal theologians this should definitely stand at the top of the agenda.<sup>13</sup> Opinions differ and Lindbeck seems quite ambiguous here. He asserts, that 'if we do justice to the actual speech and practice of religious people [...] we must allow for its possible propositional truth'.<sup>14</sup> But in his stress on the intratextual character of truth he constantly distinguishes his position from the cognitive-propositionalist approach in its search for a relation with an extratextual reality. It is, however, this extratextual truth which features in 'the actual speech and practice of religious people'.

## Traditions and Truth

To answer the question, whether apologetics



makes any sense, given that all reasoning is tradition-dependent, two different questions must be distinguished. First: if the methods and standards of a particular tradition are essential to reasoning in that tradition, is any reasonable communication and comparison *between* different traditions possible? Secondly: can such reasoning be in any sense related to, determined by, or guided towards an objective reality, which exists prior to and independent of human reasoning? The first question is concerned with the level of our communication, with intersubjectivity. The second question is concerned with objectivity.

*i) Can there be communication between traditions?*

First, does tradition-framed reasoning imply *incommunicability*? Terrence W. Tilley states: 'Intratextualist theorists like Lindbeck and Frei are open to charges of fideism because they do not clarify the relationship of intratextual to 'extratextual' meanings'.<sup>15</sup> (In this context these are the meanings embodied in other traditions.) In the same article Tilley points out that this fideism is only a consequence of contextual reasoning, if this rationality is imprisoned in separate and homogeneous compartments of traditions without any interaction.<sup>16</sup> This is, however, a theoretical construct. In reality we find traditions developing new shades or going through crises. Consequently one and the same person can 'indwell', or be part of, different phases of the same tradition and understand them both from within. So Luther could understand both late mediaeval Catholicism and his own reformation from within.<sup>17</sup> In reality we can also inhabit two traditions at the same time. A Christian academic theologian can for example read the Bible both in the believing community and in a secular academic context, understanding both rationalities from within.<sup>18</sup> Both Luther and the academic theologian are in some way able to compare both traditions and to answer the question as to which tradition is in general or in a specific situation the most adequate.

This reality of one person indwelling two traditions and understanding both in terms of *their own specific methods and standards*

*of reasoning* and subsequently evaluating both, makes clear that different rationalities do not necessarily result in incomparability of the respective traditions. For the evaluation of the debate as it goes on between different traditions we must, however, ask a further and more difficult question: are there other ways of understanding other traditions properly, without really 'indwelling' them, i.e. being part of them? Understanding is a gradual concept and we can always understand better, but how difficult is an understanding which makes comparison possible?

This depends on the distance between the investigated tradition and one's own, and on the sophistication of both traditions. But I suggest, that in general such understanding is not as difficult as it appears in the studies of many postmodern thinkers.<sup>19</sup> First of all there is the simple fact of communication between people with different rationalities and the experience of understanding, when reading literature from other traditions. In a real conversation with somebody from another tradition it can happen that our own intellectual framework is challenged. It can even prove so inadequate that a 'conversion' to the other position takes place. The reality of this 'being challenged' presupposes the possibility of comparing different traditions.

Furthermore, in understanding another tradition we can be greatly helped by the work of others. MacIntyre for example provides an analysis of the distinctive character of practical reasoning in classical Athens.<sup>20</sup> He makes us feel the wide abyss between us and the Athenians of the fifth century B.C. But in working out this difference he provides us, in a fairly short time, with considerable insight into the specific rationality of that society without us ever having been part of it. This very insight into the distance between different tradition-embodied rationalities suggests that understanding is not as remote a concept as postmodernists, and even MacIntyre himself, generally suggest.

Hence, we can compare the different rationalities embodied in different traditions by indwelling one or more traditions or, less thoroughly, by trying to understand other traditions on their own terms, distinguishing



them carefully from our own presuppositions. But this comparability does not necessarily imply that a *rational evaluation* of both traditions is possible,<sup>21</sup> as suggested in the examples of Luther and the academic theologian. For if all rationality is tradition-specific, and if these specific rationalities lead on their own terms to the rejection of other traditions, a comparison of two traditions may lead only to an understanding of why they themselves are in accordance with their own standards of truth and why the other tradition, according to that perspective, must be false. They may remain two irreconcilable perspectives, which need to be selected on pre-rational ('existential') grounds. This is the most common view in contemporary philosophy, ethics and society at large. However, this is again too simple a picture of two traditions meeting each other. Here the specific 'rationality of traditions' in their development and interaction as described by MacIntyre<sup>22</sup> gives a more realistic, but at the same time more complicated, picture: when two traditions meet they are true according to their own rationalities, but not simply true overall. When a tradition is developing, certain antinomies in a tradition may appear, or difficulties in developing the enquiry beyond a certain point (166 f.). Some of these difficulties may be resolved by new thinkers in the same tradition. Others, however, may turn out to be insoluble in terms of the tradition itself. The intrinsic development of the tradition has thus brought the need for replacement or change of at least some of the fundamental features of the tradition to the fore, and the need for the development of new sources of thought. This can happen through a radical change within the old tradition, which in fact results in a new tradition, because the old can remain alongside it.

It can also happen through encounter with an alien tradition. If the other tradition has the same limitations, the adherents of the first tradition will simply go on with their own limited traditions, lacking an alternative. If the other tradition is in all respects superior in respect of these antinomies and limitations (in that it both avoids and explains the limitations of the first tradition), this might result in conversion to the other

tradition, where only minor aspects of the first background are incorporated into the new framework.<sup>23</sup>

It should be noted, however, that we point here merely to the *possibility* of growth from a limited perspective towards a broader perspective, towards superior knowledge. Very often this possibility is not realised because of an ideological bias against the offered alternative. Generally we don't know an alternative as well from the inside as we know our own tradition. But this negative starting point is greatly enforced by a strong bias against a change towards another tradition, because this would imply a recognition of the superiority of another tradition over one's own. As Christians we should add to this a forceful bias in all humanity against the recognition of the basic structures of reality through sinful alienation from the Creator (Rom. 1:18 ff.). MacIntyre's analysis of a rationality embodied in traditions would be greatly strengthened and deepened if he had taken ideological factors into account alongside intellectual ones. This we could expect from a scholar with such a reputation in the study of Marxism.

## ii) *Can a tradition lead to objective truth?*

Thus MacIntyre shows how different rationalities can be compared and evaluated, even when no common standards and methods are available. But what does this possible growth of intersubjectivity mean for our second question: in what sense can a tradition, which avoids the limitations and antinomies of an alternative, be said to be truer in an objective sense? Our knowledge still seems to be based on rational methods and standards which we gain from our tradition and not from reality itself. How can we ever reach reality itself, when building on such a foundation?<sup>24</sup>

However, this is only a problem when a *foundational account* of knowledge is given. Foundationalism assumes that the only way to gain knowledge is to start a process of reasoning from certain or probable premisses and to derive new propositions by valid patterns of reasoning. Whether the starting point is thought of as rationalistic or empiricist and whether the valid patterns of reasoning are thought of as deductive



or inductive does not change the overall structure. According to a foundationalist, a noetic structure can only be rational if it contains an adequate basis, which contains truths that enable valid derivations to be made. This foundational account, which derives already from classical Greek philosophy, is characteristic of modern thought and is the hidden premiss of postmodern thought in its relativistic forms. The moderns sought for an universal basis of knowledge, which could overcome the conflict of traditions. And it is only because post-moderns share this foundationalist account of knowledge, that the denial of a universal starting-point necessarily leads to an overall relativistic attitude towards knowledge.

But this foundationalist account of doctrine has come under heavy criticism over recent decades, both from epistemologists and philosophers of science.<sup>25</sup> In a foundational epistemology the Cartesian distance between mind and matter and the postmodern gap between language and the reality beyond, can only be crossed when the *beginning* of the argument is firmly based on reality. The building can never be firmer than its foundations. Following a philosopher of science like Michael Polanyi<sup>26</sup> and theologians who interacted with the philosophy of science like Austin M. Farrer,<sup>27</sup> Thomas F. Torrance<sup>28</sup> and recently on a more popular level John Polkinghorne<sup>29</sup> and Lesslie Newbigin<sup>30</sup> the *reading of a book*<sup>31</sup> seems a more appropriate analogy for our knowledge of reality than the building of a house. When we read a book the beliefs with which we start need not be right in order to be useful. We indeed start with some beliefs or presuppositions about the content and message of the book. But these presuppositions are not beyond criticism. When for example someone starts reading the New Testament with the presupposition that it deals only with the relation of the soul to God this is not like the premiss of a syllogism. The premiss of a syllogism and the basis of foundational reasoning are the same in that they should be accepted or not, before the process of reasoning itself. The reasoning rests on the premisses and does not validate them. However, in a reading process we come to the text with certain presuppositions

and the reading process itself shows these to be adequate or inadequate. And if they are inadequate the reading will suggest what sort of change is needed. This process can continue, because the newly-formed assumptions about the meaning of the text can again be partly validated and partly criticised. In this circular movement from presuppositions to text and back our thought forms become more and more appropriate for the interpretation of the text and thus more and more congruent with its content. This is in fact basically the process of getting to know a different tradition, a different 'intra-textual world', to which I have alluded above. The learning of the new language begins from the outside, and by constantly changing our preconceptions we move to the content which is more alien to us.<sup>32</sup>

In the same way as our preconceptions about the content of books and other tradition are challenged in the confrontation, our tradition-given preconceptions about the reality are changed in our engagement with this reality itself. A famous example from the history of science clarifies this point. During the last turn of the century all physicists investigated the physical reality they encountered through the spectacles of the rational framework of their Newtonian tradition. But scientists like Niels Bohr and Albert Einstein found increasing evidence for the limitations of this theory, particularly where extremely high velocities and very small particles were involved. This eventually led to quantum mechanics and the theory of relativity. These theories were in fact able to explain the facts better than the Newtonian framework and can therefore be thought to be more congruent with objective reality itself. This example makes clear that through our language, we are indeed in touch with reality itself. If we were imprisoned in our language, if we could impose our thought structures on reality without ever getting any feed-back from an extra-linguistic reality, the Newtonian framework would never have been challenged: it would necessarily only be adequate to interpret a reality which it could completely form to its own image.

Let us return to the development and the interaction of traditions described by



MacIntyre, in which those rationalities which can avoid antinomies and limitations in coping with reality appear to be superior to alternatives. The criticism of the Newtonian framework suggests that this development of traditions is in fact a development in the direction of a greater congruence with reality. In this development 'between those older beliefs and the world as they now understand it there is a radical discrepancy to be perceived. It is this lack of correspondence, between what the mind then judged and believed and reality as now *perceived*, classified and understood, which is ascribed when those earlier judgements are called *false*. The original and most elementary version of the correspondence theory of truth is one in which it is applied retrospectively in form of a correspondence theory of falsity.'<sup>33</sup> What is very significant in this conclusion of MacIntyre's is that the truth or falsity of a tradition is perceived retrospectively, at the *end* of a process of reasoning. This is totally opposed to a foundational approach to knowledge in which truth necessarily lies at the beginning of an argument. But if a process of reasoning can lead to the correction of false premisses and preconceptions, foundationalism is invalid. Contrary to both modernists and relativistic postmodernists we can state that the start of a reasoning process in a particular historical tradition does not necessarily lead to relativism.

To summarise: I have argued for an epistemology, which is different from both modernism and relativistic postmodernism. Contrary to both traditions I take it that truth is not primarily to be found as the *foundation* of a process of reasoning, but that it is the *goal* of the process. So I perceive it to be the Christian position to hold with postmodernists and contrary to the 'modern' view, that all reasoning starts from an historically relative perspective, but with the moderns we hold, contrary to postmoderns, that the goal of reasoning should be universally valid and that this goal can be reached in principle.

It should be noted that this argument for realism can have two audiences.<sup>34</sup> To refute someone with sceptical presuppositions (sceptical concerning realism) a much more elaborate argument is needed than to help

those who begin with realist presuppositions, but are unable to refute the sceptical charge that a tradition-embodied rationality cannot be realist. The last section answered the problem of the 'realist in danger'. Man's natural tendency to live as if realism is true<sup>35</sup> need not be distrusted. The barriers post-modernism throws up against this can be removed.

However, in confrontation with the sceptic we are left with a stalemate. The realist cannot argue *a priori* that this method will help him to overcome the different starting points of different traditions and will overcome scepticism. An *a posteriori* argument is needed. As a Christian I believe that ultimately the only possible definitive *a posteriori* argument of this type begins with the revelation in Christ. For only from there are the main tensions between other world views and reality overcome. This assumes the need for revelation, for tradition and for conversion to overcome the strong ideological bias against Christianity. With an *a posteriori* argument it must be shown that Christianity can overcome the limitations and antinomies, to which different tradition-embodied rationalities lead. Here such an argument cannot be given. We can only point to the possibility. But at least the charge that it is *a priori* impossible to combine a tradition-embodied rationality with a critical realism is refuted.

### *iii) Can we know that a tradition entails the ultimate truth?*

One important problem must still be discussed. An argument for the validity of a tradition in terms of a 'rationality of traditions' is necessarily a cumulative argument.<sup>36</sup> The validity of a tradition is confirmed and strengthened each time it survives the confrontation with an alternative. But how can we know that a tradition entails the ultimate truth, as Christianity claims? How can we know that at some point a radically new tradition will not arise, which better applies to life and reality than Christianity does? Ultimate truth is essentially an *eschatological* concept. Only from an eschatological perspective can it become clear which tradition dealt most



effectively with reality and with alternative approaches towards reality.<sup>37</sup>

This is exactly what the Christian tradition claims: in the cross and resurrection of Christ we are confronted with God's definitive, eschatological self-revelation. This is not an arbitrary claim. The apostles supported their claim for the eschatological relevance of the revelation in Christ by pointing to His resurrection and the fulfilment of Old Testament prophecy, of which the most important aspect is the promise of the eschatological outpouring of the Holy Spirit.<sup>38</sup> But there is no need to argue for the *finality* of revelation in Christ, before the Christian framework of rationality is accepted on the basis of its *superiority*.

We should be careful here. An argument for the eschatological character of the message of the cross and resurrection of Christ does not imply that the rational framework which is now embodied in the Christian tradition (if there is only one) will survive all future confrontations with new aspects of life, with historical crises and with other traditions. This Christian rationality is itself changing and developing, as is evident from its history. What is eschatological is not the specific rational framework, but the central *narrative* of the event of the cross and the resurrection. The rationality built on it is of a second order<sup>39</sup> and partly limited by the same finiteness and ideological bias as other historical traditions. This historical rationality reveals the tension between the 'already and not yet' of the 'fulfilment without consummation'<sup>40</sup> of the eschatological Kingdom inaugurated by Christ.

### **Apologetics as Being Confronted with the Christian Tradition**

The discovery of the historical character of all human reasoning in postmodern thought has important consequences for the *content* of Christian apologetics. The postmodern evaluation of the Enlightenment project gives the apologist important arguments for the debate with the still central liberal strands of our culture. The main aim of this section, however, is to explore some of the consequences of this change for the *character* and possibility of apologetics. At first sight

the result seems to be rather negative. Lindbeck warns in his concluding chapter: 'Postliberals are bound to be skeptical, not about missions, but about apologetics and foundations' (129) and 'Theology should therefore resist the clamor of the religiously interested public for what is currently fashionable and immediately intelligible' (134). In the same way the evangelical theologian Alister McGrath in *The Genesis of Doctrine*, a study of the historical character of doctrinal development, concludes: 'It is thus evangelism, rather than just apologetics, which commends itself as of strategic importance in the present situation within western culture' (199). Neither author, however, is totally negative towards apologetics, and for that reason I take this negative attitude to be directed primarily against apologetics in its liberal forms. This liberal apologetics is indeed found wanting, for it surrendered 'much that now appears vital to the distinctive identity of the Christian religion'<sup>41</sup> for the sake of alleged universal values, which lead to a major loss of relevance of the specific Christian message. This refutation of liberal apologetics can easily lead to a refutation of apologetics altogether, for the commitment to the apologetic project, to make the Christian message intelligible for those outside its tradition, is the distinctive mark and strength of the liberal tradition. The rejection of liberal apologetics can further lead to the rejection of the apologetic enterprise as a whole, because this interpretation of apologetics was shared by the main apologetic streams of our post-Enlightenment culture, liberals and conservatives alike.

If, however, rational communication between traditions remains possible in a world without a universally shared rationality, as MacIntyre has shown, then there is no need to abandon all search for a rational 'account of the hope in us'. The aims of such a new apologetic should be more modest than the claim that often accompanies liberal apologetics, namely that the content of the Christian faith is fully accessible and acceptable according to standards shared with the non-believer. But if the Gospel is really good news for the non-believer, there must be some link with the existence of the



non-believer. These are the points of connection the apologist wants to use as pointers towards the Christian faith.

Such a postliberal apologetic could be properly called *ad hoc* apologetics, as William Werpehowski, following a suggestion of Lindbeck, does.<sup>42</sup> For one of the strengths of this apologetic is that it does not presume to know where the hearer is on the basis of some presupposed universal human nature. If her mental 'make up' is essentially derived from her tradition and from her personal history in that tradition, the only way to know where to start a meaningful conversation is to listen to her within her particular history and context. Many Christians with experience in sharing their faith with non-Christians will endorse this conclusion: the easiest way to talk without really reaching each other, is to assume that you already know what your friend's convictions, ideals and problems are.

But what reason do we have to believe that there are points of contact with each non-Christian, however diverse these may be? The answer is given in the doctrine of creation, balanced by the doctrine of sin.<sup>43</sup> By looking to these doctrines I hope to give a theological basis and a content to the idea of an *ad hoc* apologetics. Christian anthropology reveals how human beings can develop in such diverse and contrary directions because of sin, which results in man being at war with himself.<sup>44</sup> Through his sin man denies his own being, in that he denies the Creator-creature relationship. In denying his fundamental dependence on his Creator he alienates himself from his own being, created *imago Dei*, resulting in the break up of the original unity of the different parts of his existence. Through this, polarities in his existence become paradoxes, as they evidently appear in the ongoing struggle of philosophical anthropology with well-known polarities like individuality-community and autonomy-heteronomy.

The following example will help us to work out what structure an apologetic has on the basis of this anthropology. Blaise Pascal pointed in his *Pensées* with deep perceptiveness and great lucidity, to the paradox in fallen man between his 'grandeur' and his 'misère' (misery). Man is on the one hand in a miserable situation, being just an

animal like those around him, bound to the limits of material and historical existence. On the other hand man is a great creature, able to investigate the universe with his mind. However, this mind at the same time makes him even more miserable, because now man knows his limitations and suffering, of which the other animals are unaware. Pascal perceived this paradoxical character of man as underlying not only the disturbing and alarming tensions in individuals, but also the deep divisions between the conflicting philosophical trends and 'ideologies' of his time. The rationalists in the tradition of Descartes, emphasised the 'grandeur' of man, his ability to know the universe and to subject the world to himself. But in order to rest confidently in their 'grandeur' they had to suppress the profusion of signs showing the limits and finiteness of human existence. On the other hand there were the sceptics, with Montaigne as central spokesman, who were very much aware of the limitations and 'misère' of human existence, but in order to be consistent in their scepticism, they needed to neglect all signs which pointed towards a higher dignity of man, including the fact that he could reflect about his own scepticism. Thus we find here a fundamental tension in human existence, resulting from sin, as the source of two different perspectives on life, of two historical traditions, each with their own 'rationalities'.

The same tension is apparent in the modernism-postmodernism debate. Modernists stress the human striving for absolute knowledge, values and ideals. But in this search they forget the other pole of human existence, the fact that man is a finite, historical creation. Relativistic postmodernists are very aware of the limitations of human existence. They stress the fact that all human knowledge is related to its specific cultural baggage and to the possibilities their specific language and conceptual framework entail. But with this perceptiveness about the limitations of human existence they combine a lack of attention to the philosophical consequences of these perceptions: the fact that they can understand and reflect on the limitations of their specific language and conceptuality implies that at the same time they start to break through those limits.



If the apologist were only to employ a rationality which is universally shared by all people, the possibilities would be severely limited. Only a few presuppositions are shared by modernists, relativistic postmodernists and Christians alike, and this amount of shared rationality will only diminish if more cultural groups are taken into account. However, the anthropological tensions revealed by this Christian anthropology suggest that in both traditions there is more that can be linked with the Christian message, but that these aspects are simply not shared by both traditions at the same time. On the basis of the 'fellowship of creation' it is possible to argue with modernists, starting from the common recognition of the high vocation of humanity. On the same basis it is possible to converse with postmodernists based on the shared perception of the limitations of a human existence lived in history. Both arguments are 'ad hoc' and cannot be universally used. But both arguments are also based on the reality of living in a shared world, a shared creation, living a shared humanity, so both arguments could in a way be called 'natural' without being universal.

From this example a picture appears of how MacIntyre's 'rationality of traditions' provides a framework for an apologetic conversation starting from an 'ad hoc' recognition of a shared body of assumptions, a body which may change from audience to audience. Then we move on to the difficulties in both traditions. Both modernism and relativistic postmodernism soon lead to central inconsistencies and inability to cope with reality: modernism, because it appears unable to provide the universal supra-historical standards it requires for sound rationality; postmodernism, because it professes a kind of scepticism concerning human knowledge, which is inconsistent with its own knowledge of the character of language and rationality. Both the inconsistencies and the necessity to neglect evidence which is available to them spring from the fact that their concepts of knowledge are at odds with reality—in this case the reality of knowing itself. It is of course possible, that one or both of these traditions will in the future be able to overcome these

inconsistencies and to include this other evidence on their own terms based on their own rational framework. For modernism, however, this seems very unlikely, as some of the cleverest Europeans have worked on it for two hundred years. For the time being it seems justifiable to propose the Christian tradition as an alternative, and to argue with both modernists and postmodernists 'that within this other tradition it is possible to construct from the concepts and theories peculiar to it what they were unable to provide from their own conceptual and theoretical resources, a cogent illuminating explanation—cogent and illuminating, that is by their own standards—of why their own intellectual tradition had been unable to solve its problems or to resolve coherence'.<sup>45</sup>

The Christian anthropology of the human being as a creature provides the new perspective to overcome the inconsistencies and limits of both the modern and the postmodern tradition. As creature he retains his high vocation, for he has received the task to 'work and take care of' the earth (Gen. 2, 15 NIV), and is made to know his Creator. This is linked to those aspects of reality which the moderns recognise and the postmoderns are neglecting or even suppressing. On the other hand the created human being is finite and limited by his particular place in wider creation and in history. The high vocation is not something which lies in his autonomous grasp; it is something he can only fulfil in dependence on his Creator. This finiteness appears in those aspects of reality which the Christian apologist perceives together with the postmodernist, and with which he confronts the Enlightenment thinkers. The latter are biased enough to neglect this evidence and this results in the inconsistencies.

As presented here this is not really an argument. Much elaboration is needed, and other elements like community, sin, and eschaton should be brought into the picture. For it is not the aim of this article and it has been done elsewhere.<sup>46</sup> This is merely meant as a sketch of a possible line of argument to present Christianity as a superior tradition, being truer to reality, because it overcomes and explains the inconsistencies and limitations of rival traditions.<sup>47</sup>

Hence, the apologist should determine 'ad



hoc' where a conversation with a particular partner or audience should start. A common ground should be searched for. And starting from this common ground the overall aim of the apologist is to argue that, where they differ, the Christian perspective provides the superior tradition. The Christian tradition is superior, because it makes possible a better interaction with reality, which indicates that its rationality conforms more to the structure of reality itself. This conformity is derived directly from the fact that we in Christ are confronted with the revelation of the Source, Centre, and Goal of reality. In such an apologetic argument both proclamation and reasoning will have their part. God's dealing with mankind in the cross and the resurrection of Christ should be announced and the resulting new perspective on nature, human existence and history expounded. Next to the essential proclamation there will be a good deal of dialogue and reasoning. The apologist needs to identify with her partner in conversation.<sup>48</sup> She needs to look to the world from this particular non-Christian perspective, bring out the inconsistencies and point to areas of reality which cannot be dealt with adequately from this perspective. The pointing out of these limitations will help her urge the other to imagine how the same reality would look from the Christian perspective. Full understanding will only be possible from a full and committed stand in the Christian tradition, but this procedure may provide enough pointers to the superiority of the Christian tradition to motivate a 'leap of faith'.<sup>49</sup> This obvious point should be stressed over and against a common misunderstanding of the apologetic endeavour: apologetics is not relevant only when a full and absolutely compelling rational defence of the Christian faith can be given. As Samuel Butler already pointed out: in life many reasonable choices are made on the basis of evidence which is persuasive because of the probability of the truth to which it points.<sup>50</sup>

Even when the superiority of the Christian tradition can be clearly shown, conversion does not necessarily follow. It is always possible for the partner to retreat, instead of going forward; logically it is always possible to deny part of the initially shared common

ground, which is part of the argument, in order to avoid the conclusion,<sup>51</sup> a retreat which can ultimately end up in the denial of the validity of all reasoning whatsoever.

Such a retreat need not be caused by reasonable argument, even if the retreat itself is logically consistent. It will often be caused by an ideological bias against the conclusion. In the description of anthropology we saw that the distortion of the original unity of the human being and the subsequent dispersion of the different perspectives on the world are caused by sin.<sup>52</sup> If the particularity of the perspective is a result of sin, the turn to the Christian perspective must involve repentance. So in modernism, for example, the inattention to human finiteness results from a sinful striving for autonomy and self-determination; postmodernism, in some of its forms, is linked with 'the sin of despair'.<sup>53</sup> This need for repentance, to overcome a strong ideological bias in the process of conversion, forms one of the necessary limits of the apologetical endeavour, which should be taken into account in order to approach the other realistically, combining proclamation and argument with a plea for repentance, the latter plea itself being strongly enforced by both proclamation and reasoning. By now it becomes clear, why we may hope that this new direction in apologetics can be more faithful to the Creator and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ than many liberal apologies could be. In humility it understands that an absolute rational justification to those outside its tradition is not possible; realistically it combines reasoning with a call to repentance to overcome the sinful bias against the Gospel; it hopes to avoid the watering down of the relevance of this message that would result from subjecting it to alien standards; so it appears that the Lord and God of the Church is, in apologetics too, not subject to any reality or rationality outside Himself. Instead the apologist confidently tries to use and reveal all true rationality in other traditions as derived from the Creator and Judge of nature and history. Perhaps even Karl Barth would have been less harsh towards such an apologetic, for over and against the despised 'claiming of revelation by the world' in apologetics ('Apologetik'), he recognises the



legitimacy and necessity of what he calls polemics ('Polemik'): a 'claiming of the world by revelation',<sup>54</sup> which can even be compared with the Israelite conquest of Canaan, 'Had it not for a long time belonged to Yahweh?'.<sup>55</sup> And we should and can engage in such a discourse in the hope 'that the divine counter-witness will not be lacking to the human witness of faith'.<sup>56</sup>

- 1 I am very grateful to Dr. Alister McGrath of Wycliffe Hall, Oxford, who guided the research which led to this article, and to Hilary Schroeder and Paul Williams for correcting the manuscript.
- 2 There have been very few direct studies of this question. The only article explicitly dedicated to this question the author is acquainted with is William Werpehowski's 'Ad Hoc Apologetics', *The Journal of Religion* 66 (Chicago, 1984), 282-301.
- 3 Cf. Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine: A Study in the Foundations of Doctrinal Criticism* (Oxford, 1990) 90.
- 4 Cf. McGrath, *ibid.*, 132 ff.
- 5 Two recent examples can be found in: Norman L. Geisler, *Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, 1976) and R. C. Sproul, John Gerstner, Arthur Lindsley, *Classical Apologetics: A Rational Defense of the Christian Faith and a Critique of Presuppositional Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, 1984). Cf. for a criticism particularly of the last work: Kelly James Clark, *Return to Reason: A Critique of Enlightenment Evidentialism and a Defense of Reason and Belief in God* (Grand Rapids, 1990) 46-53.
- 6 I am not suggesting that all post-Enlightenment apologetics, both liberal and conservative, are equally influenced by this Enlightenment understanding of rationality. Some forms of apologetics are more deeply influenced than others. What I am mainly concerned about is that the philosophical roots and consequences of this account of rationality are generally unacknowledged.
- 7 London, 1988.
- 8 Cf. William C. Placher, 'Postliberal Theology', in: David F. Ford (ed.), *The Modern Theologians: Volume 2* (Oxford, 1989) 115-128.
- 9 London, 1984.
- 10 In the language of Lindbeck the 'intratextual' world of a religion is its complete linguistic structure of concepts and their relationships, derived from its canonical texts, in many ways comparable with the idea of 'discourse' in French postmodernism. The 'extratextual' world would be an objective reality separate from this language.

- 11 Lindbeck, *ibid.*, 113 ff.
- 12 There may be some very basic universal procedures of rational inquiry, like the law of non-contradiction and Euclidean mathematics, common to all humankind, but 'that upon which they agree is insufficient to resolve those disagreements' (MacIntyre, *op. cit.*, 351). Furthermore, there will be something which makes all different 'rationalities' worthy of the name 'rationality', but in this sense 'rationality' seems more the ability to handle the building stones, which tradition and experience provide, than that rationality itself provides us with building stones for truth (cf. Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London, 1989), 52-65).
- 13 Placher, *op. cit.*, 124.
- 14 Lindbeck, *op. cit.*, 63.
- 15 'Incommensurability, Intratextuality, and Fideism', *Modern Theology* 5 (1988/89), 95.
- 16 Cf. McGrath, *op. cit.*, 87.
- 17 Cf. MacIntyre's analysis of the possibility of learning 'a second first language' (*op. cit.*, 374) and Lesslie Newbigin's use of MacIntyre's idea in a missiological context (*op. cit.*, 55f., 65).
- 18 Tilley, *op. cit.*, 107.
- 19 Particularly in French structuralist strands of post-modernism.
- 20 MacIntyre, *op. cit.* 12 ff.
- 21 This is what Tilley seems to assume, for his rejection of the charge that contextuality of rationality implies fideism centres on the combination of contextuality with comparability (*op. cit.*, 90).
- 22 MacIntyre, *op. cit.*, particularly 'Overcoming a Conflict of Traditions' (164 ff.) and 'The Rationality of Traditions' (349 ff.).
- 23 MacIntyre gives most of his attention to a third possibility, of a stalemate between the two traditions, out of which through a very creative effort a new, third, tradition comes into being with a rationality superior to the former two traditions (cf. 83 f.). This third possibility, however, is less relevant to our present subject.
- 24 When evaluating the possibility of a realistic epistemology we should be clear what the actual problem is. Often realism is dismissed because it is thought to imply a rigid correspondence between language and reality. Most medieval theologians understood dogma in a much more dynamic way, as a *perceptio divina veritatis tendens in ipsam*, a 'perception of divine truth, tending towards this truth' (quoted in McGrath (*op. cit.*, 16) as part of a criticism of Lindbeck's dismissal of 'cognitive-propositional' approaches to doctrine).
- 25 Plantinga points to its basic inconsistency Alvin Plantinga, 'Reason and Belief in God', in



- Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (eds.), *Faith and rationality: Reason and Belief in God* (Notre Dame, 1983), 59 ff. For Barth's relation to foundationalism see Colin Gunton, 'No Other Foundation: One Englishman's Reading of Church Dogmatics Chapter V', in Nigel Biggar (ed.), *Reckoning with Barth: Essays in Commemoration of the Centenary of Karl Barth's Birth* (Oxford, 1988), 61–79. For the relation of evangelical apologetics to foundationalism see Richard R. Topping, 'The Anti-Foundationalist Challenge to Evangelical Apologetics', *The Evangelical Quarterly* 63 (1991), 45–60.
- 26 E.g. his *Science, Faith and Society*, London 1946.
- 27 Austin M. Farrer, *Faith and Speculation* (London, 1967) particularly Chapter II.
- 28 E.g. his *Theological Science*, Oxford 1969.
- 29 E.g. in his *One World: The Interaction of Science and Theology* (London, 1986) 6–25.
- 30 Lesslie Newbigin, op. cit., 27–65.
- 31 This analogy is not drawn from the writers mentioned, but seems apt to express their ideas. The analogy goes back at least to the Middle Ages, when Franciscan theologians like Bonaventure sought after God both speaking in 'the book of Scripture' and in 'the book of Creation'. Cf. Theo H. Zwieman, O.F.M., 'Prolegomena zur Lektüre von Texten Bonaventuras über das Buch der Schöpfung', in *Franziskanische Studien*, 71 (1989), 29–41.
- 32 This circular process in reading and understanding a book is called the 'hermeneutical circle'. In fact 'hermeneutical spiral' would be a better term, for in this circle 'there is also an ongoing movement and progressive understanding' (Anthony C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons: New Testament Hermeneutics and Philosophical Description with special reference to Heidegger, Bultmann, Gadamer and Wittgenstein* (Exeter, 1980), 104.
- 33 MacIntyre, op. cit., 356.
- 34 For when all rationality is tradition-embodied the idea of a neutral or universal audience to argue with appears to be a myth too.
- 35 Cf. George Santayana's saying about idealism, which is also valid against relativistic forms of postmodernism: 'I should be ashamed to countenance opinions which, when not arguing, I did not believe'—quoted by John Macquarrie, *Twentieth Century Religious Thought* (London, 1988<sup>4</sup>) 237.
- 36 William Werpehowski, *ibid.*, 287.
- 37 Cf. the anti-Hegelian strand in MacIntyre (*ibid.*, 361), which is not, however, necessarily linked with his main thesis (*ibid.*, 81).
- 38 Dulles, op. cit., 19.
- 39 McGrath, op. cit., 52 ff.
- 40 George E. Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, 1974), 60.
- 41 McGrath, op. cit., 198.
- 42 Werpehowski, op. cit. 42; Lindbeck, op. cit., 111. The problem with 'ad hoc apologetics' as a name seems to me, that it only says something about the starting-point of the apologetic reasoning, over and against the universal starting-point of liberalism. What is in a positive sense the specific character of this form of apologetics, is that very different aspects of life are all interpreted from one perspective. The adequacy and relevance of this Christian perspective validates it *a posteriori*. This could be called 'hermeneutical apologetics'. This is at least a positive term over and against the alternatives 'postliberal' or 'non-foundationalist apologetics' (cf. Richard R. Topping, op. cit.). Negative terms have the strength of appealing to negative feelings towards alternatives, but in the end a position cannot survive on the basis of criticism alone.
- 43 Cf. Werpehowski's (op. cit., 300) appeal to the 'fellowship of creation'. The appeal to specific Christian doctrines, as happens here, is not illegitimate in a study on apologetics, because at this stage the discussion is still an internal Christian enterprise.
- 44 I am drawing here on works like Emil Brunner's *Man in Revolt* (London, 1939), Reinhold Niebuhr's *The Nature and Destiny of Man* (London, 1941/43), and Wolfhart Pannenberg's *Anthropology in Theological Perspective* (Edinburgh, 1985), but many of their thoughts express anthropological reflections, which reach back to the source of Christianity.
- 45 MacIntyre, op. cit., 364.
- 46 Cf. the works already mentioned of Brunner, Niebuhr and Pannenberg.
- 47 Many other oppositions could form the basis of the same type of argument, as for example the debate between economic liberalism and Marxism, resulting from the destruction of the original balance between the individual and the community through sin, or in the opposing views of rationalism and empiricism, resulting from the alienation between the subject and the object.
- 48 Cf. Newbigin, op. cit., 65.
- 49 A possible common recognition of the apologist and the non-Christian of the impossibility of full understanding of a tradition without standing in its community may help the non-Christian to step into the Christian tradition without full understanding, but with the promise of fuller knowledge. This recognition is certainly not restricted to the Christian community, as



- MacIntyre's description of Aristotle shows (op. cit., 143).
- 50 Dulles, op. cit., 142.
- 51 Cf. George I. Mavrodes, 'Jerusalem and Athens Revisited', in: Plantinga, Wolterstorff (eds.), op. cit., 201.
- 52 This is not to say that all particularity in traditions necessarily results from sin. It can also derive from the geographical, historical, and social limitations of the starting point of a tradition.
- 53 A phrase of Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope* (London, 1967), 22–26.
- 54 *Church Dogmatics I,1: The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Edinburgh, 1975<sup>2</sup>), 341.
- 55 *Church Dogmatics II,2: The Doctrine of God* (Edinburgh, 1957), 522.
- 56 *Church Dogmatics II,1: The Doctrine of the Word of God* (Edinburgh, 1958), 96.



## • Theology and Experience

Reflections on Cognitive and Experiential Approaches to Theology

## • *La théologie et l'expérience*

## • *Theologie und Erfahrung*

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### SUMMARY

*The article deals with the manner in which the cognitive and experiential aspects of Christian theology relate to one another. It is shown that theology provides an interpretative framework by which human experience may be addressed, interpreted and transformed. The relation between theology and experience is explored*

*with particular reference to the writings of Martin Luther and C. S. Lewis. It is shown how Christianity may be related to experience without recourse to the discredited liberal appeal to 'general human experience' or compromising the total grounding of theology in the self-revelation of God in Scripture.*

### RÉSUMÉ

*L'auteur traite des rapports entre l'aspect cognitif et l'expérience dans la théologie chrétienne. Il soutient que la théologie fournit un cadre interprétatif qui permet de considérer, d'interpréter et de transformer l'expérience humaine. Il examine cette relation en s'appuyant principalement sur les écrits de Martin Luther et de C. S. Lewis. Il montre*

*comment le christianisme a trait à l'expérience sans qu'il soit besoin de faire appel à la notion libérale discréditée de 'l'expérience humaine générale', et sans compromettre le principe selon lequel toute théologie doit se fonder uniquement sur la révélation que Dieu nous a donnée de lui-même dans l'Écriture.*

### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

*Dieser Artikel befasst sich mit dem Verhältnis zwischen dem kognitiven und dem erfahrungsmäßigen Aspekt christlicher Theologie. Es wird gezeigt, daß Theologie einen Rahmen bietet, mit Hilfe dessen die menschliche Erfahrung angegangen, interpretiert und verwandelt werden kann. Das Verhältnis von Theologie und Erfahrung wird unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Werke von Martin Luther und C. S. Lewis untersucht. Es*

*wird gezeigt, wie ein Bezug zwischen dem Christentum und der Erfahrung hergestellt werden kann ohne entweder auf die diskreditierte liberale Berufung auf die 'allgemeine menschliche Erfahrung' zurückzugreifen oder die ausschließliche Gründung der Theologie in der Selbstoffenbarung Gottes in der Schrift zu kompromittieren.*

**E**xperience' is an imprecise term. The origins of the English word are relatively well understood: it derives from the Latin term *experientia*, which could be interpreted as 'that which arises out of travelling

through life (*ex-perientia*)'. In this broad sense, it means 'an accumulated body of knowledge, arising through first-hand encounter with life'. When one speaks of 'an experienced teacher' or 'an experienced



doctor', the implication is that the teacher or doctor has learned her craft through first-hand application. Yet the term has developed an acquired meaning, which particularly concerns us here. It has come to refer to the inner life of individuals, in which those individuals become aware of their own subjective feelings and emotions.<sup>1</sup> It relates to the inward and subjective world of experience, as opposed to the outward world of everyday life. A series of writings, including William James's celebrated study *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902), have stressed the importance of the subjective aspects of religion in general, and Christianity in particular. Christianity is not simply about ideas; it is about the interpretation and transformation of the inner life of the individual. This concern with human experience is particularly associated with the movement generally known as existentialism, which has sought to restore an awareness of the importance of the inner life of individuals to both theology and philosophy.<sup>2</sup>

Two main approaches may be discerned within Christian theology to the question of the relation of experience to theology:

1. Experience provides a foundational resource for Christian theology.
2. Christian theology provides an interpretative framework by which human experience may be interpreted.

The first approach has been of major importance within recent liberal theological approaches; the second is especially associated with evangelical orthodoxy, and will be explored in the present article. We begin, however, by considering the first position.

The idea that human religious experience can act as a foundational resource for Christian theology has obvious attractions. It suggests that Christian theology is concerned with human experience—something which is common to all humanity, rather than the exclusive preserve of a small group. To those who are embarrassed by the 'scandal of particularity' the approach has many merits. It suggests that all the world religions are basically human responses to the same religious experience—often referred to as 'a core experience of the transcendent'.

Theology is thus the Christian attempt to reflect upon this common human experience, in the knowledge that the same experience underlies the other world religions. We shall return to this point later in dealing with the question of the relation of Christianity to the other religions.

This approach also has considerable attractions for Christian apologetics, as the writings of many recent American theologians, especially Paul Tillich and David Tracy, make clear. In that humans share a common experience, whether they choose to regard it as 'religious' or not, Christian theology can address this common experience. The problem of agreeing upon a common starting point is thus avoided; the starting point is already provided, in human experience. Apologetics can demonstrate that the Christian gospel makes sense of common human experience. This approach is probably seen at its best in Paul Tillich's sermons *The Courage to Be*, which attracted considerable attention after their publication in 1952. It seemed to many observers that Tillich had succeeded in correlating the Christian proclamation with common human experience.<sup>3</sup>

But there are difficulties here. The most obvious is that there is actually very little empirical evidence for a 'common core experience' throughout human history and culture. The idea is easily postulated, and virtually impossible to verify. This approach has found its most mature and sophisticated expression in the 'Experiential-Expressive Theory of Doctrine', to use a term employed by the distinguished Yale theologian George Lindbeck. In his volume *The Nature of Doctrine* (1984), Lindbeck provides an important analysis of the nature of Christian doctrine.<sup>4</sup> One of the many merits of this book is the debate which it has initiated over this unjustly neglected aspect of Christian theology, which has assumed new importance recently on account of the impact of the ecumenical movement.

Lindbeck suggests that theories of doctrine may be divided into three general types. The cognitive-propositionalist theory lays stress upon the cognitive aspects of religion, emphasizing the manner in which doctrines function as truth claims or informative propositions. The experiential-



expressive theory interprets doctrines as non-cognitive symbols of inner human feelings or attitudes. A third possibility, which Lindbeck himself favours, is the cultural-linguistic approach to religion. Lindbeck associates this model with a 'rule' or 'regulative' theory of doctrine. It is Lindbeck's criticism of the second such theory which is of particular interest to us at this point.

The 'experiential-expressive' theory, according to Lindbeck, sees religions, including Christianity, as public, culturally conditioned manifestations and affirmations of pre-linguistic forms of consciousness, attitudes and feelings. In other words, there is some common universal 'religious experience', which Christian theology (in common with other religions) attempts to express in words. The experience comes first; the theology comes in later. As Lindbeck argues, the attraction of this approach to doctrine is grounded in a number of features of late twentieth-century western thought. For example, the contemporary preoccupation with inter-religious dialogue is considerably assisted by the suggestion that the various religions are diverse expressions of a common core experience, such as an 'isolable core of encounter' or an 'unmediated awareness of the transcendent'.

The principal objection to this theory, thus stated, is its resistance to verification. As Lindbeck points out, 'religious experience' is a hopelessly vague idea. 'It is difficult or impossible to specify its distinctive features, and yet unless this is done, the assertion of commonality becomes logically and empirically vacuous.' The assertion that 'the various religions are diverse symbolizations of one and the same core experience of the Ultimate' is ultimately an unverifiable hypothesis, not least on account of the difficulty of locating and describing the 'core experience' concerned. As Lindbeck rightly points out, this would appear to suggest that there is 'at least the logical possibility that a Buddhist and a Christian might have basically the same faith, although expressed very differently'. The theory can only be credible if it is possible to isolate a common core experience from religious language and behaviour, and demonstrate that the latter

two are articulations of or responses to the former.

For such reasons, the second approach outlined above to the understanding of the relation between experience and theology has regained a hearing. According to this approach, Christian theology provides a framework by which the ambiguities of experience may be interpreted. Theology aims to interpret experience. It is like a net which we can cast over experience, in order to capture its meaning. Experience is seen as something which is to be interpreted, rather than something which is itself capable of interpreting. Christian theology thus aims to *address, interpret and transform* human experience. In what follows, I propose to explore these themes with particular reference to the writings of Martin Luther and Clive Stapleton (Jack) Lewis, best known to his many readers as 'C. S. Lewis'. European theology, with its long tradition of wrestling with experience within a cognitive framework, has an important contribution to make to this global discussion, of especial relevance in an experience-centered age.<sup>5</sup>

### 1. Theology addresses experience

Christian theology cannot remain faithful to its subject matter if it regards itself as purely propositional or cognitive in nature. The Christian encounter with God is transformative. As Calvin pointed out, to know God is to be changed by God; true knowledge of God leads to worship, as the believer is caught up in a transforming and renewing encounter with the living God. To know God is to be changed by God.<sup>6</sup> As Søren Kierkegaard pointed out in his *Unscientific Postscript*, to know the truth is to be known by the truth. 'Truth' is something which affects our inner being, as we become involved in 'an appropriation process of the most passionate inwardness'.<sup>7</sup>

This is in no sense to deny or to de-emphasize the cognitive aspects of Christian theology. It is merely to observe that there is more to theology than cerebralized information. A theology which touches the mind, leaving the heart unaffected, is no true Christian theology—a point stressed by both Luther and Calvin. Although Luther



is critical of the role of experience in spirituality, he does not dismiss it as an irrelevance. Indeed, Luther insists that there is one experience which is basic to being a theologian. He describes this briefly in one of his most quoted (and most difficult!) statements. 'It is living, dying, and even being condemned which makes a theologian—not reading, speculating and understanding'.<sup>8</sup> When I first read these words of Luther, I found them baffling. Surely theology was about reading scripture, and trying to make sense of it? What was Luther complaining about? Now I know, and I am convinced that Luther is right. To be a *real* theologian is to wrestle with none other than the living God—not with ideas about God, but with God himself. And how can a sinner ever hope to deal adequately with this God?

If you want to be a real theologian, Luther insists, you must have experienced a sense of condemnation. You must have had a moment of insight, in which you realize just how sinful you really are, and how much you merit the condemnation of God. Christ's death on the cross spells out the full extent of God's wrath against sin, and shows us up as ones who are condemned. It is only from this point that we can fully appreciate the central theme of the New Testament—how God was able to deliver sinners from their fate. Without a full awareness of our sin, and the dreadful gulf this opens up between ourselves and God, we cannot appreciate the joy and wonder of the proclamation of forgiveness through Jesus Christ. In a letter to his colleague Philip Melanchthon, dated 13 January 1522, Luther suggested that he ask the so-called 'prophets' who were then confusing the faithful at Wittenberg the following question: 'have they experienced spiritual distress and the divine birth, death and hell?' A list of spiritual sensations is no substitute for the terror that accompanies a real encounter with the living God. For these modern prophets, Luther wrote, 'the sign of the Son of man is missing'.

A modern illustration might make this point. In his book *The Restoring Word*, J. Randall Nichols wrote of an experience he had while visiting the Greek island of Corfu. 'Some of the most beautiful music I ever heard was the chanting of Greek peasant

women, tears streaming down their lined and hardened faces, in a church on Corfu one Good Friday. I asked someone why they were weeping. "Because", he said, "their Christ is dead." I have often thought that I will never understand what resurrection means until I can weep like that.' Nichols' point, so memorably made, is that we can never appreciate the joy and hope of the resurrection, unless we have been plunged into the sense of hopelessness and helplessness which pervaded that first Good Friday. What is true of the resurrection is also true of forgiveness. Christian spirituality is grounded in an awareness of being a condemned sinner—an experience which is utterly transformed by divine forgiveness. We can never understand what forgiveness really means until we have wept the tears of condemnation.

Just about anyone can read the New Testament, and make some sort of sense of it. But, Luther insists, the *real* theologian is someone who has experienced a sense of condemnation on account of sin—who reads the New Testament, and realizes that the message of forgiveness is good news for him or her. The gospel is thus experienced as something liberating, something which transforms our situation, something which is relevant to us. It is very easy to read the New Testament as if it were nothing more than any other piece of literature. And Luther reminds us that it is only through being aware of our sin, and all its implications, that we can fully appreciate the wonder of the electrifying declaration that God has forgiven our sins through Jesus Christ.

## 2. Theology interprets experience

It is a consequence of the Christian doctrine of creation that we are made in the image of God. There is an inbuilt capacity—indeed, we might say, an inbuilt *need*—to relate to God. To fail to relate to God is to fail to be completely human. To be fulfilled is to be filled by God. Nothing that is transitory can ever fill this need. Nothing that is not itself God can ever hope to take the place of God. And yet, on account of the fallenness of human nature, there is now a natural ten-



dency to try to make other things fulfil this need.

Sin moves us away from God, and tempts us to place other things in his place. Created things thus come to be substituted for God. And they do not satisfy. And like the child who experiences and expresses dissatisfaction when the square peg fails to fit the round hole, so we experience a sense of dissatisfaction. Somehow, we are left with a feeling of longing—longing for *something* undefinable, of which human nature knows nothing, save that it does not possess it.

This phenomenon has been recognized since the dawn of human civilization. In one of his dialogues,<sup>9</sup> Plato compares human beings to leaky jars. Somehow, we are always unfulfilled. We may pour things into the containers of our lives, but something prevents them from ever being entirely filled. We are always partly empty—and for that reason, experience a profound awareness of a lack of fullness and happiness. 'Those who have endured the void know that they have encountered a distinctive hunger, or emptiness; nothing earthly satisfies it' (Diogenes Allen).<sup>10</sup> This well-documented feeling of dissatisfaction is one of the most important points of contact for the gospel proclamation. In the first place, that proclamation interprets this vague and unshaped feeling as a longing for *God*. It gives cognitive substance and shape to what would otherwise be an amorphous and unidentified subjective intuition. And in the second, it offers to fulfil it. There is a sense of divine dissatisfaction—not dissatisfaction *with* God, but a dissatisfaction with all that is not God, which arises from God, and which ultimately leads to God. Sartre is right: the world cannot bring fulfilment. Here he echoes the Christian view, which goes on to affirm that here, in the midst of the world, something which is ultimately beyond the world makes itself available to us. We do not need to wait for eternity to experience God; that experience can begin, however imperfectly, now. Perhaps the greatest statement of this feeling, and its most exquisite theological interpretation, may be found in the famous words of Augustine of Hippo: 'You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you'.<sup>11</sup>

Throughout Augustine's reflections, especially in the *Confessions*, the same theme recurs. We are doomed to remain incomplete in our present existence. Our hopes and deepest longings will remain nothing but hopes and longings. The resolution of this bitter-sweet tension remains real, even for the Christian, who becomes increasingly aware of the wonder of God, and of the inadequacy of our present grasp of that wonder. There is a sense of postponement, of longing, of wistful yearning, of groaning under the strain of having to tolerate the present, when the future offers so much.<sup>12</sup> The grand themes of creation and redemption there find a creative reworking which deserves careful attention. Because we are created by God in his image, we desire him; because we are sinful, we cannot satisfy that desire ourselves—either by substituting something for God, or by trying to coerce him to come to us. And so a real sense of frustration, of dissatisfaction, develops. And that dissatisfaction—but not its theological interpretation—is part of common human experience. Perhaps the finest statement of this exquisite agony is found in Augustine's cry that he 'is groaning with inexpressible groanings on my wanderer's path, and remembering Jerusalem with my heart lifted up towards it—Jerusalem my home land, Jerusalem my mother'.<sup>13</sup> We are exiled from our homeland—but its memories return hauntingly.

Augustine finds one of his finest recent apologetic interpreters in the writings of the Oxford literary critic and theologian C. S. Lewis. Perhaps one of the most original aspects of C. S. Lewis' writing is his persistent and powerful appeal to the religious imagination, in developing Augustine's maxim '*desiderium sinus cordis* (longing makes the heart deep)'. Like Augustine, Lewis was aware of certain deep human emotions which pointed to a dimension of our existence beyond time and space. There is, Lewis suggested, a deep and intense feeling of longing within human beings, which no earthly object or experience can satisfy. Lewis terms this sense 'joy', and argues that it points to God as its source and goal (hence the title of his celebrated autobiography, *Surprised by Joy*). Joy, according to Lewis,



is 'an unsatisfied desire which is itself more desirable than any other satisfaction . . . anyone who has experienced it will want it again.'<sup>14</sup>

To understand Lewis at this point, the idea of 'joy' needs to be explained in some detail. From the windows of his home in Belfast, Northern Ireland, the young Lewis could see the distant Castlereagh Hills. Those distant hills seemed to him to symbolize something which lay beyond his reach. A sense of intense longing arose as he contemplated them. He could not say exactly *what* it was that he longed for; merely that there was a sense of emptiness within him, which the mysterious hills seemed to heighten, without satisfying. Lewis describes this experience (perhaps better known to students of German Romanticism as *Sehnsucht*) in some detail in his autobiography. He relates how, as a young child, he was standing by a flowering currant bush, when—for some unexplained reason—a memory was triggered off.

There suddenly rose in me without warning, as if from a depth not of years but of centuries, the memory of that earlier morning at the Old House when my brother had brought his toy garden into the nursery. It is difficult to find words strong enough for the sensation which came over me; Milton's 'enormous bliss' of Eden . . . comes somewhere near it. It was a sensation, of course, of desire; but desire for what? Not, certainly, for a biscuit tin filled with moss, nor even (though that came into it) for my own past. . . . and before I knew what I desired, the desire itself was gone, the whole glimpse withdrawn, the world turned commonplace again, or only stirred by a longing for the longing that had just ceased. It had only taken a moment of time; and in a certain sense everything else that had ever happened to me was insignificant in comparison.<sup>15</sup>

Lewis here describes a brief moment of insight, a devastating moment of feeling caught up in something which goes far beyond the realms of everyday experience. But what did it mean? What, if anything, did it point to?

Lewis addressed this question in a remarkable sermon entitled 'The Weight of Glory', preached before the University of Oxford on 8 June 1941. Lewis spoke of 'a desire which no natural happiness will

satisfy', 'a desire, still wandering and uncertain of its object and still largely unable to see that object in the direction where it really lies'. There is something self-defeating about human desire, in that what is desired, when achieved, seems to leave the desire unsatisfied. Lewis illustrates this from the age-old quest for beauty, using recognizably Augustinian imagery:

The books or the music in which we thought the beauty was located will betray us if we trust to them; it was not *in* them, it only came *through* them, and what came through them was longing. These things—the beauty, the memory of our own past—are good images of what we really desire; but if they are mistaken for the thing itself they turn into dumb idols, breaking the hearts of their worshippers. For they are not the thing itself; they are only the scent of a flower we have not found, the echo of a tune we have not heard, news from a country we have not visited.<sup>16</sup>

Human desire, the deep and bitter-sweet longing for something that will satisfy us, points beyond finite objects and finite persons (who seem able to fulfil this desire, yet eventually prove incapable of doing so); it points *through* these objects, and persons towards their real goal and fulfilment in God himself. It is as if human love points to something beyond it, as a parable.

Pleasure, beauty, personal relationships: all seem to promise so much, and yet when we grasp them, we find that what we were seeking was not located in them, but lies beyond them. There is a 'divine dissatisfaction' within human experience, which prompts us to ask whether there is anything which may satisfy the human quest to fulfil the desires of the human heart. Lewis argues that there is. Hunger, he suggests, is an excellent example of a human sensation which corresponds to a real physical need. This need points to the existence of food by which it may be met. Simone Weil echoes this theme, and points to its apologetic importance when she writes: 'The danger is not lest the soul should doubt whether there is any bread, but lest, by a lie, it should persuade itself that it is not hungry. It can only persuade itself of this by lying, for the reality of its hunger is not a belief, it is a certainty.'<sup>17</sup>

Thirst, according to Lewis, is a further



example of a human longing pointing to a human need, which in turn points to its fulfilment in drinking—if the human being in question is to survive. Any human longing, he argues, points to a genuine human need, which in turn points to a real object corresponding to that need. A similar point is made, although a little cryptically, in relation to human sexual desire. And so, Lewis suggests, it is reasonable to suggest that the deep human sense of infinite longing which cannot be satisfied by any physical or finite object or person must point to a real human need which can, in some way, be met. Lewis argues that this sense of longing points to its origin and its fulfilment in God himself.

Lewis' less perceptive critics—sadly, more numerous than one might have hoped—argued that his argument rested upon an elementary fallacy. Being hungry didn't prove that there was bread at hand. The feeling of hunger did not necessarily correspond to a supply of food. This objection, Lewis replies, misses the point.

A man's physical hunger does not prove that man will get any bread; he may die of starvation in a raft in the Atlantic. But surely a man's hunger does prove that he comes of a race which repairs its body by eating and inhabits a world where eatable substances exist. In the same way, though I do not believe (I wish I did) that my desire for Paradise proves that I shall enjoy it, I think it a pretty good indication that such a thing exists and that some men will. A man may love a woman and not win her; but it would be very odd if the phenomenon called 'falling in love' occurred in a sexless world.<sup>18</sup>

In all this, Lewis echoes a great theme of traditional Christian thinking about the origin and goal of human nature. We are made by God, and we experience a deep sense of longing for him, which only he can satisfy. Although Lewis' reflections on the desire he calls 'joy' reflect his personal experience, it is evident that he (and countless others) consider that this sense of longing is a widespread feature of human nature and experience. An important point of contact for the proclamation of the gospel is thus established.

Lewis' insights also bring new depth to

familiar biblical passages concerning human longing for God. 'As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, the living God' (Ps. 42:1). Note the great sense of *longing* for God expressed in this verse—a sense of longing which assumes added meaning if Lewis' reflections on 'joy' are allowed. Note also the biblical parallel between a sense of need—in this case, animal thirst—and the human need and desire for God.

Theology thus interprets human experience. Yet at times, experience needs to be radically *reinterpreted*. This is a major theme of Luther's 'theology of the cross'.<sup>19</sup> For Luther, the cross mounts a powerful attack on another human resource upon which too much spiritual weight is often placed, especially in modern western thought. The experience of the individual is singled out as having revelatory authority. 'What I experience is what is right.' 'I don't experience it that way.' Luther suggests that individual experience is often seriously unreliable as a guide to matters of faith. The way we experience things isn't necessarily the way things really are.

An example—which I hasten to add is not used by Luther himself—might be helpful in bringing out the point at issue. Suppose you have been out of doors for some time on a very cold night. You arrive at the house of a friend, who notices how cold you are. 'What you need is a good drink,' he tells you. 'Have a glass of brandy.' You drink it. And after a few minutes, you become conscious of a feeling of warmth. You experience the brandy as having warmed you up.

But in fact, the brandy will make you colder. The alcohol causes your blood vessels to dilate, giving you the impression that your body is *producing* heat; in fact, it is *losing* heat. You may feel that you are warming up—but in reality, you are cooling down. Heat is being given off from your body, not taken in by it. Your feelings have led you seriously astray. Were you to drink alcohol to 'warm yourself up' in a bitterly cold situation, it is quite possible you could die from the resulting heat loss. An external observer would be able to detect what was really happening—but this perspective



would be denied to you, to the extent that you relied upon your feelings.

This example has real spiritual relevance. It makes the point that experience needs to be *criticized*. You *felt* that you were being warmed up—but the correct interpretation of that experience is that you actually felt the heat leaving your body, to be radiated outward and lost to you. You need an external reference point by which those feelings can be evaluated and judged. Luther develops a related argument: our experiences of God need to be interpreted. The way we experience things isn't necessarily the way things really are. The cross provides an external reference point by which our feelings can be evaluated and judged.

Perhaps the best way to understand the spiritual importance of Luther's approach here is to consider the scene of helplessness and hopelessness on that first Good Friday, as Jesus Christ died upon the cross. The crowd gathering round the cross were expecting something dramatic to happen. If Jesus really was the son of God, they could expect God to intervene and rescue him. Yet, as that long day wore on, there was no sign of a dramatic divine intervention. In his cry from the cross, even Jesus himself experienced a momentary yet profound sense of the absence of God, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?' Many expected God to intervene dramatically in the situation, to deliver the dying Jesus. But nothing of the kind happened. Jesus suffered, and finally died. There was no sign of God acting in that situation. So those who based their thinking about God solely on experience drew the obvious conclusion: God was not there.

The resurrection overturned that judgement. God was revealed as having been present and active at Calvary, working out the salvation of humanity and the vindication of Jesus Christ. He was not *perceived* to be present—but present he really was. What experience interpreted as the *absence* of God, the resurrection showed up as the *hidden presence* of God. God may have been experienced as inactive, yet the resurrection showed God to have been active behind the scenes, working in secret. For Luther, the resurrection demonstrates how unreliable the verdict of human experience really is. Instead of

relying upon the misleading impressions of human experience, we should trust in God's promises. God promises to be present with us, even in life's darkest hours—and if experience cannot detect him as being present, then that verdict of experience must be considered unreliable.

This has important results for Luther's understanding of faith. Faith is an ability to see God's presence and activity in the world, and in our own experience. Faith sees behind external appearances and the misleading impressions of experience. It is an openness, a willingness, to find God where he has promised to be, even when experience suggests that he is not there. Luther uses the phrase 'the darkness of faith' to make this point. This has important results for Luther's understanding of the nature of doubt.

Doubt shows up our natural tendency to base our judgements upon experience, rather than faith. When faith and experience seem to be out of step with each other, we tend to trust our experience, rather than faith. But, Luther points out, how unreliable a guide experience turns out to be! Those who trusted in experience on the first Good Friday looked very foolish in the light of the resurrection! For Luther, the resurrection demonstrates the superiority of faith in the promises of God over reliance upon experience or reason. We must learn to let God be God, and trust in him and his promises, rather than in our own finite and inadequate perception of a situation.

### 3. Theology transforms experience

Christian theology does not simply address the human situation; it offers to transform it. We are not simply told that we are sinners, in need of divine forgiveness and renewal; that forgiveness and renewal is offered to us in the gospel proclamation. If the negative aspect of the Christian proclamation of the crucified Christ is that we are far from God, the positive side is that he offers to bring us home to him through the death and resurrection of his Son. Theology, then, does not simply interpret our experience in terms of alienation from God. It addresses that experience, interprets it as a sign of our global



alienation from God through sin, and offers to transform it through the grace of God.

It is one of the many merits of the writings of C. S. Lewis, that they take seriously the way in which words can *generate* and *transform* experience. In his autobiography *Surprised by Joy*, he comments on the effect of a few lines of poetry upon his imagination. The lines were from Longfellow's *Saga of King Olaf*:

I heard a voice that cried,  
Balder the beautiful  
Is dead, is dead.

These words had a profound impact upon the young Lewis, as he later reflected.

I knew nothing about Balder; but instantly I was uplifted into huge regions of northern sky, I desired with almost sickening intensity something never to be described (except that it is cold, spacious, severe, pale and remote) and then . . . found myself at the very same moment already falling out of that desire and wishing I were back in it.<sup>20</sup>

Words, Lewis thus discovered, have the ability to evoke an experience we have not yet had, in addition to describing an experience we are familiar with. That which is known functions as a pointer to that which is yet to be known, and which lies within our grasp. In his essay *The Language of Religion*, Lewis made this crucial point as follows.

This is the most remarkable of the powers of Poetic language: to convey to us the quality of experiences which we have not had, or perhaps can never have, to use factors within our experience so that they become pointers to something outside our experience—as two or more roads on a map show us where a town that is off the map must lie. Many of us have never had an experience like that which Wordsworth records near the end of *Prelude* XIII; but when he speaks of 'the visionary dreariness', I think we get an inkling of it.<sup>21</sup>

At its best, Christian theology shares this characteristic of poetic language (not *poetry* itself, incidentally, Lewis stresses, but the *language used in poetry*), as identified by Lewis—it tries to convey to us the quality of the Christian experience of God. It attempts to point beyond itself, to rise above itself, straining at its lead as it rushes ahead, to point us to a town beyond its map—a town

which it knows is there, but to which it cannot lead us.

Theology is able to use words in such a way as to offer some pointers for the benefit of those who have yet to discover what it feels like to experience God. It uses a cluster of key words to try and explain what it is like to know God, by analogy with words associated with human experience. It is like forgiveness—in other words, if you can imagine what it feels like to be forgiven for a really serious offence, you can begin to understand the Christian experience of forgiveness. It is like reconciliation—if you can imagine the joy of being reconciled to someone who matters very much to you, you can get a glimpse of what the Christian experience of coming home to God is like. It is like coming home after being away and alone for a long time, and perhaps fully expecting never to be able to return. Apologetics uses analogies like these to try and signpost—like roads leading off Lewis' map to an unseen town—the Christian experience of God, for the benefit of those who have yet to have this transforming experience.

But how is it able to use words in this way? Is there not a certain arbitrariness to this whole business? How can we take the human experience of reconciliation, and dare to say that it somehow echoes that of reconciliation with God? It is here that the Christian doctrine of creation undergirds our theological affirmations. The analogy is given, not invented. It is, so to speak, built into the order of things. To speak of 'redemption', 'forgiveness', 'reconciliation' or 'liberation' is indeed to speak of situations within this human world. But it is also, through the creative grace of God, to speak of the entry of God into his world, and his ability to convey himself through our words. He who was rich beyond splendour became poor for our sakes—and that selfsame willingness and ability to become poor is demonstrated in the tender kindness which allows human words—*our* words—to be signposts to him.<sup>22</sup>

## Conclusion

In this article, we have explored some of the ways in which theology and experience relate to each other. We have argued that there is



no rightful place in Christian theology for any approach that is purely cognitive or purely experiential. Experience and understanding are like two sides of the same coin, which mutually reinforce and enhance one another. The liberal appeal to pure uninterpreted global experience is widely regarded as discredited, partly on account of the considerations noted by George Lindbeck and others, and partly on account of a new awareness of the implications of the philosophy of Ludwig Wittgenstein. As Stanley Hauerwas remarked, 'Wittgenstein ended forever any attempt on my part to try to anchor theology in some general account of human experience'.<sup>23</sup> Yet this widespread disenchantment with experience as a theological resource must not allow us to reject a significant experiential component in theological reflection. Furthermore, as I have argued elsewhere, experience is a vital 'point of contact' for Christian apologetics in a postmodern world.<sup>24</sup> Rather, we must insist that experience is to be addressed, interpreted and transformed in the light of the gospel proclamation of redemption through Christ, as this is made known to us through Scripture. By thus anchoring theology in the bedrock of divine revelation, while linking it up to the world of human experience, we may ensure that Christian theology remains both authentic and relevant in the years that lie ahead. Theology can address experience, without becoming reduced to the level of a mere reiteration of what we experience and observe.

- 1 For a useful analysis, see Michael Oakeshott, *Experience and Its Modes* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1933). The best general study, from a philosophical standpoint, is Wayne Proudfoot, *Religious Experience* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985). For a more theological approach, see Nicholas Lash, *Easter in Ordinary: Reflections on Human Experience and the Knowledge of God* (London: SCM Press, 1988).
- 2 See Gerhard Ebeling, 'Die Klage über das Erfahrungsdefizit in der Theologie als Frage nach ihrer Sache', *Wort und Glaube III* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1975), pp. 3–28.
- 3 For a useful study, see C. Stephen Evans, *Subjectivity and Religious Belief* (Grand Rapids: Christian University Press, 1976).
- 4 George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine*

- (London: SPCK, 1984). For an assessment and critique, see Alister E. McGrath, *The Genesis of Doctrine* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), pp. 14–34.
- 5 For other reflections on European theology, see Alister E. McGrath, 'The European Roots of Evangelicalism', *Anvil* 9 (1992), pp. 239–48.
- 6 On Calvin's understanding of the dialectic between theology and experience, see Wilhelm Balke, 'The Word of God and *Experientia* according to Calvin', in W. H. Neuser (ed.), *Calvinus Ecclesiae Doctor* (Kampen: Kok, 1978), pp. 19–31.
- 7 Søren Kierkegaard, *Unscientific Postscript* (London: Oxford University Press, 1941), pp. 169–224. Cf. P. L. Holmer, 'Kierkegaard and Religious Propositions', *Journal of Religion* 35 (1955), pp. 135–46.
- 8 For a full discussion, see Alister E. McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985).
- 9 Plato, *Gorgias*, 493b–d.
- 10 Diogenes Allen, *The Traces of God* (Cambridge, MA: Cowley Publications, 1981), p. 19.
- 11 Augustine, *Confessions*, I.i.1. Citations are from the recent translation by Henry Chadwick (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991), p. 3.
- 12 For a superb presentation of Augustine's thoughts on this tension, see John Burnaby, *Amor Dei: A Study in the Religion of St Augustine* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1938), pp. 52–73.
- 13 *Confessions* XII.xvi.23; Chadwick, p. 257.
- 14 C. S. Lewis, *Surprised by Joy* (London: Collins, 1959), p. 20.
- 15 Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, p. 19.
- 16 C. S. Lewis, 'The Weight of Glory', in *Screwtape Proposes A Toast* (London: Collins, 1965), pp. 97–8.
- 17 Simone Weil, *Waiting for God* (New York: Putnam, 1951), p. 210.
- 18 Lewis, 'The Weight of Glory', p. 99.
- 19 For what follows, see McGrath, *Luther's Theology of the Cross*. For the implications of this approach for Christian spirituality, see Alister McGrath, *Roots that Refresh: A Celebration of Reformation Spirituality* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1992).
- 20 Lewis, *Surprised by Joy*, p. 20.
- 21 C. S. Lewis, 'The Language of Religion', in *Christian Reflections* (London: Collins, 1981), p. 169.
- 22 See further McGrath, *Genesis of Doctrine*, pp. 72–80.
- 23 Stanley Hauerwas, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), p. xxi.
- 24 See Alister E. McGrath, *Bridge-Building: Effective Christian Apologetics* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1992).<sup>4</sup>



## • Review Article

Menschen werden Christen: Das Drama der Bekehrung in den ersten Jahrhunderten

Gustave Bardy, Hg. Josef Blank, Freiburg: Herder, 1988, 464 S. DM 48,—.

### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

*Der Fortschritt der Entchristlichung des einst christlichen Europa macht dies vor bereits 40 Jahren in französischer Sprache erschienene Buch über Bekehrung in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten zu einer höchst aktuellen Lektüre. Selten ist auf lebendigere Art und Weise Kirchengeschichte geschrieben worden.*

### SUMMARY

*The progressive de-Christianizing of 'Christian' Europe makes this book about conversion in the first three Christian centuries, which first appeared in French forty years ago, highly relevant today. Seldom has Church History been written in so lively a way.*

### RÉSUMÉ

*Ce livre, publié en français il y a quarante ans, traite de la conversion dans les trois premiers siècles de notre ère. L'histoire de l'Église a rarement été écrite d'une manière aussi vivante.*

*Le processus de déchristianisation de l'Europe me convainc de la pertinence de cet ouvrage pour notre temps.*

Wer ein Buch vierzig Jahre nach seiner Erstauflage in deutscher Übersetzung vorlegt, kann mit diesem Unternehmen nur eine besondere Absicht verfolgen. Der Neutestamentler Josef Blank führt zwei Gründe an, die ihn zur Übersetzung des Buches veranlaßt haben: Einmal ist inzwischen auch in Deutschland die Entchristlichung fortgeschritten, so daß die Bekehrung zum Christentum eine aktuelle Frage wird; weiter bescheinigt Blank dem Werk, daß „es sich um ein vorzügliches Buch handelt, was viele Kenner bestätigen werden, das man nur mit den bedeutendsten Arbeiten auf diesem Gebiet vergleichen kann“ (S. 7). Bei der Lektüre kann sich der Leser dem Urteil des Übersetzers nicht entziehen. Das Leben der Christen in der Antike ersteht vor

seinen Augen, weil mit der Frage nach dem Christwerden in der antiken Welt zugleich auch die Frage nach dem Christsein und -bleiben gestellt ist.

In den ersten drei Kapiteln, etwa dem ersten Drittel des Buches, erörtert der Verfasser das Problem in der griechisch-römischen Umwelt des Christentums, in der antiken Philosophie und im Judentum. Er kommt zu dem Ergebnis, daß die Bekehrung der griechisch-römischen Mentalität lange Zeit hindurch völlig fremd bleibt, weil die antiken Religionen unlösbar mit dem Leben der Familie und der Polis verbunden sind (S. 17). Häufiger gab es die Hinwendung zu einer bestimmten philosophischen Richtung (S. 76); dem Judentum war ein verhältnismäßig geringer Missionserfolg beschieden (S. 121).

Die Bekehrung zum Christentum untersucht der Autor nach ihren Motiven, ihren Forderungen, den Widerständen, die sich ihr entgegenstellten, und ihren Methoden. Das Verlangen nach der Wahrheit steht an der ersten Stelle der Motive für eine Bekehrung; die Befreiung vom Schicksal und von der Sünde spielen jedoch eine ebenso wichtige Rolle wie das Streben nach der vorbildlichen christlichen Heiligkeit. Etwas ausführlicher hätte sich der Leser aufgrund der heutigen Diskussion über die Charismata die Darstellung der Rolle des Wunders bei Bekehrungen gewünscht; nach Bardys Forschungen sind sie keineswegs ein dominierender Grund für Konversionen (S. 167). In dieser Frage und im Blick auf den Stellenwert der anderen Gnadengaben wären tiefergehende Untersuchungen wünschenswert. Andererseits hat die Lektüre der Heiligen Schriften viele zum christlichen Glauben geführt, ebenfalls die Erwartung des Weltendes (Naherwartung war immer aktuell, S. 169).

Bardys Untersuchungen über die Forderungen, die mit der Bekehrung verbunden



waren, führen den Leser ein in die Voraussetzungen und in die Konsequenzen der altkirchlichen Taufpraxis. Die Annahme des Dogmas und die Ausrichtung der christlichen Ethik an der Forderung vollkommener Heiligung machen anschaulich, was Absage an die Vergangenheit und exklusive Bindung an Christus bis hin zum Martyrium inhaltlich bedeuten. So konnten auch die Widerstände aus der Umwelt: die Abwerbungsversuche von Familie, Gesellschaft, Religion und Staat nicht ausbleiben. Die Diskussion, ob ein Christ bestimmte Berufe ergreifen oder auch sonst an „weltlichen“ Veranstaltungen teilnehmen dürfe (vgl. auch die Untersuchung von Werner Weismann über das Urteil der Kirchenväter zu den Schauspielen), wurde nicht minder heiß geführt als heute. Moralistische Gesetzlichkeit und Weltflucht einerseits, zu Sektentum und Asketentum führend, und Verweltlichung des Christentums auf der anderen Seite, diese beiden Extreme bestimmen damals wie heute die Extrempositionen ethischer Entscheidungsfindung, die es zu vermeiden gilt. Daß Irrtum und Wahrheit sich trotz ihrer Wandlungen zu allen Zeiten gleichen, dürfte dem Leser spätestens an dieser Stelle deutlich werden; er ist betroffen durch die Aktualität der angeblich so „antiken“ Welt: *tua res agitur*.

Haupt„methode“ der Bekehrung zum Christentum scheint schon in der Antike das Zeugnis der vielen Christen gewesen zu sein, die ihren Glauben im Volk bekannt-machten. Der Verfasser gesteht ein, daß seine Aufzählung der Mittel längst nicht erschöpfend ist – auch hier wären weitere

Untersuchungen angebracht. Auch das Thema der Massenbekehrungen eines ganzen Volkes zusammen mit seinem König kann er nur am Rande erwähnen (S. 305). Das Buch schließt mit einer Betrachtung der Frage, weshalb aus Christen Apostaten wurden; wobei der Verfasser in diese Gruppe auch jene einreicht, „die sich für die Religion nicht mehr interessieren und die wieder einen heidnischen Lebenswandel aufnehmen, ohne sich über ihre geistlichen Bedürfnisse auch nur die geringsten Gedanken zu machen“ (S. 327).

Man kann dem Übersetzer zustimmen, daß dieses Werk auf seinem Gebiet wirklich seinesgleichen sucht. Bardy beschreibt nicht nur trocken die Ekklesiologie und die Rechtfertigungslehre der Alten Kirche, sondern nimmt den Leser in langen, kleingedruckten Zitaten mit hinein in das Ringen um das Wesen des Christentums in der Antike. Ungeachtet der Tatsache, daß Bardy nicht eines der großen dogmatischen Standard-themen abhandelt, lernt der Leser vieles über die Dogmatik der Alten Kirche im Kontext des Ringens um die richtige christliche Entscheidung. Selten ist wohl auf eine lebendigere Art und Weise Kirchengeschichte geschrieben worden. Der Leser vermißt nur ein Register, das die im Verlauf der Untersuchung angeschnittenen Themen leichter auffinden läßt – vielleicht könnte der Verlag ein solches bei einer Neuauflage nachliefern?

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## • Review Articles

Immanuel Kant und die Frage der Erkennbarkeit Gottes. Eine kritische Untersuchung der 'Transzendentalen Ästhetik' in der 'Kritik der reinen Vernunft' und ihrer theologischen Konsequenz

Karl-Heinz Michel, TVG-Monographien und Studienbücher 334.

R. Brockhaus Verlag, Wuppertal 1987, 264 pp, DM 38,—.

Glabensdokument contra Geschichtsbuch? Die Schriftlehre Wilhelm Herrmanns

Karl-Heinz Michel, TVG-Monographien und Studienbücher 372.

R. Brockhaus Verlag, Wuppertal 1992, 212 pp, DM 29, 80.

### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

*In der von dem protestantischen Philosophen Kant vollzogenen erkenntniskritischen Trennung von Glauben und Wissen wird in diesen beiden Untersuchungen eine Grundvoraussetzung der Theologie des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts aufgedeckt und kritisch hinterfragt.*

### SUMMARY

*In the epistemological division made by the Protestant philosopher Kant between faith and knowledge, these two studies reveal and critically explore a basic postulate of 19th and 20th century theology.*

### RÉSUMÉ

*Selon la division épistémologique entre la foi et la connaissance qui a été faite par Kant, le philosophe protestant, ces deux études révèlent et examinent d'un oeil critique un postulat de base de la Théologie du dix-neuvième et du vingtième siècles.*

Der moderne Protestantismus ist, zumindest soweit er im Einflußbereich deutschsprachiger Theologie liegt, mit gutem Recht als Protestantismus nach Kant zu bezeichnen: entweder steht er (selten) im bewußten Widerspruch zu Kant, oder er baut (so der Normalfall) auf den von Kant gelegten philosophischen Fundamenten auf. Letzteres gilt von der idealistischen Theologie (Schleiermacher) über die neukantische liberale Theologie (Ritschl) bis zur dialektischen Theologie, insbesondere in ihrem existentialistischen Flügel (Bultmann), aber

auch in der neo-orthodoxen Linie (Barth), also den jeweils bestimmenden Kräften in der kontinentalen Theologie des 19. und 20. Jahrhunderts. Allen ist eigen, daß sie keineswegs die Auflösung des christlichen Glaubens wollten, sondern ganz im Gegenteil seine Verteidigung und Vermittlung an den jeweils 'modernen' Menschen. Gleiches wäre grundsätzlich auch schon vom Vater des Neuprotestantismus, Kant selbst, zu sagen: In der Vorrede zu seiner wichtigsten Schrift, der 'Kritik der reinen Vernunft' sagt er es ausdrücklich: es gehe ihm, wenn er in seiner Kritik das (aus seiner Sicht: vermeintliche) Wissen von Gott aufhebe, eben darin doch nur darum, 'dem Glauben Platz zu schaffen'. Tatsächlich aber, das macht Karl-Heinz Michel überzeugend deutlich, hat Kant, entgegen seiner scheinbar so löblichen Absicht, der Säkularisation des Denkens überhaupt, speziell aber auch in der Theologie, die Bahn gebrochen. Wie es zu diesem paradoxen, ja fast tragisch zu nennenden Ergebnis kam, das macht Michels sorgfältige Analyse und Kritik des kantschen Denkens verständlich.

Wenn Theologen sich mit Kant beschäftigen, pflegen sie in der Regel dazu vor allem seine religionsphilosophischen oder auch ethischen Schriften heranzuziehen. Tatsächlich aber ist die kantsche Erkenntniskritik, wie er sie vor allem in dem klassischen Hauptwerk der 'Kritik der reinen Vernunft' vorgelegt hat, viel wichtiger, weil schlechthin grundlegend. Ihr wendet Michel sich in 'Kant und die Frage der Erkennbarkeit Gottes' vor allem zu, und zwar in ihr



wiederum – ein methodisch wohlüberlegter Schritt – vor allem dem ersten Teil, der 'Transzendentalen Ästhetik'. Denn auf diesen wenigen Seiten des kantischen Werkes fallen bereits die das ganze System bestimmenden Entscheidungen. Dabei darf der Begriff der 'Ästhetik' den heutigen Leser nicht verwirren: Kant versteht ihn nicht etwa – wie es heute üblich ist – im Sinne einer Lehre vom Schönen, sondern, entsprechend damaligem Sprachgebrauch, im Sinne einer Lehre von der sinnlichen Wahrnehmung.

Bei seinem Versuch einer Neubegründung der Metaphysik als Wissenschaft setzte Kant – Anregungen des großen schottischen Philosophen David Hume aufnehmend – bei der Erfahrung an ('Daß alle unsere Erkenntnis mit der Erfahrung anfangt, daran ist kein Zweifel' – mit diesem lapidaren Satz beginnt die Einleitung der 2. Auflage von 1787). Damit stellte er das bis dahin in der Metaphysik übliche spekulative Denken gleichsam vom Kopf auf die Füße: ein an sich verheißungsvolles und, wie Michel vor allem am Ende seiner Untersuchung zeigt, durchaus auch biblischem Denken entsprechendes Unternehmen. Bei näherem Zusehen allerdings entpuppen sich in Kants Analyse der Wahrnehmung die sinnlichen Grundlagen der Erkenntnis (Erscheinung, Anschauung, Empfindung) als durch und durch subjektiv: die Vorstellung des Raumes etwa ist keine Aussage über die Gegenstände im Raum selbst, sondern nur eine apriorisch im Subjekt vorgegebene Anschauungsform. Der Gegenstand selbst, das 'Ding-an-sich', bleibt immer unerkennbar. Die einzige Sicherung gegen den Verdacht der Unwirklichkeit der Dingwelt ist die vom Gegenstand ausgehende 'Affektion' des Subjekts, die aber die Empfindung nur initiiert, ohne doch Inhalte zu vermitteln (132ff). Die Weltwirklichkeit verflüchtigt sich so einerseits zur Erscheinung, deren Schöpfer der autonome Mensch selbst ist (183, vgl. 225 u.ö.), im Blick auf das andererseits, was sie selbst ist, zieht sie sich in die absolute Unerkennbarkeit des 'Ding-an-sich' zurück, bei dem sogar die Anwendung des Wirklichkeitsbegriffs wieder problematisch wird (142f). Der beabsichtigte Brückenschlag 'vom apriori zur Empirie ... ist ihm zum Bruch gegraten' (225).

Der zweite Teil der Arbeit zeigt, daß, was

schon von der Erkenntnis der Weltwirklichkeit gilt, erst recht auf die Erkenntnis Gottes zutrifft. Denn die Dinge treten – wenn auch nur durch die inhaltsleere Vermittlung der Affekte – in Erscheinung, Gott aber, so Kant, erscheint nicht, ist kein möglicher Gegenstand menschlicher Erfahrung (228). Als der 'ganz Andere' ist er grundsätzlich transzendent und damit schlechthin unerkennbar (221ff).

Eine Rückfrage nach den geistesgeschichtlichen Zusammenhängen, in denen Kant steht, zeigt, daß er mit seiner scharfen Trennung von Apriori und Aposteriori, von Erscheinung und Ding-an-sich nur den das ganze abendländische Denken durchziehenden 'Hiatus zwischen Geist und Materie', verbunden mit der Abwertung der letzteren, auf seine Weise aktualisierte (175f).

Das Verdienst der Untersuchung von Michel liegt nicht nur darin, daß er diese Zusammenhänge in einer bisher nicht gegebenen Gründlichkeit aufdeckt, sondern auch darin, daß er die sie bestimmenden Grundentscheidungen kritisch hinterfragt. Dies geschieht nicht nur vom biblischen Zeugnis her (242ff), sondern auch von moderner, erfahrungswissenschaftlich begründeter Erkenntnistheorie her. Diesen letzten Aspekt bringt Michel vor allem in einer Reihe von hochinteressanten Exkursen ein. Danach ist Erkenntnis nie entweder ganz voraussetzungslos oder bloß subjektiv-apriorisch, sondern immer ein Korrespondenzgeschehen in der Interaktion zwischen Subjekt und Umwelt; sie ist nie 'reine' Erkenntnis, und doch ist sie wirkliche Erkenntnis ihres Gegenstands (155ff, vgl. 184ff; 238). Es ist geradezu aufregend zu sehen, wie hier sogenannte moderne Theologie gleichsam 'links' überholt wird, indem aufgrund der bei Michel vollzogenen Öffnung der Theologie für die Erfahrung die Erfahrungswissenschaft in die Theologie integriert wird. Entsprechendes gilt auch im Blick auf die Geschichtsforschung. 'Hier wie dort gilt es, die verengte säkularistische Sicht aufzubrechen zu einer neuen Offenheit für das Wirken Gottes und seine Wahrnehmung.' (248).

Nachdem bereits zu Anfang des 19. Jahrhunderts Schleiermacher die kantsche Trennung von Glauben und Wissen wirksam



in die Theologie eingeführt hatte, war der von ihm angeregte, aber zugleich auch unmittelbar auf Kant zurückgehende Marburger Theologe Wilhelm Herrmann der entscheidende Vermittler dieser philosophischen Weichenstellung an die Theologie des 20. Jahrhunderts. Insbesondere durch seine beiden Schüler K. Barth und R. Bultmann, die die theologische Diskussion unseres Jahrhunderts wesentlich bestimmten, hat Herrmanns Denken bis heute eine – meist zu wenig bekannte – Nachwirkung gehabt.

Um diesen Zusammenhängen nachzugehen, hat Michel jetzt eine zweite große wissenschaftliche Untersuchung vorgelegt, die sich eben mit diesem Wilhelm Herrmann, speziell seiner Lehre von der Heiligen Schrift, beschäftigt. Sie ist eine glänzende Bestätigung für die These der ersten Arbeit, daß nämlich die kantsche Erkenntniskritik von grundlegender Bedeutung für die ganze moderne Theologie ist.

Herrmanns Denken ist grundlegend geprägt von der Auseinandersetzung mit dem Säkularismus. Aus dem Dilemma der Infragestellung des christlichen Glauben durch vom Säkularismus bestimmte historische Kritik und moderne Naturwissenschaft sieht er, wie sein Lehrer Ritschl, in der strengen kantschen Trennung von Glauben und Wissen bzw. Religion und wissenschaftlicher Welterklärung den einzig möglichen Ausweg. Er sucht eine von aller Welterkenntnis unabhängige und deshalb auch unangefochtene Begründung der Religion. Er findet sie in der Sittlichkeit: Jeder Mensch, der sich seiner selbst bewußt wird, erfährt, daß er nicht einfach weltabhängiges Naturwesen ist, sondern verantwortlich für die Führung seines Lebens und das rechte Miteinander mit seinen Mitmenschen, erfährt sich als zum Tun des Guten berufen. Diese Erkenntnis wird zwar durch seine Weltabhängigkeit und sein Unvermögen, der sittlichen Forderung wirklich zu entsprechen, infrage gestellt. Aber wir machen immer wieder auch die Erfahrung, daß das Gute sich als weltüberwindende Macht erweist. Dies geschieht besonders im Leben von Christen, in einzigartiger und vollkommener Weise aber im Leben Jesu. In dieser Macht des Guten offenbart sich Gott, und das Vertrauen in

diese Macht des Guten ist Religion. Die Heilige Schrift ist nur insofern von religiöser Bedeutung, als sie diese innere Gewißheit von der Macht des Guten vermittelt. Sie ist also nicht an sich und als ganze Wort Gottes, sondern sie wird überall da partiell zum Wort Gottes, wo ein Mensch in ihr der Macht des Guten begegnet und sie ihm so selbst zum Erlebnis wird. Alles Historische, insbesondere alles äußerlich Wunderbare, ist nur der geschichtlich bedingte Rahmen, den historische Kritik ruhig auflösen kann, ohne daß dadurch die Glaubensgewißheit berührt wird. Wo man dagegen äußere Ereignisse mit Gott in Verbindung bringen will und als Offenbarung bezeichnet, da verfälscht man nach Herrmann das Glauben zum Fürwahrhalten und macht die Bibel zum Lehrgesetz. So ist z.B. auch die Auferweckung für Herrmann nur ein Glaubensgedanke, kein glaubensbegründendes Ereignis.

So ansprechend und in sich stringent diese Gedanken auch sind – und sich deshalb auch als so wirkmächtig in der Theologie des 20. Jahrhunderts erweisen konnten, so sehr widersprechen sie doch, wie Michel deutlich macht, dem Selbstzeugnis der Schrift, das eben nicht nur Ausdruck religiöser Erfahrung sein will, sondern Zeugnis vom geschichtlichen Handeln Gottes. Dieses will vom Menschen wahrgenommen und im Glauben angenommen werden. Aber es geht diesem Glauben, ihn begründend, immer voraus. So spitzt sich im Schriftverständnis schließlich alles zu auf die Alternative: Was ist die Bibel – Glaubensdokument oder Geschichtsbuch? Durch den Einfluß der beiden bedeutendsten Schüler Herrmanns, Barth und Bultmann, hat, in unterschiedlicher Weise, sich Herrmanns Option für das Verständnis der Bibel als Glaubensdokument im Hauptstrom der Theologie unseres Jahrhunderts durchgesetzt. Michel weist an einigen Stellen auf solche Nachwirkungen Herrmanns ausdrücklich hin. Aber auch darüber hinaus ist dieser Zusammenhang in Michels sorgfältiger Darstellung und Analyse der Theologie Herrmanns auf Schritt und Tritt gleichsam mit Händen zu greifen.

In gewisser Hinsicht vermag das Denken Herrmanns gerade auf missionarisch gesinnte Christen eine faszinierende Anzie-



hungskraft auszuüben: der Gedanke, wie wir angesichts der Herausforderung durch die moderne profane Wissenschaft und Technik noch Christen sein können, und wie unter den Bedingungen der Moderne ein Mensch Christ werden kann, ist Grund- und Leitmotiv der ganzen theologischen Arbeit Hermanns. Er versucht, der christlichen Religion dadurch zum Überleben zu helfen, daß er die kantsche Trennung von Glauben und Wissen übernimmt. Aber die Kosten für diese Rettungsaktion sind hoch, zu hoch müssen wir sagen: denn sie bedeuten die Lösung des Glaubens von den Wurzeln des von der Bibel bezeugten und durch sie erkennbaren geschichtlichen Offenbarungshandelns Gottes, damit aber letztlich auch vom Gott der Bibel. Es wird höchste Zeit, daß die in diesem Buch nur angedeuteten alternativen Konzeptionen (Hamann, Cremer, Schlatter u.a.) wieder ernsthaft bedacht und für eine die Wirklichkeit Gottes dem Menschen unserer Zeit neu bezeugende Theologie fruchtbar gemacht werden.

In der Aufdeckung dieser weithin ver-

borgenen geistesgeschichtlichen Zusammenhänge und ihrer grundlegenden Bedeutung für die Theologie unseres Jahrhunderts sind die beiden Untersuchungen Michels von kaum überschätzbarer Bedeutung. Ihnen ist deshalb weite Beachtung zu wünschen. Dabei mag vielleicht hilfreich sein, daß zumindest das Werk über W. Herrmann in seinem klaren Aufbau und seiner verständlichen Sprache sehr gut lesbar ist und offensichtlich auch didaktische Begabung verrät.

Es wäre darüber hinaus dringend zu hoffen, daß sich einem so hochqualifizierten Theologen, wie der Autor dieser beiden wegweisenden Untersuchungen es offensichtlich ist, der ihm aufgrund der institutionell verkrusteten Universitätsstrukturen im deutschsprachigen Bereich bisher verschlossene Weg ins akademische Lehramt möglichst bald öffnete.

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# Book Reviews/Revue des Livres/ Buchbesprechungen

EuroJTh (1993) 2:1, 81–82

0960–2720

## Assurance of Faith

Joel R. Beeke

New York: Peter Lang, 1991, 16 + 518 pp., \$42.95

### SUMMARY

*This book reviews the doctrine of assurance from the early Church to Puritanism and the Dutch Second Reformation (Part I). Part II is devoted to the doctrine in Puritanism, and Part III compares English Puritanism with the Dutch Second Reformation. The book laments the modern Church's neglect of the doctrine. The reviewer broadly endorses the book's thesis, arguing that the practical and pastoral concern for assurance would 'warm up' contemporary discussion of the Trinity.*

### RÉSUMÉ

*Dans la première partie de son livre, J. Beeke retrace l'évolution de la doctrine de l'assurance de la foi, depuis l'Église primitive jusqu'au temps des puritains et de la Seconde Réforme hollandaise. Il consacre la deuxième partie à l'étude de la doctrine chez les puritains, et la troisième à une comparaison du puritanisme anglaise et de la Seconde Réforme hollandaise. Il déplore que l'Église d'aujourd'hui néglige cette doctrine. A. P. F. Sell approuve, en général, la thèse du livre, et suggère qu'un intérêt pastoral et pratique pour la doctrine de l'assurance de la foi pourrait introduire plus de 'chaleur' dans les débats actuels sur la Trinité.*

### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

*Dieses Buch untersucht die Lehre von der Glaubensgewißheit: im ersten Teil die Entwicklung dieser Lehre von der Urgemeinde bis zum Puritanismus und der zweiten niederländischen Reformation, im zweiten Teil widmet es sich ausschließlich dieser Lehre im Puritanismus und vergleicht im dritten Teil den englischen Puritanismus mit der zweiten niederländischen Reformation. Der Autor bemängelt die Vernachlässigung dieser Lehre seitens der heutigen Kirche. Der Rezensent befürwortet weitgehend die These des Buches, daß eine praktisch-seelsorgerliche Beschäftigung mit der Glaubensgewißheit die gegenwärtige Diskussion um die Trinität mit Leben erfüllen könnte.*

With this substantial and welcome volume Joel R. Beeke makes a significant and diverse contribution to the history and import of a currently neglected doctrine. The diversity is revealed in his elucidation of the development of the doctrine of assurance through the centuries to the Dutch Second Reformation; his holding together of the British and Dutch aspects of the matter; his engaging in the current 'Calvinism *versus* Calvin' debate; and his pleading for a faith which is biblically-grounded, reasoned, experimental and practical. That he can hold all of these concerns together and leave us with a volume which is a unity is testimony to his considerable organizational skill.

The author's thesis is that 'Calvinism's wranglings with assurance were *quantitatively* beyond, but not *qualitatively* contradictory to, that of Calvin'. In Part One, 'Assurance prior to the Westminster Assembly', he outlines the (relatively scanty) treatment of the doctrine of assurance in the early and medieval Church, proceeding thence to 'The Reformation from Luther to Bullinger', 'Reformed developments in Calvin and Beza', and 'The fathers of English Puritanism and the Dutch Second Reformation'. Dr. Beeke's route may very roughly be charted by this following collage of quotations:

'[F]or Calvin assuring faith compels an indissoluble tie between *saving knowledge*, the *Scriptures*, *Jesus Christ*, *God's promises*, the *work of the Holy Spirit*, and *election* . . . Calvin clearly allows for varying degrees of faith and assurance . . . For Beza and Calvin, the critical point is *faith in Christ*. There are no *essential* differences between their views on assurance, though their *emphases* and *methods* vary considerably – no doubt in some measure due to their being in different milieus . . . Teelinck was not simply a duplicate of Perkins. In some senses he "out-puritaned" the "father" of Puritanism by his intense emphasis on godly living, the fruits of love, the marks of grace, and the primacy of the will'.

The ground laid, the author turns in Part Two to 'Assurance from the Westminster Assembly to Alexander Comrie'. He discusses 'English Puritanism and the Westminster Confession, chapter 18', 'John Owen', and 'Alexander Comrie'. He finds that 'Though the Puritans deny works-righteousness on the one hand against the "legalist", they also reject the notion of assurance



which rests on mere doctrine against the cold "professor" of Christianity . . . The organic yet distinct relationship between . . . saving faith in its essence and developed assurance, was critical for the Puritans from a pastoral perspective . . . In Part Three, 'Comparison of English Puritanism and the Dutch Second Reformation', Thomas Goodwin and Owen, and Goodwin and Comrie are compared, Goodwin being revealed as the one in whom, above all, English and Dutch teaching on assurance was synthesized. In his 'Conclusion' Dr. Beeke rehearses the difference of emphasis between English and Dutch Calvinism – for example, the English Puritans emphasised the marks of grace, the Dutch of the New Reformation the steps of grace – and laments the fact that today's Church is 'for the most part, scarcely aware that it is crippled with a comparative absence of strong, full assurance'. There follows a helpful appendix on 'The Dutch Second Reformation'.

This detailed, clearly organised work reads well (though sometimes the small words let the author down – as in the sentence just quoted; and he is too fond of italics and of the adjective, 'renowned'). The notes are a mine of information, and whole courses of lectures could be developed out of some of them. Where necessary Dr. Beeke offers grounds for dissenting from such older scholars as William Cunningham and John McLeod, and from such of his contemporaries as W. Niesel and R. T. Kendall. There are occasional slips, as when in the Bibliography my former esteemed colleague Lawrence Proctor is rebaptised; and the omission of the late Robert Paul's magisterial work on the Westminster Assembly is surprising.

Close analysis of the author's case cannot be entered upon here, though it is possible to endorse his main argument. Three general remarks may, however, be made. First, Dr. Beeke writes, 'Perkins knew that his hearers would be led to fundamental questions such as these: "Am I one of the elect . . . How may I be sure that I possess true faith . . . ?"'. One wonders how many ministers of today face a barrage of such questions. Ought we to be worried if they do not? For the Puritans, 'God's absolute promises in election and covenant are solid pillars for increasing weak faith'. If they are right, is it not disturbing that predestination – even as good news – is conspicuous by its absence from many statements and affirmations of faith published by Reformed churches over the past thirty years?

Secondly, there is a welcome recovery of the doctrine of the Trinity in current systematic theology. An intensely practical and pastoral concern for assurance as here discussed – and trinitarian references abound – would 'warm up'

trinitarian discussion and act as a safeguard against the Trinity's becoming simply a systematician's presupposition, or a counter to be played. These writings also implicitly question the wedge which is sometimes driven between the so-called 'academic' and the so-called 'practical' in theological education. At the same time, when Dr. Beeke throws down the gauntlet thus: 'saving faith is essential to the true study of Christian theology. When theology is properly undertaken, even its scientific aspect cannot be divorced from faith', one hesitates over the word 'study'. However it may be with theological construction, I, for one, wish theology to be studied and criticised by believers and unbelievers alike. Accordingly, we must take care that the terms 'true' and 'properly' are not used in such a way as to legitimate a patronising, falsely proud new gnosticism in the academy along the lines, 'Lack of comprehension, or of assent, is only what you would expect from the uninitiated/unsaved/unsound'!

Thirdly, we are informed that Dr. Beeke is 'pastor of a very large congregation in Grand Rapids, Michigan'. There is reassurance (save the pun!) in the fact that while some in comparable positions have, willingly or not, come more and more to resemble directors of corporations, Dr. Beeke continues to exalt the vocation of director of souls.

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EuroJTh (1993) 2:1, 82–84

0960–2720

### ***Rethinking Genesis***

**D. A. Garrett**

Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991, 273 pp. pb. np.

### **SUMMARY**

*The author rejects the documentary hypothesis, but finds literary sources within Genesis, and proposes in particular that Genesis conforms to a pattern of prologue-threat-resolution found in the Atrahasis epic, and which he calls the 'ancestor epic'. The reviewer thinks the author has not demonstrated sufficient literary parallels to be convincing, and further that he is speculative in his reconstruction of sources underlying Genesis.*

### **RÉSUMÉ**

*D. A. Garrett rejette l'hypothèse documentaire classique, mais il croit retrouver les sources littéraires de la Genèse à l'aide de la critique des formes. Il*



*pense que Gn 1–11, et, par extension, toute la Genèse, sont construits selon la structure prologue-menace-dénouement, que l'on trouve dans l'épopée d'Atrahasis, et qui serait caractéristique d'un genre qu'il nomme 'l'épopée des ancêtres'. T. D. Alexander estime que Garrett ne fait pas état de parallèles littéraires assez nombreux pour convaincre, et que sa reconstruction des sources qui auraient été utilisées pour composer la Genèse reste très conjecturale.*

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

*Der Autor lehnt die Urkundenhypothese ab, erkennt aber literarische Quellen in dem Buch Genesis. Er vertritt vor allem die These, daß das Buch Genesis einem Prolog-Verhängnis-Auflösung Muster entspricht, wie es im Atrahasis-Epos vorkommt, welches vom ihm als das 'Ur-Epos' bezeichnet wird. Der Rezensent ist der Meinung, der Autor habe zu wenig literarische Quellen angeführt um überzeugend zu sein und darüberhinaus beruhe seine Rekonstruktion der Quellen des Buches Genesis auf Spekulationen.*

For over a century Old Testament biblical scholarship has been dominated by the Documentary Hypothesis developed by K. H. Graf, A. Kuenen and J. Wellhausen. The last two decades, however, have witnessed such an erosion of the theory's foundations that, for many, the entire structure has already collapsed. While some scholars struggle to bolster its crumbling edifice, others are already proposing what should stand in its place. It is against this background that Garrett postulates a new theory regarding the origins of the book of Genesis.

His study falls into three main parts. In Part 1 he focuses firstly on the Documentary Hypothesis, then on the associated methodologies of form-criticism and historical-criticism, and finally on the issue of Mosaic authorship and historical reliability. His evaluation of the Documentary Hypothesis is brief, and, echoing other recent writers, he concludes that it 'must be abandoned' as 'methodologically unsound' (p. 32). Next Garrett considers contemporary form-critical and tradition-historical approaches which seek to recover the earliest oral and literary stages by which the text of Genesis developed. While highly critical of contemporary studies, he is convinced that used properly form-criticism may help uncover the sources behind Genesis. Finally, Garrett challenges the current trend to view most of the Pentateuch as deriving from the middle of the first millennium BC by arguing that 'it is possible to speak meaningfully of Genesis as a work that goes back to Moses himself' (p. 86). While his case is supported with sound arguments, it is unlikely

to convince those who do not share his evangelical presuppositions.

In Part 2 Garrett develops his own theory on how Genesis came into being. At the heart of his approach is the idea that one can isolate within the present text of Genesis a number of literary sources. Initially, he focuses on the genealogies and concludes that these witness to a set of *toledoth* sources. He then proceeds to develop further the proposal of I. M. Kikawada and A. Quinn (*Before Abraham Was: A Provocative Challenge of the Documentary Hypothesis* [Nashville: Abingdon] 1985) that chapters 1–11 of Genesis resemble the structure found in the ancient Mesopotamian cosmological myth of Atrahasis (that is, a prologue, followed by three major stories of threat, and, finally, a resolution). Garrett not only accepts that Genesis 1–11 conforms to this pattern, but argues that the whole of Genesis reflects the same structure, a form which he designates 'ancestor epic'. Furthermore, he argues that the same pattern explains the origin of a number of other passages in Genesis (i.e., the Ancestor Epic of Jacob [Prologue: 25:21–34; First Threat 27:1–28:22; Second Threat 29:1–31:55; Third Threat 32:1–33:20; Resolution 35:1–22b]; the Wife-as-sister Epic [12:10–20; 20:1–18; 26:1, 7–17]; The Lot Epic [13:1–18; 14:1–24; 18:1–19:38]; the Hagar Epic [16:1–16; 21:1–21]). In addition to these sources, Garrett proposes that one can isolate in Genesis several Negotiation Tales (e.g., 23:1–20; 24:1–67; 34:1–31), an Abraham Source (12:1–9; 15:1–21; 17:1–27; 22:1–19), which he most remarkably designates 'the Gospel of Abraham', and a Migration Epic of Joseph (37:3–50:21).

While Garrett offers some interesting insights, his attempt to isolate the sources underlying the present text of Genesis is unlikely to win much support for several reasons. Firstly, Garrett's thesis rests substantially on the assumption that there existed in the ancient world distinctive literary forms which were used in the construction of the sources underlying Genesis. The most important of these he calls 'ancestor epic'. Yet apart from the various examples which he isolates in the book of Genesis, he offers only one extra-biblical example, the Atrahasis Epic. To substantiate his theory Garrett must demonstrate from extra-biblical literature that the ancestor epic was indeed a widely used form in the ancient world. His argument for the existence of such a form on the basis of examples drawn from the text of Genesis proves nothing; it is circular. The same basic criticism is applicable to his suggestion that the Joseph Story resembles Virgil's *Aeneid* in that both are 'migration epics'. Garrett's assertion that the Joseph story and the *Aeneid* 'belong to a common literary category' (p. 178) is highly questionable and must be viewed with consider-



able scepticism. Finally, Garrett is unable to identify any literary form of the 2nd millennium BC which resembles his 'Gospel of Abraham'; rather he is forced to adopt a designation which first appears almost 2,000 years after the time of Abraham.

Secondly, reservations must be expressed about the way in which Garrett manipulates the Genesis material. For example, he proposes that the three wife/sister incidents once constituted an independent 'ancestor epic'. To substantiate this claim he presupposes that the original epic was broken up with only some parts being incorporated into Genesis. Similarly, the narratives involving Hagar are classified as 'ancestor epic' despite the fact that this material consists of only two elements and not three. To account for this discrepancy Garrett suggests that 'the early narrators simply told it as a binary structure on the basis of the information they had' (p. 143). While one cannot dismiss completely these explanations regarding the wife/sister and Hagar pericopes, one senses that at these points Garrett is guilty of making the evidence fit the theory rather than making the theory fit the evidence.

Thirdly, Garrett is much too optimistic in believing that he can recover with reasonable certainty the sources underlying the book of Genesis; nowhere does he acknowledge adequately the difficulties of recovering the sources underlying an ancient text. If we are to learn anything from the present demise of the Documentary Hypothesis, it is that we lack the knowledge to reconstruct the process by which the present text of Genesis took shape. Those familiar with the complexities of the relationship between the Synoptic Gospels will appreciate how difficult it is to determine the process by which Matthew or Mark or Luke developed. If problems arise where there are three documents to compare, how much more difficult must the task be when one is dealing with a single text.

In the third part of his study Garrett deals firstly with the origin of Genesis 1 and its relationship to chapters 2–11. He concludes that 1:1–2:3 was revealed directly to Moses who subsequently used it as the prologue to the book of Genesis which he produced using the sources outlined above. Next he explores the idea that the sources underlying Genesis were preserved by the Levites 'who were regarded as clerics by the people prior to the exodus' (p. 232). Finally, based on the observation that 'a theme of alienation pervades the entire text of Genesis' (p. 233) he defends the idea of Mosaic authorship by arguing that the most likely setting for the composition of the book was the exodus period.

Garrett's conclusions will appeal strongly to those who believe that the Pentateuchal material

derives from Moses. Unfortunately, his approach is methodologically unsound because he fails to give sufficient attention to the text of Genesis as it now stands. Garrett depends too much on structures derived from other ancient near eastern documents. As a result he manipulates various parts of the text of Genesis in order to make them conform to a particular structure (e.g. his treatment of the Abraham cycle, 11:27–25:11). While Garrett has clearly attempted to approach the source analysis of Genesis afresh, his proposals should be treated with the greatest caution.

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EuroJTh (1993) 2:1, 84–85

0960–2720

***God, Language, and Scripture: Reading the Bible in the Light of General Linguistics***

Moisés Silva

Foundations of Contemporary Interpretation, vol. 4. Leicester, UK.: Apollos, and Grand Rapids: Academie Books (Zondervan) 1990, x + 160 pp., £7.95, ISBN 0 85111 504 7

**SUMMARY**

*The book is a study of language in relation to biblical doctrine. It contains an introduction to linguistics and a discussion of the development of Hebrew, Aramaic and Greek. The most substantial part of the book describes the biblical languages at the level of sounds, words, sentences, paragraphs and larger units. The writing is clear, vigorous and learned.*

**RÉSUMÉ**

*M. Silva propose, en fait, une 'introduction à la linguistique générale appliquée à la Bible, avec des prolégomènes théologiques'. Son ouvrage étudie aussi l'évolution de l'hébreu, de l'araméen, et du grec. La partie principale décrit les langues bibliques du point de vue des sons, des mots, des phrases, des paragraphes et des unités linguistiques supérieures. Cet ouvrage admirable est écrit avec science, vigueur et clarté.*

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**

*Dieses Buch untersucht Sprache in Bezug auf biblische Lehre. Es enthält eine Einführung in die Linguistik und bespricht die Entwicklung der hebräischen, aramäischen und griechischen Sprachen. Der Hauptteil des Buches beschreibt die Sprachen der Bibel auf der Ebene von Lauten, Worten, Sätzen,*



*Absätzen und größeren Einheiten. Der Stil des Autors ist klar, überzeugend und wissenschaftlich.*

The subtitle of this admirable book might have been more precise, if more cumbersome, if it had read: 'An introduction to general linguistics as applied to the Bible, with a theological prolegomenon'.

The prolegomenon covers biblical perspectives on language in relation to creation, sin, and redemption, focusing on the linguistic implications of the doctrine that humanity is made in God's image. This chapter, though copiously illustrated by biblical references, deals more in principles than in specifics; it does not, for example, raise the question of what appear to modern readers as false etymologies in the Old Testament.

The introduction to linguistics begins with a chapter entitled 'The Scientific Study of Language', which concisely explains synchrony, linguistic structuralism, Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*, and the primacy of oral over written language. For good measure, the reader is given a whirlwind tour of the various disciplines relevant to the study of language.

Much of this will be new to many students of the biblical languages. They may feel more at home in the following discussion of the development of Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, though even here, they will probably learn something, and see what they already know in a fresh perspective.

The most substantial part of the book consists of two chapters devoted to 'Describing the Biblical Languages', successively at the levels of sounds, words, sentences, paragraphs and larger units. Wherever appropriate, form and meaning are discussed separately, and there is a special treatment of ambiguity.

An Epilogue deals with problems of textual transmission and translation, and there is an appendix on 'the Biblical Language in Theological Education'. The author makes extensive use of the work of E. A. Nida and publications of the United Bible Societies; his discussion of dynamic equivalence would perhaps have benefited from being based on the Good News Bible rather than on NIV.

The writing is clear, compressed, and vigorous; and notes and bibliography provide ample food to satisfy the appetite which the book will surely arouse.

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EuroJTh (1993) 2:1, 85–86

0960–2720

## ***A Life of John Calvin: A Study in the Shaping of Western Culture***

**Alister E. McGrath**

Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990, xv + 332 pp., £19.95, ISBN 0 631 16398 0

### **SUMMARY**

*The book discusses the influence of Calvin on Geneva, and of Geneva on Calvin and his theology. It has a special interest in Calvin's influence on our culture. It is also concerned to refute the myth that Calvin was 'the dictator of Geneva'.*

### **RÉSUMÉ**

*McGrath explore l'influence qu'a eue Calvin sur Genève, et celle qu'a exercée Genève sur Calvin et sur sa théologie. Il s'intéresse aussi particulièrement à l'influence de Calvin sur notre culture, et réfute le mythe du Calvin 'dictateur de Genève'.*

### **ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**

*Dieses Buch untersucht den Einfluß Calvins auf Genf und den Einfluß Genfs auf Calvin und seine Theologie. Ein Schwerpunkt liegt auf dem Einfluß Calvins auf unsere Kultur. Ein weiteres Anliegen ist, den Mythos zu widerlegen, Calvin sei der 'Diktator von Genf' gewesen.*

Alister McGrath is one of the most prolific and most able of contemporary Reformation scholars. Having written extensively, especially on the doctrine of justification and on Luther, he has now turned his attention to John Calvin.

The scope of the work is ambitious. There are five chapters relating to the life of Calvin. These include discussion of the influence of Calvin upon Geneva and, interestingly, the influence of the Genevan environment upon Calvin and the formulation of his theology. There are two chapters on Calvin's thought, focussing on 'the medium' and 'the message', respectively. There are chapters on the spread of Calvinism and on the relation between Calvinism and western culture.

For whom is the book written? It is directed more at the student than the specialist, being a broad overview of the subject. It would be of interest to the history student as well as the theology student, with the focus on Calvin's life and his influence upon western culture. The author is concerned to present Calvin not just as a theologian but as one who has moulded our culture (pp. xi–xii).

One of the author's concerns is to refute some of the myths about Calvin. He points out that



Calvin was not the dictator of Geneva. While in no way approving the burning of Servetus, he wonders why this one execution has been singled out for attention rather than the countless others of the time. If Calvin cannot be excused in this manner, he may and must be contextualized, in an era which, lacking many of the sensitivities of twentieth-century liberal thought, regarded the execution of heretics as routine, (p. 117). The author also attacks the repeated, but unfounded, assertion that Calvin opposed Copernicus by name (p. xiv).

The author is commendably concerned to refute some of the anti-Calvin legends. But there is an alternative Calvin legend that is as much in need of refutation – the picture of a Calvin who was all but faultless and verged on infallibility. The author does not himself fall into this trap, but it might have been better if he had devoted more attention to this other danger in the interpretation of Calvin.

A book that is so general in scope is unlikely to break much new ground. The point where this most clearly happens is in the chapter on Calvin's Paris years, where the author questions the received opinion that Calvin studied at the Collège de La Marche.

How does this book compare with William J. Bouwsma's *John Calvin: A Sixteenth-Century Portrait* (Oxford, 1988), which has aroused such interest? It is less exciting and less iconoclastic than Bouwsma's book. At the same time it is a more solid book, with a secure theological underpinning, while Bouwsma is weak in this area. It is less speculative than Bouwsma's book and does not attempt to psychologise Calvin. At the same time, it is as much a 'sixteenth-century portrait' as is Bouwsma's, placing Calvin's life, thought and influence in a firmly sixteenth-century context.

On the dust cover there is a commendation from Francis Higman, a leading Calvin scholar, who states that it is 'an excellent book, remarkable in its scope, and interesting to read'. The interest is sustained by occasional flashes of humour, of which my favourite was the following: In 1532 the Paris theology faculty condemned a series of doctrines, 'including the radical suggestion that "now that God has willed that the Bible should be in French, women will take over the office of bishops and bishops the office of women. Women will preach the gospel, while bishops will gossip with young girls"'. The faculty found this too advanced for their understanding of orthodoxy' (p. 63).

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## **Le Livre de Michée**

**Daniel Schibler**

Vaux-sur-Seine: Édifac, 1989, 152 pp., 97 FrF. ISBN 2-904407-10-3

### **SUMMARY**

*The aim of this commentary is to steer a middle course between the great detail of some modern commentaries and superficial, popular treatments. In Micah, apparently conflicting viewpoints can be explained in terms of different audiences. The reign of Hezekiah is the background to Micah's prophetic hopes. The commentary is learned, clear and theologically well-grounded.*

### **RÉSUMÉ**

*Le CEB, Commentaire Evangélique de la Bible, suit une voie moyenne entre le détail extrême de certains commentaires modernes et le traitement superficiel d'ouvrages populaires. D. Schibler étudie le livre de Michée, et résout par la référence à des auditoires différents les apparences de divergences internes. Il voit dans le règne d'Ezéchias l'arrière-plan de l'espérance prophétique de Michée. Le commentaire est érudit, clair, et bien fondé théologiquement.*

### **ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**

*Das Ziel dieses Kommentars ist, einen Mittweg zu finden zwischen der Ausführlichkeit einiger moderner Kommentare und der Oberflächlichkeit von populärwissenschaftlichen Abhandlungen. Scheinbar widersprüchliche Aussagen werden durch unterschiedliche Adressaten erklärt. Die Herrschaft Hiskias bildet den Hintergrund für Michas messianische Hoffnungen. Der Kommentar ist wissenschaftlich, klar und theologisch fundiert.*

This is the first book in a language other than English that I have been asked to review, and it has been a pleasure to sample a publication from the Faculty of Evangelical Theology at Vaux-sur-Seine. Micah is the eleventh to appear in a series planned to cover the whole Bible. The stated aim is to follow a middle course between the massive detail of specialist tomes and the superficiality of some popular publications that short-circuit the task of establishing the meaning in order to arrive at an application. The commentaries are based on the original languages, but do not presuppose a knowledge of Hebrew or Greek, and make use of the principal versions of the Bible, especially those of the last decade. Readers of this



journal will welcome the stated theological stance: confidence in the truth of the inspired text, respect for its authority, interpretation according to the analogy of faith. The Micah commentary was published simultaneously in German.

In twenty-four pages of introduction Schibler covers the prophet and his times, his book and its theology. He traces the history of critical study of Micah, assesses the arguments, and adopts the 'synchronic' approach, which enables him to interpret the book whole, rather than dissected into a multitude of small, unconnected sections. Schibler believes these can be accounted for by different situations and audiences, and he would date the prophecies in the eighth century. The reign of Hezekiah provided Micah with his messianic hopes, while his invitation to northerners to take part in the Jerusalem passover (2 Chr. 30:6) depicted for Micah a 'remnant' (2:12, 13).

The commentary on the text is rigorous. The Hebrew is transliterated when reference to it is necessary, and variants are noted and assessed. Literary devices are pointed out as an aid to exegesis; e.g. the symmetry and parallelism between 5:7 and 5:8, where the conflict between the comparison 'dew from the Lord' and 'like a lion' is resolved in the light of 2 Samuel 7 and 8. In one David was a source of blessing, in the other a conqueror. Throughout the commentary the views of other commentators are taken fully into account. Only after due consideration of these does Schibler explain his own preference or his personal interpretation.

The result is an instructive and straightforward exposition of a difficult little prophecy. Schibler writes clearly and simply, carrying along with him even this foreigner whose French is rusty, and convincing me of the appropriateness of an eighth century background for an adequate understanding of Micah's prophecy. Moreover Schibler's interpretation is enlightening theologically. The author's learning has in no way diminished his faith, rather the contrary; he deals faithfully with both human treachery that results in ruin and with God's truth and mercy (7:20), that are to be fully revealed in Jesus Christ. This scholarly but positive approach interprets Micah for today.

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EuroJTh (1993) 2:1, 87-88

0960-2720

**Dictionary of Jesus and the Gospels**  
**Joel B. Green, Scot McKnight, I. Howard Marshall (eds.)**

Downers Grove, IL; Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1992, pp. xxvi + 934. £25.95.  
ISBN 0-8308-1777-80-85110-646-3

**SUMMARY**

*This is the first of an intended library of reference volumes on the New Testament literature. It contains 200 articles (a number by eminent scholars), and Scripture and subject indexes. The important topics are generally well treated; some minor articles are less useful.*

**RÉSUMÉ**

*Le dictionnaire réalisé sous la direction de J. B. Green, S. McKnight, I. H. Marshall, est le premier d'une collection d'ouvrages de référence sur le Nouveau Testament en projet. Il contient deux cents articles (nombre d'entre eux par d'éminents spécialistes) avec des index des textes bibliques et des sujets abordés. La perspective est 'évangélique' au sens large. Les sujets importants sont, en général, fort bien traités; quelques articles, de moindre importance, n'ont pas la même utilité.*

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**

*Dies ist der erste Band einer geplanten Sammlung von Nachschlagewerken zur neutestamentlichen Literatur. Er enthält 200 Beiträge (einige von hochangesehenen Wissenschaftlern) und ein Stichwort- und Bibelstellen-register. Wichtige Themen werden im allgemeinen gut bearbeitet; einige kleinere Beiträge sind weniger nützlich.*

The dust jacket of this huge volume heralds the work as 'A Compendium of Contemporary Biblical Scholarship'. If one were to add the word 'evangelical' to that designation, one would be just about right. This volume is part of a welcome effort by InterVarsity Press to create a library of reference volumes for research into various aspects of the New Testament literature, giving expression to the best of evangelical thinking (it must be said that 'evangelical' is taken in an extended sense!). This is the volume on the Gospels, to be followed by one on Paul.

It is difficult to know where to start with such a book. The articles are arranged alphabetically, and vary in length from two columns to several over 15 pages. There are about 200 articles,



conveniently indexed at the back of the book. There are also immense biblical and subject indexes. With over 200 references under the topic 'Church' one might legitimately wonder how useful some of the index entries will be. The list of ninety plus contributors is wide-ranging, including a number of familiar names as well as a number of less-known scholars.

Each entry follows a standard format. There is usually a brief definition or introduction of the topic, followed by an outline if the topic is of sufficient length. Then the treatment ensues, often beginning with a discussion of how the topic relates to any biblical or extra-biblical background, followed by discussion of the topic in the light of its presence in the Gospels. The Gospels are often individually cited to appreciate the various treatments of the given topic among the canonical writers, with the Synoptics frequently seen in distinction to John's Gospel (the distinction is not as great as many would contend for). Occasionally there is application of the topic to other New Testament writers or to the contemporary Christian context. Each entry concludes with a bibliography. Most of the sources are in English, with sufficient information so that they can be found by a diligent student. There are also abundant cross-references, making it relatively easy to find the proper heading of a topic.

The selection of authors and their topics for a dictionary of this sort is always a tricky one. Does one ask a scholar whose views are already well-known, or does one ask a scholar who has not written on a topic before? Does one ask a well-established scholar, who perhaps has not recently rethought a topic, or does one ask a younger scholar, who may be a bit idiosyncratic? These kinds of questions seem to have been well-handled in the assignment of articles for this dictionary. In this kind of book, some of the writers one might have expected are to be found, such as F. F. Bruce on canon, F. W. Danker on benefactor, H. W. Hoehner on chronology and the Herodian dynasty, B. D. Chilton on Judaism, rabbinic traditions and targums, G. N. Stanton on Q, G. R. Osborne on redaction criticism, R. H. Stein on the synoptic problem, and G. D. Fee on textual criticism. For the most part (although not without exception) the entries by the better known scholars present solid arguments for the traditional and accepted evangelical perspective on the topic. One might wish for a little more creativity in the assessment and closer attention to some recent developments in a few of them. Several of the articles by younger scholars devolve into grocery lists of references, with the information present but without the requisite narrative to tie it all together. Fortunately, this is usually (though not always) confined to articles on less significant

topics. Most of the important topics, such as the individual Gospels, the major criticisms, and a wide variety of other expected topics (e.g. parables) are treated. There are also several very pleasant surprises, such as an article on typology by C. A. Evans and on preaching from the Gospels by S. Greidanus.

An especially nice feature of the dictionary is when several different authors write on similar or related topics, giving a welcome depth because of their complementary perspectives. For example, D. C. Allison, Jr. and T. J. Gedder write articles on apocalyptic and apocalyptic teaching, with Allison also writing on eschatology. Similarly, and of even more importance, there is an article on Christ by L. W. Hurtado, as well as individual articles on logos (D. H. Johnson), son of David (D. R. Bauer), son of God (D. R. Bauer), and son of man (I. H. Marshall). Although space constraints are a factor, a similar approach would have had beneficial results in several other areas, such as in the discussion of literary and rhetorical criticism, where comparable and complementary treatments in relation to other criticisms would have been appropriate.

I cannot attempt to mention all of the contributors – many of whose excellent articles I have had to pass over in this review. Instead, I can speculate on how this book might be used. Although it is probably too expensive to be used as a textbook, it certainly could supply required readings for courses in the Gospels or on Jesus, where reasonably short yet comprehensive introductions to a variety of topics are required. A lay readership will find it useful in this regard also. This volume will certainly prove helpful for teachers and pastors, as well. Those wanting to keep up with current thinking or to refresh their memories on topics they may have studied earlier will find good material here. Teachers of varying levels will find everything from their next lecture to representative positions argued by well-informed scholars to helpful bibliographies. In all, this volume is a significant success and bodes well for future, similar projects.

**Stanley E. Porter**

Trinity Western University, Langley, B.C.,  
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D'autre part, nous aimerions aussi recevoir de nos lecteurs des renseignements sur des ouvrages qui devraient être considérés pour la revue des livres dans cette publication.

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II(1993):2

ISSN 0960-2720

26. NOV. 1993

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Typeset by Photoprint, Torquay, Devon.

Printed in Great Britain for Paternoster Periodicals,

P.O. Box 300, Carlisle,

Cumbria, CA3 0QS U.K.

by BPCC Periodicals Ltd, Exeter.

ISSN 0960-2720



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## • Salz der Erde (Matthäus 5, 13–16)

1. In der ersten Überlegung soll es um das 'ihr' gehen. Wer sind die Angeredeten? Der Kontext macht deutlich, daß Jünger gemeint sind, das heißt, Menschen, die das bereits besondere Meister-Schüler-Verhältnis der Rabbinen überbietend nicht nur in der Gemeinschaft Jesu leben und mit ihm im Gespräch sind, sondern ihm als Person und Autorität nachfolgen. Das waren damals vor allem die Zwölf. Dann ist es die Gemeinde des Matthäus, schließlich die Kirche aller Zeiten. Sicher sind diese 'ihr' auch die einzelnen Jünger, aber darin ist der Sinn der Beauftragung nicht erschöpft. Es ist in besonderer Weise die *Gemeinde* angeredet, die mehr ist, als die Summe der einzelnen Jünger. Das unterstreicht das Bild von der Stadt auf dem Berge. Gerade die Gemeinde in ihrem besonderen Sein und Lebenszusammenhang, der sich in Begriffen wie Ekklesia und Koinonia und im Bild vom Leib ausdrückt, ist die Beauftragte. Klaus Bockmühl sagte in Lausanne 1974, daß nach seinem Urteil in Zukunft zwei große Themen auf die Tagesordnung der Evangelikalen kommen würden: Die Geistfrage und die Gemeindefrage. Ich denke für das letztgenannte Thema z.B. an Beiträge von Howard Snyder, Michael Griffiths, Rainer Riesner, die uns Kirche als Jüngergemeinde zu dolmetschen versuchen, wie sie gerade in ihrem Lebenszusammenhang, ihrer Beziehungswirklichkeit zu Christus und untereinander das Gegenüber zur restlichen Welt ist, und nicht lediglich als eine Summe einzelner Jünger.

Wir heute hören diese Beauftragung nicht in der Situation des Ursprungs. Wir kommen besonders in Europa her von einer langen Geschichte der Kongruenz, der Vermischung und nicht des klaren Gegenübers von Kirche und Welt. Diese Kongruenz ist allerdings zerfallen und zerfällt immer mehr, und es schält sich das ursprüngliche Gegenüberverhältnis heraus. Die Reaktion darauf bei uns Christen stellt sich oft dar als eine eigentümliche Mischung aus tapferer Bejahung und Trauer. Ich bin überzeugt, daß das klare Gegenüberverhältnis von Gemeinde und Welt das 'Modell' Jesu ist. Ich sage das nicht mit der Genugtuung des Freikirchlers, der ich bin, auch wenn ich das freikirchliche Modell für das der Absicht Jesu angemessenere halte. Es gibt nämlich nicht wenige Freikirchler, die dies besondere Sein als Gegenüber und Herausforderung an den Rest der Welt selbst nicht mehr begreifen. Und es gibt umgekehrt in den

Volkskirchen in einer Variationsbreite von Gestaltungen Gemeindebau im biblischen Sinne. Ferner: Manche Evangelikale haben nur eine sehr eingeschränkte Hoffnung, daß diese 'Stadt auf dem Berge' überhaupt noch mit den historischen Kirchen und Freikirchen gebaut werden kann. Sie setzen auf neue, unabhängige Gemeindegründungen, von denen es bereits viele gibt. Die Herausforderung für uns alle, einschließlich auch der Neugründungen sehe ich in der von Jesus gemeinten Jüngergemeinde, an der sich die Kirche aller Zeiten beständig ausrichten muß.

2. Die nächste Überlegung betrifft das *Mengenverhältnis*. Ein universaler Auftrag ergeht und ein armseliger Haufe in den galliläischen Bergen ist angeredet. Besonders das Bildwort vom Salz macht deutlich, daß Jesus offenbar grundsätzlich seine Beauftragten in der Minderheitensituation vor Augen hat. Sie sind Salz, nicht Teig oder Suppe. Diese Botschaft hat dennoch keinen depressiven, sondern einen positiven Charakter: Wenig Salz, wenig Licht reichen aus für eine große Wirkung. Wie gehen wir mit dieser Einsicht um?

Sie bedeutet, daß die Jünger ihren Minderheitenstatus in der Welt annehmen sollen. Er ist kein Unglück. Er hat die Verheißungen Jesu. Dieser Minderheitenstatus ist auch dann kein Unglück, wenn das Leiden für Jesus sein Merkmal ist, wie der Kontext in Vers 11 und 12 zeigt. Schwestern und Brüder aus Osteuropa könnten bezeugen, wie diese Gestalt der Jüngerschaft schwer ist, wie sie aber die Einlösung der Verheißung Jesu in vielfältiger Weise erfahren haben. Die Gemeinde muß sich daher hüten vor all' den verständlichen Versuchen, den Minderheitenstatus zu überwinden, etwa durch Macht und Rechtsansprüche. Aber auch die positive Variante ganzer bekehrter Dörfer, Städte und Länder ist offenbar die Ausnahme. In einer Arbeitsgruppe würden wir an dieser Stelle jetzt sicher zum Beispiel das Für und Wider christlicher Firmen, christlicher Schulen, christlicher Wohngemeinschaften usw. diskutieren. Soweit zum Problem der Überwindung der Minderheitensituation.

Andererseits soll sich die Gemeinde hüten, vor all den mit dem Minderheitenstatus selbst verbundenen Gefahren: Sie muß sich vor allem vor dem Minderwertigkeitsgefühl hüten. Sie soll zuversichtlich in ihrer hohen Berufung sein. Dann muß sie sich vor der 'Ghettomentalität'



hüten, dem oft so verständlichen Rückzug ins 'Salzfaß'. Falsch ist schließlich auch die Glorifizierung der kleinen Zahl und der Kümmerlichkeit als gottgewollt. Wir Europäer dürfen es von Gemeinden der Dritten Welt lernen, daß die kleine Jüngergemeinde große Verheißungen hat, daß sie Völker zu Jüngern machen soll und daß Gott hinzutun will. Das kann dann auch einmal sogar zu bekehrten Dörfern und zu großen Zahlen führen. Die erste Herausforderung in Lausanne 1974 für mich ergab sich genau zu diesem Thema: Ein afrikanischer Bruder fragte mich in der Eingangshalle nach der gegenseitigen Vorstellung: 'Brother, does your church grow?' Verbunden mit dieser Frage habe ich die andere Frage empfunden: 'Do you expect . . . ?' Ich bekenne, daß ich seit damals sicher nicht lebendig genug mit dieser Erwartung lebe, aber meine Erwartung ist gewachsen.

3. Worin besteht die *Aufgabe* der Gemeinde, die mit den beiden Bildern ausgedrückt wird? Im Hinblick auf die Aufgabe werden für das Salz die beiden Lösungen des Würzens und der Bewahrung vor Fäulnis erwogen. Die meisten evangelikalen Ausleger entscheiden sich für die zweite Lösung, der Bewahrung der Welt davor, sofort faul und gerichtsreif zu werden. Die Gemeinde habe die Aufgabe, das Gericht aufzuhalten und die Gnadenzeit zu verlängern. Einfacher liegen die Dinge beim Licht. Hier handelt es sich um ein bekanntes biblisches Bild. Im biblischen Klartext sind die Aufgaben der Orientierung, der Reinheit und der Wärme erkennbar (z.B. Eph. 5.1ff; Phil. 2.14ff). Die Jüngergemeinde hat also für die Erde/Welt die Doppelfunktion der Bewahrung durch Verlängerung der Gnadenzeit und der wegweisenden Orientierung. Für Licht und Salz gemeinsam gilt, daß es gegen ihren Sinn ist, nicht zu salzen und nicht zu leuchten. Die Gemeinde hat aber offenbar diese unmöglich Möglichkeit. Das ist der Sinn der ernststen Warnung. Gemeinsam ist ebenfalls für Salz und Licht, daß beide keinen Selbstzweck haben. Salz und Licht haben 'an sich' keine Bedeutung, sondern nur in ihrer Funktion. Man kann diese Wahrheit allerdings auch so überbetonen, daß daraus eine 'Funktionalisierung' der Gemeinde für die Welt wird. Dagegen ist dann biblisch festzuhalten, daß Gemeinde auch eine Bedeutung in sich selbst hat, nämlich für das Leben und das Wachstum ihrer Leute. Ebenso hat sie eine klare Bedeutung für Gott, nämlich für sein Lob und seine Ehre. Aber in unserem Text ist sicher die andere Seite betont. Und das ist für viele selbstgenügsame Gemeinden ein notwendiger Stachel.

4. Die vierte Überlegung betrifft die *Missionswege* der Gemeinde. Wodurch nimmt sie ihren Auftrag wahr, Licht und Salz zu sein? Im Text spricht nur Vers 16 direkt dazu. In den Auslegung-

en begegnen uns darüber hinaus für Salz und Licht viele Angebote: Das Wort sei Hauptinstrument der Gemeinde . . . . Sie habe vor allem die Aufgabe, Jesus als Person der Welt nahe zu bringen . . . . Gebet und Evangelisation sei der vornehmste Weg der weltweiten Aufgabe . . . . Ein glaubwürdiger Lebensstil im Sinne von Vers 16 sei unverzichtbar.

Diese Palette der Konkretisierungen unseres Auftrages berührt zentral die Themen von Lausanne und Manila zum Missionsverständnis: Etwa wenn die absolute Priorität hinzugefügt wird; wenn die Bedeutung des einfachen Lebensstils hervorgehoben wird; wenn die Rolle auch einer politischen Salzfunktion wachsend gesehen wird. Ein Sensus ist gewachsen, daß es um ein vielschichtiges, lebendiges Gesamtbild der Sendung geht, dessen Träger lebendige Jüngerschaft, Jüngergemeinde ist. Es wird aber auch deutlich in vielen Verlautbarungen, daß dieses Gesamtbild nicht leicht beschreibbar und noch weniger leicht lebbar ist. Jede Facette kann unversehens als das Ganze behauptet werden, sei es nun das Wort oder der einfache Lebensstil.

Zu wenig erscheint meines Erachtens in den Auslegungen und Verlautbarungen der Hinweis auf die Qualifizierung der Jüngerschaft, wie Jesus sie in den Seligpreisungen ausspricht, die doch im unmittelbaren Kontext zur Beauftragung stehen. Steht dahinter das Urteil oder das hilflose Empfinden, daß diese fundamentalen Qualifizierungen der vorhandenen Kirchlichkeit und Gemeindewirklichkeit zu fern sind? Ich bekenne, daß ich je und je diese Hilflosigkeit teile und meist erst durch eines der Worte der Seligpreisungen neu getroffen und erinnert werden muß, etwa das vom einfältigen Herzen oder das von der Barmherzigkeit. Ich merke an mir selbst einen Widerstand gegen solche Existenzweise und einen Unglauben, daß die Verheißungen, die Jesus daran anschließt, wahr sind. Meistens ist der Auslöser eines neuen fundamentalen Begreifens entweder ein schamvolles Negativverhalten bei mir oder in der Gemeinde oder aber die Begegnung mit Menschen, die mit Gottes Hilfe in der Linie der geistlich Armen zu leben versuchen. Beides wird an solchen Leuten in der Regel sofort klar: Sie sind Gegenüber zum Rest der Welt (und oft innerhalb der Gemeinde), sie sind Minderheit, aber sie sind Salz und Licht für ihren Umkreis.

5. Als Schlußüberlegung der Hinweis auf die Bewahrung vor all den Gefährdungen, die wir genannt haben, dummes Salz und nicht-leuchtendes Licht zu sein. Es sind Bewahrungen, für die Jesus selbst sorgen will. Zum einen wird das lebbar, wozu Jesus beauftragt, wenn wir es wirklich als Jünger leben, daß heißt in nachösterlicher Verlängerung zur damaligen Jünger-



situation in lebendiger geistlicher Verbindung zu ihm, wenn wir also 'in Christus' leben. Es wird lebbar also, wenn dieses Geheimnis (Kol. 1,27) vor der Tat, vor der Aktion steht. Unser Auftrag schließlich wird bewahrt vor Nebentönen, wenn unsere Zielsetzungen sich immer wieder darin ausrichten, daß Menschen gemäß Vers 16 anfangen, Gott die Ehre zu geben, die sie ihm vorenthalten haben. Mich hat es mit Verwunderung und Freude erfüllt, was ich in der Selbstvor-

stellungsschrift einer Gemeinde las, deren Pastor bei uns im Unterricht über diese Gemeinde berichtete. Es hieß dort: Erster Zweck unserer Gemeinde ist es, Gott zu loben und ihm die Ehre zu geben in einer Welt, die ihm Lob und Ehre verweigert. Eine solche Gemeinde wird vermutlich geschickt sein, ihre 'guten Werke' so zu placieren, daß das Lob und die Ehre Gottes bei Heiden als gutes Echo hervorgerufen wird.

## Salt of the Earth (Matthew 5:13–16)

1. The first point we observe in our text is that the address is you-plural. Who then are the addressees? The context makes clear that disciples are meant, that is, people who, in the company and conversation of Jesus, not only live in that special master-pupil relationship of the rabbis, but follow him both as person and authority. These are above all the Twelve. Secondly they are the community of Matthew, and in the last analysis the Church of all the ages. Certainly, these 'you' are also the individual disciples, but the sense of the commission is not exhausted by this. In a special way, the *community* is meant, which is more than the sum of the individual disciples. This is emphasised by the figure of the city on the hill. It is precisely the community, in its particular way of being and its mutual relationships, expressed in concepts like *ekklesia* and *koinonia*, and the metaphor of the body, that is commissioned. Klaus Bockmühl said in Lausanne in 1974, that in his judgment two great themes would in the future come to the agenda of evangelicals, namely that of the Spirit and that of the community. Regarding the latter, I think for example of the contributions of Howard Snyder, Michael Griffiths and Rainer Riesner, who have sought to interpret 'Church' for us as 'community of disciples', which in its whole life, in the reality of its relationships both among its members and to Christ, stands over against the rest of humanity, and is thus not merely the sum of individual disciples.

We today do not hear this commission as it was heard originally. Especially in Europe, we are heirs to a long history of assimilation and confusion, rather than of clear distinction between Church and world. This assimilation has of course begun to fall apart, and continues to do so, and the original oppositional relationship is re-emerging. Christians' reaction to this often appears to be a strange mixture of bold affirmation and of bereavement. I am convinced that the

clear opposition of community and world is the 'model' of Jesus.

I do not say this with the self-satisfaction of the free-churchman that I am, even if I do believe that the free church model is the truest to the intention of Jesus. For there are not a few free-church people who themselves no longer understand this particular way of being as opposition and challenge to the rest of humanity. And it must be said, there is community life in the biblical sense in the established churches, in a wide variety of forms. Yet I would maintain: many evangelicals have only the most limited hope that this 'city built on a hill' can yet be constructed within the historic churches and free churches. They aim to bring about new, independent community groupings, of which a number already exist. The challenge for us all, including the new groupings, I see in the community of disciples intended by Jesus, from which the church of all the ages must constantly take its direction.

2. Our second point concerns the relationship with the *many*. The commission is universal, yet only a tiny handful of people in the Galilean mountains is actually addressed. The term 'salt' makes clear that Jesus sees those whom he sends as being in principle in a minority situation. They are salt, not dough or soup. Nevertheless this mission has no depressive character, but rather a positive one: a little salt, a little light, can produce a great effect. What do we make of this insight?

It means that the disciples must accept their minority status in the world. It is not a misfortune. It carries the promises of Jesus. This minority status is not a misfortune even when for Jesus suffering is its badge, as the text shows in vv. 11–12. Sisters and brothers from eastern Europe can testify how hard this shape of discipleship is, yet how they have experienced the fulfilment of the promise of Jesus in many ways. The community



must therefore guard itself against all the understandable attempts to overcome its minority status, perhaps by force or by law. Even the real possibility of whole converted villages, towns and states is clearly the exception. We could devote a study group to the pros and cons of, for example, Christian firms, schools, 'communes', etc.

On the other hand, the community must guard itself against all the dangers that are bound up with minority status, especially from the feeling of inferiority. It must be confident in its high calling. Then also it must beware of the ghetto-mentality, the often understandable retreat into the 'salt-cellar'. Also wrong, of course, is the glorification of small numbers and poverty as God's will. We Europeans may learn from communities of the Third World that the small group of disciples has great promises, that it is to make disciples of nations, and that God wants to bring this about. That can then lead after all to converted villages and to great numbers. The first challenge to me in Lausanne in 1974 was on this theme: an African brother asked me in the entrance hall after we had been introduced: 'Brother, does your church grow?' Implied in this question I heard the other: 'Do you expect . . .?' I confess that since then I have certainly not had a lively enough expectation, but my expectation has grown.

4. Wherein does the *task* of the community consist that is expressed in these two pictures. For salt we may consider its two effects of seasoning and preservation. Most evangelical expositors decide for the second effect, the preservation of the world from becoming immediately depraved and liable to judgment. The community's function is to hold off judgment and prolong the time of grace. In the case of light the interpretation is more straightforward. Here we are dealing with a well known biblical image. Other biblical texts associate it with orientation, purity and warmth (e.g. Eph. 5:1ff., Phil. 2:14ff.). The community of disciples has the double function for the earth/world, therefore, of preservation by prolonging the time of grace and of giving direction. It is true of both salt and light that it is against their nature not to 'salt' and not to light. For the community, however, this impossible possibility exists; that is the sense of this stern warning. Equally it is true of both salt and light that neither is an end in itself. Of course, one can overstress this fact, so that the community becomes functionalised in relation to the world. That is to be resisted by recognising that in biblical terms the community has indeed a meaning in itself, namely the life and growth of its members. Equally it has a clear meaning for God, namely his praise and glory. Yet in our text the other aspect is

certainly stressed. And that is a necessary spur for many self-satisfied communities.

4. The fourth point concerns the community's missionary methods. In what way does it realise its task of being salt and light? In the text only v. 16 speaks directly to this. Expositions often offer us additional interpretations of salt and light: the word is the community's chief weapon . . . its primary task is to set the person of Jesus before the world . . . prayer and evangelism are the supreme way of carrying out the worldwide mission. In the terms of v. 16, however, a credible lifestyle is indispensable.

This range of concretisations of our task closely echoes the themes in the understanding of mission according to Lausanne and Manila—on the one hand when the absolute priority of evangelism is affirmed; on the other, when the role of social action is added; when the importance of a simple lifestyle is emphasised, or when the 'salt'-function in the political arena takes on growing significance. A feeling has grown up that mission consists in a many layered, living totality, whose bearers are a living discipleship, disciple-community. It is also being clearly heard, however, from many quarters, that this totality cannot easily be described, still less lived. Each facet can without intention be claimed to be the whole, whether it be proclaimed of the word, simple lifestyle, or another.

In my opinion interpretations point too seldom to the qualification of discipleship which Jesus pronounces in the beatitudes, in the immediate context of the commissioning. Is this because of a belief or a helpless sense that these fundamental qualifications lie too far removed from actual church life? I confess that I myself share again and again this helplessness, and must always be struck anew by one or other of the beatitudes, be it about the simple heart or about mercy. I notice in myself a resistance to such a way of living, and a lack of faith that the promises which Jesus attaches to them are true. Most often I am freed from this by some shameful failure in my own experience or that of the community, or by encounter with people who, with God's help, try to live the life of the 'poor in spirit'. Both sides of the truth in question are at once apparent in the lives of such people; they are a minority, in a role of opposition to other human beings (and often within the community itself), but they are salt and light for those around them.

5. Let us conclude by thinking about remedies against all the dangers which we have considered, which would make us tasteless salt and unshining light. There are remedies which Jesus himself procures. First, that which Jesus calls us to becomes real, when we really live as disciples,



that is, in living spiritual relationship with him in this post-Easter lengthening of that ancient discipleship, or to put it differently, 'in Christ'. It becomes real too when this secret (Col. 1:27) stands behind the deed or action. Our commission is protected, finally, against adulteration when we aim continually that people should begin, in the terms of v. 16 of our text, to give God the praise which they have withheld from him. I was

surprised and delighted by something that I read in one church's publicity leaflet, whose pastor spoke to us in our seminary about that congregation. It says: The first aim of our community is to praise God and give him honour in a world which refuses him praise and honour. Such a community has surely been sent so to show its good works that praise and glory of God is evoked among unbelievers as a good echo.

## Le sel de la terre (Matth. 5.13-16)

1. Commençons notre réflexion par le pronom 'vous'. A qui ces paroles sont-elles adressées? D'après le contexte, il apparaît clairement que c'est aux disciples, c'est-à-dire gens qui ont dépassé la relation habituelle entre maîtres et étudiants des cercles rabbiniques; ils ne se contentent pas d'être en communion avec Jésus et d'engager une conversation avec lui, mais ils le suivent en personne et reconnaissent son autorité. C'étaient à ce moment-là avant tout les douze. Ensuite la communauté de Matthieu. Enfin l'Eglise de tous les temps. Sans doute le terme 'vous' inclut aussi les disciples individuels; mais cette interprétation n'épuise pas le mandat dont il est question ici. La parole s'adresse spécialement à la communauté, qui est plus que la somme des disciples individuels. L'image de la ville située sur la montagne signale la chose. C'est la communauté dans son ensemble qui est chargée d'un mandat. Cela résulte de l'emploi des termes '*ekklesia*' et '*koïnonia*' et de l'image du corps. A Lausanne, en 1974, Klaus Bockmühl a déclaré qu'à son avis deux grands thèmes allaient être à l'ordre du jour des rencontres entre croyants évangéliques: celui de l'Esprit-Saint et celui de l'Eglise. En ce qui concerne ce second thème, je pense par exemple aux contributions de Howard Snyder, Michael Griffiths, Rainer Riesner qui essaient de nous présenter l'Eglise en tant que communauté de disciples, unie dans sa vie et marquée par sa relation avec le Christ et ses rapports mutuels. Elle constitue un corps en face du monde et n'est pas simplement l'ensemble des disciples ajoutés les uns aux autres.

Nous entendons parler de cette charge qui nous incombe dans une situation différente de celle d'autrefois. Particulièrement en Europe, nous avons derrière nous une longue histoire où l'Eglise et le monde coïncidaient plutôt que de se trouver l'une vis-à-vis de l'autre. Cette coïncidence a pris fin, et cela de plus en plus, si bien que notre relation avec le monde tend toujours davantage à

ressembler à la nette distinction entre l'Eglise et le monde qui prévalait aux premiers siècles de l'ère chrétienne. Notre réaction face à ce changement est un curieux mélange de courageuse acceptation et de regrets. Je suis convaincu qu'en principe une claire démarcation de l'Eglise par rapport au monde correspond aux intentions de Jésus. Je ne dis pas cela dans un sentiment d'auto-satisfaction, en ma qualité de 'libriste', quoique le régime des Eglises dissidentes me paraisse plus conforme aux vœux du Seigneur que celui des Eglises officielles. Mais il faut reconnaître que beaucoup de dissidents ne comprennent eux-mêmes plus bien que leur position hors du monde leur confère une responsabilité vis-à-vis du monde. Inversement, dans le cadre des Eglises officielles, il y a bien des communautés au sens biblique du terme qui s'édifient sous des formes diverses. De plus bien des chrétiens évangéliques n'ont que des espoirs limités à l'égard d'une 'ville sur la montagne' construite en commun par des adeptes des Eglises dissidentes et des Eglises officielles. Ils misent sur l'implantation de nouvelles communautés, déjà assez nombreuses à l'heure actuelle. Je pense que tous les chrétiens, y compris les membres des communautés nouvellement implantées, doivent assumer leurs responsabilités face aux exigences de Jésus pour ses disciples.

2. Notre sujet de réflexion suivant concerne le nombre des croyants. Jésus donne aux siens un mandat universel et s'adresse à un pauvre petit groupe d'auditeurs dans les montagnes de Galilée. L'image du sel laisse entendre que Jésus envisage fondamentalement que ses messagers seront une minorité. Ils sont du sel, non une pâte ou une soupe! Cette certitude ne doit pas être déprimante, mais encourageante. Peu de sel, peu de lumière suffisent pour produire un effet considérable. Quelle attitude avoir dans cette perspective?

L'image signifie que les disciples doivent accepter de rester une minorité dans ce monde.



Ce statut n'est pas un désastre. Il bénéficie des promesses du Seigneur. Il ne devient pas non plus un malheur, lorsqu'il est caractérisé par des souffrances pour le nom de Jésus, comme le contexte du verset 11 le suggère. Les frères et soeurs de l'Europe de l'Est peuvent attester combien cette situation de disciples peut être dure à supporter, mais aussi comment ils ont éprouvé la réalisation des promesses de Jésus de multiples manières. L'Église doit se garder de tous les essais, pourtant bien compréhensibles, de surmonter son statut de minorité par l'acquisition de pouvoirs ou de droits. Mais la variante positive, qui consisterait à voir des villages, des villes ou des pays se convertir dans leur totalité reste apparemment une exception. Dans un groupe de travail, nous devrions ici discuter du pour et du contre des entreprises chrétiennes, des écoles chrétiennes, des lotissements chrétiens, etc. Nous en avons assez dit sur la question de la situation minoritaire.

D'autre part, l'Église doit prendre garde à tous les dangers qui sont liés au statut de minorité. Elle doit avoir de l'assurance dans sa noble vocation. Elle doit aussi se garder d'une mentalité de ghetto, qui la pousserait à vouloir se retirer dans la boîte à sel! C'est aussi une erreur de se glorifier de son petit nombre et de sa misère comme si cela était dû à la volonté de Dieu. Nous autres Européens devrions apprendre de nos frères du Tiers-Monde que la petite communauté des disciples est au bénéfice de vastes promesses. Elle doit amener des nations à devenir disciples, et Dieu augmentera le nombre de ses membres. Cela peut éventuellement aboutir à la conversion de tribus entières et à des chiffres statistiques considérables. Le premier défi qui m'a été lancé à ce sujet à la conférence de Lausanne, en 1974, était en rapport avec ce thème. Un frère africain, après les présentations d'usage, m'a demandé dans le hall d'entrée: 'Frère, est-ce que votre Église progresse?' J'ai ressenti qu'une seconde question était liée à la première. 'Est-ce que vous vous y attendez?' Je reconnais que je ne vis pas suffisamment dans cette attente, mais celle-ci s'est quand même affirmée depuis lors.

3. En quoi consiste le devoir de l'Église, exprimé par les deux images que le Seigneur emploie? En ce qui concerne la première, celle du sel, on 'évoque deux fonctions: assaisonner et préserver de la corruption. La plupart des exégètes évangéliques insistent sur la seconde. L'Église empêche le monde de pourrir instantanément et d'être mûr pour le jugement. L'Église aurait la tâche de retarder le jugement et de prolonger le délai de grâce. L'explication de l'image de la lumière est plus simple. Il s'agit d'un thème biblique bien connu qui comporte le devoir d'orien-

ter, de purifier et de réchauffer (par ex. Eph. 5.1 ss, Phil. 2.14ss). La communauté des disciples a donc la double tâche de prolonger le temps de la grâce et d'orienter le monde dans la bonne direction. Ce qui caractérise à la fois le sel et la lumière, c'est qu'il serait contraire à leur nature de ne pas saler et de ne pas éclairer. Mais apparemment, l'Église est exposée à cette possibilité impossible! De là le sérieux avertissement du Maître. Une autre caractéristique commune du sel et de la lumière, c'est de ne pas exister pour soi. En soi, le sel et la lumière n'ont pas d'importance. C'est leur fonction qui importe. A vrai dire, on peut exagérer cette vérité au point de faire de l'Église un rouage simple dans le monde. Au point de vue biblique, il faut maintenir que l'Église a aussi sa signification en elle-même, en vue de la vie et du développement de ses membres. Elle a aussi sa valeur devant Dieu: elle doit contribuer à sa louange et à sa gloire. Dans notre texte cependant, c'est l'autre côté qui est souligné. C'est un aiguillon bien nécessaire pour beaucoup de communautés en danger de se complaire en elles-mêmes.

4. Notre quatrième considération concerne la tâche *missionnaire* de l'Église. Comme réalise-t-elle son mandat d'être le sel de la terre et la lumière du monde? Dans notre texte, seul le verset 16 aborde cette question d'une manière directe. Dans les commentaires, nous trouvons en plus diverses suggestions: la Parole est l'instrument privilégié de la communauté. L'Église a surtout pour tâche de présenter au monde la personne de Jésus... la prière et l'évangélisation sont les moyens par excellence d'atteindre le monde entier... un style de vie crédible dans la ligne du verset 16 est indispensable.

Cette palette de suggestions en vue de concrétiser notre tâche touche d'une manière centrale aux préoccupations de Lausanne et de Manille en ce qui concerne la compréhension de notre mission; en soulignant la priorité absolue de l'évangélisation; en y joignant le rôle de l'engagement social; en relevant l'importance d'un style de vie simple; en faisant valoir de plus en plus que l'image du sel a aussi un aspect politique. Un consensus se dessine: il s'agit d'une vision globale, pluridimensionnelle et vivante de la mission, appuyée par une communauté de disciples qui savent ce que ce terme implique. Dans beaucoup de déclarations, il apparaît aussi que cette image n'est pas facile à décrire et encore moins facile à vivre. Chaque facette risque inconsciemment d'être présentée comme constituant le tout, que ce soit la Parole ou le style de vie.

A mon avis, dans les explications et les proclamations, on ne se réfère pas suffisamment à la qualification des disciples, telle que Jésus la



défini dans les béatitudes, qui pourtant se trouvent dans le contexte immédiat des versets qui définissent notre tâche. Cela tient-il à un sentiment d'impuissance, comme si ces qualifications fondamentales étaient trop éloignées de notre expérience ecclésiale ou communautaire? J'avoue que je partage parfois ce sentiment d'impuissance, et que j'ai besoin d'être rappelé à l'ordre par telle ou telle béatitude, par exemple celle sur le cœur pur ou celle sur les miséricordieux. Je ressens en moi-même une résistance contre ce mode de vie, et de l'incrédulité face aux promesses qui y sont attachées. En général, la solution du problème se trouve dans une compréhension renouvelée de la promesse, soit à la suite d'une expérience humiliante dans ma vie personnelle ou dans celle de ma communauté, soit en raison d'une rencontre avec des gens qui avec l'aide de Dieu cherchent à vivre comme des 'pauvres en Esprit'. En règle générale, on peut constater que de telles personnes sont séparées du monde (et quelquefois de leur Église), constituant une minorité, mais qui pourtant sont le sel et la lumière dont leur entourage a besoin.

5. Notre réflexion finale nous amène à considérer la manière dont le Seigneur nous prémunit contre le danger de devenir du sel affadi ou une lumière qui n'éclaire pas. Jésus lui-même nous en préservera. D'une part la tâche que le Seigneur nous impose devient réalisable, lorsque nous sommes authentiquement ses disciples, c'est-à-dire lorsque nous acceptons le prolongement post-pascal de la situation de disciples que connaissaient ceux qui suivaient Jésus pendant son ministère terrestre, lorsque nous sommes en communion spirituelle avec lui, en un mot lorsque nous vivons 'en Christ'. C'est réalisable, quand le mystère de la présence de Christ en nous (Col. 1.27) précède notre action. D'autre part, notre vocation est préservée des déviations, quand nous prenons soin de viser toujours à nouveau le but que le Seigneur assigne à notre témoignage: à savoir que selon le verset 16 des gens en viennent à rendre à Dieu la gloire qu'ils lui doivent et qu'ils lui ont refusée. J'ai été rempli de joie et d'admiration lorsque j'ai lu le règlement intérieur d'une communauté dont le pasteur nous a rendu compte dans le cadre de son enseignement. Il était dit: le premier objet de notre communauté est de louer et de glorifier Dieu dans un monde qui refuse de lui donner honneur et gloire. Une telle communauté sera en mesure de présenter 'ses oeuvres bonnes' de telle façon que la louange et la gloire de Dieu trouvent un écho satisfaisant aussi parmi les païens.

Four of the five papers in the present issue were delivered at the FEET/GEET/AETE conference at Wölmersen in August 1992 on the subject of pluralism. The foregoing editorial was given as a biblical exposition at the conference.

The paper by Dr. Rolf Hille marked the award made to him at the conference of the Johann Tobias Beck Prize, 1992, for his book: *Das Ringen um den säkularen Menschen: Karl Heims Auseinandersetzung mit der idealistischen Philosophie und den pantheistischen Religionen*, Giessen-Basel, 1992. We add our congratulations to him on this fine achievement.

Vier der fünf Beiträge der vorliegenden Ausgabe gehen auf Vorträge zurück, die auf der dem Thema des Pluralismus gewidmeten Konferenz der FEET/GEET/AETE im August 1992 in Wölmersen gehalten wurden. Der Leitartikel gibt eine auf der Konferenz gehaltene Bibelarbeit wieder.

Der Vortrag von Dr. Rolf Hille wurde von ihm gehalten im Zusammenhang mit der während der Konferenz vollzogenen Verleihung des Johann-Tobias-Beck-Preises an ihn. Der Preis wurde ihm vom deutschen Arbeitskreis für evangelikale Theologie (AfET) zuerkannt für sein Buch *Das Ringen um den säkularen Menschen: Karl Heims Auseinandersetzung mit der idealistischen Philosophie und den pantheistischen Religionen* (Giessen-Basel 1990). Wir gratulieren ihm herzlich zu dieser Auszeichnung.

Quatre des cinq articles qui suivent sont le texte d'études données au congrès de l'AETE à Wölmersen en août 1992, sur le sujet du pluralisme. L'éditorial est le texte d'une méditation biblique du matin, au cours du même congrès.

L'article de Rolf Hille reprend une intervention qui fut suivie de l'attribution à son auteur du prix Johann Tobias Beck, pour son ouvrage: *Das Ringen um den säkularen Menschen: Karl Heims Auseinandersetzung mit der idealistischen Philosophie und den pantheistischen Religionen*, Giessen-Basel, 1992. Nous profitons de l'occasion pour féliciter à notre tour Rolf Hille pour ce travail remarquable.

Gordon McConville



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- **Yahweh and the Gods in the Old Testament**
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## RÉSUMÉ

*L'article traite des exigences exclusives à l'égard de Yahvé dans le contexte d'un milieu culturel où l'on partage bien des façons de penser qui, jusqu'à un certain point, ont une dimension religieuse. L'auteur se demande jusqu'à quel point on a raison de considérer en termes purement contradictoires la relation entre le Yahvisme et d'autres religions. Il aborde cette question en étudiant les thèmes de la création, de la présence de Dieu en Sion, et des noms de Dieu.*

*Lorsque l'AT utilise le langage 'mythologique' pour parler de la création, cela signifie-t-il qu'il accepte, d'une certaine manière, les idées mythologiques? La question a plusieurs aspects et peut être abordée du point de vue de l'histoire des religions, du langage, du canon et de la théologie. Dans quelle mesure les textes sont-ils 'detachés' du monde du mythe*

*par leur intégration dans un nouveau contexte canonique? Y a-t-il une 'affirmation' quelconque dans les fragments mythologiques qui sont ainsi intégrés? En général, la dimension canonique est considérée comme décisive (contre Barr et en nuancant Westermann). L'auteur essaie de le montrer pour chacun des thèmes en question.*

*La conclusion principale est que l'AT rejette avec force les éléments qui sont au coeur de la religion cananéenne. Néanmoins, l'auteur suggère de distinguer entre l'affirmation théologique et la suggestion religieuse. Le langage de Canaan, tel qu'il est employé dans l'AT, conserve une partie de son pouvoir de suggestion dans le domaine religieux. Ceci a des implications pour la façon dont les chrétiens s'adressent à ceux qui ont d'autres croyances que les leurs.*

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

*Das Ziel des Artikels ist es, die exklusiven Ansprüche, die für Jahwe erhoben werden, auf dem Hintergrund der gemeinsamen kulturellen und zum Teil der gemeinsamen religiösen Voraussetzungen zu betrachten. Es stellt sich die Frage, in wie weit das Verhältnis zwischen Jahwismus und anderen Religionen zurecht allein in gegensätzlichen Ausdrücken zu beschreiben ist. Dieser Frage wird nachgegangen durch Studien in folgenden Bereichen: Schöpfung, die Gegenwart Gottes in Zion, die Namen Gottes.*

*Wenn das Alte Testament 'mythologische' Sprache für die Schöpfung gebraucht, schließt das eine bestimmte Annahme von mythologischen Ideen ein? Diese Frage hat verschiedene Dimensionen, einschließlich von Fragen der Religionsgeschichte, der Sprache, des Kanons und der Theologie. Wie weit sind die Texte von ihrem mythologischen Bereich*

*befreit worden, als sie in den neuen kanonischen Kontext eingefügt wurden? Allgemein wird die kanonische Dimension als die entscheidende angesehen (dies einschränkend gegen Barr und Westermann). Auf diese Weise wird dann in allen angesprochenen Bereichen argumentiert.*

*Folgende Hauptschlußfolgerung wird gezogen: Das Alte Testament verwirft streng die Elemente, die für die kanaanitische Religion zentral sind. Jedoch wird eine Unterscheidung zwischen einer theologisch bindenden Aussage und einer unverbindlichen Gedanken / Idee vorgeschlagen. Die kanaanäische Sprache, wie sie im Alten Testament gebraucht wird, behält einiges von der Kraft ihrer religiösen Gedanken. Dies hat Folgen für die Art und Weise, wie Christen Angehörige anderer Religionen ansprechen.*



The aim of the present article is to consider how the Old Testament relates to the concepts found in other religions of its time when it speaks about God and his relationship to Israel and the world. That there was a relationship between the concepts of Israel, Canaan, and Babylon is not in doubt. Nor, indeed, can that relationship be described in wholly adversarial terms. Certainly, the Deuteronomic and prophetic critique of the religion of Baal must be given its due place, yet there are also elements in the relationship between Israel's thought and that of her neighbours which imply a certain sharing of beliefs.

At a certain level it is entirely uncontentious to say that Israel shared ideas with her neighbours. Culturally they occupied the same world. Hebrew is a Semitic language closely akin to that of the Canaanites who lived alongside Israel. Israel was heir, along with those nations, to a wisdom tradition in both its theoretical and practical aspects. There were shared assumptions about the religious nature of the world, and in fundamental ways about its creation. In relation to political organization also, particularly in the configuration of king, temple and structure of cultic life, there was a basic similarity with the forms of the ancient world. This similarity extends to root religious ideas such as holiness, sin and salvation. Israel's rootedness in its world is inescapable, even as it proclaims the religion of Yahweh which, in important ways, sets it apart from its neighbours.

Our particular question goes beyond observations of this sort, though as we shall see, it is inseparable from them. It is concerned with the fact that in certain key topics of faith Israel uses expressions and ideas that are very close to those of its neighbours. The question is raised, consequently, whether there is any sense in which the Old Testament writers demonstrate a positive openness to the tenets of other religions, or indeed may be said to have 'learned' from them. If there is evidence for such a phenomenon, the nature of the Old Testament's 'exclusiveness', in Deuteronomic and prophetic terms, will need to be defined carefully in relation to it.

The topics which are most interesting for

our study, I believe, are those of creation, the presence of God and the nature of God himself. In each case the question must be asked, whether and how far 'foreign' ideas have been introduced into Old Testament religion. The question has several dimensions, including the history of religion, language, canon and theology.

## 1. Creation

As is well known, the Old Testament's creation and flood-narratives have close counterparts in the ancient world. The Atrahasis epic and the Sumerian flood-story offer parallels for many of the elements of the stories of creation and flood in Genesis, and the Gilgamesh epic has particular echoes of the Genesis flood account. Echoes of the literature of the ancient world also occur in the Psalms and certain prophetic texts. These observations bring literary- and source-critical ramifications with them. In particular, what are the origins and date of Genesis 1-11, or its parts? It has long been recognized that Israelites could have been aware of the Babylonian traditions from an early time.<sup>1</sup> The current tendency is to recognize that the Bible inherited the creation/flood tradition as a whole at an early period, since its motifs, and even its basic structure, pre-date the Old Testament.<sup>2</sup> The interesting question, however, is not about chronological priority, but about what the Old Testament has done with the ideas which it takes over.

Broadly speaking, the Old Testament can be said to have reinterpreted the motifs of the literature which it echoes, and the beliefs of the foreign peoples that underlay it. Scholars such as G. von Rad, C. Westermann and B. S. Childs, for example, used the idea of demythologization in arguing for a biblical reinterpretation of the creation stories.<sup>3</sup> Our question, however, is how rigorous such a reinterpretation is. Does the Old Testament consciously turn its face against 'mythological' elements in the stories of origins, or does it leave a residue of such elements?

Westermann apparently believes that it does. He stresses that in its belief in creation as such, Israel is no different from its neighbours, or indeed many other races and



religions.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, Israel does not need to express its faith in God as creator, so much is this a presupposition of its thought.<sup>5</sup> There is, of course, a crucial difference between Israel's understanding of creation and that of other nations, namely in that there is in Israel no creation of 'gods'.<sup>6</sup> Nevertheless, the 'myths of origin' (i.e. where the memories of 'beginning' are not yet related to a personal creator) still 'leave their stamp on Gen. 1'.<sup>7</sup> And Ps. 139:15 preserves a memory of the origin of human beings from the womb of mother-earth.<sup>8</sup>

Westermann's belief that the Old Testament rests on certain presuppositions which it has in common with other religions is developed into a hermeneutical theory. On the one hand, he is in no doubt that the biblical narrative, with its prefixing of the primeval history to the story of Abraham, represents a transformed understanding of the relationship between the primeval period and the present: that is, in the Bible the medium is history, not 'cultic actualization'. On the other, however, he insists: 'In the interpretation of the primeval story, one must be well aware that these two points of view cannot be fully harmonized'. And again: 'It would not be in the mind of the (Israelite) narrators to give voice merely to the specifically Israelite adaptation and meaning of the primeval stories; they wanted more; they wanted their audience to hear something that belonged to the prehistory of Israel'.<sup>9</sup>

Westermann's position has been criticized by H-J. Kraus. Kraus stresses the recasting of Israelite thought about creation in the light of its understanding of God as saviour. The sovereignty of Yahweh, demonstrated in the history of Israel's salvation, is reflected in the Old Testament's presentation of creation, where Yahweh also conquers his foes. There is a consistent picture, furthermore, freed from mythological theogonic conceptions, of a world created entirely within history. Kraus expressly rejects Westermann's view that creation is merely presupposed in the Old Testament, rather than subsumed under a comprehensive understanding of God's relationship with his people.<sup>10</sup>

The difference between Kraus and Westermann is largely a matter of emphasis.

Concrete differences between them are elusive. Kraus can say of Ps. 90:2, by way of a concession: '... there are echoes of rudiments of the mythological view of the procreative power of "mother earth" (cf. Job 38:4ff.)'. The difference between Kraus and Westermann, therefore, seems to concern whether these 'echoes' actually affirm something, or whether they really are mere relics, evacuated of their original meaning by the new context which they have received in the Old Testament's thought.

It is already clear that a decision between these points of view involves going further than observations of a religious-historical sort, to issues of language, canon and theology, as noted above. For Kraus, the linguistic issue is clear: where the Old Testament uses language known from the myths, it is because it has borrowed foreign elements in connection with the theme of creation; this borrowing, however, is in the interests of the worship of Yahweh as creator. Linguistic affinities, therefore, may not be read as the simple assimilation of concepts.<sup>11</sup>

The issue of language requires some special notice in this connection. The difference between Westermann and Kraus goes to the heart of the central question raised by modern discussions of language, namely how does language relate to meaning? Older notions of a 'referential' relationship between words and meaning have given way to the belief that meaning emerges essentially within discourse, and beyond that, within a social and cultural matrix.<sup>12</sup> This insight has direct application to our subject. We have seen that both Kraus and Westermann think of the adaptation of certain topics within the broadest religious-cultural horizon to a specifically Israelite understanding of God and the world. Here then is precisely a claim that the language of the Old Testament should be understood within the terms of its cultural matrix. This would appear to mean that the use of certain words, phraseology and even extended stretches of discourse cannot be assumed to imply the borrowing of ideas from a different cultural milieu.

There is indeed a methodological difficulty in the attempt to discover whether such a borrowing could have occurred. That difficulty consists in the need to understand the



'world' of Israel in order rightly to interpret its discourse, while we are almost completely dependent on its discourse for our understanding of its world. The sort of information which we would need in order to break into this circle is not available because it would involve quizzing the authors about their meaning. The difficulty is scarcely diminished by the closeness of the culture of the biblical writers to that from which, in certain crucial respects, they differ. It may be supposed that they *understand* that culture.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, their self-conscious engagement with it may be presumed to give rise to the specific way in which they treat it. This, indeed, is a postulate of much of the Old Testament itself, in its presentation of Israel as a people which, in a profound sense, has 'come out' of its environment, whether in the form of the Mesopotamian cultural-religious world (Joshua 24:2) or of Egypt, and which continues to be called out of the Canaanite religious culture by the prophets, who see Israel as thoroughly conformed to it.

Considerations of this sort should put us on our guard against over-simple interpretations of cases where the Old Testament seems to echo motifs from the myths of its neighbours. The point may be illustrated from Ps. 74:12ff., which seems to suggest a rather self-conscious and rigorous adaptation of such motifs in favour of the Old Testament's understanding of God and the world. Here there is a distinct evocation of the myth of the slaying of the chaos monster (v. 13), yet it is carefully interwoven with the motif of the dividing of the Reed Sea in the deliverance of Israel from Egypt. Creation effectively becomes an act of salvation, demonstrating the sovereignty of the God of Israel. A similar pattern is visible in Isaiah 43:15ff., 51:9–10.

In passages of this sort we have examples, I think, of the creative power of language, another important insight of the modern discussion.<sup>14</sup> The full implication of the point is that the biblical writers do not simply realign well-known motifs into a pre-existing, free-standing frame, but rather that their use of the motifs actually is part of the structuring of that frame. In Funk's words (speaking generally of metaphorical language): 'The metaphor is a means of modifying the tradition'.<sup>15</sup>

This insight seems particularly apposite in the case of the Old Testament in view of the fact that Israel does indeed stand within a tradition along with its neighbours. Its writers may be seen as redirecting or reconstructing a tradition of thinking about God and the world. This is slightly different from the category of polemic, which better characterizes the prophets' outright attacks on Canaanite religious beliefs and practices. The sort of language of creation which we have considered is better described as re-creative or redemptive. The beliefs of Israel are being articulated and re-articulated within a cultural and religious tradition. The use of motifs from the myths is neither a borrowing of ideas nor a simple rejection of them; it is rather theology in the making.

These considerations make it hard to think in terms of a residue of Canaanite ideas, such as Westermann had in mind when he said: 'It would not be in the mind of the (Israelite) narrators to give voice merely to the specifically Israelite adaptation and meaning of the primeval stories' (see above n. 9), or such as even Kraus acknowledged in Ps. 90:2; Job 38:4ff. Equally it is hard to allow that such passages may be regarded as 'merely' poetic.<sup>16</sup> And certainly metaphor may not be appealed to as a way of suggesting some dilution of meaning, as Funk has warned.<sup>17</sup> Language, perhaps especially poetic language, with its habitual recourse to metaphor, is never 'innocent'.

The view we have thus taken of the Old Testament's language about creation implies that it produces a rather radical reinterpretation. However, I have suggested that this language is not best described as polemical. It restructures rather than rejects outright. Our interpretation, then, permits the question whether the motifs which we recognize as Canaanite have any positive life left in them when they appear in the Old Testament. At the level of religious apprehension, I think that they do. When, for example, the Old Testament uses birth-imagery, as in Ps. 90:2, it should not be supposed that its readers would have thought: Ah, but it doesn't really *mean* that. The language is evocative of a beginning, a 'coming to be' on a massive scale, and may be heard for what it is.



Similarly in Ps. 93 the lordship of Yahweh over the created order is expressed with a thrice-repeated allusion to the swelling *neharôt* (literally 'rivers'), and the waves of *yam* (literally 'sea'). Behind the allusions to the natural phenomena of rivers and sea, however, will have been heard the names of the Canaanite gods Nahar and Yam (intimately associated, of course, with just those phenomena in the myths). This point is reinforced by the suggestion of personification in the manner of the allusions. Now in one sense the Psalm may be said to 'demythologise'—these forces are not in fact personal, but the inanimate creatures of the one Lord, Yahweh. In another sense, however, the traditional motifs have been adopted precisely for their evocative power. In their fear of the natural elements Israelites had a point of contact with their neighbours. The poetry is used for its effect on the mind, even though at the same time it is made to serve the worship of Yahweh.

The view thus taken affords, I believe, a satisfactory rationale for the adoption of Canaanite motifs in the language of the Old Testament. Westermann tried to account for what he saw as residual elements in the Old Testament with the tentative suggestion that the biblical writers wanted their readers to hear echoes of the old creation ideas. This is scarcely satisfying as an explanation of the writers' purpose. Our notion of a development of a tradition held in common by Israel and her neighbours turns this rather negatively conceived intention into something rather more positive.

Our discussion must move next, however, to canon and theology. This stage of the argument is already anticipated by our observations so far. This is because the idea of canon has a point of contact with linguistic theory as applied to the Old Testament. We have mentioned the fact that meaning has to be considered in the context of stretches of discourse. The canon of the Old Testament might well be taken as the natural limits of the discourse in question. Indeed we have already implied this by talking about the ideas, meaning etc. of the 'Old Testament'. Of course, two rather different principles are in view here. For the purposes of the study of language, the limits of the discourse might

well be differently defined (either smaller or larger than the Old Testament canon). With the canon, however, we have introduced a strictly theological criterion, which invites discussion on its own terms.

Nevertheless, canonical assumptions are present in Westermann's thought when he argues that the primeval history is freed from the realm of myth by its juxtaposition with the Abraham narrative. That argument proceeds from the final form or redaction of the text. Westermann continues to refer to the documents J and P in his treatment of Genesis 1–11, but the differences between them are at best incidental to his argument. He tends to think rather of the 'biblical authors' together, albeit as representing a developing tradition which features an internal dialogue. Here a matter of basic principle is raised. In comparing the thought of the Bible with that of other ancient literature and religions, where do we identify the former? The question touches a contentious issue in contemporary Old Testament interpretation. The debate about so-called 'canonical criticism', conducted chiefly between its leading advocat B. S. Childs and his arch-critic James Barr, is well known. At its heart is a question of biblical authority. Does the authority, the meaning of the Bible 'for us', lie in final forms (whole books, and ultimately the whole Bible) because these are the forms that have been received by successions of believing communities? Or conversely, does it lie in the Bible's religious ideas, conceived as a more disparate collection, among which we must make our own theologically informed value-judgments? In the former case, the quest for 'biblical thought' is relatively straightforward (though Childs has a place for the critical reconstruction of the pre-history of texts<sup>18</sup>); in the latter it is complicated, because the question is raised acutely of the status of putative prior stages of the text, which may be thought to contain ideas quite different from those of the text in its final form. It will be seen immediately how considerations of this sort are interwoven with the preceding discussion about the 'biblical' reinterpretation of Canaanite ideas.

The point may be seen clearly in relation to Genesis 1–11. Barr can say, for example, that



on the relationship between the man and the woman in Genesis 1–3 'P' corrects 'J'; that is, Genesis 1 (the later text) affirms the equality of the two, where Genesis 2 had seen the woman as an afterthought to the creation of the man.<sup>19</sup> On immortality he goes further, discerning Canaanite motifs behind the text of Genesis 2–3 and, partly on that basis, denying that those chapters teach a 'Fall' in the sense of the traditional Christian understanding. In a review of the work in question in the present issue, I have argued that such an approach cannot properly claim to have ascertained 'biblical' thought on the matter, for it has given an unwarranted authority to a reconstructed pre-history of the text (the fact that this is hypothetical hardly affects the principle at stake), and passed over the assimilation of the material, which is surely the point at which distinctively 'biblical' thought may be found. The point applies to Genesis 1–11 in its entirety, where, as we have noted, motifs and elements from the ancient myths have been recast in a narrative which has its own logic.<sup>20</sup> In my view, Westermann and Childs are right to emphasise the precedence of this dimension of interpretation over previous stages of the text's history, as well as over allegedly imported ideas. It is this level of interpretation too which ultimately provides the right context for the interpretation of linguistic usages held in common with mythological texts.

The point about canon enables an important distinction to be made between religious experience and theological affirmation. If we have been able to find a point of contact between Israelites and Canaanites in their understanding of the world this can be expressed in terms of religious experience. The idea of the canon, however, is a presupposition of the attempt to articulate the beliefs of Israel as they are enshrined in the Old Testament, and therefore in the use and understanding of the Old Testament as the Word of God. (The point thus bears, obviously, on the relationship between linguistic theory and biblical authority, or theological truth, for a discussion of which I refer the reader elsewhere.<sup>21</sup>)

## 2. The Presence of God

The argument set out above in relation to the topic of creation may be briefly retraced

in relation to that of the presence of God, specifically in the context of so-called Zion-theology. There are clear and well known similarities between the Old Testament's idea of Yahweh dwelling on Mt. Zion and that of Canaanite Baal dwelling on Mt. Zaphon. The Canaanite idea is that the mountain of Baal represents the divine mountain, the dwelling of the gods (the Canaanite counterpart of Greek Olympus), located at a primeval confluence of the great rivers in the mythological 'north'. Echoes of the idea may be found in the biblical Garden of Eden, which is apparently equated with the 'mountain of God' in Ezekiel 28:13–16, and out of which, in Genesis 2:10, flow the four primeval rivers.<sup>22</sup> The more specific connections with biblical thought relate to the temple on Mt. Zion, however. In Canaanite thinking Baal's dwelling in his temple on Zaphon (usually located south of the Orontes<sup>23</sup>) procured life and security for the whole people who worshipped him. A number of so-called Zion-Psalms echo this idea, now of Yahweh and Israel. Yahweh, dwelling in his temple, laughs at his foes (Ps. 2:4ff.) and establishes his authority over all nations (Ps. 46:5–10); from there he makes himself manifest to his worshipping people (Ps. 50:2). Most remarkably, Mount Zion is said to be 'in the far north' (Ps. 48:3), in a clear echo of the northern location of the mythological mountain (since the description cannot be geographically realistic).

The Old Testament affords some insight into the religious-historical background to these affinities. It is clear that what we may call the Zion-tradition was not always, or universally, accepted in Israel (2 Sam. 7:5–7). Part of the story of its origin there is told, no doubt, by King David's bringing of the ancient ark of the covenant to Jerusalem and by the building of Solomon's temple. Yet there may be lines of continuity too from the Jebusite cult, echoes of which may be found in the story of Melchizedek and Abraham (Genesis 14).<sup>24</sup> This might provide the religious-historical explanation for the ready acceptance of mythological language in the worship of Zion.

Those linguistic affinities call for an explanation, as the language of creation did, in terms of the relationship between expression



and thought. In Canaan, the cult of Baal involved the use of images of the god, repugnant in Israel, and in character was a fertility-cult in which sacrifice and ritual were thought to exert a quasi-magical influence on the disposition of the god. The rituals, involving cult-prostitution, invited the strong opprobrium of the prophets (e.g. Hosea 2). The prophets also evidently considered the Canaanite cult to be non-ethical in character, and therefore in sharp contrast to the covenantal basis of the cult of Yahweh (e.g. Hosea 4:1–3).<sup>25</sup> In the Book of Isaiah, moreover, where the language of the Zion-theology is heavily used, the Canaanite ideas are evidently overwhelmed by the strong covenantal, salvation-historical theology. Whether a prophet is (superficially at least) 'pro-Zion', like Isaiah, or overtly critical, like Jeremiah (Jer. 7:1–15), they agree that Israel must be dissuaded from the opinion that cultic worship has inherent efficacy. This larger theological view is in the nature of the case harder to apply to the Psalms, because they consist of smaller, discrete units. Yet the Book of Psalms too shows signs of the need to come to terms with a 'failed' cult.<sup>26</sup> Observations like this echo our argument above that words take their meaning within large contexts, both linguistic and cultural.

As with the creation topic, it is important to avoid two extremes of interpretation, namely the idea that the language is merely a poetic relic, evacuated of content, or on the other hand that it is actually a vehicle for Canaanite ideas. The former is impossible because the language of Zion had as its context the apparatus of worship in the Jerusalem temple—nothing 'merely' poetic here.<sup>27</sup> The opposite belief, that Canaanite ideas really were implied in the Zion-imagery, has more weight, if only because of those hesitations, mentioned a moment ago, which the Old Testament has preserved. It is clear, however, that the language of Zion has entered the mainstream of Israel's worship of Yahweh. Once again, it is best to conclude that the hymnists of Israel drew readily on the language about God found in the wider religious-cultural environment. To the religious imagination, shared in some sense by Israelites and Canaanites, the idea

of a remote north or a mysterious river apparently expressed something of the majesty and mystery of God. Once again, however, a distinction must be maintained between religious experience, where there is common ground between Israel and her neighbours, and theological affirmation, where the prophetic criticism of Canaan's idolatry is decisive.

### 3. Names of God

One of the most complicated topics which the Old Testament faces us with in the present connection is that of the names of God. It is well known that the Old Testament uses a number of divine names which are also used in Canaan, principally 'El', which occurs especially in Genesis in various combinations (e.g. El Shaddai, El 'Elyôn). The religious-historical reason for this has been hotly debated. The view of F. M. Cross now largely prevails over that of A. Alt, namely that El in the Old Testament is, predominantly at least, a proper name. His conclusion is reached partly on linguistic grounds and partly by analogy with what is known about the Canaanite high god El. El in the Old Testament, he concludes, should be understood in terms of that god.<sup>28</sup>

Cross has shown that there are impressive similarities between the biblical expressions and certain Canaanite ones.<sup>29</sup> However, the next stage of the argument is the crucial one. Does the use of Canaanite language for God imply anything about how Israelites thought about God himself? There have been those who have advocated such a view. O. Eissfeldt, leaning heavily on the LXX of Deuteronomy 32:8–9, concluded that Yahweh was at one time understood as one of a pantheon of gods subordinate to El Elyôn.<sup>30</sup>

A related question is how we should understand references to the 'gods' in places such as Ps. 92. In its portrayal of a 'divine Council', where Yahweh presides over other heavenly beings (cf. Job 1; 1 Kings 22), it has echoes of a high god in a pantheon. According to certain modern treatments passages of this sort afford evidence of a surviving polytheism in Israel.<sup>31</sup>

In all these cases, however, as with the topics already discussed, the relationship



between language and theological content requires careful handling. The view, well exemplified by Barker, that pre-exilic Israelite religion was predominantly polytheistic and that this is reflected in biblical texts of the sort just mentioned, finds it hard to avoid circularity. The postulate is based on readings of certain texts which are then read in the light of the postulate. In fact, a key text like Deuteronomy 32:8–9 is capable of quite a different reading from that of Eissfeldt and Barker, namely that Yahweh is cast in the role of the 'Most High', who disposes over the nations of the earth. The text in MT strongly suggests a 'mono-Yahwistic' meaning, with its 'sons of Israel' instead of LXX's 'sons of God'. Whether MT has deliberately altered the LXX text because it read the latter as polytheistic is debatable. The interpretation of Dt. 32:8–9 LXX belongs to the wider question of interpretation under discussion.

As with the other topics we have considered, the idea of canon operates in the discussion. It is significant that the context of the passage in question is Deuteronomy, the supreme 'mono-Yahwistic' treatise in the Old Testament. The same point applies to Deuteronomy 4:19–20, where Yahweh is said to have 'allotted the sun, moon and stars to all the peoples under heaven'. It is unjustified to think that this phrase means a deliberate permission or dispensation, and highly implausible in the context of the strong repudiation of idolatrous worship in Deuteronomy 4.

These considerations show, I think, that there is no simple correlation between 'god'-language and beliefs about God. It may be granted that Canaanite language provides the best analogies for that of the Old Testament, but that is merely the beginning of the question how the biblical writers, by comparison with Canaanites, thought of God. The divine Council idea, indeed, bears the hallmarks of demythologization, where Yahweh reigns supreme, and other beings are of a different order. This is clear in 1 Kings 22, where the 'host of heaven' are 'spirits', available to do Yahweh's bidding (vv. 19, 21). In other cases the idea of 'sons of God' may be little more than a literary device (as in Job 1), or even outright polemic against

the idea of a pantheon (as, arguably, in Ps. 92).<sup>32</sup> The strange narrative in Genesis 6:1–4, furthermore, is subordinate to the concept of the ordering of the parts of creation by the one God (Genesis 1),<sup>33</sup> and has even been understood as a polemic against fertility cults.<sup>34</sup> These points too have a canonical dimension to them, alongside an exegetical one.

With the interpretation of the name El we come to a more strictly linguistic question. Cross believed that the close analogies of usage which he identified implied that the Old Testament identified the God of the fathers as the Canaanite God El.<sup>35</sup> This, however, does not follow, nor does its corollary, that the Old Testament narrative in Genesis and Exodus, culminating in Exodus 6:1–3, similarly identifies Yahweh with El. The issue here concerns the nature of language about God itself. The term El is used in the Old Testament both as a name in the strict sense, and as a general word for 'god' (a generic, or appellative term) in passages like Exodus 15:2, 11; 20:5.<sup>36</sup> There would seem, then, to be a similar potential range of meaning in the biblical word El as in the English 'god' (or German Gott, or French dieu). It is a word denoting deity.

This point should not be misunderstood, however. If Israel uses the same word for 'god' as the Canaanites it does not mean that they know or worship the 'same' god. Even the idea of God takes shape within frameworks of thought.<sup>37</sup> This means that it may be used with all kinds of different understandings of who or what 'God' is. And this point holds, I think, whether the word is being used as a 'proper name' or an appellative. In principle, therefore, the fact that Israel shares a habit of speech about 'God' with Canaan does not entail that it shares Canaanite ways of thinking about him, or at least not in all respects. The broad religious and cultural affinities between Israel and her neighbours, which we have referred to frequently in the present essay, are sufficient to explain the similarities of usage in the language about God. A similar point about God-language, incidentally, has been well made by N. T. Wright, concerning the use of the term *theos* in the New Testament.<sup>38</sup>

It is pertinent at this point to consider one



of the best-known difficulties of interpretation in this area, namely the question why the term El was accepted in the Old Testament, but not the term Baal.<sup>39</sup> The foregoing has shown that this alleged problem rests on a misapprehension, namely the idea that the Old Testament not merely 'accepted' the name El, but with it the high god of the Canaanites. The idea in itself that Israel 'accepted' the term is suspect. Rather, the term El, both in Israel and in Canaan, is simply the primary word for 'god'—both as a generic and also as a way of speaking of the supreme (or in Israel's case, only) God—the precise meaning, in each case, being determined by a wide context of religious ideas. The word Ba'al did not have this broad range, and was therefore more resistant to assimilation.

## Conclusions

A number of conclusions follow from our discussion. The first is the Old Testament's rigorous repudiation of the elements that are central to Canaanite religion. This repudiation is most evident in Deuteronomy and the prophets. Its characteristics are an insistence on the covenantal-ethical nature of Yahwism, and on the prohibition of image-worship. At its most vociferous, this can imply that the gods of the nations are no gods at all (Jeremiah 2:11; Isaiah 44:9–20). At its most rational, it seeks to articulate the essential nature of Yahwism in contrast to the religion of Canaan. Thus Deuteronomy 4 offers a sustained treatise on the way in which Yahweh may be thought to dwell at once in heaven and on earth. The thought of this text rejects the Canaanite solution, involving images, with their implied containment of the god in the material world. Rather, God's being in heaven and earth is bound up with his self-giving to Israel in history, in a way which guards his own freedom.

The question whether Israel has 'borrowed' from Canaan is not entirely answered thus, however. We saw that the use of certain religious language implied some degree of commonality with Canaan at the level of religious experience. The polemic against the Canaanite gods hardly denies the reality

of Canaanite religious experience, or their apprehension of 'god'; even the harshest critique of idolatry moves in a world in which the reality of the divine is taken for granted. Israel shared with Canaan certain kinds of language which could provoke a religious response.

Finally, we may draw inferences for the relationship between Christianity and other religions today. Christian theology is bound as much by its allegiance to Christ as the Old Testament writers ever were by their conviction of the uniqueness of Yahweh. Dialogue between Christianity and other faiths is therefore laid under this constraint, and any quest for 'common ground' is therefore hazardous. Nevertheless it is in this area that our observations so far have real contemporary significance. Kenneth Cragg, writing from long missiological experience on the ways in which the different faiths may 'hear' each other, draws on the Canaanite echoes in the Zion-Psalms to suggest ways in which adherents of one faith may hear 'truth' in another:

Such readings (i.e. the finding of such echoes) by modern scholars may dismay Hebrew orthodox. If we can allow them, they may give the severely Semitic imagery of Jerusalem some distant translation into Asian faiths which prefer to cities the imagery of rivers rising in the far vaster majesty of the Himalayas.<sup>40</sup>

Cragg carries this point further by saying that the range of metaphors available for use in language about God is bounded by the earth that is shared by all. The same metaphorical language is used by all faiths to interpret the same world. 'They will not cease to debate and differ, but only within devices of language and meaning common to them all.'<sup>41</sup> This is not far from our contention that there are points of contact, *mutatis mutandis*, between Israelite and Canaanite worshippers at the level of religious suggestion.

A recognition of this feature of religious language involves, in my view, no derogation from the first conclusion of our study, namely that the Old Testament insists uncompromisingly on the unique rights of Yahweh to rule and receive worship in the world. It may, however, allow on the one hand



a tempering of zeal with sensitivity in Christian relations with members of other faiths, and on the other a 'bridge' in a dialogue which nevertheless remains committed to the truth of the Gospel.

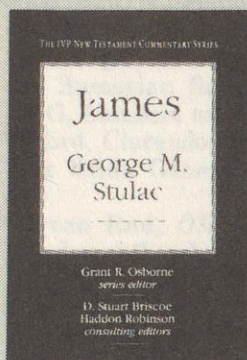
- 1 See S. R. Driver, *The Book of Genesis*, London, Methuen, 1904, 27–31, especially 31.
- 2 See G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Waco, Texas, Word Books, 1987, for an account of the relationship between Genesis 1–11 and ancient Near Eastern creation and flood traditions. The claim that the basic structure of a creation-flood epic existed prior to Genesis rests largely on the evidence of Atrahasis and the Sumerian flood-narrative. See further W. G. Lambert and A. R. Millard, *Atrahasis*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1969; T. Jacobsen, 'The Eridu Genesis', *JBL* 100 (1981), 513–529.
- 3 G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology 1*, Edinburgh/London, Oliver and Boyd, 1962, 139. B. S. Childs, *Myth and Reality in the Old Testament*, London, SCM, 1960; C. Westermann, *Genesis (Kapitel 1–11)*, Neukirchener Verlag, 1976<sup>2</sup>; ET (cited here) London, SPCK, 1984. Von Rad saw the crucial difference between the biblical understanding of creation and the mythological view in the setting of the former within time. Westermann, 64f., thought the prefixing of the primeval history to the Abraham narrative freed the former from the realm of myth. Both these views now look like overstatements. Caution is needed in seeing the category of time as crucial in distinguishing the Old Testament from the myths (see B. Albrektson, *History and the Gods*, Lund, Gleerup, 1967; J. G. McConville, *Grace in the End: a Study in Deuteronomistic Theology*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 1993, 128ff.).
- 4 Westermann, op. cit., 25.
- 5 Ibid., 43.
- 6 Ibid., 25f.
- 7 Ibid., 20f., cf. 20ff.
- 8 Ibid., 26.
- 9 Ibid., 65.
- 10 H.-J. Kraus, *Theology of the Psalms*, Minneapolis, Augsburg Publishing House, 1986, (ET of *Theologie der Psalmen*, Neukirchener Verlag, 1979), 63.
- 11 Ibid., 64.
- 12 See A. C. Thiselton, *The Two Horizons*, Exeter, Paternoster, 1980. The work in its entirety relates to modern theories of language and meaning, but note especially 115–139 (on hermeneutics and language), 149–168 (on Heidegger), 357–385 (on Wittgenstein).
- 13 On the possibility in principle of understanding foreign cultures, see B. van den Toren, 'A New Direction In Christian Apologetics', *EJT* 2 (1993), 49–64.
- 14 R. Funk puts it thus: 'Metaphor shatters the conventions of predication in the interests of a new vision . . . a fresh experience of reality', *Language, Hermeneutic and Word of God; the Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology*, New York, Harper and Row, 1966, 138f. Thiselton also notes Heidegger's contribution to this insight; *Two Horizons*, 43.
- 15 Funk, ibid.
- 16 Cf. J. C. L. Gibson: ' . . . most of (Job) is in poetry, which is not doctrine (there is, for instance, considerable use of pagan imagery) . . .'; *Job*, Edinburgh, St. Andrew's Press, 1985, 3.
- 17 Above, n. 15. See also G. B. Caird, *The Language and Imagery of the Bible*, London, Duckworth, 1980, 153f.
- 18 See his commentary on Exodus, London SCM, 1974, which classically demonstrates the 'canonical critical' method.
- 19 J. Barr, *The Garden of Eden and the Hope of Immortality*, London, SCM, 1992, 72.
- 20 In addition to Westermann's treatment, note also D. J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, Sheffield, JSOT, 1978, 61–79.
- 21 See Thiselton, *Two Horizons*, 432–438.
- 22 Cf. also Ezekiel 47:1–12, Joel 4:18, Zechariah 14:8, Isaiah 33:20–22.
- 23 So F. M. Cross, *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic*, Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 38; and see his treatment of the theme generally, 36–39.
- 24 See G. von Rad, *Old Testament Theology 1*, Edinburgh/London, Oliver and Boyd, 1962, 46–48.
- 25 For a comparison of Canaanite and Israelite ideas of worship see R. E. Clements, *God and Temple*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1965; cf. H.-J. Kraus, *Gottesdienst in Israel*, Munich, Kaiser, 1962<sup>2</sup>, 210–220.
- 26 For example in the questions raised about the apparent failure of the Davidic covenant in Ps. 89. See further the author's 'Jerusalem in the Old Testament', in P. W. L. Walker ed., *Jerusalem Past and Present in the Purposes of God*, Cambridge, Tyndale House, 1992, 21–51, especially 30–33.
- 27 For Zion as heir to the world of ideas of the pre-Israelite cult, see H.-J. Kraus, *Psalms 1–59*, Minneapolis, Augsburg Publishing House, 1988, 462f.; R. Davidson, *The Courage to*



- Doubt: Exploring an Old Testament Theme*, London, SCM, 1983, 140–144.
- 28 F. M. Cross, op. cit., 46ff., note 49. Contrast A. Alt, *Der Gott der Väter*, (BWANT III/12), Stuttgart, Kohlhammer, 1929 = 'The God of the Fathers', in *Essays on Old Testament History and Religion*, Sheffield, JSOT, 1989, 1–77.
- 29 See *ibid.*, 19, 50ff.
- 30 O. Eissfeldt, 'El and Yahweh', *JSS* 1 (1956), 25–37; cf. M. Barker, *The Great Angel: a Study of Israel's Second God*, London, SPCK, 1992, 5f.
- 31 Barker, *ibid.*, 6f.
- 32 So M. Weinfeld on Ps. 82: *Deuteronomy 1–11*, New York, Doubleday, 1991, 206.
- 33 Cf. B. S. Childs, *Myth in the Old Testament*, London, SCM, 1960, 54–57; G. J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, Waco, Texas, Word Books, 1987, 141.
- 34 So E. Drewermann, *Strukturen des Bösen 1; die Jahwistische Urgeschichte in exegetischer Sicht*, Paderborn, Schöningh, 1982, 181–183.
- 35 Cross, op. cit., 49.
- 36 Cross recognizes this for Exodus 15:11; *ibid.*, 46.
- 37 Cf. P. van Buren: 'To examine the word ('God') in isolation from its context in the life of religious people is to pursue an abstraction'; *The Edges of Language*, London, SCM, 1972, 71.
- 38 See N. T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* London, SPCK, 1992, xivf.
- 39 See Cross, op. cit., 190f.
- 40 Kenneth Cragg, *To Meet and to Greet*, London, Epworth Press, 1992, 82.
- 41 *Ibid.*, 83.



# COMMENTARIES giving INSIGHT



## **James. ▲**

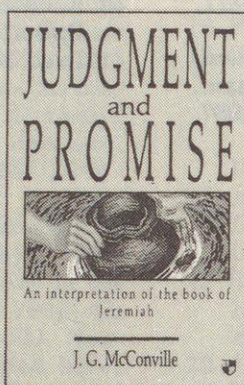
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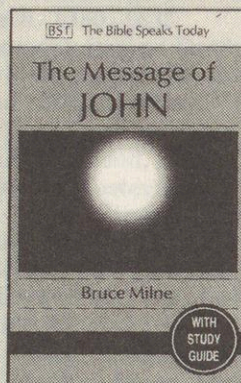
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## RÉSUMÉ

*Dans le débat théologique récent, l'a souvent été soutenu que les affirmations traditionnelles du caractère absolu du christianisme étaient devenues nulles ou dénuées de sens, tout simplement par le fait du pluralisme religieux. Ceci semble supposer que l'affirmation d'un caractère absolu avait son sens dans un contexte où le christianisme exerçait un monopole religieux et culturel, mais qu'elle perd son sens en dehors de ce contexte. On peut répondre à cela en avançant la thèse opposée: dès son origine, le christianisme a affirmé son caractère absolu, alors qu'il est né au sein de la situation pluraliste de l'empire romain. Autrement dit, c'est précisément une situation de pluralisme religieux et culturel qui a constitué le milieu d'origine de cette affirmation d'un caractère absolu. Ainsi, une étude plus approfondie du processus par lequel le christianisme s'est défini dans le monde gréco-romain prend tout son sens au vu de la situation actuelle.*

*Les non-Juifs qui ont cru en Christ attiraient l'attention de leurs voisins par leur attitude intolérante vis-à-vis de tout culte rendu au génie de l'empereur ou aux dieux romains. Seuls les Juifs avaient le privilège légal de refuser de participer à ce culte. Quand les chrétiens d'origine païenne ont commencé à se comporter comme des Juifs sur ce point, sans être Juifs eux-mêmes, ils ne disposaient d'aucun fondement juridique pour justifier leur refus de prendre part à la religion officielle.*

*Deux noms que l'on a dès l'origine attribués aux chrétiens, *christiano* et 'le troisième peuple' (ni juifs, ni grecs), nous montrent que les chrétiens devaient définir leur identité par rapport à deux entités: le judaïsme et le paganisme. En ce qui concerne le paganisme, les chrétiens d'origine païenne partageaient la conviction fondamentale des Juifs selon laquelle tout culte païen constituait de l'idolâtrie et devait par conséquent être*

*désapprouvé. A ce propos, que ces religions païennes aient été l'une des anciennes religions nationales (animistes pour la plupart) ou le culte officiel rendu aux dieux gréco-romains, ou encore l'une des nouvelles religions à mystère ne faisait aucune différence significative. Toutes ces religions étaient elles-mêmes plutôt tolérantes et pouvaient s'accommoder d'autres croyances qui n'étaient pas exclusives, tout comme elles n'étaient pas elles-mêmes exclusives. C'est le refus 'juif' des chrétiens d'avoir quoi que ce soit à faire avec les autres religions qui les a mis en marge et a fait d'eux un problème pour leurs voisins et pour les autorités romaines.*

*Pour les autorités romaines, le refus des chrétiens de participer à la religion officielle était le seul et unique problème. Ceci explique la politique adoptée par Rome à l'égard des chrétiens. En même temps, ce refus explique le secret de la victoire de l'Église sur l'un des plus puissants empires que le monde ait jamais connus.*

*En ce qui concerne les religions à mystère la non participation des chrétiens ne posait pas le même problème. C'était même l'inverse: le christianisme pouvait être considéré comme très semblable aux religions à mystère et pouvait être inclus parmi elles comme la 'version à mystère' du judaïsme. Les apologistes chrétiens reconnaissent quelques similitudes entre les sacrements chrétiens et les rites des religions à mystère, mais il l'expliquent par la théorie de l'imitation démoniaque. Le défi le plus subtil que dut relever le christianisme vint du gnosticisme qui, souvent, ne se présentait pas comme une autre voie que le christianisme, mais comme le christianisme même. Le gnosticisme était compatible avec la religion officielle et avec d'autres religions. Ainsi, il n'a pas produit de martyrs. En refusant la voie gnostique, l'Église disait non à une approche facile, et très*



séduisante, du pluralisme. Elle disait également non à une approche qui pouvait entraîner l'extinction du christianisme en tant que tel, avec son identité propre, et la disparition des chrétiens comme un peuple différent.

L'idée, émise par Justin, Clément d'Alexandrie et d'autres parmi les premiers pères de l'Eglise, d'une révélation extérieure à l'Écriture n'atténue en aucune manière cette approche sans compromis des religions païennes. St. Justin, l'auteur de l'idée du Logos spermatikos, ne pensait pas du tout que Christ était la réalité cachée derrière les religions païennes. Ce n'était pas non plus la pensée de Clément d'Alexandrie, ni d'aucun autre père de l'Église primitive. Justin partageait la conviction courante parmi les chrétiens que cette réalité cachée n'était pas Christ mais les démons. Il savait aussi que ce rejet de la religion officielle était considéré comme un outrage et qu'il conduisait au martyre. Mais il

voulait rendre ses lecteurs païens conscients du fait que les chrétiens n'étaient pas les seuls à refuser le culte officiel. Parmi leurs grands hommes les plus éminents, plusieurs avaient fait de même. L'un d'eux, Socrate, était même devenu un martyr pour cette raison. Ainsi, en l'un des grands héros de la culture grecque, le plus grand des philosophes, Justin trouve un allié, un porte parole, précisément pour cet élément qui semblait le plus anti-culturel dans la foi chrétienne: le rejet de la religion officielle.

Par conséquent, ce n'est absolument pas dans la religion non-chrétienne que Justin voit le Logos spermatikos à l'oeuvre, mais dans le rejet par des non chrétiens de la religion non chrétienne. La même idée se retrouve chez Clément d'Alexandrie et même chez Tertullien. Les tentatives modernes de faire des premiers pères de l'Église les porte parole de l'idée d'un 'Christ caché' dans les religions païennes sont donc sans fondement.

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

In der modernen theologischen Debatte ist oft behauptet worden, daß traditionelle Bestätigungen über die absolute Natur des Christentums mit der einfachen Tatsache des religiösen Pluralismus' zunichte gemacht wurden. Das deutet an, daß solch ein Gedanke nur in einem Kontext sinnvoll ist, in dem das Christentum ein kulturelles und religiöses Monopol ausübt. Das Gegenteil kann jedoch behauptet werden: von Anfang an hat das Christentum seinen absoluten Charakter bestätigt, obwohl es im Herzen des pluralistischen Römischen Reiches entstanden ist. Daher ist ein Studium darüber, wie das Christentum sich selbst in der Griechisch-Römischen Welt zu verstehen bekam, relevant zu der modernen Situation.

Nicht-jüdische Christen zogen die Aufmerksamkeit ihrer Nachbarn auf sich, in dem sie sich weigerten, an der Anbetung des Kaisers oder römischer Götter teilzunehmen. Nur Juden hatten vom Gesetz her das Privileg solche Anbetung zu verweigern. Christen, die ursprünglich Heiden waren, begannen sich in dieser Hinsicht wie Juden zu benehmen, hatten aber keine gesetzliche Grundlage dafür.

Christen wurden als 'das dritte Volk' zu

einem Begriff, weder Juden noch Griechen. Mit den Juden teilten sie sich den Glauben, daß die Anbetung der Heiden Götzendienst war—egal ob es die Form der alttümlichen nationalen Religionen annahm; oder die offizielle Anbetung, die den Griechisch-Römischen Göttern angeboten wurden; oder eine der neuen Mysteriumreligionen. Diese waren alle 'tolerant', es war die 'jüdische' Intoleranz der Christen, die sie für ihre Nachbarn unerträglich machten.

Für die römischen Behörden war die Verweigerung der Christen, an dem offiziellen Kult teilzunehmen, das einzige Problem, und das erklärt ihre Feindseligkeit. Dies war jedoch auch der Schlüssel zu dem Sieg der Kirche über eines der mächtigsten Reiche in der Geschichte.

Das Problem im Fall der Mysteriumreligionen, und besonders in der Gnostik, war die Versuchung sich wegen einigen oberflächlichen Ähnlichkeiten anzugleichen. Die Gnostik war 'umfassend'. Mit der Ablehnung dieses Weges lehnte das Christentum eine Möglichkeit ab, die seine Identität zerstört hätte.

Und zuletzt, es gibt in den Schriften



*bestimmter Kirchenväter (insbesondere Justin's Logos Spermatikos keine Rechtfertigung für die Annahme, daß Christus die versteckte Realität in heidnischen Religionen war. Justin, im Bezug auf Sokrates und andere, wollte nur aufweisen, daß Christen nicht die Einzigen waren, die eine offizielle Religion verweigerten. Justin sieht*

*daher das Logos Spermatikos nicht als mittätig an in anderen Religionen, sondern nur in der Verweigerung von einigen Nicht-Christen bei nicht-christlichen Religionen. Daher sind moderne Versuche, eine Basis für die Annahme des versteckten Christus' in nicht-christlichen Religionen in den Schriften der Kirchenväter zu finden, ohne Grundlage.*

## I

The present-day relevance of my theme could be indicated by a slight reformulation of the title: Christian identity in a religiously pluralistic world. As is well known, Christians in general and theologians in particular are not in agreement concerning the question how Christians should respond to the reality of religious pluralism.

Paul Rajashekar, the leader of the LWF office for the *Church and People of Other Faiths*, once said the following:<sup>1</sup> 'While we hold our allegiance to the universal Lordship of Jesus Christ, Christianity itself is a particular religion in a religiously pluralistic world and there is every indication that it will remain so. Today we cannot take the same attitude which many Christians in the past took in dismissing other faiths as some form of satanic substitutes or demonic deceptions.' Rajashekar continued by saying that Christians in our times in increasing measure have seen the many positive values in other religions, and that other religions have established themselves in Christian countries and have won considerable hearing. 'In this situation the traditional absolute claims of Christianity have become rather tenuous. Some Christians have even raised the question of whether Christian faithfulness demands the repetition of the absolute claims of the New Testament and the early church.'

If I am not mistaken, this quote is rather representative of a certain way of thinking which has been very much in vogue lately. It may be summarized like this: The absolute claims of Christianity were credible in a certain period and in a certain setting. They were credible when Christianity was the

only religion of Christian Europe, they may have been credible in other periods and areas when Christianity was the dominant element in a certain culture, they may even have been credible when there were realistic prospects of Christianity becoming the only or dominant religion of a certain area. But now, with the prospect of increasing religious pluralism, and Christianity losing its cultural monopoly in the 'old world', the Christian claims of absoluteness become less and less credible. The context in which they gave meaning is vanishing.

I must confess that as an historian of the early Church I find it rather surprising that anyone should hold this view. It seems to presuppose that the claims of absoluteness originated in the Constantinian period, or maybe even in Medieval Europe. As everyone should know, this is not the case. The Bible did not originate in a homogeneous, unified culture, Jewish or Christian. It took shape in a situation of cultural and religious pluralism and confrontation, of ethnic and racial conflict. The same description holds true with regard to the formative years of the early Church. The world of religious pluralism, the world of the pluralistic metropolis, was not a foreign world to early Christianity. It was precisely in this world it had to define itself from the beginning, and all the sayings of absoluteness or uniqueness have exactly this world as their background. One could, I think, argue that it is only in a pluralistic situation that sayings about uniqueness are really meaningful. Pointing out that there is only one saviour and only one way leading to salvation, is more appropriate in a setting where several saviours and ways are competing, than in a monopoly situation in which no alternatives are allowed to appear.



Accordingly, the need to define Christian identity in a situation of religious pluralism is by no means a new challenge to Christians. From the beginning, Christians had to find out what belief in Jesus meant in exactly this kind of environment. We shall take a closer look at some important aspects of this process of defining Christian identity and Christian belief in the pluralistic Graeco-Roman world.

## II

'The disciples were called Christians first at Antioch' (Acts 11,26). People are identified by their names. Individuals are given individual names. A group of people with a strong group identity will usually be given a name, for easy identification. Very often, the name which the group itself prefers, is not the same as the name used by outsiders. In Antioch, Luke tells us, the disciples *were called* Christians<sup>2</sup>—presumably by outsiders.<sup>3</sup> It was not a name they chose for themselves. And for good reason, for it was hardly meant as an honorary or positive name. Calling someone a *christianos* was equal to saying that he belonged to the sect founded by Christos (the Anointed One) or Chrestos (the useful one)—both words were pronounced the same way. Names with the ending—*ianos* were typical sect names. In this case, the name to which the ending was appended, may have been strange in itself. If Gentiles in Antioch took it to mean The Anointed One, they would not be familiar with its meaning. Well informed Gentiles would have some vague knowledge that it had something to do with the national aspirations and hopes of the Jewish people, maybe they would even know that 'The Anointed One' was the expected national redeemer. As long as Jews in Antioch talked about this Anointed One, their Gentile surroundings would hardly take notice, and hardly bother. What was special in Antioch, was that an increasing number of Gentiles began behaving strangely Jewish. And all the time these Gentiles were talking about The Anointed One, even more so than the Jews themselves. These Gentiles were strange people. They behaved very Jewish, they were thinking very Jewish. First of all,

they refused to have anything to do with normal, ordinary religion at Antioch, exactly like the Jews. They would not pay any respect to the official gods of Rome, let alone sacrifice to them. They would not burn incense in front of the emperor's statue. Nor would they pay any respect to the traditional gods of Antioch—that is: the old gods of Syria, the gods of their own ancestors, the gods they themselves had worshipped until recently. They would not even have anything to do with any of the new religions, the mysteries—again: exactly like the Jews. Like the Jews, they behaved and thought as a people apart, a people different from other men. But they were not Jews. They did not undergo circumcision at their conversion, they did not observe the Jewish purity regulations concerning food, they did not appear to observe the Sabbath, they did not attend the Synagogue service. And all the time they had this strange name on their lips, 'The Anointed One', *Ho Christos*. So, what else could you call them, these strange non-Jewish Jews, than 'those people of the Anointed One', 'the Messianics', *Hoi Christianoi*.

## III

My theme is Christian identity in the Graeco-Roman world, and I could think of no better point of departure than the situation in Antioch, when the disciples were given the name Christians. And I think it will prove fruitful to stay a little more in Antioch, and make some points concerning Christian identity with constant reference to that city.<sup>4</sup>

Antioch was the third biggest city of the Roman empire, and it was the old capital of a large empire older than the Roman. It was founded in the forth century BC, shortly after the death of Alexander, by one of his three leading generals, Seleucus Nicator. He named the city after his father Antiochus, and made it the capital of his empire, which extended from the shores of the Mediterranean and all the way the borders of India. It was a typically Hellenistic city, with a nucleus of six thousand Athenian immigrants in its population, the rest of which was mostly natives from the region (Aramaic-speaking Syrians), and a



substantial Jewish colony.<sup>5</sup> Antioch soon flourished, and especially under Antiochus IV Epiphanes it became a true metropolis, consciously hellenized, magnificently adorned, known as the centre of culture, art, and pleasure in the East, arena of the Olympic games. It was also under Epiphanes that the Jewish question for the first time was put on the agenda in Antioch. Jewish resistance to Epiphanes' programme of Hellenization did not make them popular, and when the story of Jewish resistance in Jerusalem became known in Antioch, anti-Jewish riots broke out, the first such riots on record ever. When the Romans took control of the province of Syria and Palestine in 64–63 BC, Antioch took on new significance as the Roman stronghold against the Parthian empire in the east. It became a typically Graeco-Roman city, the third biggest in the empire after Rome and Alexandria, and it provides us with an excellent and typical example of the religious, cultural, and political setting in which early Christianity had to define itself.

First of all, we see quite clearly that the identity of Christians had to do with their relationship to Judaism and the Jewish people. As long as we are talking of the community of Jewish believers in Jesus in Jerusalem, that might be considered self-explanatory. Of course the first believers in Jesus had to define themselves vis à vis the rest of the Jewish people, the great majority who did not believe in Him. But I want to emphasize that this relationship to Judaism and the Jews was not less important in a typically Graeco-Roman city like Antioch. Maybe one could reasonably argue that it became *more* important there, than in Jerusalem.

In Jerusalem, the Jewish identity of all Jews was, in a certain sense, unproblematic. A Jew in Palestine could belong to the party of the Sadducees, the Pharisees, the Essenes, or the disciples of Jesus; he could be a Zealot, or he could belong to no particular party at all. In any case, his Jewish identity as such was not in question. He belonged to an old nation, recognized as such by the Roman authorities. He belonged to a nation with rather peculiar religious traditions, but even that was recognized by the Romans, to the point that they allowed the Jews *not* to take part in official worship of the Roman gods and the genius of the Emperor. This special privilege, granted to the Jews and to nobody else, was not granted

willingly by the Romans, and they always carried a grudge against the Jews and were deeply suspicious of them. But they had to admit that it was an old and established tradition among the Jews that they could only worship the God of Israel and nobody else, and the Romans had a deep respect for traditions; their own and those of other peoples. Nobody could deny that the Jews were following the traditions of their forefathers when they behaved in this peculiar way in all matters of religion and ritual.

In the diaspora outside the Land of Israel, Judaism was recognized as a *religio licita*, a legal religion. There were Jewish colonies in all the major cities all around the Mediterranean, and in their conduct of their religion and rituals, these Jewish colonies were protected by the legal status of Judaism. But they were not loved by their Gentile neighbours. They were under great pressure towards assimilation and loss of Jewish identity. They were under great pressure to minimize Jewish ritual observances, because these kept them most apart and made social life with Gentiles difficult. In other words: In the diaspora, Jewish identity was much more problematic, it was something you had to be conscious about, and perhaps fight for.<sup>6</sup>

This was the case in Antioch, too. So, in Antioch we find the two religious and cultural elements that were always important in Christian self-definition: the Jews and the Gentiles, the Jews and the Hellenistic population. The Jewish believers in Jesus hardly represented a problem to their Gentile neighbours. They were Jews, they were allowed to behave Jewish—and probably were expected to behave Jewish—with regard to official religion. It was otherwise with the Gentile believers in Jesus. They, too, behaved Jewish with regard to official religion. In refusing to have anything to do with official religion or emperor worship they behaved Jewish, they claimed a Jewish privilege. But they were not Jews. They were the neither-nor-people. Early in the second century they were called 'the third people'. Not Jews, not Gentiles, but the third people.<sup>7</sup> This name, as well as the name *Christianoi*, tells us that Christian identity in the Graeco-Roman world was defined within the social, cultural, and religious tension between Gentiles and Jews. The relationship Jews/Gentiles so to



speak provides us with a diagram within which we can describe Christian identity. To understand this better, we shall have to look a little closer at the Gentile element in this diagram.

#### IV

Let us look at Paganism in Antioch. Antioch was a metropolis, a true mega-city by the standards of those days, with maybe as much as half a million inhabitants.<sup>8</sup> That means, in Antioch we find the typical pluralism of all big cities, ancient or modern. In Antioch, as in Rome, Alexandria, Ephesus, Carthage—the five biggest cities in the Roman empire, and also the five most important centres of Christianity, after Jerusalem—we find three elements in Pagan religion.<sup>9</sup>

The first is what we could call the old native religion. This would be different from city to city, from area to area, because the gods of native religion were local. In Antioch the native religion would be very close to the religion of the Canaanites of the OT; it means, e.g., that Baal was a major deity.<sup>10</sup> It was a religion concerned with fertility and vitality, life energy, among men and beasts and on the fields; Baal was a dying and rising god, he died and rose with the barley in the fields. It was a religion concerned with personified forces in nature, it was basically an animistic religion, concerned to appease the divine forces, good or evil. In other words, the core of traditional religion in Antioch was classic animism, as we still find it at the core of popular religion all over the world.

The second element was that which we could call official religion, lying as a second layer above the old native worship. The Romans were convinced that the welfare of their empire was directly dependent on the goodwill and favour of the Roman gods, and their favourite technique for accommodating other peoples' pantheons was to identify the Roman gods with those of other peoples.<sup>11</sup> Only the names differed, the gods were the same. This process had been carried out first with regard to the gods of Greece; in this case there existed officially recognised identifications. But the same process went

on with other pantheons of the eastern peoples. In Antioch this process was begun before the Roman conquest, the Greek Seleucids had identified the old Semitic gods of Syria with the Greek pantheon already, and this process of Hellenization was so complete by New Testament times, that only the Greek names of the deities of Antioch survive in our sources, not the Semitic ones. On top of this, the Roman identifications were added, and the old cults of Syria could parade as the official worship of the Roman gods, who were no longer local, but in a sense universal, at least as universal as the empire itself. This was not a religion for the individual, private man; it was the official worship carried out by the authorities. Its purpose was the wellbeing and peace and prosperity of the empire. Its latest addition brings this out most clearly: the worship of the emperor's personal genius.

The third and newest element of Paganism in a city like Antioch was what we nowadays would call the new religions. This new type of religion can be seen as a product of the cultural and religious common-market established with the empire itself. When people travelled from city to city, when people met with other people of quite different backgrounds in the big cities, something happened to traditional, national religion. People were forced to compare and to think about their religion. They were forced to raise the problem of universality: Is my religion just the religion of this locality, or is it in any way the truth for all men?

This resulted in two things. It resulted in a high degree of religious relativism and syncretism. But it also had another and apparently different result. Some became convinced that their old local religion really was the truth for all men, and so they loosened their old faith from its national limitations and made it an offer to all men. In this way some national cults became international and missionary; most of them had an eastern origin. We call them the mystery religions, because they had rites of initiation that were kept secret to outsiders.<sup>12</sup>

It is interesting to observe that these religions of eastern origin were consciously Hellenized, that is: westernized, before they were presented to the Greek-Roman world.



In A.D. Nock's words: 'For the . . . expansion of cults from the Near East in Greece and in the West . . . (they) were substantially translated into Greek and remade with Greek elements into cults which retained an Oriental flavour but were divorced from their original cultural and religious setting.'<sup>13</sup> The mystery cults of Dionysios and Attis came from Asia Minor, the mysteries of Isis came from Egypt, and the mysteries of Mithras came from Persia. These mystery religions did not aspire to the position of new state religion, they did hardly at all *want* to become official religion—and the only one to achieve a kind of semi-official standing was Mithraism, which for one period in the third century was popular in the army and with some emperors. No, the mystery religions were satisfied to form a new kind of religious society: the *private religious society or club*. The peak of this movement was the 'New Age' phenomenon of antiquity: Gnosticism. It tried to make an amalgam of all the best oriental wisdom, and presented it as new wisdom in the West, old and new at the same time.

It goes without saying that this new religiosity was a typical city phenomenon. Very likely, the mystery cults satisfied the need of big-city people for new social networks. In the mystery cults, the individual was taken seriously. Mystery religion very much centred on the salvation of the individual. And the mystery societies acted as fellowships of mutual help and assistance.

At the same time, the mystery cults did not bother about or interfere with the other religious loyalties of the citizen. He could apply for membership in a mystery cult, and at the same time perform the obligatory rites of official religion. He could be initiated in more than one mystery religion; after some time it became an ideal to be initiated in 'all mysteries'. Therefore the Romans could tolerate these new missionary religions, despite the fact that they regarded some of them with considerable suspicion.

## V

We must now look at the other side of our religious diagram, the Jewish side. And it may be fruitful to include at once some

observations on the situation of Christians also.

As I have said, a high degree of mutual tolerance prevailed within the Roman empire, especially with regard to religion. Old national religions were accepted, and even the missionary mystery religions were tolerated. But speaking of tolerance, we should stress the word *mutual*. There was, so to speak, an unwritten rule of the game: If you tolerate my gods, I will tolerate yours. And everyone respected this rule—except the Jews and the Christians. The reason was simple. As one Jewish historian has put it: 'The Gods of Greece could easily compromise with the God of Israel, but he could not compromise with them.'<sup>14</sup>

The problem with the Jews, seen from the Roman perspective, was that it proved quite impossible to get the Jews to pay any homage whatsoever to the Roman gods. To the Jews, of course, that would have been idolatry plain and simple. And to worship the Emperor would be as bad if not worse, for that was worship of a human being as if he were God. So the Jews proved absolutely stubborn on these points: No homage to the Roman gods, no worship of the emperor.

This was very hard to accept for the Romans. No other people made such difficulties. No other people had a God like the people of Israel, a God who tolerated no other god beside himself. Because of this, the Romans did not love the Jews, to put it mildly. In fact, there were many who did not like the Jews very much. The Jews were popularly called atheists, meaning that they refused any participation in official religion. They were called haters of men, meaning anti-social people, because their rules of ritual purity did not allow much contact with Gentiles. They could not eat together with non-Jews, for example.<sup>15</sup>

Nevertheless, the Romans were realists enough to understand that there was no way they could change or force the Jews to behave differently in these matters. And the Romans had respect for old traditions. They had to recognize, although they may not have liked it, that the Jews were following the tradition of their ancestors when they refused to have anything to do with any god beside the God of Israel. Accordingly, the Roman authorities



made an exception from the general rule: *The Jews were allowed to abstain from worship of the Roman gods and the emperor.* Part of the reason for this tolerance by the Romans was probably their conviction that Judaism was and would remain the national religion of the Jewish people. And in this they were not mistaken. The problem came with Christianity, when it became clear that Christianity was not destined to remain a Jewish religious group, but recruited more followers outside than inside Judaism.

I have said that the mystery religions were old national eastern religions turned universal and missionary. In this perspective, one can easily imagine the role into which Christianity would be cast. Christianity could be interpreted as Judaism turned into a universal mystery religion, the 'mystery version' of Judaism. Probably this was how some saw it in antiquity. Certainly it has been seen this way by some modern scholars.<sup>16</sup> And although I believe this perspective is, on the whole, misleading, it certainly makes us see the identity problem of early Christians clearly.

Mystery religions were very tolerant, never exclusive. If Christianity, as another 'new' religion, was put in this category, Christian refusal to take part in any other religious worship must have been very offensive. In this respect Christians did not behave like the mystery people. They behaved like Jews. When, at the same time, they did not present the national aspect of Judaism, but were consciously universalistic and missionary, they represented a unique challenge to their surroundings. The mystery religions did present their adherents with an addition, a new dimension to their religious life. Confronted with Christianity, you had to choose, you had to say no to everything else to be able to say yes to a new master and a new life. Let us look a little closer at this Christian 'no' to other faiths.

## VI

With regard to the old national religions, Christianity quite simply continued the rejection pronounced by the OT and Judaism. To worship Pagan gods by honouring their statues in the temples was regarded as

idolatry plain and simple, the very thing most of the OT was directed against. The Jews and the Christians took notice of the basically animistic character of the old religions by claiming that the official gods were not really gods at all, but deceptive demons, evil spirits. Official religion was nothing else than worship of (evil) spirits!<sup>17</sup>

This was no learned theory of advanced theologians only. It was impressed on all Christians minds, e.g. at their baptism. When a Gentile was baptised, he said two things. He confessed his faith in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit in the form of affirmative answers to the three questions of faith—which developed into the three articles of the creed.<sup>18</sup> But before the baptismal candidate confessed his faith in this positive way, he said the following formula: I renounce thee, Satan, and all service of you and all your works.<sup>19</sup> We still have basically the same sentence in our Norwegian baptismal liturgy, and no-one any longer knows exactly what it means. To the early Christians it had a very clear and drastic meaning: I hereby declare that I shall no longer visit the temples, no longer bring the sacrifices or burn incense to any image, no longer consult the astrologers or fortune-tellers, no longer have anything to do with the religious traditions of my ancestors. It is all service to Satan, slavery under Satan. Now I am free from it, I quit all that, I break with it.

One can easily imagine how offensive this was with regard to family and old friends who still were not Christians. And it brought the non-Jewish Christian into a legal no-man's land where he was unprotected by any law. He behaved Jewish, but he was not a Jew. He was not protected by the legal status of Judaism. He was the follower of a new religion, not a century-old tradition. He had no legal protection.

I believe this explains quite exactly the legal standing of the great majority of early Christians—those of non-Jewish origin. It explains why the early Church was a persecuted Church and a martyr Church. If Christianity had only had consequences within the realm of private religion, there would have been few problems with the authorities. There would have been severe



conflicts within the family and among friends, but not with the authorities. But Christianity had consequences outside the realm of private religion. Christians—just like the Jews—refused to take part in official religion. Therefore the Church had a constant conflict going with the authorities.

It is interesting to see how this conflict between Church and state developed. For the first 200 years the state authorities tried, with mixed success, to ignore the Christians as far as possible. Roman policy was delineated by the emperor Trajan in a response to an official in Bithynia, Asia Minor, in 112 AD.

You have taken the right line, my dear Pliny, in examining the cases of those denounced to you as Christians, for no hard and fast rule can be laid down, of universal application. They are not to be sought out; if they are informed against, and the charge is proved, they are to be punished, with this reservation—that if any one denies that he is a Christian, and actually proves it, that is by worshipping our gods, he shall be pardoned as a result of his recantation, however suspect he may have been with respect to the past. Pamphlets published anonymously should carry no weight in any charge whatsoever. They constitute a very bad precedent, and are also out of keeping with this age.<sup>20</sup>

The meaning of the emperor is quite clear: Make as few martyrs as possible. Do not make active investigation as to who are Christians. Only when persons are denounced as Christians by their neighbours should action be taken—but then due punishment must be given. Refusal to worship our gods is the very mark of the Christian, and is a capital offence.

This official policy was normally the one actually carried out. The early reports on martyrdoms confirm that the initiative to legal persecution did not come from the authorities, but from ordinary people: neighbours, relatives, slaves betraying their masters and vice versa.

Part of the reason why the Romans would avoid great numbers of martyrs, was that they regarded Christian martyrs as good publicity for the Church and bad publicity for the authorities. They knew the truth of Tertullian's famous words: The blood of the martyrs is the seed of the Church. But the problem was: With or without this publicity, the Church continued to grow. In the third century, Christians had become so numerous that one of the emperors, Decius, decided it was intolerable that so many people openly opposed the obligatory duties of all loyal citizens. In 251 AD Decius introduced

the second phase in the State's dealings with the Church: That year he launched the first systematic and full-scale attempt to destroy the Church through violent persecution. He succeeded in producing a great number of martyrs, but he did not succeed in destroying the Church. It lasted about 50 years until the emperor Diocletian tried once more to wipe out the Church once and for all. It was the most terrible persecution ever, and in the Eastern part of the empire it lasted 10 terrible years. But it did not succeed. Historically speaking, it was probably too late. The Christians were too many and were so integrated into the society on all levels that it was practically impossible to destroy them without destroying the fabric of society.<sup>21</sup>

And then, within less than ten years, came the great shift which introduced the third phase, which in parts of Europe has lasted into our century: The Constantinian era. Emperor Constantine obviously understood that the Church could not be beaten, it had successfully opposed the physical means of power which Diocletian had amassed against it. There is a popular American saying, 'if you can't beat 'em, join 'em.' Whether that was Constantine's reason or not; it clearly was his policy. The only way to make the power of Rome and the spiritual power of the Church coexist peacefully and without unbearable conflict, was to make Christianity the religion of the state.<sup>22</sup>

I think that is a very interesting story. What was the force that drove this story forward; what was the secret behind the Church's victory over one of the most powerful empires the world has ever seen? I think one may put it quite simply: It was the simple fact that the Christians refused to take part in official religion. In the long run, that left the state with only two alternatives: beat 'em or join 'em. Through this stubborn refusal to participate in official religion, the Christians conquered the empire. In the words of Peter Brown: 'They remained a small group: but they succeeded in becoming a big problem.'<sup>23</sup> It did cost them a terrible price: The blood of the martyrs. But through it, they won.

## VII

With regard to the mystery religions, the situation was similar, and yet different. There was no obligation to take part in



these, the Christians were not the only ones who refused to have anything to do with them. The greatest problem was the similarity between the mystery religions and Christianity itself. Therefore, Christian polemic at this point is not simply a take-over from Judaism, because the Jews did not have this problem. The early Apologists, like Justin, see the problem and usually follow the strategy of admitting a superficial similarity, especially with regard to the rites of the Christian sacraments, but attributing these to demonic imitation. The demons knew in advance about Christ and the Christian sacraments, because they knew the Old Testament prophecies. Therefore they produced poor parodies of these things among the Gentiles, so that when the real thing came, people would say: just another myth, just another mystery.<sup>24</sup>

This sharp polemical attitude was itself part of the big difference between Christianity and the mysteries. The world of mystery religions would easily have accommodated Christianity and made it a member of the group, had not Christians insisted that their faith excluded all other forms of worship.

The biggest problem in this field was Gnosticism, because important groups within this movement insisted on being the true Christians. While the mystery religions may have accused Christians of being narrow-minded because they would allow no alternatives, Gnosticism presented itself not as an alternative but as Christianity itself. There are many aspects of this conflict with Gnosticism which there is no space to go into here; I will only draw attention to one feature. For the most part, Gnosticism presented itself as the open-minded version of Christianity. Which means: Gnostic Christianity *was* compatible with the necessary participation in official religion, and also with membership in one or more of the Pagan mysteries. By and large, Gnostics avoided being persecuted, and they seem to have mocked Christian martyrdom as completely unnecessary.<sup>25</sup>

So—to sum up: In a world of religious pluralism, a world in which people intensely disliked to choose *one* alternative and exclude all others, Christianity presented people

with exactly this option. It made Christianity unpopular, like Judaism, and for much the same reason. But more than that: It made Christians visible, it made them 'public', because the Christian rejection of Pagan worship was not a private affair. It could make them martyrs.

## VIII

In the light of this—what about the early Christian sayings that seem to speak for tolerance and for the idea that Christ was active also outside Biblical revelation, as the *Logos Spermatikos*? What do these sayings tell about Christian identity? In our days, some theologians advocating a more inclusive approach have pointed to the *Logos Spermatikos* idea as an early Christian version of the idea that Christ is the hidden reality also in non-Christian religion.<sup>26</sup>

Let me state my thesis quite bluntly: The author of the *Logos Spermatikos* idea, Saint Justin, did *not* think that Christ was the hidden reality behind Pagan religions.<sup>27</sup> Nor did Clement of Alexandria, nor any other father of the early Church. Justin shared the common conviction among Christians that this hidden reality was not Christ, but the demons. He also knew that this rejection of official religion was regarded as an outrage, and that it produced martyrdoms. Like some Jewish apologists before him, he liked to make his Gentile audience aware of the fact that Christians were not the only ones who rejected official worship. There were some among their own greatest men who had done the same. One of them even became a martyr for it, like the Christians: Socrates. In one of the big heroes of Greek culture, the greatest of philosophers, Socrates himself, Justin finds an ally, a spokesman, and a spokesman for precisely that element in Christian faith which seemed most anti-cultural: the rejection of official religion.

Those who were born before Christ . . . were dragged into law courts as irreligious and meddling persons, when they tried in human narrowness to think out and prove things by reason. Socrates, the most ardent of all in this regard, was accused of the very crimes that are imputed to us. They claimed that he introduced new deities and rejected the state-sponsored



gods. But what he did was to ostracize Homer and the other poets, and to instruct men to expel the evil demons and those who perpetrated the deeds narrated by the poets;<sup>28</sup> and to exhort men by meditation to learn more about God who was unknown to them, saying: 'It is not an easy matter to find the Father and Creator of all things, nor, when He is found, is it safe to announce him to all men.'<sup>29</sup> Yet, our Christ did all this through His own power. There was no one who believed so much in Socrates as to die for his teaching, but not only philosophers and scholars believed in Christ, of whom even Socrates had a vague knowledge, ... but also workmen and men wholly uneducated, who all scorned glory, and fear, and death (Justin, 2. *Apology*, 10 (transl. Falls)).

Accordingly, it is *not* in non-Christian religion that Justin sees the *Logos Spermatikos* at work, but in non-Christian rejection of non-Christian religion.<sup>30</sup> In Justin's case, it is precisely the most offensive, the most provocative aspect of Christian behaviour within a pluralistic society, namely the stubborn adherence to Christ alone, which is brought home and explained in a culturally meaningful way through his idea of the *Logos Spermatikos*.

To sum up: In Justin religion and philosophy are antagonistic entities. Philosophy is valued in so far as it destroys official religion, and it is this destruction of non-Biblical religion (idolatry) by *Pagans* which is regarded as manifestations of Christ the Sower, the *Logos Spermatikos*, by Justin.<sup>31</sup>

Whence did Justin get his idea that Pagans who repudiated idolatry should be reckoned as Christians? There is a Rabbinic saying, transmitted in different contexts, which says: Anyone who repudiates idolatry, is to be called 'a Jew'.<sup>32</sup> Pagans who reject idolatry, are, so to speak, Jews *honoris causa*. The Rabbis could sometimes group Abraham, Ananias, Azarias, and Mishael (the three young men of Dan 3) together as model martyrs or model proselytes, precisely because they all repudiated idolatry. In exactly the same way Justin can group such people together as 'Christians':

Lest some should unreasonably assert ... that we affirm that Christ was born one hundred and fifty years ago ... and should accuse us as if all men born before Christ were not accountable for their actions, we shall

anticipate and answer such a difficulty. We have been taught that Christ was First-begotten of God, and we have indicated above that He is the Logos of whom all mankind partakes. Those who lived by reason (or: according to Logos) are 'Christians', even though they have been considered atheists: such as, among the Greeks, Socrates, Heraclitus, and others like them; and among the foreigners, Abraham, Ananias, Azarias, Mishael, Elijah, and many others ... (1. *Apol.* 46:1-3, transl. Falls).

I would suggest that Justin has christianized a Jewish idea: The Gentile person who all on his own repudiates Pagan religion is heading in the right direction, he is an honorary 'Jew'—or, *mutatis mutandis*, a 'Christian'. The model case is Socrates: He repudiated Athenian religion (idolatry, demon worship) and exhorted the Athenians to seek the Unknown God.

## IX

It is time to conclude. We have seen that the identity, or the self-definition, of early Christians was a complex phenomenon with many aspects. Instead of trying to sum up everything of relevance, I would like to end by highlighting one conclusion.

Christianity was born in a religiously pluralistic world, among pluralistically minded people. In such a world, many things are tolerated. But one thing is difficult to tolerate: The message which claims to be absolute truth for all men. The early Church was under a constant pressure to dilute or soften its claim to possess an absolute truth for all men. The best proof of this pressure are the many martyrdoms. Christians were martyred for not being willing to respect the Roman gods and the divine status of the emperor. It was incompatible with their Christian faith. Their uncompromising attitude with regard to Pagan religion in general probably made people in general dislike them to the extent of instigating mob persecutions. On the other hand, it was this Christian unwillingness to compromise which made them such an insoluble problem to the authorities.

Early Christian ideas of Christ as the Logos Spermatikos in no way softens this



uncompromising stand. On the contrary, they bolster it by pointing out that a few among the Pagans anticipated this uncompromising rejection of Pagan religion.

I have consciously emphasized the rough edge of this early Christian identity. It should not surprise us. Let me repeat: We are dealing with a Church suffering martyrdoms. And yet—allow me to bring some warmth to the picture by ending with a quote which not only keeps the rough edge, but also speaks of the love behind it. It is the nicest expression of Christian identity I can think of:

The distinction between Christians and other men is neither in country nor language nor customs. For they do not dwell in cities in some place of their own, nor do they use any strange variety of dialect, nor practise an extraordinary kind of life. . . . Yet while living in Greek and barbarian cities, according as each obtained his lot, and following the local customs, both in clothing and food and in the rest of life, they show forth the wonderful and confessedly strange character of the constitution of their own citizenship:

They dwell in their own fatherlands—but as sojourners;

they share all things as citizens—and suffer all things as strangers;

every foreign country is their fatherland—and every fatherland is a foreign country;

they offer free hospitality—but guard their purity;

they pass their time upon the earth—but their citizenship is in heaven;

they obey the appointed laws—and they surpass them in their own lives;

they love all men—and are persecuted by all men; . . .

they are put to death—and they gain life;

they are poor—and make many rich;

they lack all things—and have all things in abundance;

they are dishonoured—and are glorified in their dishonour;

they are spoken evil of—and are justified;

they are abused—and give blessing;

they are insulted—and render honour.

When they do good—they are buffeted as evildoers;

when they are buffeted—they rejoice as men who receive life.

They are warred upon by the Jews as foreigners, and are persecuted by the Greeks—but those who hate them cannot state the cause of their enmity (*Epistle to Diognetus*, IV).

- 1 In an opening address at a seminar in Chicago, 2 and 3 May 1986, arranged by the Commission on Studies in the LWF. Quoted here according to a xeroxed press release by the LWF.
- 2 The Greek construction (*chrematisai . . . tous mathetas christianous*) is formally an accusative with an (active) aorist infinitive, but the meaning is clearly passive, as observed in all translations.
- 3 Gentiles, not Jews. The Jews believed in the Anointed One themselves, and called the Christians by the name of Nazarenes, to identify them with Jesus. The form of the adjective *christianos* is a Latinism (*christianus*). Some scholars take this as an indication that the name was coined by the Roman authorities in Antioch, but this is by no means a compelling inference. Similar names were usual, as e.g. *Herodianoi* et al.
- 4 For general information on the Antioch of antiquity, cp. G. Downey, *A History of Antioch in Syria*, Princeton 1961; J. H. W. G. Liebeschütz, *Antioch. City and Imperial Administration in the later Roman Empire*, Oxford 1972. Concerning Christianity in Antioch, consult A. J. Festugière, *Antioche païenne et chrétienne* (Bibliothèque des écoles françaises d'Athènes et de Rome, 194), Paris 1959; D. S. Wallace-Hadrill, *Christian Antioch*, Cambridge (Cambr. Univ. Press) 1982; and W. A. Meeks, R. L. Wilken, *Jews and Christians at Antioch in the first four centuries of the Common Era* (Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study Nr. 13), Missoula 1978, 13–52.
- 5 On Jews in Antioch, cp. W. A. Meeks, R. L. Wilken, *op.cit.*, 2–13; and the older work by C. H. Kraeling, 'The Jewish Community at Antioch', *JBL* 51 (1932), 130–60.
- 6 Concerning Judaism in the Diaspora of the Graeco-Roman world, cp. V. Tcherikover, *Hellenistic Civilization and the Jews*, paperback ed. New York 1977 (orig. publ. 1959), part II, 269–277; and the older work of Jean Juster, *Les Juifs dans l'empire romain*, Paris 1914.
- 7 On the concept of the third people—the oldest occurrence is in *Kerygma Petrou*, fragm. 2a (*apud* Clem. Alex. *Strom.* VI:5:41) —cp. esp. A. von Harnack, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten I* (4.Aufl.), Leipzig 1924, 264–67; 281–89, with copious references to the primary sources.
- 8 That is, in 'greater Antioch', the entire territory of the city. According to Meeks/Wilken, *op. cit.*, 8 (referring to Liebeschütz), Antioch proper may have had 150,000 inhabitants in the fourth century, whereas the whole territory of Antioch probably had 400,000. Maybe the population was already declining in the fourth century AD.
- 9 On religion in the ancient cities, cp. in particular A. D. Nock, *Conversion. The Old and New in*



- Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*, Oxford (paperb. ed.) 1961; R. L. Fox, *Pagans and Christians in the Mediterranean world from the second century AD to the conversion of Constantine* (Penguin Books), Harmondsworth 1988, 27)261.
- 10 On traditional Paganism in Antioch, cp. Wallace-Hadrill, *op. cit.*, 14ff.
  - 11 Cp. R. M. Ogilvie, *The Romans and their Gods*, (paperb. ed.) London 1986 (orig. publ. 1969).
  - 12 To my mind, the best description of these 'new religions', the mystery cults, is still A. D. Nock's in *Conversion*, chs. III–IX (1961 paperb. ed., pp. 33–155). For a convenient collection of primary sources in translation, see M. W. Meyer (ed.), *The Ancient Mysteries: A Source Book*, San Francisco 1987.
  - 13 A. D. Nock, *op. cit.*, 37. The analogies in modern times are striking: First, the westernization of Hinduism into Neo-Hinduism around the turn of the last century; then, in our days the Americanization of eastern ideas in the cultural melting-pot of California.
  - 14 Victor Tcherikover in the book quoted in note 6.
  - 15 On Gentile and Roman attitudes towards and perceptions of Jews, cp. *i.a.* I. Heinemann, 'The attitude of the Ancient World toward Judaism', *Review of Religion* 4 (1940), 385–400; J. G. Gager, *The origins of Anti-Semitism. Attitudes toward Judaism in Pagan and Christian Antiquity*, New York/Oxford 1985, esp. pp. 35–112. Gager makes a good case for the view that anti-Jewish feelings were not universal, and were balanced by much fascination and sympathy for Jews, often by Pagans in high places. This was no doubt the case, but should not be generalized unduly. There is a full presentation of the sources in M. Stern, *Greek and Latin authors on Jews and Judaism I–II*, Jerusalem 1974/80 (a third volume projected).
  - 16 E.g. A. Loisy and H. Lietzmann, and *instar omnium* Odo Casel. For a critical and informed discussion of this thesis, cp. the chapter 'Pagan and Christian Mysteries' in J. A. Jungmann, *The Early Liturgy*, London 1960 (and later reprints), 152–163.
  - 17 The early Christian sayings to this effect are legion, beginning with Justin. The same idea is certainly presupposed already by Paul in 1 Cor 10:20f, and indicated in the LXX and the Jewish Pseudepigrapha. Cp. a short review and discussion of the material in my *The Proof from Prophecy: A Study in Justin Martyr's Proof-Text Tradition* (Suppl. to Novum Testamentum 56), Leiden 1987, 368f.
  - 18 Cp. esp. J. N. D. Kelly, *Early Christian Creeds* (3 ed.), London 1972, 40–49.
  - 19 This formula, with some variation in wording, is first attested in Tertullian ca 200 AD, and then in several liturgical texts from Hippolytus (c. 220 AD) onwards. Texts in English translation in E. C. Whitaker, *Documents of the Baptismal Liturgy* (2. ed.), London 1970, 7ff.
  - 20 I have adopted here the translation in Henry Bettenson, *Documents of the Christian Church* (2. ed.), London 1963, 6.
  - 21 On the theme of Church and state, persecution and martyrdom in the early Church, see first and foremost William H. C. Frend, *Martyrdom and Persecution in the Early Church*, Oxford 1965 (reprint Grand Rapids 1981).
  - 22 There are a great many books and articles on Constantine and his religious policy—see for orientation A. H. M. Jones, *Constantine and the Conversion of Europe*, Pelican Books, Harmondsworth 1972; and Heinrich Kraft (ed.), *Konstantin der Grosse* (Wege der Forschung 131), Darmstadt 1976.
  - 23 P. Brown, *The World of Late Antiquity from Marcus Aurelius to Muhammad*, London 1971, 65.
  - 24 E.g. 1. *Apol.* 33:3; 53f; 62:1; 64; 66:4; *Dial.* 70:1; 78:6 *et al.*
  - 25 This is well brought out and well documented by E. Pagels, *The Gnostic Gospels*, New York (Vintage Books) 1981, ch. IV (pp. 84–122).
  - 26 E.g. George Khodr in a paper read at the WCC central committee meeting at Addis Ababa in 1970: 'Christianity in a Pluralist World—the Economy of the Holy Spirit'; later published in S. Samartha (ed.), *Living Faiths and the Ecumenical Movement*, Geneva 1971, 131–142. In this paper, Khodr claims Justin as one of the originators of the idea that 'Christ . . . is asleep in the night of the religions' (p. 142).
  - 27 On *Logos Spermatikos*, cp. *i.a.* R. Holte, 'Logos Spermatikos. Christianity and Ancient Philosophy according to St. Justin's Apologies', *Studia Theologica* 12 (1958), 109–168; N. Pycke, 'Connaissance rationelle et connaissance de grâce chez saint Justin', *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 37, Louvain/Gembloux 1961, 52–85; J. H. Waszink, 'Bemerkungen zu Justins Lehre vom Logos Spermatikos', *MULLUS, Festschrift für Theodor Klauser* (= Jahrbuch für Antike und Christentum, Ergänzungsband 1), Münster 1964, 380–390; D. Bourgeois, *La sagesse des anciens dans le mystère du verbe: évangile et philosophie chez saint Justin philosophe et martyr*, Paris 1981.
  - 28 This refers to Socrates' criticism of Homer and the other poets in Plato's dialogue *Republic*, X.
  - 29 Socrates in Plato's dialogue *Timaeus* 28C.
  - 30 It may come as a surprise to some that Justin employs the concept of *Logos Spermatikos* only twice, and both times in the Second Apology. The first occurrence, in 2. *Apol.* 8:2f, is in a passage completely parallel to the one from 2. *Apol.* 10



quoted above. The second, in 2. *Apol.* 13:3, has a very similar context: martyrdom and witness for the truth, fight against demons, being partially accomplished by some of the philosophers.

- 31 The Christology behind this idea would seem to be the concept of Christ (=Logos) as the *mediator of creation*, especially the creation of man. As the creator, God has endowed man with a rational (Logos-like) capacity. The demons and the demonic are anti-rational, anti-Logos. Justin's idea is not very far from Paul's in Rom. 1 and 2, and Paul's Areopagus speech in Acts 17. Cp. in particular B. Gärtner, *The Areopagus Speech and Natural Revelation* (Acta Seminarii Neo-

testamentici Upsaliensis 21), Uppsala 1955, and my own remarks on the *Logos Spermatikos* Christology in Skarsaune, *Incarnation: Myth or Fact?* St. Louis 1991, 67–70.

- 32 Cp. *Mekhilta de Rabbi Ishmael*, tractate Pisha V:40–43 (ed. Lauterbach pp. 26f); *Bab. Talmud*, tractate Megillah 13a; *Sifre Deut.*, paragraph 28. Cp. also the following: 'Idolatry is so heinous that he who rejects it is as though he admits the whole Torah' (*Bab. Talmud*, Kiddushin 40a. For some further comments on this theme, see my *The Proof from Prophecy*, 364–66; and *Incarnation: Myth or Fact?*, 68f.



- **Zum Christsein in der modernen Welt berufen**
- ***The Christian Calling in the Modern World***
- ***L'Appel à une vie Chrétienne authentique dans le monde moderne***

**Dr. Rolf Hille**, Tübingen. Vortrag anlässlich der Verleihung des Johann-Tobias-Preises 1992 bei der FEET-Konferenz am 17. August 92 in Wölmersen.

## SUMMARY

*The preposition 'in' is of fundamental importance as far as this subject is concerned. One of the principal distinctions between Christianity on the one hand and Buddhism and Islam on the other, is that Jesus' disciples are called to be a minority group in society, to active discipleship in the world that does not absolve them from the problems and suffering of human existence. The motivation for living out the Christian faith in the world, even under difficult conditions, lies in God becoming man in Christ who humbled himself and gave himself for us. The Christian calling in the world can still today be defined in terms of the three so-called theological virtues (1. Cor. 13:13). Firstly, the question of truth. Modern philosophy with its linguistic analysis and scientific positivism is undergoing a crisis of thought, in which the question of truth is considered to be fundamentally unanswerable. Ludwig Wittgenstein clearly demonstrates this agnosticism in his philosophical treatise. In this respect the insight gained during the Reformation in the 16th century must be extended in its application. Luther discovered for the first time that man cannot justify himself in the sight of God on the basis of his*

*moral attainments. In our century we have to grasp the fact that man is intellectually incapable of explaining his existence, or of defining the meaning of history in purely rational terms. Man needs the gift of faith to release his intellect from the shackles of agnosticism and existential uncertainty. Secondly, theology can provide a counter to the hedonistic lifestyle of modern man by pointing to the resurrection of Christ. Only when man has a viable hope that transcends this world, is he no longer forced to concentrate his pursuit of happiness on the few years of his earthly existence. For this leads to the forms of egoism and pursuit of pleasure that have become all too prevalent in western society. Finally, in John 7:17 Jesus promises that his power and presence can be experienced in everyday life. When people enter into a relationship with Christ and follow him, they discover that his word holds true and his love sustains them.*

*Church history shows how, in different situations of extreme difficulty, Christ preserved and renewed his church. Because the church is not centred on a dead tradition, but on a living Lord, Christians have, even as a minority, the opportunity to permeate modern society with the savour of the gospel.*

## RÉSUMÉ

*La préposition 'dans' est fondamentale pour le thème que nous traitons. La foi chrétienne se distingue d'autres religions comme le bouddhisme ou l'Islam essentiellement en ceci: elle place les disciples du Christ devant l'obligation d'être actifs pour le Seigneur dans le monde, tout en restant une minorité, et de ne*

*pas se dérober aux problèmes et aux souffrances de la vie présente. Nous devons être prêts à mettre en oeuvre notre foi chrétienne dans le monde malgré les circonstances difficiles, et cela en vertu du fait que Dieu s'est fait homme dans la personne du Christ qui s'est abaissé lui-même et s'est donné pour nous. La vocation du*



chrétien dans le monde peut s'ordonner aujourd'hui encore autour des trois vertus dites théologiques (1 Cor. 13–13). D'abord en ce qui concerne la vérité: la philosophie moderne, avec son analyse linguistique et son positivisme scientifique, en est arrivée à une crise de la pensée qui laisse entendre que la quête de la vérité n'est pas susceptible de recevoir une réponse. Ludwig Wittgenstein manifeste un agnosticisme de ce genre dans son traité philosophico-logique. Dans ce contexte, il convient de suivre la ligne de la réformation du 16e siècle. Luther avait découvert tout à nouveau que l'homme ne peut pas se justifier devant Dieu sur la base de ses prestations morales. A notre époque, il s'agit de comprendre que l'homme n'est pas en mesure, par sa seule intelligence, de fonder rationnellement son existence, ni de définir le sens de l'histoire universelle. Pour être délivré des liens de l'agnosticisme et de l'incertitude existentielle, l'homme a besoin du don de la foi. En second lieu, la théologie peut aller au-devant de la mentalité moderne avide de

jouissance, et cela en se référant à la résurrection de Jésus-Christ. Il faut à l'homme une espérance valable au-delà du monde présent, pour l'empêcher de concentrer toutes ses aspirations de bonheur sur les quelques années de son existence terrestre. Une telle réduction aboutit aux formes bien connues de l'égoïsme et du matérialisme jouisseur qui caractérisent la société occidentale. Enfin, Jésus promet (Jean 7.17) que c'est en mettant sa parole en pratique que nous expérimenterons sa puissance et sa présence. Quand des hommes acceptent de le rencontrer et de le suivre, ils constatent que sa parole est vraie et son amour efficace.

L'histoire de l'Église montre comment le Christ a su préserver et fortifier les siens dans des crises dues à des situations souvent extrêmement difficiles. Comme l'Église n'est pas liée à une tradition morte, mais à un Seigneur vivant, les chrétiens ont l'avantage, même en tant que minorité, de faire pénétrer le sel de l'Évangile dans la société moderne.

## Kirche am Rand der säkularen Gesellschaft

Vor einigen Wochen wollte ein englischer Austauschstudent, der im Albrecht-Bengel-Haus in Tübingen Forschungsarbeiten betreibt, wissen, was der Begriff 'Bengel' eigentlich bedeutet. Er war ziemlich erstaunt, als er in seinem Wörterbuch die Übersetzung 'Hooligan' für Bengel fand. Da ich Studienleiter am Albrecht-Bengel-Haus in Tübingen bin, möchte ich Sie gewissermaßen als ein 'theologischer Hooligan' begrüßen.

Diese Vorbemerkung ist nicht nur ein Scherz, sondern es ist im Blick auf unser Thema höchst interessant. Die Art wie die säkulare Gesellschaft mit dem Problem der Hooligans umgeht, wirft schon ein erstes Licht auf unser Gesamtthema 'Moderne Welt'. Auf dem Weg hier her nach Wölmersen hörte ich in den Rundfunknachrichten, daß die deutsche Regierung beschlossen hat, jährlich 80,000,—DM für Sozialarbeiter bereitzustellen. Diese sollen während der Bundesligaspiele vor allem die verschiedenen

Fanclubs der Fußballmannschaften psychologisch betreuen und ruhig halten. Es wird offensichtlich in unserer Gesellschaft weder von der Polizei noch von den Pfarrern erwartet, solche schwierigen sozialpsychologischen Probleme zu lösen. Diese Aufgabe legt man lieber in die Hände von Sozialarbeitern, denen es auf Grund ihrer psychologischen Ausbildung und Erfahrung zugetraut wird, Konflikte unserer modernen Freizeitgesellschaft zu bewältigen. Der Vorgang macht also auf typische Weise deutlich, was säkulare Gesellschaft bedeutet, wie sie funktioniert und warum viele traditionelle Arbeitsgebiete von der Kirche weg auf weltliche Institutionen verlagert werden. Wir wollen deshalb fragen: was ist die Berufung des Christen in der modernen Welt? Da wir während der vergangenen Konferenztage viel über das Phänomen 'Moderne Welt' gehört haben, möchte ich hier nicht eine weitere Analyse des Säkularismus vorlegen, sondern kann mich darauf



beschränken, einige wesentliche Aspekte zusammenzufassen.

### **Der Weg zur postmodernen und postchristlichen Gesellschaft**

—Die frühe Kirche mußte ihren Weg innerhalb des römischen Reiches finden. Das Imperium Romanum stellte ein weltumspannendes politisches System mit einem gemeinsamen kulturellen Erbe dar. Inmitten einer pluralistischen Gesellschaft, geprägt durch die verschiedenartigsten religiösen Kulte, philosophischen Systeme und ideologischen Lebensentwürfe, waren die Christen bereit, sowohl Verfolgung zu erleiden als auch mit einer klaren und wirksamen Strategie die Evidenz ihres Glaubens apologetisch nach außen zu vertreten. Das machte sie mehr und mehr für ihre heidnische Umgebung glaubwürdig und attraktiv.

—Die nachkonstantinische Epoche, die wir von unserem historischen Blickwinkel her Mittelalter nennen, war jene tausendjährige Periode der Weltgeschichte, die allgemein als die Ära des christlichen Abendlandes bezeichnet wird.

In der darauf folgenden Neuzeit setzte mit dem beginnenden 16. Jahrhundert eine zunehmend kritische Reaktion gegenüber den Voraussetzungen der christlichen Kultur, Kirche und Theologie ein. Die Überzeugung, der Mensch sei gut, wird bestimmend. Das Denken seit der Aufklärung ist durch eine optimistische Sicht der Weltgeschichte sowie durch hohe Erwartungen im Blick auf die rationalen Fähigkeiten des Menschen bestimmt. Die autonom gewordene Vernunft ließ viele Traditionen der christlichen Vergangenheit als einengend hinter sich zurück.

—Nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg trat zunehmend deutlich eine neue Konstellation auf, die die westliche Kultur heute bestimmt. Man nennt sie die Postmoderne. Offensichtlich sind nach Auschwitz und Hiroshima der moralische Optimismus und die Erwartung des historischen Fortschritts weithin verloren gegangen. Es fehlt an Vertrauen, daß die moderne Wissenschaft wirklich in der Lage sein wird, aus eigener Kraft die Probleme zu lösen, die sie produziert hat; ich

verweise hier beispielhaft auf die ökologische Krise. Vor allem kennzeichnet nahezu grenzenloser Pluralismus die Moderne, mit der wir es heute als Kirche zu tun haben. War die Neuzeit also noch von der Illusion bestimmt, daß man durch bloße menschliche Vernunft die gesellschaftlichen Probleme nicht nur durchschauen, sondern auch lösen könne, so zeigt sich am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts, daß das einst christliche Abendland heute weder über die geistige Klarheit noch über die kulturelle Identität verfügt, um den gegensätzlichen ideologischen Herausforderungen wirksam zu begegnen.

Wir haben es im Blick auf die jüngere Geschichte mit einer doppelten Wende zu tun. Die Welt der Aufklärung ist ursprünglich eine Reaktion gegen die christliche Tradition und kann ohne deren christlichen Hintergrund überhaupt nicht begriffen werden. Aber die Postmoderne stellt nun ihrerseits eine Reaktion gegen die aufgeklärte Neuzeit dar, ohne jedoch noch das Bedürfnis zu empfinden, sich überhaupt auf den christlichen Glauben einzulassen. Von daher ergibt sich die sachliche Konsequenz, daß aus der postmodernen Welt notwendig eine nachchristlichen Situation erwächst.

### **Leben in der modernen Welt**

Von dieser Vorgeschichte müssen wir m.E. ausgehen, wenn wir unser Thema 'Berufung zum Christsein in der modernen Welt' ernsthaft angehen wollen. Bevor ich das Thema allerdings inhaltlich im einzelnen entfalte, möchte ich noch die Präposition 'in' in unserer Thematik erörtern, denn sie ist in unserer Überschrift theologisch von einigem Gewicht.

Als christliche Theologen sprechen wir von der Berufung der Kirche in der modernen Welt, und das bedeutet konkret: wir leben und glauben inmitten dieser postmodernen und postchristlichen Welt. Damit betonen wir gleichzeitig, daß wir uns dieser Welt nicht verweigern wollen noch aus ihr zurückziehen können.

Das Besondere der Position, die wir als Christen damit markieren, wird sehr schnell am Vergleich des christlichen Glaubens mit den großen Religionen und Ideologien deutlich. In der religionspsychologisch orientier-



ten Erlösungslehre des Buddha zielt alles darauf ab, den Menschen Wege zu zeigen, wie sie die vorfindliche Welt mit ihren Problemen, Begierden und Leiden hinter sich lassen und diese fliehen können. Wieder ganz anders stellt sich das Verhältnis von Religion und Welt im Islam dar: Ein Moslem kann sich schwerlich eine Umwelt vorstellen, die nicht durch das islamische Gesetz, die Scharia, bestimmt ist. Für ihn muß letztlich zwischen der politisch-sozialen Wirklichkeit und der religiösen moslemischen Gemeinschaft eine möglichst weitgehende Identität bestehen. Moslem in der Diaspora zu sein, ist ein nur schwer vollziehbarer Gedanke und macht den Anhängern des Islam auch erhebliche Probleme. Sie kennen aus dem Koran keine Berufung, als kleine Minderheit wie Sauerteig in einer großen Mehrheit zu wirken. Und schließlich war die säkulare Ideologie des Marxismus ebenfalls nicht bereit, die liberale, pluralistische Welt, so wie sie sich darstellte, zu akzeptieren. Die totalitären Staaten des Ostens konnten die vorfindliche Welt nur im Blick auf die gewaltsame und innerweltliche Umsetzung ihrer utopischen sozialistischen Zielvorstellung ertragen.

Aber wir sind als Christen dazu berufen, in dieser modernen nachchristlichen Welt zu bleiben und uns als Jünger Jesu in ihr zu bewähren. Aber diese Bewährungsprobe, in der wir uns in dieser Welt befinden, hat einen tiefen christologischen Grund: weil der ewige Sohn Gottes sich selbst gedemütigt hat und in keiner anderen Welt als eben der unseren Mensch geworden ist,—und zwar mit all ihrem Elend und ihrer Not,—sollen wir ihm auf diesem Weg folgen. Es ist die inkarnatorische Herablassung Christi, die uns motiviert und befähigt nach der 'Berufung des Christen in der modernen Welt' zu fragen und nicht danach Ausschau zu halten, wie wir persönlich oder als Kirche dieser modernen Welt entfliehen könnten. Denn Christus sehnt sich danach, unsere säkulare Generation aus ihrer Verlorenheit zu erlösen. Und wir sind als sein Leib mit hineingenommen in die Bewegung der Inkarnation—mit dem Ziel der Rettung für viele.

Von diesem Zusammenhang ausgehend möchte ich *drei Bereiche der christlichen Berufung in der modernen Welt* ansprechen.

Dabei werde ich der Aussage des Paulus folgen: 'Nun bleiben aber Glaube, Hoffnung, Liebe diese drei, aber die Liebe ist die größte unter ihnen.' (1. Kor 13,13). Es geht also um eine zeitgemäße Einführung in das, was man in der Tradition die theologischen Tugenden nannte.

## 1. Der moderne Agnostizismus und die christliche Gewißheit des Glaubens

Für den modernen Menschen ist es eine tiefe Desillusionierung, feststellen zu müssen, daß all sein Bemühen, die Geheimnisse dieser Welt in einer möglichst einfachen und systematisch ausdrückbaren Formel zu fassen, gescheitert ist. Im 18. Jahrhundert erschien die Welt noch als eine nach mechanischen Gesetzen konstruierte Maschine, die gemäß mathematischen Gesetzen funktioniert. Aber die physikalisch-astronomische Wirklichkeit erwies sich zunehmend als komplizierter. Der Wissenschaftstheoretiker Thomas Kuhn hat deutlich nachgewiesen, daß selbst die sogenannten exakten Naturwissenschaften einem Prozeß zunehmend rascher Veränderung unterliegen, und daß ein Naturbild revolutionär durch ein anderes abgelöst wird. Letztlich trugen die 'naturwissenschaftlichen Revolutionen' dazu bei, daß die modernen Philosophie schließlich in einer Art Agnostizismus endete. Es gibt also keine Möglichkeit, die universale Wahrheit mit den Mitteln der 'reinen Vernunft' zu erkennen. Je länger wir uns ausschließlich der Methode mathematisch konzipierter Erkenntnis verpflichten und diese als einzigen Weg sicheren Wissens in allen Bereichen der Forschung zulassen, desto deutlicher müssen wir zugestehen, daß alle Aussagen über die entscheidenden metaphysischen Fragen letztlich rational nicht mehr vertretbar sind. Die drei berühmten Fragen Kants wurden während unserer Konferenz mehrfach angesprochen: 'Wo komme ich her? Wohin gehe ich? Was soll ich tun?'. Ludwig Wittgenstein stellt in seinem berühmten 'Tractatus logico philosophicus' fest, daß nachdem alle wissenschaftlichen Fragen beantwortet sind, die wesentlichen Probleme des Menschen erst beginnen. Und er endet in seiner Tractatus-philosophie mit der realistischen, wenn auch



depressiven Einsicht, daß wir über all die Dinge, über die wir nicht sprechen können, schweigen sollen. Und die Dinge, an die er dabei dachte, sind eben alle jene bedrängenden Probleme der klassischen Metaphysik.

Worin besteht angesichts einer agnostisch argumentierenden Umwelt unsere Berufung als evangelikale Theologen? Zunächst enthält die im Gefolge des Positivismus und der analytischen Sprachphilosophie zu Tage getretene Desillusionierung wichtige Aspekte. Die Auslegung der paulinischen Briefe besonders an die Römer und die Korinther sowie das Studium der Reformation haben mir in diesem Zusammenhang viel geholfen. Luther entdeckte an Hand der Schrift und im Widerspruch gegen die Theologie des Spätmittelalters, daß es für den gefallen Menschen unmöglich ist, sich durch gute Werke selbst zu erlösen. Nicht durch moralische Anstrengung, sondern allein durch Gottes Gnade finden wir das Heil. Gott rechtfertigt den Sünder um des Leidens und Sterbens Christi Willen. Christus allein bringt Versöhnung. Dies ist die Botschaft vor allem des Römerbriefes. Parallel dazu ist es nun in unserer agnostischen postmodernen Welt wichtig, die entsprechende erkenntnistheoretische Wahrheit der beiden Anfangskapitel des ersten Korintherbriefes wahrzunehmen. Nach Paulus ist es nicht nur unmöglich den Menschen durch seine moralischen Fähigkeiten zu erlösen, sondern auch illusorisch eine feste Gewißheit im Blick auf die letzten Fragen des Menschen durch die bloße Vernunft finden zu wollen. Es stimmt zwar, daß der Mensch als Ebenbild Gottes vor allem durch seine Fähigkeit, zu wollen und zu denken ausgezeichnet ist. Aber nach dem Fall sind beide menschlichen Grundmöglichkeiten,—nämlich der Wille und die Vernunft—, nicht mehr ausreichend, um die gebrochene Beziehung zwischen Gott und Mensch wiederherzustellen. Durch die reine Vernunft allein kann der Mensch keine Glaubensgewißheit in irgend einer Weltanschauung finden. Trotz dieser Unfähigkeit ist er als geistiges Wesen auf eine zuverlässige Verankerung seines Lebens angewiesen. Deshalb besteht die Tragödie des *'animal rationale'*, wie Thomas von Aquin den Menschen definiert hat, gerade

darin, daß eben jene Stärke der intellektuellen Begabung nicht in der Lage ist, das Problem des menschlichen Elends 'jenseits von Eden' zu bewältigen. Zu Beginn der Neuzeit hat nicht zuletzt Blaise Pascal mit großer Klarheit und Einsicht über die Bregrenzung unserer rationalen Erkenntnis in seinen *'Pensées'* gesprochen.

Es ist und bleibt also ausschließlich Gottes Gnade, wenn ein Mensch, der von Natur aus im Agnostizismus verirrt ist, durch die Gabe des Glaubens festen Grund für sein Leben findet. Luther hat dies in unvergleichlich knapper und präziser Weise in seinem Kleinen Katechismus zum Ausdruck gebracht: 'Ich glaube, daß ich nicht aus eigener Vernunft noch Kraft an Jesus Christus meinen Herrn glauben oder zu ihm kommen kann, sondern der Heilige Geist hat mich durchs Evangelium berufen ...'.

Deshalb dürfen wir auch als evangelikale Theologen nicht die Illusion erwecken, daß wir etwa durch bloß rationale Argumentation unsere agnostischen Mitmenschen zum Glauben führen könnten. Aber wenn ich dies so feststelle, dann möchte ich dennoch gleichzeitig unterstreichen, daß wir auch weiterhin in die apologetische Aufgabe hineingestellt sind und alle unsere intellektuellen Möglichkeiten voll ausschöpfen sollen. Allerdings müssen wir im Kontext der erkenntnistheoretischen Diskussion die Grenzen der reinen Vernunft deutlich kennzeichnen. Wir müssen auf die oben dargestellte Tatsache hinweisen, daß der Mensch nicht autonom existieren kann, sondern von Gottes Gnade abhängt; und zwar auch im Bereich seiner Erkenntnismöglichkeiten. Dann sollten wir jedoch wie Karl Heim dies in der ersten Hälfte des 20. Jahrhunderts beispielhaft versucht hat, all jene intellektuellen Widerstände beiseite zu räumen versuchen, die die akademische Elite daran hindert, sich dem Evangelium zu öffnen. Wir sind dazu herausgefordert, das biblische Evangelium in einer für die modernen Welt relevanten und auch intellektuell kohärenten Gestalt zu vermitteln.

Ein weiterer wichtiger Grund, sich mit dem postmodernen Denken auseinanderzusetzen, besteht darin, daß die westliche Wissenschaft früher oder später alle Kulturen durchdringt, weil nämlich alle



Nationen sich darum bemühen, am Wohlstand der nordwestlichen Gesellschaften teilzuhaben. Deshalb sind sie auch daran interessiert, das technologisch-naturwissenschaftliche Know-how der modernen Zivilisation kennenzulernen. In diesem Kontext ergibt sich unsere besondere mis-siologische Verantwortung vor allem den Kirchen der Dritten Welt zu helfen, mit den intellektuellen Problemen der westlichen Philosophie angemessen umzugehen. Wenn wir als Theologen aus dem Westen nicht in einer geistlichen Weise die herausfordernden Fragen unserer eigenen Kultur theologisch bewältigen können, wie können wir erwarten, daß unsere Brüder in Afrika, Asien oder Lateinamerika damit fertig werden.

## 2. Der moderne Hedonismus und die christliche Dynamik der Hoffnung

Als sich die moderne Gesellschaft durch die Ideen des 18. und 19. Jahrhunderts zu formen begann, wurde sie durch starke Impulse der Hoffnung und hohe Erwartungen im Blick auf eine glänzende Zukunft der Menschheit bestimmt. Und in der Tat war der Fortschritt der modernen Naturwissenschaften und in ihrem Gefolge der technisch-industriellen Produktion, sowie des medizinischen Standards Ursache dafür, daß das Leben einfacher und bequemer wurde. Der spanische Philosoph Ortega y Gasset hat gezeigt, daß der heutige Normalbürger mehr Privilegien genießt als die Eliten früherer Zeiten; also z.B. Könige, Adlige oder kirchliche Würdenträger. Diese Tatsache verweist auf die Zielsetzung Ludwig Feuerbachs, der dazu aufgefordert hat, aus 'Kandidaten des Jenseits Studenten des Diesseits' zu machen. Feuerbach verband diese Perspektive mit dem kritischen Hinweis, daß die Menschen von den törichten christlichen Hoffnungen auf eine künftige Welt befreit werden müßten, um sich dem irdischen Leben uneingeschränkt zuwenden zu können. Aber auch in dieser Hinsicht haben sich die Verhältnisse grundlegend gewandelt. Die postmoderne Welt hat ihren Optimismus verloren und das Potential der Hoffnung scheint ziemlich erschöpft zu sein; und dies sowohl im Blick auf die individuellen als auch die öffentlichen Verhältnisse. Indem

der Mensch nämlich sein eschatologisches Ziel verloren hat, müssen alle seine Erwartungen in den kurzen Zeitraum des irdischen Lebens hineingepreßt werden. Dabei ist der moderne Mensch noch immer von der Verheißung der Aufklärung bestimmt, daß das Verlangen nach Glück als ein selbstverständliches (self evident) Menschenrecht eingefordert werden darf, und daß die politische Gemeinschaft die Glücksverheißung zu erfüllen habe. Die Menschen unserer Generation haben demgemäß eine sehr klare Vorstellung davon, in welcher Weise das irdische Leben durch Luxus, Lust und Vergnügen aller Art die Erwartungen einzulösen hat. Warum sollte irgend jemand auf irgendeinen persönlichen Vorteil verzichten, wenn es eine so große Vielfalt von Möglichkeiten gibt, das Leben zu genießen. Das Motto: 'Lasset uns essen und trinken, denn morgen sind wir tot' bestimmt weitgehend die westliche Zivilisation.

Die Haltung des Hedonismus ist vermutlich ein Grund für die hohe Attraktivität der fernöstlichen Vorstellung von der Reinkarnation. (Diese findet sich in der westlichen Philosophie allerdings auch bei Platon und anderen Denkern.) Reinkarnation scheint nämlich eine zweite bzw. dritte usw. Möglichkeit eines je verschiedenen individuellen Lebensentwurfes zu ermöglichen. Dabei mißverstehen und mißbrauchen die Europäer jedoch die ursprüngliche Konzeption des Begriffes Wiedergeburt. Während für Hindus und Buddhisten die Hoffnung gerade darin besteht, von der Last individueller Reinkarnationen erlöst zu werden, sieht der westliche Mensch in dieser Philosophie eine Möglichkeit der exzessiven und quantitativen Lebenssteigerung.

Man kann die Grundhaltung des modernen Hedonismus auch noch an einem anderen Zusammenhang aufzeigen. Innerhalb unserer Kultur war das Thema Sexualität lange Zeit in der öffentlichen Diskussion tabuisiert; während man auf dem Hintergrund einer christlichen 'ars moriendi' unmittelbar über die Erfahrung des Todes in der eigenen Familie und der Nachbarschaft etc. sprechen konnte. Man war direkt mit dem Problem des Todes konfrontiert. Heute ist das Thema der Sexualität enttabuisiert und stattdessen das Problem des Todes



tabuisiert. Der Tod wird soweit als möglich aus unserer modernen Gesellschaft verdrängt, weil die Menschen nicht den Mut und die Fähigkeit haben, sich dem ernstesten Problem des Lebensendes wirklich zu stellen.

Angesichts der Tatsache, daß der Hedonismus die prägende Weltanschauung geworden ist, sollten wir den modernen Menschen ganz neu mit der historischen Realität der Auferstehung Jesu Christi konfrontieren. In unserer Welt der Fakten darf niemand erwarten, daß die Menschen auf Grund von Mythen oder bloßen Symbolen glauben, mit der schweren Erfahrung des Todes zurecht zu kommen. Angesichts der Probleme menschlichen Elends, der Krankheit und des Todes kann man keine Erlösung und Vollendung in lediglich methaphorischer Weise verkündigen. Wer der Realität entgegentreten will, kann dies nur so tun, daß er die Tatsächlichkeit dieser Welt mit ganz anderen Tatsachen konfrontiert. Deshalb bleibt auch die Argumentation des Paulus in 1. Korinther 15,1-8 für unsere Situation von höchster Bedeutung. Nur die historische Faktizität der Auferstehung hat Kraft, Menschen dazu zu bewegen, die Begegnung mit dem heute lebendigen Christus zu suchen.

Einzig Menschen, die nicht durch die Todesfurcht beeindruckt werden, können den Versuchungen unserer hedonistischen Gesellschaft widerstehen. Die Überzeugung, die Paulus in Römer 8,16 äußert, befähigt und ermutigt Christen ihr Leben für ihren Nächsten zu opfern: 'Denn ich halte die Leiden dieser Zeit—und man könnte gewiß ergänzend hinzufügen: auch die Vergnügungen dieser Welt—nicht für wert, mit der Herrlichkeit verglichen zu werden, die an uns offenbar werden soll.' Diese Hoffnung macht dafür offen, irdische Güter mit den Armen zu teilen. Sie macht bereit, persönliche Lebenskraft und Lebenszeit an die zu verschenken, die geistlichen Rat und praktische Hilfe brauchen.

Die Märtyrer der frühen Kirche stellten die hellenistische Welt ihrer Tage mit deren Spekulationen über die Unsterblichkeit der Seele durch die konkrete Hoffnung der Auferstehung von den Toten in Frage. Ich bin der Überzeugung, daß wir als Christen in unserer modernen Welt ganz neu durch-

denken müssen, wie wir die Inhalte der eschatologischen Hoffnung in konkreter Weise verkündigen. Wir sollten neu den Mut haben, die biblische Botschaft vom Jüngsten Tag uneingeschränkt zu verkündigen. Das gilt sowohl für die Verheißung des ewigen Lebens als auch für das Strafgericht. Nur so gewinnen wir den realgeschichtlichen Zusammenhang, in dem die kommende Gottesherrschaft ausgesagt und als relevant und evident erwiesen werden kann. Der Horizont der Zeit ist *sub specie aeternitatis* neu zu entdecken.

Ein weiterer gewichtiger Aspekt, der uns motivieren sollte die apokalyptischen Perspektiven der christlichen Hoffnung uneingeschränkt in den Mittelpunkt zu stellen, ist die Begegnung mit modernen Schriftstellern wie z.B. Franz Kafka. In seinen Beiträgen 'Das Schloß' oder 'Der Prozeß' beschreibt er sehr eindrücklich, wozu es führt, wenn der moderne Mensch sich anschickt, die Rolle Christi am Jüngsten Tage selbst zu übernehmen. Wohin können wir als Menschen fliehen, wenn einer den anderen beschuldigt und anklagt und zugleich jeder der Richter seines Nächsten ist. Wir durchleiden dieses Problem derzeit auf recht schmerzhaft Weise in Deutschland. Zunächst war die Kirche in Ostdeutschland nach dem Fall der Mauer und der Wiedervereinigung unseres Landes als eine Art Widerstandsbewegung gegen das kommunistische Regim hoch geachtet. Aber Schritt um Schritt werden Akten enthüllt, die beweisen, daß der Staatssicherheitsdienst der ehemaligen DDR auch viele Spione in die Kirche einschleusen konnte. Nicht wenige kirchliche Mitarbeiter haben sich dazu hergegeben, sogenannte Informelle Mitarbeiter des Staatssicherheitsdienstes zu werden. Wie soll man mit all den menschlichen Schwächen, den Verwirrungen und der Schuld, die auf allen Ebenen der Gesellschaft enthüllt wird, umgehen, wenn man nur gegenüber Instanzen dieser Welt und ihren Tribunalen Verantwortung trägt. Wer hat das moralische Recht, jene zu verurteilen, die sich unter den schweren Belastungen einer Diktatur schuldig gemacht haben? In unserem politischen Kontext ist die Frage nach Vergebung und Versöhnung zum brennenden gesellschaftlichen Problem



geworden. Aus diesem Grund hat auch die Deutsche Evangelische Allianz für ihre Jahreskonferenz 1992 in Bad Blankenburg den Satz aus dem Vaterunser zum Thema gewählt: 'Und vergib uns unsere Schuld wie auch wir vergeben unseren Schuldigern'. Es ist unsere besondere Verantwortung als Christen sowohl die ganze Schwere menschlicher Sünde deutlich zu machen, als auch in die hoffnungslose Situation der Schuldigen hinein das herrliche Angebot der Vergebung durch Jesus Christus zu verkündigen.

Auf dem Hintergrund von Schuld und Sühne können wir schließlich auch die Frage der Theodizee in überzeugender Weise ansprechen. Nicht der Mensch kann Gott wegen all des Elends in der Welt anklagen, sondern der Mensch muß sich demütigen und unter das Gericht Gottes stellen, um auf diesem Wege die Rechtfertigung allein aus Gnaden zu finden.

### 3. Die Tatsache der moralischen Desorientierung und die verwandelnde Kraft christlicher Liebe.

Wenn wir uns den Idealen der Neuzeit anvertrauen, dann besteht die höchste Bestimmung des Menschen darin, eine autonome Persönlichkeit zu werden. Höchstes Ziel ist, in allen Entscheidungen völlig unabhängig von lediglich traditionell begründeten moralischen Urteilen zu sein. Diese Zielvorstellung der Aufklärung wurde in klassischer Weise von Kant definiert als 'Ausgang des Menschen aus seiner selbstverschuldeten Unmündigkeit'. Sie stellt den mündigen Weltbürger unter das Motto: '*sapere aude*' (Wage es, dich deines Verstandes zu bedienen). Die Gegenposition zu dieser modernen ethischen Autonomie besteht in der Heteronomie, jener Haltung also, die den Menschen durch bloß vorgegebene Traditionen und fixierte Gesetze von sich selbst entfremdet.

Aus der Tatsache der Auferstehung ergibt sich nun weit über die angezeigte ethische Alternative von Autonomie und Heteronomie hinausgehend für die christliche Ethik ein neues Verständnis und eine grundlegende neue Erfahrung jenseits dieses Gegensatzes

absoluter Selbst- und Fremdbestimmung. Der Grund für jenes *tertium* liegt im Osterereignis. Unmittelbar vor seiner Himmelfahrt offenbarte sich Jesus in Gegenwart seiner Jünger als Herr: 'Mir ist gegeben alle Gewalt im Himmel wie auf Erden'. Durch diese Aussage unterstreicht Christus das Faktum, daß der Missionsbefehl in der personalen Wahrheit seiner Auferstehung wurzelt. Das unterscheidet die Wahrheit des christlichen Glaubens fundamental von der der Religionsstifter und großen Philosophen der Vergangenheit. Deren persönliches Mandat ist fraglos mit ihrem Tod zu Ende gegangen. Nach ihrem Tod wurden ihre Worte als Literatur gesammelt und müssen mühsam bewahrt werden. Den einzigen Einfluß, den Religionsstifter und Philosophen auf die Geistesgeschichte haben, besteht eben darin, daß die abgeschlossene Tradition, die sie hinterließen, bewahrt wurde. Diejenigen, die ihnen folgen, haben es mit bloß historischen Ereignissen und Fakten zu tun. Eine solche abgeschlossene Situation ist etwas gänzlich anderes als die Interaktion zwischen heute lebenden Personen, die miteinander kommunizieren.

Darüber muß sich evangelikale Theologie immer neu im klaren sein, daß sie es nicht nur mit einer großen historischen Vergangenheit des Christentums zu tun hat, sondern mit dem lebendigen Gott, der durch den auferstandenen Christus gegenwärtig ist. Weil Christus alle Macht gegeben ist, können Theologen seine Worte nicht nur in Gestalt von Literatur, sondern durch den ständigen Hinweis auf den heute wirksamen Christus zur Sprache bringen. Ich denke hier liegt einer der tiefsten Gegensätze zwischen den evangelikalen und den sogenannten historisch-kritischen Theologen. Denn letztere gehen mit der Bibel nur auf der Ebene historischer Fragestellungen um. Aber es besteht ein wesentlicher Unterschied zwischen dem Bemühen, die Lehre eines Propheten oder Philosophen der Vergangenheit, der inzwischen gestorben ist, für die Nachwelt zu erhalten und jenem Wirken des allmächtigen Herrn, der sein Wort spricht und seine Wunder durch die ganze Geschichte hindurch je neu wirkt. Die Worte, die er vor fast 2000 Jahren gesagt hat, erweisen sich heute als lebendige Macht, weil Christus



gestern, heute und in Ewigkeit derselbe Herr ist.

Christus ist der einzige, der wirklich die Brücke zwischen Transzendenz und Immanenz, zwischen Himmel und Erde baut. Durch seine Menschwerdung ermöglicht er die fortdauernde Gemeinschaft zwischen Gott und Mensch. Aus diesem Grunde können evangelikale Theologen niemals dem methodischen Atheismus der säkularen Wissenschaft folgen, die von der Voraussetzung her denkt 'als ob es Gott nicht gäbe' (*etsi deus non daretur*). Ganz im Gegenteil: wirkliche christliche Theologie erwächst aus der dynamischen Begegnung zwischen dem lehrenden Christus und dem lernenden Jünger, zwischen dem sich offenbarenden Gott und dem über diese Offenbarung nachdenkenden Theologen. Diese Realität der Begegnung zwischen Christus und dem Theologen, die in allem theologischen Nachdenken und Forschen bestimmend ist, erfordert als entscheidende Konsequenz, daß der Theologe die Gegenwart des lebendigen Herrn respektiert. Theologisches Nachdenken kann sachgemäß nur in der Haltung eines demütigen Dieners vollzogen werden, der die Stimme seines Herrn hört und sich vor ihm beugt. Es ist die konkrete Erfahrung der Führung durch den Herrn mittels seines Wortes und seines Geistes, durch das er uns den Weg weist, den wir gehen sollen.

Wenn ich richtig sehe, dann hat das Wort Jesu aus Johannes 7,16f im geistesgeschichtlichen Horizont der Neuzeit eine herausragende Bedeutung erlangt: 'Jesus antwortete ihnen und sprach: Meine Lehre ist nicht von mir, sondern von dem, der mich gesandt hat. Wenn jemand dessen Willen tun will, wird er innerwerden, ob diese Lehre von Gott ist oder ob ich von mir selbst aus rede.'

Mit diesen Worten ermutigt Jesus nicht zuletzt den modernen Menschen, der ja primär auf die Empirie und deren praktische Verifikation ausgerichtet ist. Er wird von Jesus eingeladen, die Erfahrung seiner Gegenwart zu machen. Im Abenteuer des konkret vollzogenen Glaubensgehorsams erweist sich Jesus als der von Gott gesandte und autorisierte Herr. Solche Möglichkeit der praktischen Verifikation ist für Menschen unserer Zeit, die ganz an ihren

Erfahrungen orientiert sind, wichtig. Im Horizont des Glaubens sollen sie die Wahrheit Jesu erleben, indem sie konkrete Schritte der Nachfolge wagen und die Tragkraft des Evangeliums erproben. Durch den gelebten Gehorsam werden wir als Gemeinde attraktiv für Menschen außerhalb der Kirchenmauern. Denn wenn man die Liebe sieht, kann man die Botschaft hören.

Der Ruf Jesu in die Nachfolge führt also zu einer tiefgreifenden Erfahrung der heute aktuellen christlichen Berufung. Die christliche Berufung kann nicht mit einem Job verglichen werden, den man hier und da nach eigenem Gutdünken praktiziert, sondern sie ist eine Notwendigkeit (*Anangkä*), d.h. eine unabweisbare Notwendigkeit. Paulus bringt das auf sehr persönliche Weise in 1. Korinther 9,16 zum Ausdruck: 'Denn daß ich das Evangelium predige, dessen darf ich mich nicht rühmen; denn ich muß es tun. Und wehe mir, wenn ich das Evangelium nicht predigte!' Der Apostel und Missionar befindet sich also unter einer inneren Verpflichtung, die nur mit der prophetischen Leidenschaft eines Jeremia zu vergleichen ist.

### Sauerteig in einer säkularen Gesellschaft

Ich habe versucht, das mir vorgegebene Thema vor allem im Blick auf die persönlichen Aspekte des christlichen Zeugnisses herauszuarbeiten; und das deshalb, weil ich davon überzeugt bin, daß dieser Zugang dem biblischen Verständnis entspricht. Aber die personale Dimension verweist gleichzeitig auf die notwendige Durchdringung der modernen Gesellschaft. Denn die persönliche Verantwortung schließt keineswegs öffentliches Engagement—einschließlich des politischen Bereichs—seitens der christlichen Kirche aus. Die Wirksamkeit der Gemeinde Jesu Christi in der Öffentlichkeit ist allerdings eine Aufgabe, die einzig durch das Priestertum aller Gläubigen erfüllt werden kann. Nur die Gemeinde als ganze kann der christlichen Berufung hinsichtlich der politischen und sozialen Dimensionen gerecht werden. Mir hat die Arbeit im Rahmen der christlichen Studentenmission (SMD), den Blick dafür geöffnet, wie wichtig die Kooperation von Akademikern ver-



schiedener Fakultäten ist. So muß beispielsweise die Frage nach der medizinischen Ethik unbedingt in Verbindung mit christlichen Ärzten gelöst werden. Was sollen wir im Blick auf die höchst schwierigen Probleme des Lebensanfangs und—endes ohne die Erfahrungen und Einsichten der Ärzte, die bewußt in der Nachfolge Jesu Christi stehen, als Theologen sagen. Hier sind vor allem die Fragen der Abtreibung und Euthanasie etc. zu nennen. Entsprechende Fachgruppen christlicher Ingenieure, Psychologen, Juristen, Naturwissenschaftler usw. sind erforderlich, um sowohl intellektuell als auch praktisch zu zeigen, wie Christen sich beruflich in der modernen Welt bewähren können. Unter diesem Aspekt des allgemeinen Priestertums hat Friedrich Gogartens Theorie von der Säkularisation als einer positiven Befreiung des Menschen zu beruflichem Engagement in der Welt seine theologische und gesellschaftliche Berechtigung. Gerade der sogenannte 'Laie' kann in seinem Arbeitsbereich, wenn er ethisch von der Bibel geprägt ist, auch anderen Orientierung geben. Einzelne Theologen, aber auch synodale Gremien usw. sollten demgegenüber sehr sorgfältig abwägen, bis zu welchem Grad sie in der Lage sind, sich in die komplizierten Zusammenhänge der modernen Welt kompetent einzuarbeiten, um sich dann durch qualifizierte Statements zu äußern. Wir sollten als Kirche grundlegende biblische Orientierung geben, aber wir dürfen uns nicht in politisch kontroverse Ermessensfragen einmischen und dabei den Anspruch erheben, im Auftrag Gottes, d.h. mit prophetischer Autorität, zu reden.

Welche Chancen haben wir als christliche Minderheit überhaupt noch, um die post-moderne und postchristliche Gesellschaft zu prägen?

Soziologische Untersuchungen besagen, daß bereits ein oder zwei Prozent der Bevölkerung in einer Gesellschaft ausreichen, um einen erkennbaren Einfluß auf diese Gesellschaft auszuüben. Eine solche gesamtgesellschaftliche Wirksamkeit setzt natürlich voraus, daß es sich um eine qualifizierte Minderheit handelt, die klar bestimmbar Zielen folgt. Diese Tatsache sollten wir als Herausforderung aufmerksam

hören, denn sie besagt, daß wir als christliche Minorität die westliche Gesellschaft nachhaltig beeinflussen können, ohne daß wir damit dem Trugschluß erliegen, Erweckung sei künftig planbar. Denn es geht bei der missionarischen Durchdringung der säkularen Welt nicht um Erfolg, sondern um Frucht, die Christus seinem Wort verheißt.

## Perspektiven der Erneuerung

Im Zusammenhang der ungeheueren Veränderungen, die wir in unserer Welt während der letzten drei Jahre erfahren haben, erinnere ich mich an ein Ereignis, das sich 1969 zugetragen hat. Während der Studentenunruhen in Westeuropa veranstalteten anlässlich des Kirchentages in Stuttgart bei einer Hallenveranstaltung mit 6.000 Teilnehmern, Studenten einen sogenannten 'go in'. Sie enthüllten ein riesiges Transparent, auf dem jeder lesen konnte: 'Jesus ist tot. Marx lebt.'. Dieser Vorgang war ein typisches Phänomen für den modernen Säkularismus. Angesichts der Provokation mußten sich Christen damals fragen, ob es überhaupt noch eine Chance gibt, in dem von sozialistischen Utopien bestimmten Europa zu evangelisieren. Heute, nach dem Zusammenbruch des Weltkommunismus stellt sich die Parole: 'Jesus ist tot. Marx lebt.' in ganz anderem Licht dar, denn Marx ist tot und der Marxismus—Leninismus ist an sein definitives Ende gekommen—politisch wie ideologisch.

Deshalb sollten wir ganz bewußt das Geheimnis der Gemeinde Jesu Christi durch die Kirchengeschichte hindurch studieren. Es liegt darin, daß Christus seine Gemeinde bewahrt und durch die Jahrhunderte hindurch immer wieder erneuert. An drei herausragenden historischen Konstellationen möchte ich dies kurz verdeutlichen:

Schien nicht schon in den ersten Jahrhunderten nach Christus—etwa angesichts der diokletianischen Verfolgung—alles verloren? Aber Christus stärkte die frühe Kirche nicht nur, im Glauben fest zu bleiben, sondern erwies sich als der Lebendige, indem sein Evangelium die Provinzen des römischen



Reiches allen heidnischen Widerständen zum Trotz durchdrungen hat.

Wie dunkel und verloren schien die Situation der Kirche in der Epoche der Renaissancepäpste, aber Christus schenkte in dieser verfahrenen Situation die Reformation, eine Erneuerung seiner Gemeinde an Haupt und Gliedern. Niemand konnte an der Schwelle des 16. Jahrhunderts aus menschlicher Perspektive einen derart tiefgreifenden Wandel in der Geschichte der Kirche prognostizieren.

Die Lage erwies sich auch im 19. Jahrhundert als extrem schwierig. Die Massen folgten religionskritischen Philosophen wie Feuerbach und Marx. Aber genau zu dieser Zeit schenkte Christus die große Erweckung in Nordamerika und auch eine Fülle von erwecklichen Aufbrüchen in Europa. Als Ergebnis entstand weltweit eine starke Missionsbewegung, die in nahezu allen Ländern der sogenannten Dritten Welt tiefe Spuren des Gemeindeaufbaus hinterlassen hat.

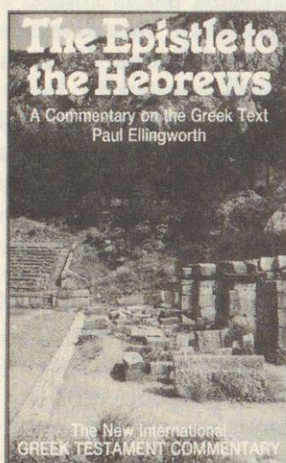
Deshalb möchte ich mit der hoffnungsvollen Perspektive schließen: Wir sind als evangelikale Theologen dazu berufen, durch solide Lehre und Forschung der Gemeinde Jesu Christi in unseren Tagen zu helfen, ihrer Berufung in der modernen Welt besser gerecht zu werden. Es ist und bleibt allein der auferstandene Christus, der neue Impulse und neues Leben in unserer nachchristlichen Welt geben kann. Er vermag eine Bewegung auszulösen, die wir uns unter den jetzigen Bedingungen noch gar nicht vorstellen können. Er ist es, der sich selbst als der souveräne Herr seiner Kirche erweist. Seine Kraft wird sogar unter Verfolgungen und angesichts verschwindend kleiner Minderheiten wirksam. Denn sein Wort vermag neue Erweckung hervorzubringen. Christus ist Herr. Das genügt, um seiner Berufung in unserer modernen Welt gehorsam zu sein.



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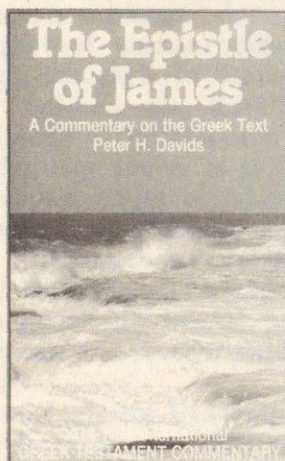


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## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Nach einem kurzen Überblick über die Geschichte der Säkularisierung in dem die Renaissance, die Reformation, die Aufklärung, die industrielle Revolution und der nach dem 2. Weltkrieg erfolgte Durchbruch behandelt werden, wird die Frage gestellt, was Säkularisierung eigentlich sei. Die Antwort auf diese Frage hängt von der Perspektive ab aus der dieses Phänomen betrachtet wird. Gerard Dekker, ein niederländischer Religionssoziologe, erwähnt drei Aspekte: eine Abnahme der religiösen Praxis, eine zunehmende Eingrenzung des Einflßbereiches der Religion und die Anpassung der Religion an die jeweils herrschende Kultur. Gerben Heitink, ein niederländischer Theologe, betrachtet das Phänomen aus der Sicht des Einzelnen und entdeckt drei andere Aspekte: den Verlust eines religiösen Bezugsrahmens, den Verlust der Relevanz und den Verlust der Transzendenz. Beide Beispiele zeigen, daß in Westeuropa ein vollständiger Paradigmenwechsel stattgefunden hat. Säkularisierung findet jedoch nicht in der Isolation statt. Sie ist Teil eines viel größeren Phänomens des Modernisierungsprozesses, der von einer Differenzierung sowohl in der Gesellschaft als ganzer als auch im Leben des Individuums gekennzeichnet ist. Der mündige Mensch (Bonhoeffer) wurde in verschiedene Prozesse miteinbezogen: Demokratisierung, Subjektivierung und Rationalisierung. Dies führte zu einer grundlegenden Pluralisierung der Gesellschaft, die unsere moderne Welt in eine nachchristliche Welt verwandelte. Im allgemeinen haben die Kirchen auf die Säkularisierung auf drei unterschiedliche Weisen reagiert: durch Vorherrschaft (besonders in den römisch-katholischen Ländern), durch Widerstand (kleinere

konservative Gemeinden und kleine inner- und außerkirchliche Gruppierungen) und durch Anpassung (die größeren traditionellen Konfessionen). Eine wesentliche Rolle in diesem Anpassungsprozeß spielte die Art der Verkündigung. 'Ein wahres Evangelium muß verkündbar sein' war das Schlagwort, die führte jedoch zumeist zu einer Verkürzung des Evangeliums (vgl. Bischof Robinsons 'Gott ist anders' und die darauffolgende Auseinandersetzung).

Ist die Lage hoffnungslos? Viele Soziologen waren und bleiben, dem Beispiel Max Webers folgend, pessimistisch. Andere waren und bleiben, dem Beispiel Dürkheims folgend, eher optimistisch. Sowohl Peter Berger (Soziologe) als auch Lesslie Newbigin (Theologe) gehören zur letzteren Gruppe. Sie teilen die Ansicht nicht, Säkularisierung sei ein unausweichliches Schicksal, das zum Aussterben aller Religion führen werde. Die Säkularisierung selbst könnte bald in eine innere Krise geraten. Sogar Harvey Cox sah sich gezwungen, ein neues Buch zu schreiben: 'Göttliche Spiele. Meine Erfahrungen mit den Religionen' 1989; dies stellt in gewisser Weise einen Widerruf seines früheren Werkes 'The Secular City' (1965) dar. Anscheinend ist die Religion doch sehr gesund und munter! Offensichtlich ist der Mensch unheilbar religiös.

Das Evangelium bleibt eine befreiende Botschaft. Der moderne Mensch kann nicht vor den existentiellen Fragen fliehen, die sein eigenes Leben berühren. Bei unserer Verkündigung des Evangeliums brauchen wir nicht nach religiösen Berührungspunkten zu suchen: das Evangelium schafft sich seinen eigenen Landeplatz.

Darüberhinaus ist die christliche Botschaft nicht nur eine Botschaft für den Einzelnen,



sondern für eine ganze Kultur. In diese Kultur möchte sie dadurch eindringen, daß sie sich in ihr verleiht und sie von innen heraus verändert.

Das Evangelium zielt aber noch weiter. Es ist die einzige Botschaft, die eine einheitliche und kohärente Weltanschauung anbietet. Dies wird besonders am Brief an die Kolosser aufgezeigt. Nur das Evangelium bietet eine Antwort auf die Differenzierung, Pluralisierung und

Zersplitterung unserer modernen Kultur. Aber das Evangelium besteht nicht nur aus Worten; es fordert auch zu Taten heraus, zu Taten selbstloser Liebe.

Darin bestand die innere Stärke der Urgemeinde, die in einer vorchristlichen Kultur lebte. Darin besteht auch die 'Antwort' für eine Kirche, die in einer nachchristlichen Kultur lebt.

## RÉSUMÉ

Après un court historique de la sécularisation, traitant brièvement de la Renaissance, de la Réforme, du siècle des lumières, de la Révolution industrielle et de l'expansion qui a suivi la seconde guerre mondiale, la question est posée: 'qu'est la sécularisation?' La réponse dépend de la manière dont on considère le phénomène. Le Hollandais Gerard Dekker, spécialiste de sociologie de la pratique religieuse, mentionne trois aspects: une baisse de la pratique religieuse, une diminution croissante de l'importance du religieux en bien des domaines, et l'accommodation de la religion elle-même à la culture dominante. Le théologien hollandais Gerben Heitink aborde la question du point de vue de l'individu et signale trois autres aspects: la perte d'un cadre de référence religieux, la perte de pertinence et la perte de transcendance. Dans les deux cas, nous constatons qu'il s'est produit un changement complet de valeur de référence en Europe occidentale.

Toutefois, la sécularisation ne s'effectue pas isolément. C'est un aspect du phénomène beaucoup plus vaste qu'est la modernisation, et qui se caractérise par la différenciation dans la société en général et dans la vie des individus. 'L'homme a atteint sa majorité' (Bonhoeffer) et s'est impliqué dans des processus divers: ceux de la démocratisation, de la subjectivisation et de la rationalisation. Tout cela a conduit à une pluralisation profonde de la société, avec pour résultat que notre monde moderne est devenu un monde post-chrétien.

En général, les Églises ont réagi à la sécularisation de trois manières différentes: en exerçant une certaine domination (spécialement dans les pays catholiques), en résistant (Églises conservatrices plus petites et petits groupes à

l'intérieur ou en marge des Églises), ou en s'accommodant (les plus grandes dénominations historiques). Dans ce processus, les ministres du culte ont souvent joué un rôle important. Le slogan est devenu: 'un vrai Évangile doit pouvoir être prêché', mais ceci a souvent mené à un Évangile réduit (cf. *Honest to God* et le débat qui a suivi).

La situation est-elle désespérée? De nombreux sociologues, à la suite de Max Weber, ont eu et ont encore une vision pessimiste. D'autres, suivant Durkheim, ont été et sont plus optimistes. Le sociologue Peter Berger et le théologien Lesslie Newbigin appartiennent tous deux à cette deuxième tendance. Ils croient que la sécularisation n'est pas un destin inéluctable qui conduira à la disparition de toute religion. La sécularisation elle-même peut avoir à faire face bientôt à une crise interne. Même Harvey Cox a dû écrire un nouveau livre, *Religion in the Secular City*, la religion dans la cité séculière' (1984), dans lequel, d'une certaine manière, il se rétracte par rapport à son premier ouvrage *The Secular City*, 'la cité séculière' (1965). La religion fait preuve d'une grande vitalité. Apparemment, l'homme est incurablement religieux.

L'Évangile demeure un message libérateur. L'homme moderne ne peut échapper aux interrogations existentielles qui concernent sa propre vie. Dans notre proclamation de l'Évangile, nous ne devrions pas nous soucier des points de contact religieux: l'Évangile se crée lui-même sa piste d'atterrissage.

En outre, l'Évangile chrétien ne s'adresse pas seulement à l'individu, mais c'est un message qui concerne la culture entière. Il veut pénétrer cette culture en s'y incarnant lui-même et en la transformant de l'intérieur.



*La portée de l'Évangile est même plus vaste. Il est le seul message qui offre une vision du monde unifiée et cohérente. Nous rencontrons cela en particulier dans l'épître aux Colossiens. Seul l'Évangile offre un remède à la différenciation, la pluralisation et la fragmentation de notre culture moderne. Mais*

*l'Évangile ne consiste pas seulement en paroles; il appelle aussi à l'action, une action d'amour généreux. C'était là la force intérieure de l'Église primitive qui vivait dans une culture pré-chrétienne. C'est aussi la 'solution' pour une Église vivant dans une culture post-chrétienne.*

## Introduction

We are living in a secularized world and we all know it. Whether we come from Holland or Great Britain, from Germany or Scandinavia, from France or Spain or Italy, from Hungary or Rumania, we are all surrounded by a secularized world. In many ways it is a strange and unique phenomenon. In the 'Choruses from *The Rock*' T.S. Eliot wrote:

It seems that something has happened that has never happened before: though we know not just when, or why, or how, or where.

Men have left GOD, not for other gods, they say, but for no god; and this has never happened before.

Alan D. Gilbert, who quotes these words, says: 'The possibility that an entire culture, not just elite elements within it, might dispense with religion altogether is uniquely a product of modern Western civilization'.<sup>1</sup> And he rightly adds that this secularized culture is proving exportable, even in a post-colonial age. For however true it may be that the church is growing vigorously in Africa, and also in some Asian countries, such as Indonesia, Korea and China, it is equally true that secularization is making its impact on the youth in many non-Western countries, especially on the young people that flock to the cities.

### 1. A short history of secularization

Even in our Western world secularization did not emerge all of a sudden. Though our generation may have witnessed a tremendous upsurge of secularization, the process itself started many centuries ago. I shall not weary you with a long drawn-out historical survey, but will confine myself to a few facts

and figures. These, I believe, are necessary for arriving at a proper understanding of what is going on in our own day.

At the beginning of the Middle Ages, when the so-called Constantinian era started, the European world embarked upon the road toward *Christianization*. At the height of the Middle Ages this process appeared to have been very successful; at that time one could speak of a Christian culture or civilization in Western Europe. As Gilbert puts it: 'Medieval Europe owed its coherence to the common bonds of a basic Christian consensus' (20).

But hidden under this common Christian culture were forces that would eventually lead to the secularization of this very same culture. As a matter of fact, at the end of the 14th century these forces already presented themselves. In Italy the so-called *Renaissance* started, taking hold of the heritage of the ancient Greek civilization, which was characterized by the centrality and autonomy of man. At first the Renaissance seemed to be a mixture of both Greek and Christian thinking. The same was true of *Humanism* that developed alongside it. Many humanists of the 15th and 16th century (for instance, Desiderius Erasmus) were devout members of the Catholic Church. At the same time they shared with the Renaissance the confidence in the intellectual power of man and they also shared its critical evaluation of ancient traditions and dogmas. Even though the Christian consensus remained largely unquestioned, the acceptance of free inquiry and rational criticism meant that the way toward secularization was opened.

The *Reformation* of the 16th century made its own contribution. To be sure, the



Reformers themselves continued to adhere to the idea of a Christian culture and even maintained a Constantinian view of society ('throne' and 'altar' usually retained their close relationship in countries that were deeply influenced by the Reformation). Yet there were elements in reformational thinking which in the long run could and would promote the process of secularization. I am thinking here, for instance, of Luther's doctrine of the priesthood of all believers. This doctrine not only offered to each individual believer direct access to God but also, in a fundamental way, made him independent of the ecclesiastical offices and authorities. Gilbert mentions three major contributions of the Reformation at this point. 1. It left Europeans with a profound crisis of authority. 2. It re-imposed upon Europeans a distinction between Christianity and culture. 3. It set in motion various social and political forces leading eventually to religious toleration in most European societies (27ff.).

The major source of today's secularization, however, is to be found in the 18th century movement of the *Enlightenment*. Lesslie Newbigin even calls it a 'conversion experience'.<sup>2</sup> The whole outlook on reality and on man's place within reality changed completely. Immanuel Kant, one of the 'fathers' of the Enlightenment formulated it thus: 'Enlightenment is man's exodus from his self-incurred tutelage. Tutelage is the inability to use one's understanding without the guidance of another person ... Dare to know! Have the courage to use your own understanding; this is the motto of the Enlightenment.' By its emphasis on the human 'ratio' as the only way to understand reality and as the only means of arriving at ultimate and absolute truth, the Enlightenment broke the basic Christian consensus that had characterized the Middle Ages and to some extent also the Reformation period. At the same time it provided a new framework or paradigm for a new understanding of reality.

The Enlightenment itself, however, did not yet de-Christianize Europe. It was largely limited to the higher classes and did not yet affect the common people. Nevertheless, it made a profound impact upon Western culture. Gilbert formulates it aptly: 'While it

remained *dominant*, the Christian world-view was no longer *normative*'(36).

Later movements absorbed much of Enlightenment thought and speeded up the process of secularization. I am thinking of the *French Revolution* at the end of that very same century, with its well-known slogan: 'Liberty, equality and fraternity', all ideas derived from the Enlightenment. I am also thinking of the effects of the *Industrial Revolution* in the 18th and 19th century, alienating large parts of the working classes from the Christian faith and the Christian church. The industrial revolution was not only a economic and material transformation of society, but it was also a social and cultural phenomenon that completely changed the existing culture and the lives of people involved in this culture. Gilbert calls it a 'watershed in human experience with which only the Neolithic Revolution of pre-history is comparable'(43).

Still, even the industrial revolution did not yet de-Christianize Western Europe. This happened only *after World War II*, when all of a sudden the dams broke and the river of secularization swept everything along, which stood in its way. Various largely independent and yet interrelated factors combined to bring this about. I can only mention them: increasing prosperity, higher levels of education for all, the increase of free time and of mobility, the impact of the mass media, in particular of television, etc. The result of all these factors together is that the Christian face of Europe changed rapidly. Even worse, this Christian face has already disappeared and has been replaced by a secular face. Western Europe has become a *secular continent*.

## 2. What is secularization?

It is not easy to define or circumscribe the phenomenon of secularization. The original meaning of the term is quite clear. *The Shorter Oxford English Dictionary* gives the following meanings. 1. The conversion of an ecclesiastical or religious institution or its property to secular possession and use. 2. The giving of a secular or non-sacred character or direction to art, studies, etc.; the placing of morals on a secular basis; the



restricting of education to secular subjects (1964, 1828). In a more general sense one can say that secularization today means the process in which society at large and large sections of societal life are being divorced from the impact of the Christian Gospel, without adopting any other form of religion. Owen Chadwick gives the following broad definition: 'The growing tendency in mankind to do without religion, or to try to do without religion.'<sup>3</sup>

The Dutch sociologist of religion Gerard Dekker (Free University, Amsterdam), looking at the phenomenon of secularization from the perspective of *society as a whole*, concludes that we should distinguish at least three aspects. (1) There is a *decrease in religiousness* among the population. An ever larger number of people no longer attends church services, or even leaves the church. (2) There is a *growing restriction of the range or significance of religion*. Religion no longer has a bearing on huge segments of societal life. It is virtually restricted to a person's private life. (3) Religion itself is *accommodating itself* to the new ways of thinking and living which are dominant in society at large. In other words, the ideas and experiences of religious people themselves are changing too. Dekker here speaks of an 'inner' secularization.

The Dutch theologian Gerben Heitink (also teaching in the Free University) has a somewhat different approach. He looks at the phenomenon of secularization from the angle of the *individual person* and notes three other aspects that are characteristic of the dominant secular world-view of our day.<sup>4</sup> (1) The *loss of a religious frame of reference*. The believer is no longer supported by his environment, but is largely left to himself. This easily leads to doubt and to questions such as: Is it still worthwhile to believe and live a Christian life? (2) The *loss of relevance*. People begin to ask themselves: What is the value of belief in a world that has become autonomous, that has excluded God from its centre and that seems to be quite able to manage without Him? (3) The *loss of transcendence*. One of the major aspects of secularization is the restriction of all reality to the universe as we know it and explore it with our telescopes and micro-

scopes, and to the present life as we live it between birth and death. Even theology has at times adapted itself to this way of looking at reality. Although Paul Tillich and John Robinson still wanted to believe in God and did not want to do away with the whole idea of transcendence, in their theology God was no longer seen as the Transcendent One, who is distinct from the world and does not need it, but in a panentheistic way they described Him as the Ground of Being or Being itself.

All these aspects, both the ones mentioned by Dekker and those mentioned by Heitink, show that in the Western-European world a complete *change of paradigm* has been and is taking place. When we compare the new paradigm with the old, we notice that autonomy has taken the place of heteronomy, that a democratic way of thinking has replaced the hierarchical way of transmitting truth and authority, and that the idea of transcendence has given way to that of immanence.<sup>5</sup>

Naturally, we should not make the mistake of thinking that this shift of paradigm is happening everywhere in the same way and to the same extent. Dekker rightly points out that the three forms of secularization which he has mentioned do not simply coincide. There is at this point quite a difference between the *United States* and *Western Europe*. In the former religion has adapted itself to a greater degree to the developments in society at large, while in the latter religion was less adaptable, the result being that the gap between modern society and the church became more pronounced and many people abandoned religion altogether. Gilbert, who also notes the difference between the United States and Britain, mentions another difference. According to him in Britain 'institutional secularization in the wider society has advanced more rapidly than in America, and the residuum of 'religious terminology' and formal Christianity is therefore less conspicuous, less authentic; less seriously regarded'(106). Even within Western Europe there are differences. In my own country, for instance, the results of secularization are in some ways more pronounced than in other Western European countries. While in most



countries secularization leads to a decreasing church attendance, without causing a complete break with the church (the non-church-goers remain nominal members of their church), in my own country we see that many people make a clean break with the church and officially and statistically become non-church members.

So far we have concentrated on the process of secularization on its own. In actual fact, however, secularization does not take place 'on its own'. It is an aspect of a much larger process, the *process of modernization*, which has been going on in Europe for at least some centuries. Here, too, I shall not give a detailed survey of the entire process, but only mention some of its striking characteristics. The most striking is perhaps the *differentiation* that has taken place in society at large. In the past, even up to the second half of the 19th century, society as a whole was still characterized by unity and coherence and the lives of the individual members of society were equally characterized by unity and coherence. Family life and professional life were closely interwoven. Quite often the whole family was engaged in the same trade or profession, which was usually pursued in the building next door. As a result of the industrial revolution and the increase in technology family and trade/profession became two separate worlds, existing side by side, the trade/profession often being practised away from home. Gradually nearly all aspects of life became independent and occupied their own world: the arts, education, medicine, economics, etc. The same also happened to religion: it too became a separate world, confined to the sphere of private life. 'Christian faith became—for most people—a private and domestic matter strictly separated from the public worlds of politics and economics.'<sup>6</sup>

During this same process of modernization the place of man himself within the spectrum of society changed. He became more and more independent, or to put it in the well-known words of Dietrich Bonhoeffer: '*Man came of age*'. In the first place man was allowed, even supposed, to speak his own mind in the various, differentiated spheres of life (the process of *democratization*). In the second place he was allowed, even supposed, to make his

own choice in the world of values and truths (the process of *subjectivization*). In the third place he was expected, even supposed, to plan his own future and to bend this future to his own will (the process of *rationalization*).

All these processes together have lead to a profound *pluralization* of society. Modern society shows little coherence (apart from the fact of modernity itself!), but consists of a great number of competing pluralistic systems, each constituting a small unified world and vying for the interest and support of all members of society.

From the viewpoint of the Christian Gospel we must say that our modern world is a *post-Christian world*, generally characterized by such secular presuppositions as: only scientific knowledge or knowledge of facts is true knowledge; all convictions are equally valuable and legitimate; religious convictions are relegated to private life; sin is an antiquated, at the very most a personal point of view; life itself is restricted to life in this world, that is, to the comparatively short period of time between birth and death.

### 3. An evaluation of secularization

In the fifties quite a few theologians were quite optimistic about the process of secularization. In his book *Verhängnis und Hoffnung der Neuzeit: Die Säkularisierung als theologisches Problem* (1953),<sup>7</sup> the German theologian Friedrich Gogarten distinguished between secularization and secularism. The former is appreciated positively as a fruit of the Christian faith, leading to a de-sacralization of the world and the historicization of human existence. The latter is seen as a negative development, in which the meaning of life is sought and found within the confines of life on earth (ideological secularism) or in which people simply cease to look for the meaning of life (nihilistic secularism).<sup>8</sup> A similar line of thought is pursued by A.T. van Leeuwen in his *Christianity in World History* (1964), supplying many historical illustrations. Other optimistic appreciations of the phenomenon of secularization in those days were found in the books of John A.T. Robinson,<sup>9</sup> Harvey Cox<sup>10</sup> and Ronald Gregor Smith.<sup>11</sup>

Many advocates of such an optimistic



interpretation of secularization appealed to Bonhoeffer's *Letters and Papers from Prison*. In one of these letters he introduces his theory of a world come of age and of a free, autonomous man who has learned to cope with all questions of importance without recourse to God as a working hypothesis.<sup>12</sup> At the same time he rejects every Christian apologetic that attacks the adulthood of the world. Such an apologetic is pointless, ignoble and un-Christian. Yet Bonhoeffer by no means abandons the Christian Gospel. On the contrary, fully accepting this world come of age he is vexed by the question how we can reclaim this world for Christ.<sup>13</sup> Two weeks later he writes to his friend Eberhard Bethge: 'The only way to be honest is to recognize that we have to live in the world *etsi deus non daretur*. And this is just what we do see—before God . . . God is teaching us that we must live as men who can get along very well without him . . . . Before God and with him we live without God. God allows himself to be edged out of the world, and on to the cross. God is weak and powerless in the world, and that is exactly the way, the only way, in which he can be with us and help us.' This is optimism indeed, but not of the kind we find in many later authors. Central in this conception is the God who is weak and powerless, as Christ was on the cross, but who as the suffering God is *with us and helps us*. And in the meantime Bonhoeffer, in his prison, read his Bible and said his prayers and sang the Christian hymns of his Lutheran tradition!<sup>14</sup>

Indeed, there is little reason to be optimistic about this all-embracing process of secularization, in the midst of which we spend our own lives. *Hendrikus Berkhof*, who in the fifties and early sixties was still rather optimistic, afterwards changed his mind and began to speak of the 'eclipse of God'.<sup>15</sup> As a matter of fact, even in his more optimistic days he clearly recognized the ambivalence of the concept and reality of secularization. As early as 1958 he wrote: 'Secularization is the child of the gospel, but a child who sooner or later rises against his mother.'<sup>16</sup> Indeed, he goes back further and sees secularization as the child of OT religion. Especially in the creation stories we see that nature is desacralized (sun and moon, for instance,

are just lamps God suspended from the ceiling of the universe) and that nature thus is made the object of man's exploitation (90). Secularization in itself, therefore, is neither good nor bad. All depends on what direction it takes. Berkhof at that time distinguished between secularization as a *Christian* or an *anti-Christian* phenomenon (91ff.). As the former it is 'conversion projected in culture—the Christianization of life' (91).

Since the seventies Berkhof has become more careful, even to some extent *pessimistic* in his use of the term secularization. He now uses a threefold distinction: *secularism* (a world and a life, entirely without God), *secularization* (also a negative term, indicating the gradual disappearance (eclipse) of God from the 'manageable' world of man) and *emancipation* (a positive term, indicating the independence of man over against a desacralized nature and his task of controlling nature).<sup>17</sup> This emancipation, however, is wholesome and beneficial only when man accepts his freedom as a gift of God. As soon as he uses it for his own purposes, detached from the purposes of the Creator with this world, it becomes secularization. Emancipation and secularization are two movements that are often intertwined and at times even look similar, and yet they are essentially different. Emancipation is in line with Genesis 2, where we read of the divine command to till and keep the garden; secularization is in line with Genesis 3, where we hear the voice of the tempter, promising man that he will be like God, knowing good and evil.

#### 4. The church and secularization

Never before has the church had such a difficult time as in our day; not even in the first centuries of its existence, when it was attacked and persecuted on all sides. In those days there was an enemy who was easily recognized. Today the church is facing an enemy who is disguised in numerous ways. I fully agree with Gilbert, when he writes: 'Secularization is a much deadlier foe than any previous counter-religious force in human experience' (153). And the trouble is that this enemy is present everywhere, though not in the same way and to the same



extent. In *American society* we often encounter a strange mixture of secular values and religious terminology. In 1961 the American sociologist Peter Berger formulated it thus: 'The churches operate with secular values while the secular institutions are permeated with religious terminology.'<sup>18</sup> The result is that at times one can hardly distinguish between church members and those who are 'unchurched'. Both seem to cherish the same values and use similar terminology. 'Usually the most that can be said is that the church members hold the same values as everybody else, but with more emphatic solemnity.' In *Britain* secularization has advanced more rapidly and more radically. There is less left of formal Christianity, and religious terminology has disappeared almost completely from public life. In *continental Europe* secularization has progressed even more radically. Throughout the 19th century the impact of the French Revolution (which was never experienced in Britain!) was felt in many ways and gradually public life was completely divorced from religion and religious impulses. In our day the process has advanced to such an extent that all of Western Europe has become one large mission field! On his return to England Lesslie Newbigin took on a ministry in one of the industrial sections of Birmingham and soon discovered that communicating the Gospel in secularized Birmingham is even more difficult than in multi-religious India!<sup>19</sup> The Western culture, more than any other culture, has become resistant to the Gospel.

How did the churches react? In general there are three possibilities and we see how all three of them are being tried out in our own 20th century.

1. The first one is *dominance*. Some churches have tried and still try to uphold the dominance of the church in the midst of a secularizing culture. This attitude applies in particular to the Roman Catholic Church in predominantly Roman Catholic countries. Although the church authorities were and are well aware of the serious inroads secularization is making into every nook and cranny of society, they nevertheless continue their own work, as if all of society is still under the sway and even tutelage of the church. Similar ideas, I am afraid, are

also behind the pope's recent proposal to re-evangelize Europe. Here secularization is not really taken seriously. Ignoring the reality of secularization the church simply aspires to dominate the national or European culture. There is, however, little reason for optimism, as far as the outcome of this programme of re-evangelization is concerned. In order to succeed it would need a reversal of the overpowering processes of secularization and modernization, a prospect that is highly unlikely.

2. The second possibility is *resistance*. In this case churches or small groups within the churches refuse the modern world, distance themselves from its secular culture, fence for the traditional faith and seek to preserve it from the corrosion of the world outside. This attitude is usually found in the smaller conservative churches or in conservative groups within the larger denominations. Gilbert calls it a 'lonely sectarian road' (133) and mentions as an example the British Baptists (138f.), Evangelicalism (139f.) and Pentecostalism (140f.). Here secularization is taken seriously, but the price to be paid is rather high. Not only is such resistance rarely successful, but it also isolates those who opt for it from the rest of society, the result often being that they find themselves in a cultural backwater.

3. The third possibility is *accommodation*. This was the road usually taken by the larger historical denominations. The spirit of tolerance, characteristic of pluralistic society, also entered the churches and consequently most of the larger churches became pluralistic themselves. The secular way of life became so common and so natural that most church members were not even aware of the fact that their lives were becoming highly secularized. As early as 1900 the President of the Methodist Church in England said in his presidential address: 'You are in the world, brethren, steeped in its affairs, conversant with its ideas and affected by its fashions and maxims to a degree that would have shocked your fathers.'<sup>20</sup> Today there is often little difference between the church member and the non-church member, apart from the fact that the former still attends the worship services, either regularly or once in a while, and the



latter has abandoned this practice. In this situation the term 'worldliness' has become obsolete. 'Churches which once () fulminated against secular novels and frivolous conversation, and pronounced anathema on the card table, dance-hall or theatre, [have] ended up seeing nothing essentially wrong with these things' (Gilbert, 109).

A major role in this process of accommodation was usually played by the *ministry* of the church. Of course, they did not mean to introduce secularization into the church. As a matter of fact, they started from the other end. Their question was: how can we still reach people who are living in this secular world of ours with the Gospel? Thus at the beginning of this century the German theologian Friedrich Niebergall wrote his three volume work: *Wie predigen wir dem modernen Menschen?* (How do we preach the Gospel to modern man?)<sup>21</sup> In England Reginald W. Thompson, chairman of the Congregational Union of England and Wales in 1938, said in an official address: 'We have abandoned doctrines once thought essential: physical hell; total depravity; endless punishment for sins committed in this moment of life; Christ punished by God for others' sins; the predestination of some to eternal woe. . . . All these dogmas were () abandoned () because the working minister found they simply could not be told as Good News to the people. *A true Gospel must be preachable*' (Gilbert, 119). In our own life time we have seen similar adaptations of the Gospel in many theologies, eventually leading even to the death of God theology. But whatever the shape of the theology may be, this so-called 'preachable' Gospel always appears to be a *reduced* Gospel and in the long run it promotes secularization rather than diminishing it. Gilbert points out that 'the appearance of *Honest to God* was a vital event in the making of post-Christian Britain. It precipitated attitudes towards religion which had long remained in suspension—vague, inchoate, undecided . . . . It is impossible () not to conclude that the publication hastened the decline of British Christianity and actually increased the estrangement from the secular culture of that waning religious tradition which the Bishop sought to make more preachable' (121/2). Many

ordinary church people, especially those who had little personal relation to the church, concluded: 'Well, if a bishop of the church says that it is enough to lead decent lives and be kind to others, why in the world should we still go to church?' Thus the secularization of theology passed the point beyond which there is simply no powerful ideological reason for calling people out of the 'world' into a denominational 'Church' (123).

## 5. Is the situation hopeless?

Having come so far, there seems to be only one conclusion left: the situation is hopeless. There appears to be no escape from secularization. It seems to be an irreversible fate that hangs over our heads as an immovable and threatening thunderstorm.

As a matter of fact many sociologists are very *pessimistic* about the future of religion in our secular society. Max Weber, who was one of the first to give serious attention to the process of secularization, was of the opinion that there would no longer be a place for socially operative forms of religion in a fully secularized society. Many others have followed him on this path. With regard to the German National Churches A. Kuphal once used the picture of a tree in autumn. In the years 1933–1945 National Socialism functioned as the strong wind that shook the leaves down. Today we live in a period in which the leaves simply fall down, while there is no air stirring.<sup>22</sup> S. S. Aquaviva closes his book on *The Decline of the Sacred in Industrial Society* with the picture of humanity entering a long night, which will become increasingly darker as the generations move on, a night of which we cannot yet see the end. It is a night in which there seems to be no place for the idea of God or for the concept of the sacred and in which the traditional way of giving meaning to life or of facing life and death are increasingly becoming untenable.<sup>23</sup>

Others are more *optimistic*. In the wake of Durkheim's approach they believe that even in an almost completely secularized world there will be elements of Christian values in secular institutions (Parsons) or forms of civil religion (Bellah). Peter Berger is one of those who reject the theory that 'modernity



is intrinsically and irreversibly antagonistic to religion'.<sup>24</sup> Already in earlier publications he had maintained that religion will survive in the secularized world, because man cannot fail to seek answers to the fundamental questions of the whence, the whither and the why of his life. He calls the 'secular' answers to these questions 'banal'. They will lead only to the all-pervasive tedium of a world without gods.<sup>25</sup> In an article of 1982 he points out that secularity as a world-view, including the myth of progress, has been severely shaken in modern times. 'While modernization brings promises and tangible benefits, it also produces tensions and discontents both institutionally and psychologically' (15). It is therefore no wonder that in recent years several vigorous counter-secular and counterpluralistic 'resistance movements' have come into existence. Besides the upsurge of religious movements in the Third World and the revival of religion in the Soviet Union he mentions the rise of the so-called counterculture and the resurgence of Evangelical Protestantism in the United States (16ff.). Berger even considers the possibility that society (in America!) will become less secular. This may happen when 'the symbolic center of the society would move to the right religiously' (21). He already sees signs pointing in this direction.

In *The Other Side of 1984* Lesslie Newbigin follows a similar line. He agrees with the philosopher Michael Polanyi that the critical movement which started in the Renaissance and which has enriched us mentally and morally to an extent unrivalled by any period of similar duration, is gradually coming to its end. 'Its incandescence has fed on the combustion of the Christian heritage in the oxygen of Greek rationalism.' But now the fuel is exhausted and the critical framework itself has burnt away (21). What we now need is a new 'post-critical philosophy'. Newbigin believes that the Christian Gospel is able to provide a new paradigm. It must be 'based unashamedly on the revelation of God made in Jesus Christ and attested in scripture and the tradition of the Church' and must be offered 'as a fresh starting point for the exploration of the mystery of human existence and for coping

with its practical tasks not only in the private and domestic life of the believers but also in the public life of the citizen' (27).

Naturally Berger and Newbigin cannot offer 'hard' evidence for their thesis that the process of secularization is coming to a dead end. But they do give us indications that something like this is actually happening. To these indications we may add the fact that the prediction of many scholars in the sixties that religion would gradually fade out of society has not come true. In 1965, for instance, Harvey Cox wrote his best-seller *The Secular City*, in which he predicted the demise of religion, at least of transcendent religion, in the secular city of our time. He then quoted with approval Amos Wilder's words: 'If we are to have any transcendence today, even Christian, it must be in and through the secular. . . . If we are to find Grace it is to be found in the world and not overhead. The sublime firmament of overhead reality that provided a spiritual home for the souls of men until the end of the eighteenth century has collapsed' (261). But in 1984, in his new book *Religion in the Secular City*, he had to retract many of his previous notions and predictions. He had to admit that there had been new developments, indicating that religion is by no means dead. In this later book he mentioned among others the revival of fundamentalism, the resurgence of evangelicalism, the rise of liberation theology and the coming into being of the more radical Christian base communities, not only in Latin America but also in the United States and Western Europe. Admitting all this, Cox himself remained an unrepentant modernist. Throughout his book he still presented the primary goal of modern theology as the need to adapt religion to the modern world.

But whatever our evaluation of Cox's own theology may be, one thing is very clear: religion is by no means dead, but it is still very much *alive and kicking*. It may not always be the Christian religion, as we understand it, but it is religion nevertheless. The same is true of the New Age movement which is so popular in our day. We may wholeheartedly disagree with its religious content, for instance, its pantheism, its belief in reincarnation or its deep interest in



matters occult, but it cannot be denied that the movement is religious through and through.

Apparently man is 'incurably religious'. Or as J. Blauw says it: 'A man without "religion" is a contradiction in itself. In his "religion" man gives account of his relation to God. His religion is reaction upon (the real or pretended) revelation of God. Man is 'incurably religious', because his relation to God belongs to the very essence of man himself. Man is only man as man-before-God.'<sup>26</sup> This is also the reason why modernization and secularization are unable to fulfil the deepest human needs. They leave man alone with his most essential personal questions, such as: Whence do I come? Whither am I going? What is the meaning of life? How do I cope with illness, bereavement, loneliness and death?

There is therefore no reason whatever to let the whole process of secularization happen to us, as if it were a fatal disease for which no cure exists. The Gospel as it has been given to us in Jesus Christ most certainly is just as much a liberating message for our modern, secular world and for secular men and women in this modern world as it was for pagan men and women in the declining years of the Roman Empire. But it is a *liberating* message only when we preach the *full* Gospel. An accommodated Gospel is a cul-de-sac. Only a message that contains the full richness of the Christian Gospel will do.

This may mean that as evangelicals we will have to accept a kind of 'sectarian' position or that others will regard us as a kind of antiquated religious subculture, because we refuse to accept certain cultural and moral developments in the modern world. But this sacrifice is small, compared with the result: a community of new people who are bound to Christ as their Saviour and Lord and who are guided by the Holy Spirit.

## 6. How to communicate this liberating Gospel to others?

My first comment is: we should start at the point *where people really are*! As evangelicals we are often inclined to bring the message in the same way as we ourselves have heard it

in our own evangelical tradition. So we start with an attempt to convince people of their sinfulness and their guilt vis-à-vis God and then go on to speak of the cross of Jesus as the means of expiation and reconciliation.

But is this really the correct way to communicate the Gospel in a secular world? It may be the right method of communication within the church itself, because there people to a large extent share a common frame of reference, which includes the conviction that in the face of God we are all sinners. But the problem in our modern world is that secular man does not know this feeling of guilt, because he has no inner, personal relationship with God. In fact, he is generally a well-meaning person, who tries to make the best of his life and is willing to help his fellow-humans in the best way he can. I know many secular men and women who, as far as their morality is concerned, have a higher standard and better record than many church people I know!

But is it really necessary always to begin with our own traditional understanding of the Gospel? In my reading of the *New Testament*, I am struck time and again by the fact that the apostles proclaimed the Gospel in *many different ways*. Peter, for instance, as pictured in Acts, usually preaches the Gospel to a *Jewish audience*. And he does start at the point where these people are. He addresses them as the covenant people who are acquainted with their holy Scriptures. When he speaks of Jesus, he puts Him in the context of these Scriptures and tells them that in Jesus the prophecies of old have been fulfilled. He calls Jesus the Messiah, a term that is familiar to his audience. He further emphasizes again and again that they have crucified and killed this God-given Messiah (Acts 2:23; 3:15; 4:10), but that God has raised Him from the dead, thereby confirming Him as Lord and Christ (2:36). In Peter's sermons the concept of salvation plays a central role (forgiveness of sins, 2:38; turning everyone from his wickedness, 3:26; salvation, 4:12) and every time he calls his hearers to repentance (a well-known concept in Old Testament religion), in order that they may share in the messianic salvation.

When *Paul* proclaims the Gospel to a



*pagan audience*, his approach is quite different. We see this clearly in Acts 17, when he speaks to Epicurean and Stoic philosophers at the Areopagus. Again Paul starts at the point where his listeners are. He speaks of the altar to the unknown God and he quotes from some of their own poets: 'In him we live and move and have our being'; and 'We are indeed his offspring'. Taking his cue from these facts he speaks of the God who created the world and everything in it, who also gave all nations and all individuals their particular place on earth and who hopes that they will feel after Him and find Him. So far it looks as if Paul has no new message for these people. But in actual fact it is brand new, for Paul preaches the one God who is the Creator of the universe and of everything in it and who is so great that he cannot be represented by anything on earth. He does not leave it at this, but goes on to call these people to repentance and to point to Jesus Christ, who will be the judge of all history, as God clearly indicated by raising Him from the dead. In his commentary on Acts F. F. Bruce calls this 'an introductory lesson in Christianity for cultured pagans'. The first lesson starts with their self-confessed ignorance of the divine nature and with a statement of the truth about God, in creation, providence and judgment, ending by introducing the Man of God's appointment. Undoubtedly the second lesson would start with this Man and his resurrection.

So we see how Paul interprets the message in the *language and thought-forms of the culture* of his listeners. Newbigin points out that this is always a 'risky business'.<sup>27</sup> Too often the figure of Jesus has been represented in other cultures as 'merely an image of [their] own ideal'. And yet this approach is unavoidable. We have to start there, where people find themselves, that is, in our case in the *secular culture* of Western Europe. This case, of course, is particularly difficult. Secular men and women of our day and age seem to be completely a-religious. They do not have any altar at all, and most certainly not one dedicated to 'an unknown God'. There does not seem to be any 'point of contact' (Anknüpfungspunkt) between modern secular man and the Christian message of a

transcendent God who has revealed Himself in Jesus Christ. Is this not a hopeless situation? Where then to start?

Again I say: we have to start at the point *where these people are*: in a secular world. It may be a world characterized by the loss of a frame of reference, a loss of relevance and a loss of transcendence, but this does not alter the fact that they are human beings and that as human beings they cannot escape from *existential questions* that touch their own lives: Whence do I come? Whither am I going? What is the meaning of my life? How can I cope with such existential problems as illness, bereavement, loneliness and death? I would not be surprised if Paul, supposing he could address an audience in our present Western European world, would start with these questions. Modern man may have lost all sense of transcendence, yet he cannot fail to ask these questions, which, perhaps in a negative way, point in the direction of transcendence. And I would not be surprised at all if Paul in such a case would again point his secular listeners to the message of the God who created this whole world and who also called his listeners personally into being and who wants to take them along into his future. And if modern man would ask Paul how he knows all this, the apostle would undoubtedly again point to Jesus Christ, who after his suffering and death on the cross was raised by God from the dead, not to return to this life and to this history, but to enter into the new, eternal Kingdom which God has promised.

No doubt in our day, too, many of the people who would hear this message of resurrection would mock, as some of the Athenians did, but others might say: 'That is interesting; we would like to hear you again about this'. I firmly believe that we should not worry too much about the fact that there is hardly any point of contact between secular man and the Gospel, if any at all. Man's religiousness is no more a point of contact for the Gospel than modern man's irreligion. As a matter of fact, man's religiousness may be the greatest obstacle to the Gospel, because he believes that he knows God already in and through his own religion (cf. Karl Barth's statement: 'Religion is unbelief!'). Or he may incorporate Jesus



Christ into his own religion as an image of the ideal of this religion. The Gospel does not really need our religious points of contact. It *creates* its own point of contact or, if you wish, its own landing place. And it does this because it is an instrument in the hands of the *Holy Spirit*. Jesus did not only bequeath to us the Gospel of his cross and resurrection, but He also sent the Holy Spirit to be his witness (John 15:26). 'The Spirit is the one whose witness makes possible the witness of the Church (John 15:18–27). The Spirit is [also] the prosecutor who brings the fundamental axioms of a culture under judgment (John 16:7–11).'

<sup>28</sup>

## 7. The broad sweep of the Christian Gospel

The Christian Gospel, however, is not just a personal message for individual human beings living within a certain culture, either a religious or a secular culture. It is a message for the entire culture and it wants to enter into that culture. This it does, not by accommodating itself to that culture, so that the culture itself remains unchanged, but by *incarnating itself* in this culture and changing it from within. This is a very complicated process that can hardly be described. The Gospel enters into our culture, shows the features of this culture and at the same time criticizes this culture. The Christian faith is always to a great extent qualified by the culture in which it is at work, and at the same time is a *critical* factor towards this culture. There is always a strongly *dialectical* relationship between every culture and the Gospel. Without the incarnation of the Gospel in a certain culture, this culture could not be reached, nor could it be criticized in its own terms. The Gospel is a voice that challenges a culture in its own cultural language and style.

Of course, this, too, is a risky business. The Gospel might be 'domesticated' by the culture into which it enters. As a matter of fact, every culture (including our own Western European culture!) tries to do this. Looking at the history of our own Western European culture, we may sometimes become nostalgic and look back longingly on the Christian culture of the Middle Ages and of

the Reformation period. But was this truly a 'Christian' culture, or was it little more than a synthesis of a Christian world-view and remnants of a pagan culture? However this may be, the experiment of the 'incarnation' of the Gospel in every culture, also our own culture, must be risked, for it is the only way to 'redeem' a culture.

In fact, we find some splendid *examples* of this 'experiment' in the *New Testament* itself. Over against but also in relation to incipient Gnosticism, the apostle Paul in his *first letter to the Corinthians* does not hesitate to use the terminology of this Gnostic thinking. Again and again he uses their familiar terms, such as '*sophia*' and '*mysterion*'. But he fills them with a new content, the content of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. 'Since in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Greeks, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and *wisdom of God*' (1:21–24). God Himself made Jesus Christ the *wisdom* of the believers (1:30). For this reason Paul's message to the Corinthians was 'not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and power, that their faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God': (2:4, 5). And yet his message is also a message of wisdom, namely the '*secret and hidden wisdom of God*, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification' (2:6, 7). It is evident that this Gospel is very critical of the culture of wisdom. Paul does not mind saying that 'the wisdom of the world is folly with God' (3:19). And then he opens the panorama of the wisdom of the Gospel: 'All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future, all are yours; and you are Christ's and Christ is God's' (3:21–23).

The most beautiful and encouraging example of the communication of the Gospel in and to a particular culture is undoubtedly the *Gospel of John*. Lesslie Newbigin has pointed out that here the language and the thought-forms of the Hellenistic world are employed in such a way that Gnostics in all



ages have thought that the book was written especially for them.<sup>29</sup> 'And yet nowhere in Scripture is the absolute contradiction between the word of God and human culture stated with more terrible clarity.' The Gospel starts with a prologue (1:1–18) that resembles the opening theme of a symphony. In this prologue most of the fundamental ideas are unfolded.<sup>30</sup> The Gospel itself consists largely of three parts. (a) 1:19–12:50 describes the public ministry of Jesus, where He shows Himself to his own people as the revelation of God, but his own people reject Him. (b) The second part, running from 13:1 to 16:33 contains the farewell discourses, 'in which Jesus himself is the radiating center of light and love, and all circumstances and future history are illuminated and made meaningful by that light and love' (Newbigin, 53). (3) The last part, 17:1–20:31 (with the later addition of chapter 21) tells the story of Jesus' 'glorification' in his passion and death on the cross, in his resurrection and in his bestowal of the Holy Spirit. The whole purpose of the Gospel is summarized in 20:31—'that you may believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.'

In this proclamation human culture, both contemporary Jewish and Greek-Hellenistic culture, is penetrated by the Gospel of Jesus Christ in a sublime and at the same time critical, even devastatingly critical way. Terms which belonged to the common religious and cultural heritage of that time, such as *logos*, *phoos*, *kosmos*, *aletheia*, *zoe*, *ginooskoo*, *marturia*, etc., are freely used, but at the same time they are filled to the brim with the new revelation that has taken place in Jesus of Nazareth. It is a wonderful story, but it is also a tragic story. 'The true light that enlightens every man was coming into the world. He was in the world, and the world was made through him, yet the world knew him not. He came to his own [home], and his own people received him not' (1:9–11). A tragic story indeed! But also a wonderful story, for 'all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God; who were born not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God' (1:12, 13).

For people in John's own day this Gospel

must have sounded attractive, because it spoke a language with which they, be they Jews or Hellenists, were familiar. And yet it must have been strange too, for it prized all familiar terms open and filled them with a new, unusual and dazzling content. I believe we, Christians of today, have to do the same when we encounter those who are under the spell of New Age thinking or of Eastern mysticism. Why not speak the Gospel to them in their own language and thought-forms, showing that we find the true union with God only in Jesus Christ? I admit that this is a risky method indeed. If we are not very careful, the Gospel may be lost in the process of translating it into this language and these thought-forms. Yet the risk has to be taken. And it can be taken, so long as we hold on to the essential features of the Gospel: that Jesus is both the self-revelation of God and the prototype of the new humanity, God's new creation.

## 8. A Christian world-view

The sweep of the Gospel, however, is still wider. It is the only message that offers a *unified, coherent world-view*, in which every aspect of created reality has its own place. There are at least four passages in the New Testament, belonging to three different authors, that link Jesus Christ with the divine act of *creation*: John 1:2—all things were made through Him (the Logos); 1 Cor. 8:6—Jesus Christ, through whom are all things; Col. 1:15ff.—in Him all things were created and in Him all things hold together; Heb. 1:2—a Son, through whom He also created the world. In all four passages Jesus Christ, who died on the cross and who rose again, is connected with the very act of creation. According to many contemporary theologians we should not read these expressions as indicating the pre-existence of Jesus Christ and therefore his real 'involvement' in creation. These passages speak from the perspective of redemption and use an extrapolating mode of speaking, in which the risen Christ is related to the primeval act of creation. Hendrikus Berkhof, who does not believe in the pre-existence of Christ, explains the statement as saying: 'the world was created *in view of Jesus Christ*; God



would not have created the world if not in connection with his coming and exaltation'.<sup>31</sup>

It is debatable, however, whether this interpretation does justice to the meaning of these passages. Classical and evangelical theology always interpreted them as speaking of the presence and activity of Jesus Christ, as the *Logos incarnandus*, in the act of creation. F. F. Bruce speaks for this tradition, when in his commentary on *The Epistle to the Colossians* (1957) he interprets Col. 1:15–17 as declaring 'our Lord's divine essence, pre-existence, and creative agency' (192). 'Here () Christ is presented as the agent of God in the whole range of His gracious purpose towards men, from the primaeval work of creation through the redemption accomplished as history's midpoint on to the new creation in which God's purpose will be consummated' (193). When Paul calls Christ 'the firstborn of all creation', this expression should not be interpreted in an Arian fashion as indicating that Christ was the first and foremost of God's creatures, as a declaration that He was present when creation began, and that it was *for* Him as well as *through* Him that the whole work was done (194). In Him, as in a 'sphere', the work of creation took place. But He was not only the *mediator* of creation, but also its *goal* ('unto him'). Yes, in Him all things *cohere or hold together*. This Stoic term (*sunesteeken*) is used by Paul to signify that the inner unity of the entire creation is found in Jesus Christ. Apart from Him the various aspects of the creation disintegrate and fall back into chaos. Only in relation to Him do they have a coherent and meaningful relationship with each other.

I believe that here we find one of the most significant messages of the Christian Gospel for our modern world. If one thing is lacking in our modern world it is coherence. The *differentiation* that started after the industrial revolution is still continuing and both society as a whole and the life of the individual seem increasingly to become *fragmented*. Likewise *pluralism* is threatening both the unity of society at large and the life of every individual member of society. Modern society is not only characterized by political, social and religious pluralism, but increasingly also by moral pluralism, which

threatens the very existence of society. For 'it is difficult to see how a society can survive without a basic moral consensus'.<sup>32</sup> The individual member of modern society also suffers from a similar pluralism. Since his life has become more and more compartmentalized (it is subdivided in different spheres—family, work, leisure, church—, each often with their own set of morals), he is also in danger of losing the coherence of his life. Only the Gospel of Jesus Christ offers a framework in which the unity of reality, both in the societal and individual sphere of life, is rediscovered and regained. To me one of the great challenges of the modern world to the church is that it should stimulate the church to bring a Gospel that does not restrict itself to personal salvation only, but that is full-orbed, offering our fragmented world a new perspective of unity and coherence: 'Jesus Christ in whom all things hold together' (Col. 1:17).

## 9. Word and deed

The Christian Gospel, however, does not only offer a message of personal salvation and a unified world-view, but also calls for *action*. Christians are called to perform good works by which they praise their Lord and serve their fellow human beings and creation as a whole. The New Testament is full of promptings on this score.

It is interesting to note that even in our secularized world we constantly encounter people who, though fully secular in their philosophy of life, still retain many of the Christian values that for many centuries have been part and parcel of our Western European culture. In spite of their philosophy of moral autonomy, they still adhere to many of the moral values they inherited from their parents, their schools, the societies of which they are members etc. This explains to a large extent why, in spite of the ongoing process of secularization, there was so much interest in the peace movement in the sixties and seventies and why today so many people join the green movement. Likewise, when an appeal is made for those who die of hunger in Africa, many secularized and religionless people are willing to make generous donations.



Christians, who know the Pauline exhortation: 'As we have opportunity, let us do good to all men, and especially to those who are of the household of faith' (Gal. 6:10), should emulate their secular neighbours in all such activities. And they should join them in the struggle for justice and equality in a world, in which there is still so much injustice, inequality, intolerance, discrimination, racism, etc. They should show in their actions that they are prompted by an *unselfish love*, which has its origin in the self-giving love of Jesus Christ, who told his disciples that He did not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many (Mark 10:45). Following his example was the inner and outer strength of the early church. Undoubtedly these early Christians formed a kind of subculture in the society of their day. They were a repressed and persecuted majority and lived as 'strangers' in a pagan world. But they excelled in Christian love. The church historian Henry Chadwick writes of this minority church: 'The practical application of charity was probably the most potent single cause of Christian success. The pagan comment: 'See how these Christians love one another' (reported by Tertullian) was not irony. Christian charity expressed itself in care for the poor, for widows and orphans, in visits to brethren in prison or condemned to the living death in the mines, and in social action in time of calamity like famine, earthquake, pestilence or war.'<sup>33</sup>

If all this is true, why should we be pessimistic? Who would have expected that, two thousand years ago, an insignificant, primarily Jewish cult might succeed in turning the great classical world upside down? And yet this happened! To be sure, our situation is different. They lived in a pre-Christian culture; we are living in a post-Christian culture that seems to be inoculated against the Christian faith. But we still have the same wonderful and potent Gospel and our Lord is still the One in whom not only all aspects of creation cohere, but to whom as the exalted One has been given all authority in heaven and on earth!

1 Alan D. Gilbert, *The Making of Post-Christian Britain. A History of the Secularization of Modern Society*, 1980, XII.

- 2 Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks. The Gospel and Western Culture*, 1986, 23. Cf. also his *The Other Side of 1984. Questions for the Churches*, 1983, 6ff.
- 3 O. Chadwick, *The Secularisation of the European Mind in the Nineteenth Century* (The Gifford Lectures for 1973/4), 1975, 17.
- 4 G. Heitink, 'Secularisatie en het individuele geloofsleven', in G. Dekker en K.U. Gäbler (eds), *Secularisatie in theologisch perspectief*, n.d., 164ff.
- 5 Cf. Gerard Dekker, *op. cit.*, 48ff.
- 6 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Other Side of 1984*, 22.
- 7 E.T. *Despair and Hope for Our Time*, 1970.
- 8 In subsequent publications (especially in his posthumous *Die Frage nach Gott* (1968) Gogarten strongly emphasized the negative tendency in secularism: without God autonomous man falls back into a new slavery. Cf. Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, 1979, 517.
- 9 John A. T. Robinson, *Honest to God*, 1963.
- 10 Harvey A. Cox, *The Secular City*, 1965.
- 11 Ronald Gregor Smith, *Secular Christianity*, 1965.
- 12 Letter of June 8th 1944.
- 13 Letter June 30th 1944.
- 14 Cf. also his 'Prayers for fellow prisoners', which are added to the letters.
- 15 This is the translation of a term borrowed from Martin Buber: *Gottesfinsternis*.
- 16 Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christ the Meaning of History*, 1966, 92.
- 17 H. Berkhof, 'Emancipatie, secularisatie en de zending van de kerk', in *Ibid.*, *Bruggen en bruggehoofden*, 1981, 176ff.
- 18 Peter Berger, *The Noise of Solemn Assemblies*, 1961, 41.
- 19 Lesslie Newbigin, 'Verder dan 1984' (= Beyond 1984), in Martien E. Brinkman and Herman Noordegraaf (eds), *Het evangelie in het Westen*, 23.
- 20 Gilbert, *op. cit.*, 107.
- 21 The three volumes were published in 1902, 1906 and 1921 respectively.
- 22 A. Kuphal, *Abschied von der Kirche. Traditionsabbruch in der Volkskirche*, 19179, 472.
- 23 *Op. cit.*, 1979, 201/2.
- 24 P. Berger, 'From the Crisis of Religion to the Crisis of Secularity', in Mary Douglas and Steven Tipton (eds.) *Religion in America. Spiritual Life in a Secular Age*, 1972, 14-24.
- 25 P. Berger, *Facing up to Modernity*, 1979, chapter 13. Cf. also P. Berger, *Rumor of Angels. Signals of Transcendence in the Modern World*, 1969 and Andrew M. Greeley, *Unsecular Man*, 1972.
- 26 J. Blauw, 'The Biblical View of Man in



his Religion', in H. G. Anderson (ed.), *The Theology of the Christian Mission*, 1961, 32.

27 Lesslie Newbigin, *The Other Side of 1984*, 53.

28 Newbigin, *loc. cit.*

29 Lesslie Newbigin, *Foolishness to the Greeks*, 53. By quoting this statement of Newbigin we do not mean to say that Gnosticism itself was already a full-grown plant in the first century. But incipient Gnosticism or pre-Gnostic forms of thinking, at least in the shape of docetic thinking, were very likely present. On the other hand, there is considerable agreement today that this Gospel is essentially Semitic and has a primarily Jewish background.

30 Cf. I. H. Marshall, 'Johannine Theology', in *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, Vol. II, 1982, 1082.

31 Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, 167. Berkhof follows here Barth's line of thinking. In his CD III 1 Barth made two interrelated propositions: creation is the external basis of the covenant—the covenant is the internal basis of creation.

32 Peter Berger, *art. cit.*, 23.

33 Henry Chadwick, *The Early Church* (Penguin Church History), 1967, 56.





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- **Les promesses faites à Abraham et la destinée d'Israël**
- ***The Promises Made to Abraham and the Destiny of Israel***
- ***Die Verheißungen an Abraham und die Bestimmung Israels***

Gerald Bray, Cambridge

## SUMMARY

*This article discusses the promises made to Abraham in Genesis 12, in the light of claims being made today by the State of Israel. The importance of the subject for both Jews and Christians is mentioned before embarking on a detailed examination of the Old Testament evidence. The article shows that the Genesis account does not support the exclusive claims of Israel, ancient or modern, and that the blessing given to Abraham had a wider dimension even before the coming of Christ. In particular, the article points out that obedience was the condition placed on the inheritance, and that Israel repeatedly failed to live up to its side of the Covenant.*

*There is then a detailed discussion of the*

*origins of modern Zionism, pointing out how Evangelical dispensationalism and Jewish idealism combined to produce a climate favourable to the establishment of a Jewish state in Palestine. Evangelicals have traditionally supported the Zionist claims, though with little reason. The article concludes with the thesis that the New Testament transforms the promises made to Abraham into a universal promise made to the Church, of which Israel is meant to form a fundamental part. There can now be no fulfilment of OT promises apart from Christ, which makes it impossible for Christians to accept the claims of Zionism.*

## ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

*In diesem Artikel werden die in Genesis 12 Abraham zugesprochen Verheißungen angesichts der heutigen Ansprüche des Staates Israel diskutiert. Auf die Bedeutung des Themas sowohl für Juden als auch für Christen wird zuerst eingegangen, bevor die Aussagen des Alten Testaments detailliert untersucht werden. Der Artikel zeigt auf, daß das Buch Genesis die exklusiven Ansprüche des antiken und des modernen Israels nicht unterstützt und daß auch schon vor dem Kommen Jesu der Segen an Abraham eine über Israel hinaus gehende Dimension hatte. Besonders betont wird, daß der Gehorsam die Bedingung zur Anteilhabe am Erbe war und daß Israel seine Bundesverpflichtungen immer wieder vernachlässigte.*

*Daraufhin folgt eine detaillierte Diskussion*

*der Ursprünge des modernen Zionismus. Dabei wird darauf hingewiesen, wie das Zusammentreffen eines evangelikalen Dispensationalismus mit einem jüdischen Idealismus ein Klima hervorbrachte, das die Gründung eines jüdischen Staates in Palästina begünstigte. Evangelikale haben seit jeher die zionistischen Ansprüche unterstützt, auch wenn dies wenig begründet war. Der Artikel schließt mit der These, daß das Neue Testament die Verheißungen an Abraham in eine universelle Verheißung an die ganze Gemeinde umwandelt, in der Israel einen wichtigen Teil bilden sollte. Es gibt keine Erfüllung der alttestamentlichen Verheißungen außerhalb von Christus und deswegen sei es für Christen unmöglich, die Ansprüche des Zionismus zu akzeptieren.*



Il est évident que la question de la signification des promesses faites à Abraham, dont témoignent les chapitres 12-24 de la Genèse, a toujours occupé une place centrale dans la pensée de tout étudiant de la Bible. Même le lecteur qui ne sent aucun intérêt particulier vis-à-vis de ces promesses doit reconnaître qu'il y a là un fondement sans parallèle de cette conscience collective qui constitue la base indispensable de l'existence d'une nation historique. Peu importe si les événements qui y sont décrits trouvent des correspondances dans l'histoire scientifique ou non—l'on sait, d'après des milliers d'autres exemples, que la mythologie peut posséder une puissance qu'ignore l'histoire concrète, mais trop banale.

Pour le croyant, qu'il soit juif, chrétien ou même musulman, cette reconnaissance va beaucoup plus loin et se rattache finalement à sa propre conception de sa foi personnelle. Si l'on croit qu'on est fils et donc héritier d'Abraham, que ce soit par la descendance selon la chair ou par une affinité spirituelle, il est évident que la substance de ces promesses jouira dans sa conscience d'un poids particulier. Le Nouveau Testament, et surtout les épîtres aux Romains et aux Galates, rappelle l'importance religieuse de ces promesses, et leur interprétation chez S. Paul constitue un des éléments décisifs de la séparation entre Juifs et chrétiens.

Plus tard, l'on comprend comment, chez les Réformateurs, et surtout chez les disciples de Calvin, l'évolution de la théologie de l'Alliance et la nouvelle prise de conscience de l'unité des deux testaments dans le cadre de l'élection d'un peuple particulier, a inauguré une période dans la vie de l'Eglise où il était tout à fait normal d'intégrer l'expérience spirituelle des chrétiens à celle des Juifs de l'Ancien Testament—en passant sans doute par le Christ, mais en arrivant finalement à la source commune—la foi d'Abraham et les promesses qui lui ont été faites au moment de l'appel qui déterminerait sa vocation.

C'est au legs de cette conscience de l'unité du Peuple Élu que nous devons l'intérêt spécial chez les chrétiens évangéliques d'aujourd'hui vis-à-vis du sort du peuple juif. Au moyen âge, par exemple, ou même aujourd'hui dans un milieu catholique, orthodoxe ou même luthérien, cet intérêt est beaucoup moins grand, bien qu'il existe. Mais dans les milieux touchés par un calvinisme systématisé, il y a

un certain sentiment de solidarité avec le peuple juif qui nous incline d'une manière spéciale vers la considération d'une application possible de ces promesses à ce peuple aujourd'hui, et surtout à la destinée de l'Etat d'Israël établi en Terre Sainte depuis 1948.

L'existence de cet Etat, l'impérialisme dont il est accusé et surtout la durée, qui semble être infinie, d'un conflit interethnique qui à l'âge nucléaire prend des dimensions apocalyptiques—tout cela donne une nouvelle actualité aux promesses documentées dans la Genèse, qui dépasse les limites de la seule religion et touche à l'ensemble de la vie politique de nos jours.

Le problème des promesses se pose donc aujourd'hui en trois dimensions, qui correspondent à trois aspects, ou niveaux herméneutiques différents. La première dimension est celle de l'*exégèse*. Quelle était l'intention de ceux qui auraient rédigé le cycle des légendes patriarcales? Peut-on discerner dans cette rédaction une orientation particulière qui aurait falsifié les données primitives en faveur—n'hésitons pas devant le mot—d'une certaine propagande israélite? Comment doit-on comprendre le lien entre le récit et l'histoire?

La deuxième dimension est celle de la *théologie*. Ayant fait le travail exégétique, pouvons-nous trouver là-dedans quelque chose de valable pour notre pratique de la foi? Comment devons-nous comprendre et recevoir l'élément de la révélation qui en principe serait le but principal du récit? Pour le chrétien une autre question s'ajoute à celle-ci—comment peut-on lier l'enseignement et l'oeuvre du Christ à ces promesses? La théologie de S. Paul, expliquée en Romains et Galates, exclut-elle toute référence aux Juifs modernes quand on parle des héritiers des promesses? Jusqu'à quel point le chrétien peut-il, ou même doit-il, soutenir les thèses politiques de l'état sioniste, voyant là-dedans l'accomplissement de la prophétie biblique?

La troisième dimension est celle de la *politique*. Il y a un accord extraordinaire entre le dispensationalisme fondamentaliste et les buts stratégiques et politiques israéliens, qui exerce une influence considérable dans les milieux gouvernementaux américains. Il ne faut pas oublier que le sentiment de parenté entre les calvinistes et les Juifs, qui s'est manifesté au XVII<sup>e</sup> siècle, se voit aujourd'hui



sous la forme de deux groupes de pression autour de la Maison Blanche, qui font cause commune en faveur d'Israël. Comment expliquer cette alliance entre chrétiens conservateurs et Juifs pratiquement athées? Le chrétien qui se réclame de l'autorité biblique, doit-il suivre la politique de ces éléments hétérogènes, qui est parfois presque fasciste? Et que dire du sort de ces millions de Palestiniens, dont plusieurs sont des chrétiens, et même parfois des chrétiens évangéliques, qui ont été expulsés de leur terres natales au nom de l'accomplissement des promesses faites à Abraham?

### Les données

Revenons donc d'abord aux textes cités comme preuves de ces promesses, et considérons leur portée dans le contexte de l'alliance entre Dieu et Abraham. Il s'agit d'une vingtaine de versets bibliques, éparpillés sur huit chapitres du récit patriarcal. Il est inutile de citer l'ensemble de ces versets, qui se répètent selon les formules légales de l'époque, mais il faut en signaler l'essentiel et en commenter le développement qui se voit depuis le début de la carrière d'Abraham jusqu'à sa mort.

Nous commençons donc au début du récit abrahamique, à Gn 12:2-3, où nous trouvons les thèmes suivants :

1. Je ferai de toi une grande nation
2. Je te bénirai
3. Je rendrai ton nom grand
4. Tu seras une source de bénédiction
5. Je bénirai ceux qui te béniront
6. Je maudirai ceux qui te maudiront
7. Toutes les familles de la terre seront bénies en toi

On pourrait, en feuilletant les commentaires, discerner ici des divisions autres que les 7 que nous proposons. Le chiffre n'est pas très important, bien que le nombre 7 corresponde à la formule de bénédiction généralement employée au Proche-Orient à l'époque, et représente aussi l'analyse la plus détaillée du texte. La présence du mot *bénédiction/bénir*, aussi bien que celle de son antithèse *malédiction/maudire* est plus significative, parce qu'elle souligne le fait que l'alliance est d'abord une relation personnelle entre Dieu et Abraham. Le contenu exact de cette bénédiction/ malédiction demeure extrême-

ment vague et se réduit pratiquement à la seule promesse de la grandeur—le nom et la nation étant en effet la même chose.

Néanmoins, il faut admettre une division de principe entre les trois premières formules, qui ne touchent qu'Abraham lui-même, et les quatre dernières, qui introduisent une perspective qui comprend des relations intertribales et internationales. Cette dualité sera un élément de l'alliance qui marquera son évolution jusqu'à l'époque néotestamentaire et qui dans certains milieux retient son actualité encore aujourd'hui.

La bénédiction personnelle et exclusive est celle de la grandeur de la nation et du nom d'Abraham. Mais qu'est-ce que cela veut dire? Le lecteur judéo-chrétien, influencé par la réalité historique, pense immédiatement à la semence d'Isaac, fils de la promesse, et de Jacob, qui a reçu le nom d'Israël. Et certes, la combinaison de ces trois noms est assez fréquente dans la Bible pour que nous nous sentions parfaitement justifiés en adoptant cette conclusion. Mais le récit abrahamique lui-même est plus ambigu, car en dehors du cas d'Isaac, Dieu répète cette bénédiction dans le cas d'Ismaël (Gn 16:10) et à Gn 17:4-6 Il dit à Abraham: 'Voici mon alliance que je fais avec toi. Tu deviendras père d'une multitude de nations. On ne t'appellera plus Abram, mais ton nom sera Abraham, car je te rends père d'une multitude de nations. Je te rendrai fécond à l'infini, je ferai de toi des nations, et des rois sortiront de toi'.

Encore une fois, la grandeur de la nation est étroitement liée au nom personnel d'Abraham. Mais la modification portée à ce nom par la révélation divine est aussi une modification de la promesse première. Abraham—son nouveau nom l'indique—sera le père de *plusieurs* nations, dont chacune recevra une portion de la bénédiction céleste. Certes, la priorité de la ligne principale, la ligne d'Isaac et de Jacob, n'est nullement compromise par cette modification. Isaac demeure le fils légitime, le fils de la promesse, qui restera chez son père et qui héritera la plus grande partie de ses biens, tandis que les autres, Ismaël et les fils des concubines (Gn 25:6) seront rejetés et exclus de la compagnie patriarcale.

Néanmoins il est clair que la descendance



d'Ismaël, aussi bien que les autres nations dont l'identité demeure un peu mystérieuse, recevront une portion de la bénédiction abrahamique. Leur exclusion de l'alliance ne doit pas être comprise comme étant un refus catégorique de la part de Dieu de les considérer comme les frères d'Isaac et donc des fils eux-aussi d'Abraham.

Le contenu de cette bénédiction, aussi bien que la nature de l'exclusion de ces autres peuples de l'alliance se révèle au cours du récit. Par exemple, quand Dieu donne à Abraham le signe de la circoncision, au moment de la naissance d'Isaac, Abraham circoncit non seulement Isaac mais aussi Ismaël, qui partagera donc le signe essentiel de toute reconnaissance d'un homme particulier comme membre du Peuple Élu. N'oublions pas l'importance de cette question dans l'Église primitive. Les Juifs convertis avaient du mal à accepter des frères incirconcisés — mais Ismaël, le rejeté, avait reçu la circoncision ! Logiquement donc, les Juifs qui rejetaient les païens convertis, auraient dû accepter les Ismaélites, au moins jusqu'à un certain point, comme des co-héritiers des promesses faites à Abraham.

La promesse de la multitude d'enfants fut aussi accordée à Ismaël (Gn 16:10), et le langage employé est le même que dans le cas d'Isaac. La portée de l'exclusion se limite donc à deux éléments principaux. D'abord, l'octroi de la terre. Le sort d'une famille nombreuse sans ressources est toujours pénible, et rend la fécondité maudite plutôt que bénie. Nous le savons très bien aujourd'hui, surtout dans le cas du Tiers-Monde, mais le principe s'applique également à toutes les sociétés. Les nomades du désert sont condamnés à la transhumance et plus nombreux ils sont, plus souvent ils sont obligés de déménager. Chez eux il n'y a jamais ni la sécurité d'une terre fixe, ni la possibilité d'évoluer en une civilisation permanente. Les fils d'Isaac, installés en Terre Promise, vont créer une culture qui se répandra dans le monde entier ; les fils d'Ismaël par contre, vont rester à l'état des Bédouins qui poursuivent la même existence aujourd'hui que leurs ancêtres connaissaient il y a 4000 ans.

Il ne faut donc jamais sous-estimer l'importance de la possession d'un territoire,

qu'il ruisselle de lait et de miel ou non, pour le développement d'un peuple et l'épanouissement de son identité propre. Mais la promesse de la terre est aussi étroitement liée à la destinée eschatologique d'Israël, ce qui nous mène naturellement à la question de la bénédiction que la nation portera au monde en général. Il y a dans cette promesse de la terre le germe de la promesse future d'un royaume — rappelons que Dieu dit à Abraham que 'des rois sortiront de toi' et que ce sera avant tout l'espoir de l'accomplissement de cette promesse qui va animer la foule au moment de la révélation de Jésus. Entre donc dans la promesse de la terre un élément politique, qui jouera un rôle non négligeable durant le ministère de Jésus-Christ et qui sera couronné par des ronces au moment de la crucifixion du Roi des Juifs. La promesse du royaume, établi à Jérusalem, est aussi le fondement de la bénédiction sur les nations, car c'est de Sion que 'sortira la Loi, et de Jérusalem la parole de l'Éternel' (Es. 2:3) et de Sion que partira la délivrance d'Israël (Ps. 53:7). Les nations s'y rendront avec joie, et y adoreront le vrai Dieu, selon la vision eschatologique de l'Ancien Testament.

Nous devons donc résumer la portée des promesses faites à Abraham et confirmées par l'alliance comme suit : la circoncision et la postérité (l'une est liée à l'autre !) sont octroyées sans distinction et à Isaac et à Ismaël, et peut-être aussi aux autres fils d'Abraham, mais la possession de la terre et des biens, aussi bien que la dispensation d'une bénédiction aux nations, sont réservées au seul fils de la promesse.

## Les obligations

Avant de considérer les interprétations possibles des promesses dans les perspectives vétérotestamentaire, néotestamentaire et actuelle, il serait utile de rappeler que la révélation octroyée à Abraham comprend aussi certaines obligations de sa part, qui deviendront les obligations de l'Alliance et qui formeront donc la base spirituelle et théorique du culte juif. Au fond se trouve l'obéissance, base principale de toute adoration et de toute vie spirituelle. Cette obligation est peut-être plus implicite



qu'explicite à Gn 12:1-2, quand Dieu appelle Abraham à quitter son pays, sa patrie et la maison de son père. Mais l'implication devient absolument claire plus tard, par exemple à Gn 18:19, où le Seigneur dit: 'Je l'ai choisi, afin qu'il ordonne à ses fils et à sa maison après lui de garder la voie de l'Éternel, en pratiquant la droiture et la justice, et qu'ainsi l'Éternel accomplisse en faveur d'Abraham les promesses qu'Il lui a faites.'

Les limites de cette obéissance se révèlent un peu plus tard, dans le chapitre 22, quand Abraham est appelé à sacrifier son fils Isaac, tout en sachant qu'il représente la semence bénie (22: 17-18). L'obéissance va jusqu'au sacrifice de ce qui est le plus précieux, de ce que Dieu lui-même avait promis!

Rappelons aussi que ce thème de l'obéissance, liée à, et manifestée par les sacrifices de l'Alliance, va dominer non seulement la vie culturelle d'Israël mais aussi la prédication des prophètes, auxquels sera accordé le droit (et donc la responsabilité) de conserver la religion juive en pureté. Il est étonnant de remarquer qu'en dehors du Pentateuque, le nom d'Abraham ne figure que 21 fois dans l'ensemble de l'Ancien Testament—comparez cela aux Évangiles, où le nom se rencontre 34 fois, ou aux épîtres aux Romains, aux Galates et aux Hébreux (28 fois), et l'on verra jusqu'à quel point la figure d'Abraham se perd dans la tradition post-mosaïque. Mais qui peut compter le nombre des fois qu'un prophète dénonce la désobéissance du peuple sur tous les plans?

L'importance de l'obéissance, si clairement énoncée à Gn 18:19, grandit avec le temps, bien que la personne d'Abraham diminue et disparaisse derrière celle de Moïse. Et n'oublions surtout pas que c'est justement cette condition d'obéissance qui sera rappelée par Jésus pour condamner l'opposition juive de son temps, et qui sera employée par l'apôtre Paul comme la raison principale de l'abandon d'Israël en faveur des Gentils après la Pentecôte.

On doit donc conclure que l'exigence de l'obéissance n'était pas facultative, ou supplémentaire aux promesses faites à Abraham. Au contraire, l'obéissance à la loi divine, manifestée par un culte dont le sacrifice pur était l'élément principal, constituait

la base fondamentale du contexte religieux et social dans lequel les promesses seraient actualisées.

## Les interprétations

L'importance de cette dernière remarque se voit au plus clair quand nous essayons de dégager de la multiplicité des interprétations de ces promesses qui sont possibles, et qui ont paru quelque part et de quelque manière au cours de l'histoire, celle qui correspond le mieux au sens du récit. Il y a d'abord les interprétations d'ordre exégétique, qui ne dépassent guère le seul cadre du texte de l'Ancien Testament, c'est-à-dire, les interprétations des promesses qui auraient influencé soit la formulation de ces promesses elles-mêmes à l'époque de la rédaction définitive du Pentateuque (ou avant), soit le commentaire que nous appelons les Prophètes et les Écrits.

Tout le monde sait que la critique libérale du siècle dernier croyait que des propagandistes d'une époque postérieure auraient rejeté sur des patriarches plus ou moins mythiques les idées reçues de leur propre époque. Aujourd'hui pourtant, il faut dire que les travaux des spécialistes et les découvertes archéologiques ont démontré d'une façon presque incontestable que dans le récit patriarcal il y a un fondement historique qui n'est pas—et plus important encore—qui ne saurait être le produit d'une imagination propagandiste postérieure. Les formules employées pour la rédaction des promesses est typique de l'époque et a généralement disparu de l'usage bien avant l'instauration de la monarchie davidique.

Ce résultat plus ou moins assuré de la recherche scientifique oblige la vaste majorité des commentateurs à accepter l'origine primitive des promesses, bien que l'on puisse y retrouver une certaine influence rédactionnelle. Par exemple, l'Américain Brevard Childs dit que les promesses contiennent, dans leur forme actuelle, une perspective eschatologique qui serait étrangère aux formules primitives. Selon cette logique, Abraham devait comprendre que les promesses étaient faites pour lui et pour sa famille immédiate, aussi bien que pour sa postérité historique. Selon Childs, le



fait de son déménagement scellerait la contemporanéité du récit, qui aurait été modifié par la suite quand la nation se rendait compte que l'accomplissement des promesses lui échappait encore.

Childs résume l'essentiel d'un argument académique peu utile pour l'interprétation contemporaine. Tout ce qu'il faut en retenir est l'accent sur l'eschatologie qui, au temps de Jésus, après d'innombrables échecs politiques, sera la clé de voûte de l'espérance messianique. Jamais pendant l'histoire politique d'Israël ne peut-on dire que les limites du territoire définies dans Gn 13:14-15 ont été atteintes; même à l'époque de David et de Salomon, il y avait encore des régions qui n'étaient pas sous le contrôle du roi à Jérusalem. Et la fragilité de cette république couronnée est bien connue; on peut même dire que le sentiment d'appartenir à une seule nation n'était guère développé chez les Hébreux à cette époque, et que ce n'était que la centralisation du culte à Jérusalem, achevée finalement seulement après l'Exil quand les Samaritains ont été définitivement expulsés de la nation, qui l'a engendré.

Il est donc évident que la tradition juive ne voyait pas d'accomplissement des promesses faites à Abraham au courant de l'histoire politique d'Israël. On peut même dire que la vision d'un accomplissement futur devenait de plus en plus étroite au cours des siècles, surtout en ce qui concerne la bénédiction des nations. L'ouverture culturelle, tolérée et même applaudie à la cour de Salomon, était déjà condamnée sous Ahab, et disparaissait progressivement après cette date. Au Nouveau Testament le judaïsme est distingué par son exclusivité, voire par un certain snobisme vis-à-vis du monde extérieur, et le nom de 'Juif' était devenu scandaleux chez les Grecs. Les difficultés rencontrées par l'apôtre Paul au cours de sa mission aux Gentils ne seraient guère concevables si les Juifs de l'époque étaient vraiment conscients de leur mission, et malgré la recherche de certains savants qui voudraient démontrer le contraire, le prosélytisme n'a jamais joué un rôle chez les Juifs comparable au rôle qu'il a toujours joué chez les chrétiens et les musulmans. On pourrait dire, avec certains apologistes juifs

aujourd'hui, que la promesse faite à Abraham s'accomplit dans l'épanouissement des religions filles du judaïsme, mais le rôle du peuple juif lui-même y est très réduit, et cela déjà depuis la deuxième génération des chrétiens.

A l'époque de Jésus donc, ceux qui croyaient encore à l'accomplissement futur de ces promesses le liaient indissolublement à l'avènement eschatologique du Messie. Mais il faut ajouter que le messianisme juif n'était pas vraiment basé sur ces seules promesses, qui ne sont jamais citées dans les Évangiles, malgré les discussions entre Jésus et les pharisiens au sujet d'Abraham. Il n'est que plus tard, dans le conflit entre chrétiens, juifs et non-juifs, que l'apôtre Paul commence à développer une théologie néotestamentaire qui touche les questions posées par les promesses faites à Abraham et leur portée après les événements de la vie de Jésus.

### **La thèse sioniste et les mentalités évangéliques au siècle dernier**

Nous y reviendrons. Pour le moment, disons que pendant les dix-neuf siècles du Second Exil, la vaste majorité des Juifs ne considéraient pas que ces promesses avaient une actualité politique. 'L'an prochain à Jérusalem' pouvait être le salut traditionnel à la Pâque, mais presque personne ne le croyait littéralement. Les Juifs n'avaient ni les convictions, ni les moyens, ni les sympathies du monde, qui auraient été essentielles si le retour devait se réaliser. Quand Eliézer Ben-Yehuda est allé s'installer en Palestine en 1880, quand il a commencé à parler l'hébreu avec ses enfants, quand finalement il a réussi la création d'une petite communauté d'*ôlim* (Juifs du retour), personne ne faisait attention à lui. La Palestine, pays depuis longtemps appauvri sous le joug ottoman, était loin et inconnu, arabophone à 99%, et partagé plus ou moins également entre musulmans et chrétiens, eux-mêmes divisés en sectes hostiles. Une colonie de Juifs idéalistes n'excitait guère les imaginations, et l'aventure de Ben-Yehuda était considérée à l'époque comme tout à fait excentrique.

En réalité, son aventure aurait sans doute



excité davantage d'intérêt chez certains chrétiens évangéliques, s'ils en avaient été conscients. Il s'agit bien sûr des dispensationalistes, qui suivaient la vague apocalyptique, tempérée par la théologie calviniste, qui gagnait du terrain après la Révolution française. Nous n'en sommes pas très conscients aujourd'hui, mais le réveil du siècle dernier était un mouvement spirituel animé à un certain degré par la peur de la Révolution. Certes, nous ne pouvons pas nier ses conséquences positives, mais nous devons aussi reconnaître qu'il y avait dans l'Europe de la Restauration un climat conservateur qui inclinait vers la crainte de toute innovation. Au siècle du progrès on devait accepter que cette vague inconnue représentait une puissance dont l'énergie était loin d'être épuisée. Mais elle représentait aussi, dans les mentalités bourgeoises surtout, la destruction de toutes les valeurs connues et acceptées depuis le triomphe de la croix au quatrième siècle. A leurs yeux, la Révolution était l'Antichrist, le signe de la fin des temps.

Cette nouvelle conscience apocalyptique conduisait certains chrétiens à une nouvelle appréciation des prophéties bibliques. Déjà depuis le Moyen-Âge, il était normal dans certains milieux de regarder les visions de Daniel et de l'Apocalypse comme étant des prophéties des événements contemporains. On peut même dire qu'avant S. Augustin, le millénarisme était l'eschatologie la plus répandue dans l'Église. Mais ce millénarisme n'envisageait guère un rôle spécial pour le peuple juif. L'attitude de la majorité des chrétiens est révélée par la 'controverse des trois langues' à l'époque carolingienne. Confronté par l'oeuvre missionnaire de Cyrille et Méthode dans les pays slaves, qui a donné naissance à la Bible et à la liturgie slaves, les théologiens carolingiens réagissaient en disant que la Bible n'aurait reconnu que trois langues sacrées—celles écrites sur la croix de Jésus. Mais l'hébreu était tombé en désuétude à cause de l'impiété des Juifs, et le grec avait disparu à son tour grâce à l'hérésie de l'Église Orientale. Seule la langue latine jouissait encore de l'approbation divine, bêtise qui devait influencer la pratique catholique jusqu'aux années 1960.

Un tel dispensationalisme ne laissait guère

de place aux Juifs. Seule la théologie calviniste de l'Alliance pouvait les faire rentrer dans la pensée eschatologique chrétienne. Le nouveau dispensationalisme du siècle dernier estimait que les Juifs étaient toujours un peuple élu. Les promesses faites à Abraham, pour ne pas parler des autres promesses de l'Ancien Testament, n'avaient pas été accomplies chez le peuple de l'ancienne Alliance, mais l'existence du peuple juif à l'époque chrétienne devait indiquer que cette Alliance n'avait pas été révoquée. Quelques remarques assez contestées de l'apôtre Paul (Rm 11) ont servi de prétexte au développement de toute une eschatologie dans laquelle le rôle du peuple juif était de tout premier plan.

Selon cette nouvelle eschatologie, le peuple juif devait regagner son territoire ancestral, avec les frontières de Gn 13;14-15, et y créer de nouveau le royaume davidique. Après l'installation de ce royaume, les Juifs seraient massivement convertis au christianisme, les nations se lèveraient contre le nouvel Israël, et la crise de la fin des temps aboutirait à l'Armageddon. Ce nouveau dispensationalisme pénétrait assez vite les milieux évangéliques. Non seulement les darbystes, mais aussi des hommes de politique comme Bismarck et Gladstone ont été touchés par ces idées. L'arrivée au pouvoir d'une génération formée par l'école du dimanche protestante est d'une importance capitale pour la compréhension des événements en Palestine autour de 1900.

L'écrivain américain Barbara Tuchman a réuni des documents sur les progrès du sionisme dans les milieux politiques en Angleterre dans son livre *Bible and Sword* (New York, 1956). En parlant du premier ministre David Lloyd George, elle écrit que quand il a rencontré Chaim Weizmann, le chef du mouvement sioniste, en décembre 1914, il s'avouait que les noms des lieux palestiniens lui étaient plus connus que ceux des champs de bataille du front flamand. De Lord Balfour, auteur principal de la Déclaration du gouvernement britannique en 1917, qui a permis aux Juifs d'établir un 'foyer national' en Palestine, elle ajoute qu'il a acquis son intérêt pour le peuple juif dès son enfance, quand sa mère lui avait enseigné la Bible. Selon Mme Tuchman, le jeune



Balfour aurait répété à haute voix le texte entier de la Bible, chapitre par chapitre, avant de se coucher le soir!

Une telle éducation, qui rappelle les méthodes des écoles rabbiniques, a formé toute une génération. Lord Shaftesbury, honoré encore aujourd'hui comme le grand mécène et réformateur des conditions sociales en Angleterre, était aussi le chef d'un mouvement évangélique pour la restauration de la république juive en terre palestinienne, et l'influence morale de son exemple s'étendait à des milieux qui en principe n'avaient pas beaucoup de sympathie pour ses thèses religieuses. Etant donné le fait que c'était ce milieu britannique qui est devenu l'instrument de la réalisation du rêve sioniste, leur formation évangélique et dispensationaliste doit trouver une place fondamentale dans l'histoire des événements.

### Le mouvement sioniste au vingtième siècle

Mais le millénarisme chrétien n'aurait jamais pu créer un état juif en Palestine s'il n'y avait pas eu de co-opération de la part des Juifs eux-mêmes. Le XIXe siècle a vu l'émancipation des Juifs dans la plupart des pays de l'Europe. Ils ont acquis tous les droits de la citoyenneté et plusieurs d'entre eux commençaient à occuper des postes importants dans tous les milieux sociaux. Mais le progrès légal des Juifs ne correspondait pas à l'évolution des mentalités de la majorité de la population. L'affaire Dreyfus en France a démontré aux Juifs combien leur position était précaire, et dans certains endroits—à Vienne, par exemple—il y avait des émeutes antisémites bien avant 1914. N'oublions pas que le jeune Hitler a appris sa haine du peuple juif quand il était chômeur dans la capitale autrichienne de la Belle Époque. Mais malgré tout cela, tout le monde acceptait que cet antisémitisme n'était qu'une réaction ultraconservatrice qui devait être combattue par toutes les forces démocratiques. En France par exemple, ce ne sont pas les Juifs mais les éléments réactionnaires—royalistes, ultramontains etc.—qui ont été discrédités à la suite de l'affaire Dreyfus, et en Autriche la vie culturelle continuait à produire des Freud, des Kafka etc.

Le seul pays où la persécution antisémite était encore une réalité politique était la Russie impériale. Là, la réaction qui a suivi l'assassinat de l'empereur Alexandre II en 1881 a très vite frappé le peuple juif. Ce peuple avait toujours été strictement contrôlé au sein de l'empire, et il n'avait pas le droit de s'installer dans le territoire habité en majorité par les Russes eux-mêmes. Il devait se limiter aux régions frontalières, où la population était majoritairement ukrainienne, polonaise ou même allemande. Mais malgré tout cela, il a pu créer par sa propre industrie, toute une civilisation judéo-russe, et dans certaines villes comme Vilna, Kishinev, Odessa et peut-être même Kiev, il formait la majorité de la population urbaine.

Les persécutions tsaristes, ou *pogroms*, frappaient une population déjà divisée par des interprétations diverses de leur religion ancestrale. Les Juifs de Vilna avaient déjà évolué vers la pratique mystique que nous appelons hasidique, et les *Hasidim* étaient devenus les porte-parole du judaïsme eschatologique et messianique. Chez eux, la réponse à la souffrance terrestre était la fuite intérieure, ce qui allait comprendre plus tard et le rejet de la solution sioniste et le refus de reconnaître l'Etat d'Israël après 1948. Encore aujourd'hui à Jérusalem, il y a une colonie hasidique qui n'accepte pas le régime israélien, et qui en 1948 aurait collaboré avec les Arabes pour empêcher le triomphe sioniste!

Mais le mouvement hasidique n'était jamais plus que très minoritaire chez les cinq millions de Juifs en Russie. Parmi les autres, c'était plutôt l'idéologie séculariste qui gagnait du terrain vers la fin du siècle. Plusieurs ont abandonné leur religion et se sont intégrés aux nouveaux partis socialistes révolutionnaires. Mais la majorité des Juifs ne voulait pas abandonner la conscience de sa nationalité propre. Ils savaient que le mépris dirigé contre eux tirait une bonne partie de sa force du fait qu'ils étaient un peuple sans foyer—sans terre et sans Etat. Dans le climat du nationalisme du XIXe siècle, ils étaient ainsi gravement handicapés. Pourtant, la solution était claire—il fallait trouver un endroit où ils pourraient créer un Etat-nation, ce qui les rendrait les égaux de tous les peuples du monde. A une époque où



la domination européenne s'étendait à la quasi-totalité de la planète, et quand l'émigration massive vers les pays vierges, occupés peut-être par quelques indigènes sans culture, devenait le phénomène social du siècle, ce rêve n'était pas si fantastique. Même les Bolchéviques l'ont reconnu, et dans leur programme social, défini en 1912, ils ont reconnu aux Juifs le droit d'établir un foyer national où leur culture pourrait s'épanouir. Après la Révolution ils sont restés fidèles à leurs promesses—depuis 1934 il existe dans un petit coin de la Mandchourie russe une entité politique qui s'appelle la Région Autonome Juive, où la langue officielle est le yiddish. Le seul inconvénient, c'est que cette région n'a presque pas de Juifs—5% au maximum des habitants.

Le grand mouvement du peuple juif en Russie se dirigeait dans une toute autre direction. Déjà en 1897, le Juif russe Théodore Herzl a fondé le Congrès Mondial Sioniste, avec le but d'établir un Etat juif en Palestine. La réaction générale contre la répression tsariste a donné à Herzl une certaine sympathie dans les chancelleries occidentales, et en 1905 le gouvernement britannique lui a offert l'Ouganda comme pays de colonisation. Le Congrès a refusé cette offre, qui aurait créé un autre Transvaal en Afrique, en disant que seule la Palestine, encore sous le joug turc, pouvait remplir les conditions nécessaires à l'établissement d'un Etat sioniste. Mais pourquoi la Palestine?

Pour le lecteur fidèle de la Bible, la réponse va de soi. Mais les sionistes n'étaient pas religieux—au contraire, ils étaient très souvent des athées déclarés. Leur rattachement à la terre palestinienne était donc romantique plutôt que théologique; leur conscience juive étant comparable à la conscience gauloise, anglo-saxonne, celtique ou germanique qui créait le nationalisme européen du XXe siècle. Le sionisme d'avant 1914 n'était pas raciste dans le sens moderne de ce mot, mais le fondement d'un racisme postérieur était déjà en place. Il faut comparer les sionistes non pas avec Hitler, mais avec les nationalistes romantiques comme Péguy, Maurras ou les idéalistes du réveil celtique en Irlande, dont l'idéologie ne deviendra fasciste que plus tard.

Romantique, sans issue pratique—voilà le sionisme en 1914. Comme nous le savons

aujourd'hui, c'était l'entrée de la Turquie dans la guerre et sa défaite qui ont créé les conditions nécessaires pour la réalisation du rêve sioniste. Et c'était l'alliance entre les Juifs persécutés de l'Empire russe et la conscience biblique des dirigeants britanniques qui ont conquis la Terre Sainte, qui a produit une situation en Palestine favorable à la réalisation du rêve séculaire juif.

## L'État d'Israël

Nous ne pouvons pas maintenant tracer toute l'histoire du mandat britannique en Palestine, mais il faut souligner que c'est la période 1918-1948 qui a préparé le scénario de tout ce qui a suivi depuis. Les britanniques avaient scellé une alliance avec les Arabes pour vaincre les Turcs, et ils leur avaient promis l'indépendance après la guerre. Mais ni la Grande-Bretagne ni la France ne voulait encourager l'indépendance d'un Etat arabe qui pourrait servir de modèle pour tout le monde colonial. Ils ont donc divisé les pays arabes entre eux, bien que formellement ils les gouvernaient sous l'égide de la Ligue des Nations.

La Palestine est donc devenue britannique, et les Juifs pouvaient s'y installer selon les principes de la Déclaration Balfour de 1917. Malheureusement, personne n'avait consulté l'avis de la population locale, et après 1930, quand l'immigration juive était devenue significative, il y avait une crise permanente en Palestine. Après 1945 cette crise devint catastrophique. La révélation du génocide hitlérien créa en Occident une vague de sympathie pour les aspirations sionistes, aussi bien qu'une population considérable de réfugiés juifs qui avaient perdu leurs foyers en Europe. Ces gens commençaient bientôt à gagner la Palestine clandestinement, le gouvernement britannique ne pouvait pas les empêcher, et la guerre civile s'intensifiait dans le chaos universel. Le 14 mai 1948 les Britanniques se sont sauvés de la Palestine, et le nouvel Etat juif fut proclamé à Tel Aviv. Le lendemain, c'était la guerre avec les Arabes.

Nous savons que les Juifs ont gagné cette guerre, mais le territoire qu'ils occupaient n'était que les deux-tiers de la Palestine britannique. La population juive était en



1947 toujours minoritaire sur ce territoire, une situation qui fut renversée par la suite, avec l'expulsion massive des Arabes et l'immigration des Juifs venant de tous les pays arabes. Mais malgré cela, la proportion de Juifs dans la population palestinienne n'a jamais dépassé les 67%, et peut-être aujourd'hui se situe vers 60% ou moins du total. L'évolution démographique favorise les Arabes, ce qui explique en partie l'opposition israélienne à toute idée de rapatriement des réfugiés.

La lune de miel du nouvel état devait continuer jusqu'en 1967, après la guerre de six jours. Au début le *blitzkrieg* juif fut accueilli comme un miracle dans le monde entier. Mais bientôt les problèmes de la conquête trop rapide se sont manifestés, et l'opinion publique mondiale commençait à favoriser la cause palestinienne pour la première fois. En Israël aussi le climat changeait progressivement. Avant 1967 l'Etat hébraïque n'était pas religieux, mais après la grande victoire, la pratique religieuse s'imposait de plus en plus dans la vie quotidienne. La présence d'un grand nombre de Séphardim, Juifs venus des pays arabes, a certainement contribué à cette évolution conservatrice, ainsi que la conscience de la nécessité d'une solidarité impénétrable face à un monde hostile. Dans les années 1970 Israël est devenu un pays idéologiquement juif, pratiquant une certaine discrimination contre les autres religions, et notamment contre le christianisme évangélique, qui voulait prosélytiser dans le pays. Le soutien des Etats-Unis, garanti avant, est maintenant de plus en plus incertain, et l'existence même de l'Etat juif se remet en question. Est-ce là que nous trouvons l'accomplissement de la prophétie biblique?

## Le Nouveau Testament

Le chrétien qui veut rester fidèle à l'enseignement biblique doit donc se poser des questions au sujet de l'état d'Israël. Peut-on vraiment accepter que cet Etat représente l'accomplissement des promesses faites à Abraham? Il nous semble que nous devons répondre NON à cette question, non pas parce que la politique israélienne nous déplaît—cela n'a aucune importance—mais

parce que le Nouveau Testament nous enseigne autre chose. Regardons les textes principaux—Gal 3-4 et Rm 2-4 et 9-11. Comment S. Paul comprend-il la portée des promesses abrahamiques?

D'abord, il considère que l'histoire d'Abraham nous offre une leçon typologique. Les deux femmes et leurs enfants sont deux alliances, l'une selon la loi et la chair, l'autre selon la promesse et l'esprit. Il assimile les Juifs de son époque aux Ismaélites parce qu'ils prêchent l'esclavage spirituel à la loi mosaïque. Ce sont les chrétiens qui sont les fils de la promesse et donc les frères d'Isaac, parce qu'ils sont justifiés par la foi. Il dit (Gal 3:8) : '... l'Écriture, prévoyant que Dieu justifierait les païens par la foi, a d'avance annoncé cette bonne nouvelle à Abraham : Toutes les nations seront bénies en toi! de sorte que ceux qui croient sont bénis avec Abraham le croyant', et encore, (Gal 3:13-14) : 'Christ nous a rachetés de la malédiction de la loi, étant devenu malédiction pour nous ... afin que la bénédiction d'Abraham eût pour les païens son accomplissement en Jésus-Christ'.

La centralité de Jésus est renforcée de nouveau dans les versets qui suivent (Gal 3:16) : 'or les promesses ont été faites à Abraham et à sa postérité. Il n'est pas dit 'et aux postérités', comme s'il s'agissait de plusieurs, mais en tant qu'il s'agit d'une seule, 'et à ta postérité', c'est-à-dire, à Christ'. Un judaïsme qui se définit par la loi n'a plus de sens—la fonction de la loi est terminée, la distinction entre Juifs et Grecs est abolie. La conclusion paulinienne se trouve dans Gal 3:29 : 'si vous êtes à Christ, vous êtes donc la postérité d'Abraham, héritiers selon la promesse'.

Il est évident que le problème central dans toute cette discussion est la question du droit à l'héritage abrahamique. Ce n'est pas seulement le cas que les Juifs selon la chair doivent hériter les promesses, y compris bien-sûr, la promesse de la terre, et que les chrétiens selon l'esprit doivent hériter les mêmes promesses d'une autre manière—le royaume céleste au lieu de la terre sainte palestinienne. Non! Paul n'accepte pas l'idée qu'il y ait deux types d'alliance qui seraient en principe également valables. S'il y a vraiment deux alliances, c'est parce que



l'une d'entre elles est *fausse*. Le fait qu'il met l'accent sur le salut des païens par le Christ ne veut pas dire qu'il exclut les Juifs de ce privilège. Au contraire, le Juif qui suit la loi ne suit que le pédagogue qui le conduira à Christ, afin qu'il soit justifié par la foi, lui aussi (Gal 3:24). Si le Juif jouit d'un statut particulier quelconque, c'est le fait qu'il a eu le privilège d'avoir entendu la bonne nouvelle à l'avance—au Juif d'abord!—mais son refus de cette bonne nouvelle l'a livré à une condamnation encore plus sévère. Le Juif qui n'accepte pas la révélation de Jésus-Christ est rejeté par Dieu, parce qu'en réalité il n'est pas le fils d'Abraham selon la foi.

En disant cela, Paul ne fait que suivre l'enseignement de Jésus lui-même. N'oublions pas que c'était cette même question—du droit à l'héritage abrahamique—qui a divisé Jésus des pharisiens (Jn 8:39,44) : 'Jésus leur dit: Si vous étiez enfants d'Abraham, vous feriez les oeuvres d'Abraham . . . vous avez pour père le diable, et vous voulez accomplir les désirs de votre père'.

D'après ces textes il est évident que le peuple juif n'a aucun droit aux promesses faites à Abraham en dehors du Christ. C'est en Lui et seulement en Lui que les promesses ont été accomplies, et cela de façon spirituelle. Les chrétiens dispensationalistes, qui ne veulent pas accepter cette conclusion, se penchent surtout sur ce que dit S. Paul dans Rm 9-11. Mais en réalité ce texte ne fait que renforcer la thèse déjà énoncée, par exemple: 'Christ est la fin de la loi, pour la justification de tous ceux qui croient' (Rm 10:4) et 'Il n'y a aucune différence en effet entre le Juif et le Grec, puisqu'ils ont tous un même Seigneur, qui est riche pour tous ceux qui l'invoquent' (Rm 10:12). Paul ne prévoit donc aucun autre salut, aucun accomplissement des promesses en dehors de celui offert aux Grecs et à toute l'humanité.

Tout ce qu'il semble prêt à reconnaître,

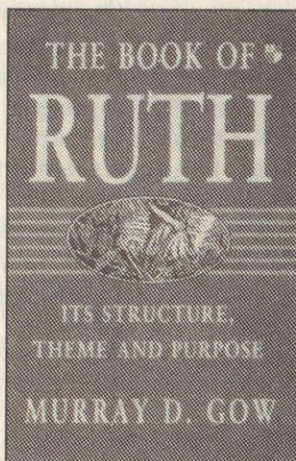
c'est que le rejet des Juifs n'est pas total, que Dieu n'a pas encore dit le dernier mot à leur sujet. Pour se faire comprendre, Paul adopte l'exemple des 7000 qui n'avaient point fléchi le genou devant Baal (Rm 11:4). Il insiste que 'dans le temps présent il y a un reste, selon l'élection de la grâce' (Rm 11:5), et que 's'ils ne persistent pas dans l'incrédulité, ils seront entés sur leur propre olivier' (Rm 11:23-24). Pour le moment, et jusqu'à l'entrée de la totalité des païens, une partie d'Israël est tombée dans l'endurcissement, mais cette partie est toujours aimée par Dieu à cause de leurs pères, car Dieu ne se repent pas de ses dons et de son appel (Rm 11:25-29). A la fin du temps, comme dit S. Paul, en citant Es. 59:20-21 : 'Le libérateur viendra de Sion et il détournera de Jacob les impiétés, et ce sera mon alliance avec eux lorsque j'ôterai leurs péchés'.

Ce libérateur est pourtant Jésus-Christ, son oeuvre chez les Juifs sera la même qu'elle est chez nous, son alliance avec eux sera la même qu'il a déjà scellée avec nous par son sang. Quand Paul dit dans Rm 11:26 que *tout* Israël sera sauvé, il comprend que les Juifs selon la chair et les païens convertis partageront un même salut, un même destin en Jésus-Christ.

Le retour à la Sion terrestre, la reconstruction du temple, le rétablissement de la république vétérotestamentaire—tout cela n'a aucun sens. Les chrétiens qui pensent comme ça sont plus proches des Témoins de Jéhova, qui n'acceptent pas que la loi a été accomplie en Christ, qu'ils ne sont de l'orthodoxie néotestamentaire. Le chrétien évangélique n'a aucun droit de favoriser les Israéliens contre les Arabes à cause des Israélites de l'Ancien Testament. Ce n'est plus la chair mais la foi qui nous rend fils d'Abraham et héritiers de ses promesses, que nous soyons Juifs, Arabes, Européens ou quoi que ce soit.

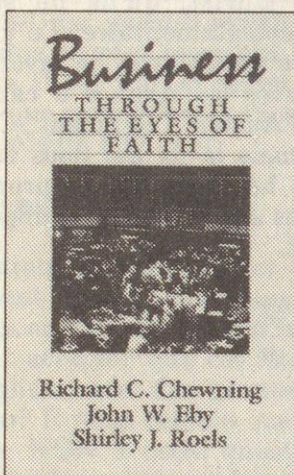


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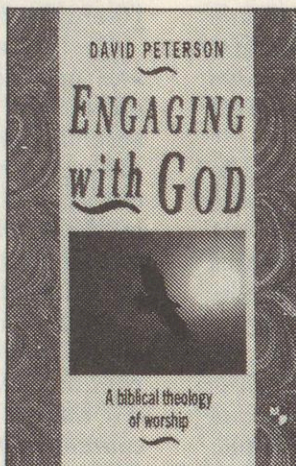
## **The Book of Ruth Murray D Gow**

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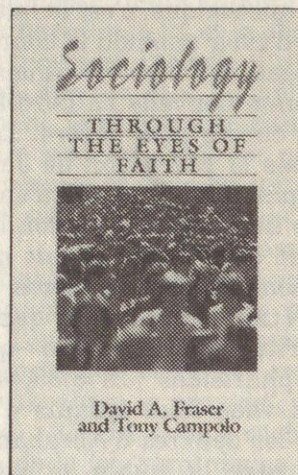
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# Book Reviews/Revue des Livres/ Buchbesprechungen

EuroJTh (1993) 2:2, 175–176

0960–2720

## *The Work of Christ*

Robert Letham

Leicester: IVP, 1993, 284 pp., £12.95, paperback, ISBN 0 85110 891 7

### RÉSUMÉ

*Letham organise son étude autour des trois offices christiques de prophète, prêtre et roi. Dans la première partie de l'ouvrage, il considère l'oeuvre de Christ comme le point culminant de l'histoire d'Israël et de l'histoire du monde. Dans les trois sections suivantes, il traite respectivement de l'aspect prophétique, de l'aspect sacerdotal et de l'aspect royal de l'oeuvre de Christ. Il rend compte de l'aspect sacerdotal de façon particulièrement satisfaisante.*

### ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

*Letham baut seine Arbeit auf dem Triplex Munus von Christus als Prophet, Priester und König auf. Im ersten Teil wird das Werk Christi als vollendung der Geschichte Israels und der Welt betrachtet. Die Teile II, III und IV behandeln jeweils die prophetischen, priesterlichen und königlichen Aspekte des Werkes Christi. Die Schilderung des Priesteramtes Christi ist besonders beeindruckend.*

The scope of a book such as this is potentially vast, designed as it is to say something of value about 'all that Christ did when he came to this earth "for us and for our salvation", all that he continues to do now that he is risen from the dead and at God's right hand, and all that he will do when he returns in glory at the end of the age' (18–19). With such a remit questions of selection of focus and of structure inevitably arise, and even when these have been tackled, as Letham admits, a book of readable length can still only expect to skate over the surface.

The approach which Letham himself takes is to marshall his material around the familiar *triplex munus* of Christ as prophet, priest and king. This decision reflects both his own tacit commitment to the Reformed tradition in theology and equally the predominantly biblical focus of his study. The task of Christian theology may be put crudely into two categories: first, the interpretation of the received tradition, biblical and ecclesial, and second the attempt to relate this tradition to the

questions and problems of contemporary understanding and life. While, however, the series of which this book is a part is avowedly concerned to accord top priority to contemporary issues (9) it must be admitted that the strength of this book is in the acquittal of the former of the two tasks. It does, it is true, afford some brief consideration to the use of biblical motifs by liberation theology, but the vast majority of its pages are taken up with biblical exposition and discussion of the tradition of atonement theology over the centuries.

Part One of the book sets the work of Christ firmly in the interpretive context provided by the history of Israel, finding in him, as do the apostolic writers themselves, the climactic point in this history, and the central point of human history as a whole. One possible criticism is that it does not do enough to reckon and to dialogue with other approaches which are pursued in Christian theology. It sometimes gives the (doubtless false) impression of a happy unawareness of any other way of seeing things.

Parts Two, Three and Four respectively address the prophetic, priestly and royal aspects of Christ's work. For myself I found the treatment of Christ's priesthood the most satisfying of these, especially the writer's willingness to stray from some traditional evangelical accounts, and to accord due recognition to the biblical emphasis upon the essential humanness of Christ's vicarious existence, obedience, victory, suffering, death and resurrection 'for our sake'. All too often a crypto-docetism or subtle Apollinarianism has held sway here, but Letham's account is well informed by an admirable familiarity with the patristic discussion of the anhypostasia and enhypostasia.

On the other hand I'm afraid I found the treatment of the doctrine of penal substitution rather disappointing; far too concerned to make the right noises, somewhat insensitive to the point of some of the criticisms levelled at it, and apparently unwilling to differentiate between the biblical linking of Jesus' death with the divine judgment or curse on human sin and certain seventeenth century theorizing concerning the same. A good dose of P. T. Forsyth's writing on the atonement might help to clarify the issues.

Overall this is not a piece of creative theologizing. It is, however, a helpful and accessible restatement of a certain sort of evangelical orthodoxy, and provides a perspective on the biblical context for and interpretation of the work



of Christ which many will find informative and stimulating. There can be little doubt of the need for more serious theological writing at this level, and both the series (Contours of Christian Theology) and this volume in particular are to be welcomed for that reason.

**Trevor Hart**  
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EuroJTh (1993) 2:2, 176–177

0960–2720

***Atonement and Incarnation: an Essay in Universalism and Particularity***

**Vernon White**

Cambridge: CUP, 1991, 134 pp., ISBN 0 521 40732 X

**RÉSUMÉ**

*White souligne le caractère universel de l'oeuvre salvatrice de Christ. L'expérience que Dieu lui-même fait de la souffrance et de la mort lui donne l'autorité pour remporter la victoire sur elles en faveur de l'humanité. L'auteur considère la différence entre la fonction rétributive et la fonction re-créatrice du châtement, et il montre comment les deux sont impliquées ensemble dans l'expiation. L'auteur de la recension met en question la manière dont l'auteur défend sa position doctrinale au moyen d'argument philosophiques, de même que sa façon d'assimiler la doctrine de l'expiation à des prétendues intuitions morales naturelles.*

**ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**

*White betont die Universalität des rettenden Handelns Christi. Gottes eigene Erfahrungen von Leid und Tod begründen seine Autorität, sie stellvertretend für die Menschheit zu überwinden. Der Unterschied zwischen den vergeltenden und wiederherstellenden Funktionen der Strafe wird behandelt. Beide Aspekte werden im Sühnetod Christi vereint. Der Rezensent hinterfragt sowohl die Verteidigung der Lehrmeinung durch philosophische Argumente als auch die Assimilation der Lehre von der Sühne mit angeblich natürlichen moralischen Intuitionen.*

In this work, the author defends the claim that what Jesus Christ accomplished in particular space and time has universal effect. The strategy is simple and the presentation succinct. After sketching out the relevant traditional claims, White indicates why such belief has come under pressure. The dimensions of our world in time

and space make traditional christological and soteriological belief implausible for many. While White sympathizes with those who react in this way to the restrictions on saving *knowledge*, he wants to emphasize instead the universal dimension of saving *action*. Having surveyed thinkers on the different sides of the debate, White sets out his own proposals in three central chapters (5–7). These expound the claim announced thus on page 39:

The heart of the model to be proposed rests on what might be called the criterion of moral authenticity, and goes something like this: *unless and until God himself has experienced suffering, death and the temptation to sin, and overcome them, as a human individual, he has no moral authority to overcome them in and with the rest of humanity.*

White makes much of the moral dimension. On the basis of our 'natural moral intuitions' he expounds the difference between retributive and recreative functions in punishment. In personal relations, only action with recreative intent is unimpeachably moral. But although this is directed against traditional notions of penal substitution, White wants to incorporate the biblical elements of that doctrine (the reality of divine wrath and justice) into his own claims. Hence in the end: 'Moral intuition here meets theological claim, and sends it on its way rejoicing' (p. 106). This elaborates the argument for the way what God has done in Christ is constitutive of salvation.

A particular act could constitute universal redeeming possibilities because it equips the agent with certain qualities or experiences which 'qualify' him to relate more effectively to the objects of his action (p. 53).

The conceptual requirements for this set of convictions can be fulfilled. The doctrine of incarnation is conceptually coherent and here the author avails himself of work on the brain and the person to buttress coherence. Particular attention is given to the question of divine eternity. Here White believes that an account of God's relation to time can embrace both divine transcendence of temporal sequence and temporality within divine experience. The book ends with a postscript defending the author against the charge of anthropocentric (rather than cosmocentric) theology and warning against imperialistic evangelism.

This is a brief and economically-written account which covers a great deal of ground. It is a good, succinct, introduction to the *status quaestionis* in British theology. His proposal has much to commend it, maintaining, as it does, incarnation and reconciliation in history on an intentionally biblical foundation. But two aspects of his work call



for comment—each on the subject of theological method.

Firstly, White consciously follows the pattern established in analytic theology of defending the coherence of his doctrinal position at a conceptual (loosely 'philosophical') level. The difficulty here is that the plausibility of belief in incarnation seems excessively dependent on the philosophical success of conceptual construction. On the one hand, it is true that questions of conceptual coherence can not be dodged if claims are to be intelligible. On the other hand, claims can be both intelligible and plausible without needing to be so demonstrated at a sophisticated conceptual level. It would be quite unfair to expect the author to address the question of theological method involved here but, equally, the point needs to be made.

Secondly, White assimilated the doctrine of the atonement to alleged natural moral intuitions. But those who seriously encounter the love and holiness of God in Christ crucified must ever after humbly conform any moral intuitions to what they have now learned. Moral sense can not stand in judgement! Yet this essay conjures up the picture of an intellectually balanced, morally composed theologian, shaping the biblical matter according to the canons of his judgement. Now it may indeed be the case that cardinal features of a proper doctrine of the atonement can be expounded in the light of moral experience; with serious qualifications one might even allow talk of some natural moral intuitions. But moral, as intellectual, wisdom must allow its countenance to pale in the light of the cross, just as far as the cross and its foolishness require.

It would be unjust, however, to overstate these points. Conclusions that are similar could, I think, be argued in a different way to quite convincing effect. But although one could have discussed the issues of substance that arise here, it is important also to attend to theological method and, indeed, mood, which can not leave substance unaltered. It is just that I miss Luther.

**Stephen Williams**  
Oxford  
England

EuroJTh (1993) 2:2, 177–178

0960–2720

### ***The Gospel According to Matthew***

**Leon Morris**

Grand Rapids: Eerdmans/Leicester: IVP,  
1992, 781 pp., ISBN 0 85111 338–9

### ***The New American Commentary Vol. 22 Matthew***

**Craig L. Blomberg**

Nashville: Broadman, 1992, 464 pp.,  
ISBN 0 8054 0122 9

#### **RÉSUMÉ**

*Ce sont là deux nouveaux commentaires sur l'Évangile de Matthieu par deux spécialistes évangéliques. Morris a un souci strictement exégétique, tandis que Blomberg s'attache plus à la structure de l'Évangile et à son application. Blomberg manifeste une plus grande familiarité avec les publications récentes.*

#### **ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**

*Dies sind zwei neue Kommentare zum Matthäusevangelium von evangelikalen Wissenschaftlern. Morris' Anliegen ist ausschließlich exegetischer Natur, während Blomberg seinen Schwerpunkt auf die Struktur des Evangeliums und seine Anwendung legt. Blomberg ist mit der neueren Literatur besser vertraut.*

These two commentaries have much in common: both are middle level one volume commentaries written by leading, well-informed evangelical scholars. Both are based on the English text of the gospel, though referring to Greek in the footnotes. Both cautiously recommend the traditional view that Matthew the tax-collector was in some sense author of the gospel, and both respect Matthew as a historical source, while interacting to a greater or lesser extent with critical issues. Both have a useful introduction to Matthew's themes at the start of the commentary.

Morris provides his own English translation of the gospel; Blomberg comments on the NIV. Morris's commentary is almost twice as long as Blomberg's, and Morris is able to offer a verse by verse treatment of the gospel (with the advantages that a more detailed approach brings), whereas Blomberg works more in sections (with the advantages that a less fragmented approach brings). Morris is a veteran scholar, who is most familiar with the older literature and whose main interaction with recent literature is with some other recent commentaries (including Gundry, Carson and France). Blomberg is a younger scholar who



refers more to the most recent journals, books and approaches and who offers some interesting suggestions on the structure of the gospel. Morris is more strictly exegetical seeking to elucidate Matthew's meaning; Blomberg reflects more (though necessarily briefly) on questions of application.

The commentaries agree on many things, not all of them obvious: e.g. they both trace the 'exception' clause in 5:32, 19:9, back to Jesus and argue that Jesus allowed divorce and remarriage in exceptional cases (contra W. Heth and G. Wenham *Jesus and Divorce*, R. F. Collins, *Divorce in the New Testament*, and others). They diverge on other points: e.g. Morris entertains the view that 'on this rock' (16:18) could be a reference to Jesus' teaching and Blomberg prefers to take it as a reference to Peter; Morris takes 16:28 to refer to Jesus' death and resurrection and Blomberg to the transfiguration.

Both commentaries are well-written, and both are to be warmly recommended—with Morris having the edge for those wanting more detail, and Blomberg for those wanting a somewhat more accessible, modern approach and more up-to-date bibliography. With France and Carson already available, English-speaking readers now have a remarkable range of middle-level evangelical commentaries on Matthew. With the massive three volume International Critical Commentary of W. D. Davies and D. Allison almost complete and Don Hagner's Word commentary expected shortly, students of Matthew will soon be very well served indeed.

David Wenham  
Oxford  
England

EuroJTh (1993) 2:2, 178–179

0960–2720

### ***Guardians of Creation: Nature in Theology and the Christian Life***

**L. Osborn**

Leicester: Apollos, 1993, 172 pp., £9.95, paperback, ISBN 0 85110 951 9

#### **RÉSUMÉ**

*L'auteur s'efforce de bâtir une éthique de l'environnement sur un fondement théologique. Dans la première moitié du livre, il aborde les sujets de la montée de l'écologie et de la spiritualité verte, et il présente des critiques de l'attitude chrétienne et les réponses qui peuvent y être données. L'auteur édifie lui-même une théologie trinitaire de la création en réponse à ces*

*critiques. C'est un ouvrage stimulant, qui apporte une contribution précieuse au sujet, mais il souffre d'un manque de clarté quant au rôle de Christ dans la création, et l'hébreu du premier chapitre de la Genèse y est mal compris.*

#### **ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**

*Der Verfasser erarbeitet eine Umweltethik auf theologischer Grundlage. Im ersten Teil des Buches behandelt er das Aufkommen des Umweltbewusstseins, die Öko-Spiritualität und die an verschiedenen christlichen Positionen geübte Kritik. Anschließend antwortet er auf diese Kritik. Der Verfasser entwickelt selbst eine trinitäre Schöpfungstheologie. Seine Argumentation ist nachdenkenswert, die Rolle Christi bei der Schöpfung bleibt jedoch unklar und der hebräische Text in Genesis I wurde mißverstanden.*

In this book Dr. Lawrence Osborn, who has degrees in both science and theology, seeks to develop a Christian environmental ethic grounded in a theological understanding of the environment as a dimension of God's good creation. It begins with a brief survey of the rise of environmentalism and of the issues which lead to talk of a present environmental crisis. He then outlines the case that some environmentalists make against Christianity as being responsible for the attitudes and beliefs that have precipitated the crisis. This leads to a chapter on non-Christian forms of 'green' spirituality, which is a very useful guide to this area. After this comes a survey of some Christian responses to the environmental crisis. These are helpfully classified into three groups: those that are negative reactions to green spirituality; those which try to reconstruct Christian theology into what is claimed to be a more environmentally friendly form; those which re-examine traditional Christian beliefs in the light of the Bible in order to find resources to address the present crisis. There is a disappointing weakness in the critique of the views surveyed under the first two categories. The reason for this might be its necessary brevity, but more could have been said without expanding the chapter very much. Another way of dealing with this weakness would have been to point the reader to a few books or articles where a fuller critique can be found. In fact, the book could do with a short annotated bibliography rather than just the list of works cited.

Dr. Osborn's own approach to developing a theologically based Christian environmental ethic falls into the third of his categories, and makes up the second half of the book. There is a lot that is very good here, especially the insistence on



developing a truly trinitarian understanding of creation. It begins with a study of relevant biblical passages. This section could be strengthened by making more use of the implications of Job 38–42 (dismissed in one short sentence) and the O.T. visions of a new heaven and a new earth (e.g. in Isa. 65 and 66). It is also possible to present a stronger defence of Gen. 1:26–28 against the criticism of it by environmentalists than that which Osborn gives. Surprisingly, there is no discussion of the favourite text of Christian anti-environmentalists, 2 Peter 3:10.

I am not at all convinced by the definition of the role of the Father in creation in terms of the giving of a promise to creation (pp. 85, 133ff). This seems to rest on a semantic sleight of hand. It is true that some (not all) of the commands in Gen. 1 are expressed by jussive forms in Hebrew (translated as 'let . . .'). This is taken to mean that the Father gives the creation 'permission to be'. This 'permission' is then mysteriously transformed into a promise of 'a future with God'. However, the jussive is the normal form used for third-person commands in Hebrew and the context of Gen. 1 makes it clear that that is the force of the jussives here. The statement that Gen. 1:26–28 does not impose any ontological distinction between the human and non-human (p. 136) is at least questionable. Clearly, like the non-human creation, humans are also ontologically creatures, with all that that implies. However, it does seem possible that being in the image of God implies an ontological distinction of another kind.

There are some points where I would like clarification. For example, what is meant by the statement that 'through Christ, creation is enabled to resist entropy and, hence, disorder' (p. 121)? Does this simply mean that the consummation of God's purpose for the universe will come about before its 'heat death' (which is billions of years off anyway), or is Dr. Osborn saying that God is working against the Second Law of Thermodynamics, a Law which he brought into being and sustains?

These criticisms and comments are not meant to detract from the book; rather they indicate its thought-provoking nature, which makes it valuable reading on this important topic.

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EuroJTh (1993) 2:2, 179–181

0960–2720

## **Garden of Eden**

James Barr

SCM, London, 1992, 146 pp., £9.95, pb, ISBN 334 00531 0

### **RÉSUMÉ**

*L'auteur essaie de montrer que les idées de résurrection et d'immortalité ne sont pas opposées l'une à l'autre dans la pensée biblique. Les chapitres deux et trois de la Genèse n'enseigneraient pas la doctrine de la chute de l'homme, mais la perte de la chance d'obtenir l'immortalité. La pensée biblique sur la vie et la mort serait plus proche de la pensée grecque qu'on ne le pense parfois. L'auteur de la recension met en question la façon dont les parallèles extra-bibliques sont utilisés pour comprendre la pensée 'hébraïque' et pour expliquer le sens du texte biblique.*

### **ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**

*Hier wird behauptet, die Vorstellungen von Auferstehung und Unsterblichkeit stünden im biblischen Denken in keinem Gegensatz zueinander. Genesis 2–3 unterstütze nicht die Lehre des Sündenfalls, sondern zeige eine verlorengegangene Chance der Unsterblichkeit auf. Biblisches Denken über Leben und Tod sei dem griechischen Denken näher als manchmal angenommen wird. Der Rezensent stellt die Methodik in Frage, wobei außerbiblische Parallelbeispiele herangezogen werden, um das 'hebräische' Denken zu erleuchten und die Bedeutung des biblischen Textes zu erklären.*

The book is based on the Read-Tuckwell lectures, given in the University of Bristol on the subject of Human Immortality. Professor Barr uses the opportunity to reassess the ideas of immortality and resurrection as they have been understood in Christian theology. The book has some of the marks of its origins as lectures, with asides and digressions, and some of the author's impatience with views he regards as untenable. But it is always interesting, often engaging, and reveals a little more of the author's own piety than some of his other works.

The main thesis of the book is that the ideas of immortality and resurrection are not in opposition to each other. Certain strands in Christian theology have tended to overstress resurrection, in the belief that immortality (especially 'immortality of the soul') is Greek and therefore unbiblical. This position has been informed in recent decades by the postulate of so-called 'totality thinking' in the Old Testament (i.e.



denying the division of the person into 'soul' and 'body'), a view which has been reinforced by certain trends in modern psychology.

In pursuing his argument, Professor Barr brings his formidable exegetical powers to bear on a range of biblical and apocryphal texts, not least Genesis 2–3. This text is not about a 'fall of man', that is, a loss of immortality due to a first sin; there is in his view no such idea in the Old Testament. Rather, the text, which has 'comic' features, tells about a missed chance of gaining immortality. The 'knowledge of good and evil' concerns a 'god-likeness' which is permitted to mortals, but which brings out an awareness of unpleasantness and trouble. It is not a primeval act of rebellion.

This is true of other stories in this part of Genesis; the Noah story too, as may be discerned on the basis of its similarities with the Gilgamesh epic, is really another creation account, which also has the missed chance of immortality as its theme. The Old Testament as a whole, in fact, regards death as perfectly natural, and does not attribute it to sin. Barr's array of evidence for this (pp. 21ff.) includes the Old Testament's well-known celebration of long life and interest in leaving a good 'name', as well as an extended discussion of Sheol, and a study of the term 'nephesh' in the context of a treatment of 'totality thinking'.

A conclusion of these reflections is that Hebrew thinking about death is not so different from Greek ideas as is often claimed. The point emerges particularly from the treatment of 'nephesh', in which Barr makes the point that Genesis 2:7, often quoted as evidence of 'totality thinking' in Hebrew anthropology, need not be normative for the Old Testament's understanding of 'nephesh'. In other instances, the term seems to indicate something distinguishable from the 'flesh', and may well lie close to the concept of 'soul' (pp. 37ff.). It is not possible, therefore, to speak of a systematic difference between Hebrew and Greek concepts; indeed ancient Hebrew ideas and pre-Platonic Greek ones show important similarities. It seems to me that Barr has made an important corrective point here.

The Greek connection emerges also in the late biblical period. In fact, the immediate antecedent of Paul's understanding that the first sin incurred the loss of immortality for all is the Hellenistic Wisdom of Solomon (pp. 16f.). The point is made in deliberate opposition to the attempts of Cullmann and Stendahl to remove the taint of Hellenism from Paul in respect of his view of immortality (pp. 94ff.). Paul, indeed, seems to have presupposed the immortality of the soul (1 Corinthians 15:53; against Stendahl; p. 111).

The argument concludes by showing the complementarity of immortality and resurrection, as they developed in the late biblical and apocryphal literature and in the New Testament. Immortality, indeed, may have preceded and led to resurrection in biblical thought. With the realization that the general resurrection was not imminent, immortality became particularly important. This remained the case in Christianity, both in Roman Catholicism, with its idea of Purgatory, and in Protestantism, conversely, because of its insistence on immediate judgment (Barr cites the Westminster Confession).

The book's final note puts together a connection between Paul and Genesis, which it had been at pains to sever, albeit newly expressed. If Genesis spoke of a lost chance of immortality, Paul knew of a re-opening of that opportunity: 'Later one came to redeem the defect of humanity. Immortality was brought to light' (p. 116). It is in this connection that an interesting pastoral angle is brought to bear on the subject, for example with the report that Cullmann encountered hostility from readers of his book because he had undermined a crucial element in their faith. There is an element of personal confession too, as in the final lines of the book, just quoted.

My questions about the book concern biblical interpretation. The interpretation of Genesis is obviously crucial to the argument. Yet Barr's treatment reveals certain hesitations about methods. On one hand, he attaches much importance to reconstructed antecedents of the present biblical text. This is most notable in the case of the flood narrative, where his comparison with Gilgamesh is the dominant factor in the interpretation. Barr admits that the story has been transformed within Israel, yet says: '... it seems hardly possible to explicate the story without recourse to the sort of mythological hinterground which we have discussed' (p. 83). The discovery that the narrative is fundamentally a creation myth is then taken to confirm the conclusion gained from the study of Genesis 2–3 (which incidentally involved the speculation that the encounter of Eve and the serpent reflected a story about a snake-goddess who tempted the first man (p. 65)). Barr's espousal of views of this sort is related to his readiness to suppose that Israel imbibed rather freely of the ideas of other nations and their religions, which is actually one of his general concluding reflections on his investigations (p. 108). But a major issue of interpretation is raised by this, without a systematic treatment of it.

The search for 'previous' meanings sits in some tension with the 'canonical' reading which he adopts (with some self-conscious irony, in view of



his well-known altercation with B. S. Childs) for Genesis 2–3 in its final form (p. 60), and with his recognition that Israel did in fact transform certain ideas of the other nations. The need to read Genesis 2–3 in its 'final form' is argued cogently: whoever put the original stories into their present form did so consciously, and with a definite purpose. Barr's insistence on this, however, may prove too much for his general view, for it begs the question of the significance of the broader context of Genesis 2–3, namely its immediate juxtaposition with Genesis 1, and more generally its position within Genesis 1–11.

If, in fact, the relationship between Genesis 1 and chapters 2–3 were taken as seriously as the one between the hypothetical constituent parts of the latter, the conclusions of the investigation might be quite different. For the progression from chapters 1 to 3 arguably implies a strong sense of 'loss'. And if this is not explicitly in terms of immortality, nevertheless a context is provided for chapters 2–3 which shows that the issues there are essentially about a created purpose that has been frustrated. The same kind of consideration applies to chapter 4, which Barr calls a 'different story' (p. 66), but which can be fruitfully interpreted as an extension of the infections of sin and death which have entered the human world (with D. J. A. Clines, *The Theme of the Pentateuch*, Sheffield, 1979, pp. 61ff., building in part on von Rad, *Genesis*, though more orientated towards the final text). So in turn the flood-narrative may be seen, not as a further creation account, but as a deliberate sequel to the first, expressly introducing the question, how may Yahweh continue with his created humanity in view of its utter sinfulness, and answering in terms of covenant.

Now it may be replied that such a scenario is a very late rationalization, a figment of the 'P' writer. But in this kind of argument 'lateness' is rather relative, and as I have noted, the work of the editorial hand is accepted without demur at other points. In any case, is not the issue, as Barr himself has introduced it, what is a biblical, or possibly a Hebraic, understanding of human destiny? By what criterion is the P writer disqualified from representing such an understanding—while the mythological streams are permitted to flow in and occupy places of honour?

At the very least it will be acknowledged that Paul was reading Genesis as a whole, the mysteries of Pentateuchal criticism presumably remaining hidden from him. This should be given due weight in reading Paul, and suggests, I think, that he was closer to the mark than Barr would have us believe. This is not to say that Paul might not also have been influenced by the Wisdom of Solomon; a complete account of the

influences on any human mind is likely to be impossible, and there is no reason why such influence should be ruled out of court. Indeed, the presence of Hellenistic ideas in the New Testament, especially in connection with the anthropological concepts which are in view, seems to me to be demonstrated here. But such influence on Paul is hardly incompatible with his reasoned and intelligent interpretation of Genesis.

The book is likely to be a landmark in studies of immortality in the Bible, and rightly. There is a wealth of perceptive comment, together with the author's customary readiness to slaughter the sacred cow. It will be clear that the book is not just a work of Biblical Studies in the narrow sense, but has implications for Systematics, and perhaps most importantly, Pastoral Theology.

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EuroJTh (1993) 2:2, 181–182

0960–2720

### ***The Doctrine of God***

Gerald Bray

Leicester: IVP, 1993, 281 pp., ISBN 0 8511 890 9

### **RÉSUMÉ**

*L'ouvrage est paru dans une nouvelle série sur la théologie chrétienne. L'auteur fait une présentation évangélique de la doctrine de Dieu, en s'appuyant beaucoup sur la théologie patristique. Dans la connaissance de Dieu, la rencontre personnelle est centrale; le caractère autre de Dieu est affirmé contre l'immanentisme; la distinction entre la nature et les personnes divines joue généralement un rôle important dans l'argumentation. L'auteur établit, d'une manière nouvelle, un dialogue fertile entre la théologie protestante et la théologie orientale.*

### **ZUSAMMENFASSUNG**

*Als Teil einer neuen theologischen Reihe entwickelt der Autor eine evangelikale Sicht der Lehre von Gott, indem er sich stark auf patristische Theologie gründet. Bei der Erkenntnis Gottes ist die persönliche Begegnung von zentraler Bedeutung. Die Andersartigkeit Gottes im Gegensatz zur Diesseitigkeit wird bekräftigt. Der Unterschied zwischen der Natur und den Personen Gottes ist bei dieser Auseinandersetzung bedeutsam. Dieses Buch ermöglicht eine neuartige gegenseitige Bereicherung der evangelischen und orthodoxen Theologie.*



The new series launched by IVP entitled 'contours in Christian theology' has Gerald Bray as the series editor, and his own book falls within the series. The series intends to cater for theological students at all levels, from Bible college to University department, and aims to present the evangelical theological perspective in a fresh and creative way, 'top priority has been given to contemporary issues'. The writing style aims at being accessible to as wide a range of reader as possible. Such are the criteria laid down for the volumes in the series, and clearly they should meet a need if they can meet these standards.

*The Doctrine of God* attempts to meet the challenge valiantly and with an impressive range of scholarship. We are taken through an initial chapter on evidence for faith in God, through consideration of God's nature, trinitarian persons and characteristics of a specifically evangelical doctrine.

The classical theistic arguments for the existence of God are felt to be not compelling and the evangelical approach of encounter with the living God, a revelation controlled by the Biblical testimony, remains the authentically christian view. But Barth, who upheld this tradition, is held to be vague in his understanding of revelation. The author reveals his own predilection for patristic theology early in his book, drawing on discussions of Plato and Aristotle and their influence on early christian thought, to elaborate his theme.

The second chapter on God's nature affirms the utter otherness of God, and defends the notion of God as 'a being' in the face of process theology which regards God as an immanent life behind and through the created reality. This debate might have had more space and attention devoted to it, as it is a critical area of controversy today. It is argued that the distinction between the nature and the persons of the triune god has not been observed by modern immanentists, who accordingly posit a developing God. We learn also that to absolutise 'God is love' fails to keep in tension the wrath of God visited on sin, although the fusion of these two concepts christologically is not explored. God is not vulnerable to the world, following Calvin, and the majesty of the sovereign Lord gains much emphasis; it is a pity that there is no dialogue with P Fiddes' influential work, *The Creative Suffering of God* at this point. The patristic approach that the divine person of the Son suffered in human nature, not in divine nature, holds sway, God suffers in the economic, not the essential, Trinity.

The third chapter, 'One God in Trinity', provides some excellent patristic discussion of the development of the trinitarian understanding of God, and the book is well worth buying for this. Like-

wise with the fourth chapter, 'The Persons and the Nature of God', which stresses the distinction again of nature and person, the former unknowable, the latter encountered in revelation. Calvin and Eastern Orthodox theologians are brought into an unusual creative relationship to forge an Eastern style synthesis. The Reformation led to a new type of christianity, more than a mere reform of the old, in its stress on the utter equality of the persons as *autotheos*. This seems to be approaching the influential thesis of John Zizioulas of 'being as communion'.

Bray wrestles with the issue of election using once again his normative distinction between nature and persons; will, he argues, relates to nature rather than person, and God does not deal with us at the level of nature. Rather it is personal encounter that is decisive and which means that election is not a matter of a grid of divine will but of mutual trinitarian encounter in God extended to humanity by the Son and Spirit.

This gives the flavour of the creativity of the book which comes from the interface of eastern and Calvinist traditions. No doubt more space could have been devoted to a greater range of modern thinkers and the pressing question of the feminist critiques of God-talk in particular, but hopefully the volumes on creation and providence will do this. Even so Bray manages to include some consideration of Barth, Moltmann and Jüngel in his discussion, as well some remarks on Islam, which is interestingly compared with Mormonism. Here is a learned and highly trinitarian interpretation, cross-fertilising Eastern and Protestant theology, itself a new event in theology.

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EuroJTh (1993) 2:2, 182-184

0960-2720

### ***Biblische Hermeneutik*** **Gerhard Maier**

R. Brockhaus Verlag, 2. überarb. Aufl.,  
Wuppertal 1991, 404 S., DM 49, 80

### **SUMMARY**

*In accordance with Reformation principles, Maier wants to understand the Bible not only as a human witness to God, but also as God's word. He therefore seeks to establish the essential priority of Scripture vis-a-vis the expositor. In contrast, for example, to Luther, Maier bases the revelatory authority of the Bible formally only on its 'inspiration', and not*



*primarily on its witness to Christ. It is questionable, however, whether Maier differentiates sufficiently between historical cognition and biblical witness in their capacity for the truth.*

## RÉSUMÉ

*Dans le sillage de la Réforme, Maier considère la Bible non pas comme un témoignage humain rendu à Dieu, mais comme la parole de Dieu adressée aux hommes. Il entend maintenir ainsi la primauté du texte biblique par rapport aux commentateurs. Pourtant, contrairement à Luther, il établit la valeur de la Bible en tant que révélation divine uniquement sur la base 'formelle' de l'inspiration, et non sur la base 'matérielle' du témoignage rendu au Christ. En conséquence on peut se demander si Maier distingue suffisamment l'exactitude historique et le témoignage biblique dans leur approche respective de la vérité.*

Gerhard Maier's Buch ist der Versuch, die in der Programmschrift „Das Ende der historisch-kritischen Methode“ (1974/1984) aufgestellten Thesen auf biblisch und kirchengeschichtlich breiterer Basis weiterzuführen. Bereits auf den ersten Seiten wird für eine spezielle biblische Hermeneutik plädiert. Maier will damit den Dialog mit der allgemeinen Hermeneutik, zu der sich „zahlreiche Überschneidungen und Gemeinsamkeiten“ (S. 16) ergeben, nicht abbrechen, aber gegenüber einem cartesianischen Rekurs auf den kritisch denkenden Menschen als Maß aller Dinge dem Offenbarungscharakter der Bible Geltung verschaffen. Der „Ansatz bei der Offenbarung“ bedeutet, daß die Maßstäbe der Schriftauslegung „grundsätzlich nur induktiv“ durch „das immer neue Hören auf die Schrift“ zu gewinnen sind (S. 26), für Maier ein wichtiger Unterschied auch zur fundamentalistischen Deduktion einer Irrtumslosigkeit der Schrift.—Im Hinblick auf den Ausleger ist der Glaube „eine willkommene und hilfreiche, ja letztlich unverzichtbare Voraussetzung des Verstehens“ (s. 41); so sieht im Raum theologischer Wissenschaft methodisches Vorgehen unerlässlich ist, wäre „eine rein ‚sachliche‘ Schriftforschung ... eine Verfehlung an der Offenbarung“ (S. 46), die als personale Anrede Gottes den Hörer vor eine Entscheidung stellt und ihn durch den Heiligen Geist in die Gemeinschaft der Glaubenden führt. In Anlehnung an die traditionelle Auffassung vom mehrfachen Schriftsinn und angesichts der Gefahr einer historischen Verengung unterscheidet Maier das historische, dogmatische, typologische, allegorische und prophetische Verständnis als „kognitive Verständensmöglichkeiten“, die ihrerseits ergänzungsbedürftig sind „durch ein dynamisches und ethisches Verstehen der Offenbarung“ (S. 78).

Die göttliche Inspiriertheit der ganzen Schrift („Ganzinspiration“ im Unterschied zu einer bloßen „Personalinspiration“ oder „Realinspiration“) sichert die „vollkommene Verlässlichkeit“ (S. 123) des biblischen Wortes und verhindert eine kritische Unterscheidung zwischen Bibel und Wort Gottes von seiten des Auslegers. Insofern in der Schrift die „Personautorität“ Gottes begegnet, ist sie die „höchste und allein maßgebliche Norm für die Gemeinde Jesu Christi“ (S. 152); der Gehorsam ist im Gegensatz zum methodischen Zweifel der historischen Kritik die angemessene menschliche Entsprechung. Demgemäß ist auch der biblische Kanon kritischer Problematisierung entzogen: Er „ist kein Produkt der Kirche, sondern ein Produkt desselben göttlichen Geistes, der die einzelnen Schriften hervorgebracht hat“ (S. 134). Die Anwendung von „Sachkriterien“ ist ein „Fehlweg“, ein „Kanon im Kanon“ immer subjektiv. Die Einheit der Schrift läßt sich nicht in einem „abstrakten Lehrsystem“ (auch nicht von einer christologisch-soteriologischen „Mitte“ her) darstellen, sondern nur im Rahmen einer heilsgeschichtlichen Sicht, die den progressiven Charakter der Offenbarung ernstnimmt.

Im Rahmen der von Maier vorgeschlagenen „biblisch-historischen Auslegung“ schließt sich an die übliche philologische und historische Arbeit eine „synthetische Auslegung“ an, die den jeweiligen Text „innerhalb des Ganzen der biblischen Offenbarung“ zu verstehen sucht, ihn weiter ins Gespräch bringt „mit den bisherigen Auslegern einschließlich der Dogmatik“ (Wirkungsgeschichte), mit der heutigen Gemeinde und mit den Herausforderungen heutiger Umwelt (S. 347f.). Die „kommunikative Auslegung“ schließlich soll die gewonnenen Ergebnisse in die gemeindliche Praxis weiterführen, ein Schritt, der den Exegeten an die Ganzheitlichkeit seiner Person und Arbeit erinnert und zum Zeugen werden läßt.

Gerhard Maier will die Bibel nicht nur als menschliches Zeugnis über Gott, sondern als Wort Gottes hören. Demgemäß ist er bemüht, der prinzipiellen Vorordnung der Schrift gegenüber dem Ausleger Geltung zu verschaffen. Beides sind Grundanliegen reformatorischen Schriftverständnisses. Anzuerkennen ist auch, daß Maier auf dem kirchlichen Bezug der Auslegung und einer biblisch orientierten Inspirationslehre insistiert. Zu fragen ist, ob die Offenbarungsautorität der Schrift nur formal von der „Inspiriertheit“ und nicht primär material von ihrem Christuszeugnis her zu begründen ist. Ähnlich die Frage im Blick auf den Kanon: Ist dieser primär verbindlich aufgrund einer heilsgeschichtlichen Interpretation seiner Entstehung oder wegen des die verschiedenen Schriften verbindenden



Christuszeugnisses (vg. Luthers „Was Christum treibet“)? Und schließlich: Besteht die Einheit der Bibel in einem fortschreitenden Offenbarungsprozeß oder ist sie nicht vorgängig von ihrer christologischen Mitte her zu bestimmen? Anders als z.B. P. Stuhlmacher lehnt es Maier ab, das Christusevangelium als Mitte der Schrift zu entfalten, weil, wie er richtig sieht, dies nicht nur integrierende, sondern auch sachkritische Implikationen nach sich zieht, die—wie die Erfahrung zeigt—von Ausleger zu Ausleger sehr verschieden ausfallen können und nicht selten den Schein des Willkürlichen tragen. Offenbar ist hier ein Dilemma gegenwärtiger protestantischer Schriftauslegung angesprochen, das jedoch nicht durch Verzicht auf die sachliche Entfaltung der biblischen Christusmitte zugunsten einer biblizistischen Vorgehensweise zu lösen ist.

Maier will eine historische Auslegung, bei der die Bibel nicht zum Gegenstand menschlicher Kritik wird. Indem er die historisch-kritische Forschung auf einen vom „neuzeitlich autonomen Geist“ bestimmten Ansatz festlegt, wird er jedoch einer Vielzahl von Exegeten nicht gerecht, die sich um ein für den Offenbarungscharakter der Bibel offenes Verfahren bemühen.—Nun läßt sich historische Forschung nicht im Vorhinein auf bestimmte Ergebnisse festlegen, etwa auf solche, die konkrete Aussagen der Schrift bestätigen. Das sieht auch Maier und findet die Lösung mit J. A. Bengel darin, „lieber der weltlichen Historie Gewalt tun“ zu wollen als die „Prävalenz der Schrift“ (S. 184) preiszugeben. Damit ergibt sich freilich die Gefahr, daß historische Probleme unter Hinweis auf die Prävalenz der Schrift überspielt werden, ohne zuvor geklärt zu haben, daß besagte Prävalenz primär nicht historischer, sondern theologischer Natur ist. Sinnvoll wäre hier, zunächst historische Erkenntnis und biblisches Zeugnis in ihrer jeweiligen Wahrheitsintention genau zu unterscheiden. Solche Unterscheidung könnte verhindern einerseits, daß der methodische Zweifel historischer Wissenschaft unter der Hand zum Glaubenszweifel an der Offenbarung wird (vgl. S. 246f.) und andererseits, daß aus der theologischen Verlässlichkeit der Schrift ohne weiteres im Sinne eines Fundamentalismus auf ihre historische Verlässlichkeit geschlossen wird (letzteres ist eine in Maiers Bibel-Kommentaren deutliche Tendenz). Maiers Frage nach der „göttlichen Zwecksetzung“ der Bibel (S. 125) könnte in diesem Zusammenhang immerhin die Richtung weisen.

Unbeschadet solcher grundsätzlichen Fragen ist Maiers „Biblische Hermeneutik“ ein wichtiger Beitrag aus den Reihen des württembergischen Pietismus zur Frage des Schriftverständnisses und der Schriftauslegung. Sie bewegt sich auf

den Bahnen des von Bengel gewiesenen Biblizismus zwischen Reformation und wissenschaftlichem Fundamentalismus (vgl. Chicagoer Erklärung von 1978). Schade freilich, daß Maier auf die Herausforderungen, die gegenwärtig von der befreiungstheologischen, feministischen, tiefenpsychologischen . . . Bibelauslegung ausgehen, nicht weiter eingeht.

Karl-Heinz Schlaudraff

EuroJTh (1993) 2:2, 184–187

0960–2720

### ***Bestechung. Eine theologisch-ethische Untersuchung***

**Paul Kleiner**

(Europäische Hochschulschriften XXIII/459)  
Bern u.a. (Peter Lang) 1992, 272 Seiten,  
broschiert, SFr 45.-/DM 49.-

#### **SUMMARY**

*In this seminal study, accessible to theologians and non-theologians alike, the author discusses the question of bribery and corruption. It is written in three parts. The first deals with contemporary practices at social, economic, political and legal levels. In the second part, the fruit of biblical exegesis is deployed to generate ethical criteria apt for these issues. In the final part, concrete proposals are offered in various spheres, thus bringing the first two parts together. The author's 'realism', when it comes to these, occasionally tempers any absolute opposition to corruptive bribery and this is theologically controversial. The discussion illustrates the difficulty of moving from biblical precepts to contemporary ethical prescriptions. And yet, this is a most readable, conscientious and important treatment which must certainly stimulate further reflection on its themes.*

**As a translation of this review is available in French, we have included this translation rather than a summary.**

Cette dissertation présentée à Zurich est un travail théologique de pionnier sur un thème important du domaine économique et social contemporain, particulièrement dans les pays du tiers-monde. L'auteur examine divers aspects de la vénalité dans d'autres disciplines économiques, commente les textes bibliques qui portent sur la question et aboutit à un jugement différentiel du phénomène en distinguant trois niveaux d'application. L'ouvrage est accessible aussi à ceux qui ne sont pas des théologiens et peut



être recommandé surtout aux responsables qui ont des décisions à prendre sur les plans économique et politique.

Il s'agit d'une thèse présentée à la Faculté de Théologie de l'Université de Zurich. L'auteur, à la suite de ses études à la Faculté Évangélique de Bâle et à l'Université de Zurich, a reçu la consécration pastorale dans l'Eglise Réformée. Il a été collaborateur à temps partiel des Groupes Bibliques Universitaires (branche suisse). A l'heure actuelle il est professeur de théologie en Angola. Le sujet de la thèse qui est d'une brûlante actualité dans les pays en voie de développement tient compte des expériences personnelles de l'auteur sur le champ missionnaire.

L'auteur commence par préciser ce qu'il faut entendre sous le vocable 'vénalité', lequel implique une atteinte à la confiance et une injustice.

Dans la première partie de l'ouvrage (la vénalité aujourd'hui), des manifestations de cette tendance sont rassemblées, et cela dans divers domaines: société, économie, justice, politique. L'auteur distingue entre la vénalité proprement dite et les phénomènes parallèles (pots de vin, trafic d'influence, associations de 'petits amis'). Ce qui caractérise la vénalité, c'est l'emploi secret de moyens détournés pour obtenir, d'une manière qui ne se justifie pas, des avantages qui, au fond, ne peuvent pas être acquis à prix d'argent. Puis l'auteur examine les moyens légaux mis en oeuvre pour obvier à ces abus.

La deuxième partie est intitulée vénalité dans la théologie et la philosophie. L'état de la recherche contemporaine sur le sujet est examiné, aussi sur les plans interconfessionnel et international; on constate une carence très nette. Une recherche fondamentale s'impose, basée sur les affirmations bibliques relatives au problème. Dans l'Ancien Testament nous trouvons la notion de *chôhad* (comp. Ex. 23.8; Dt. 16.19; 1 Sam. 8.3; etc.) qui exprime bien l'idée. Ceux qui siègent à un tribunal sont invités à rendre leur jugement sans se laisser corrompre par des présents, parce que Dieu lui-même est impartial (Dt. 10.17). Dans le Nouveau Testament nous ne trouvons pas de terme spécifique, mais le problème est abordé par divers exemples comme Mt. 28.11-14; Lc. 19.1-10; Actes 8.18-24; 24.25-26. Le résultat exégétique est utilisé par l'auteur pour déterminer des critères éthiques: justice, confiance et vérité.

La troisième partie de l'ouvrage est la plus intéressante (la vénalité dans une perspective théologique et éthique). Il s'agit là de suggestions concrètes faites par l'auteur pour résoudre le problème. Bien que ce soient toujours des hommes qui essaient de recourir à la corruption, il lui semble opportun de distinguer trois niveaux. Le niveau supérieur concerne les responsables des systèmes politiques et sociaux et qui sont mandatés pour cette fonction. Dans leur cas, la vénalité doit être catégoriquement

rejetée. Les mesures à prendre pour combattre les abus à ce niveau sont le respect d'un comportement éthique, avant tout dans la famille, une législation claire et la lutte contre la concurrence sauvage et contre les entraves illégitimes à la concurrence.

Le niveau moyen concerne les entreprises, y compris les sociétés missionnaires et les organismes d'encouragement au développement. Le verdict est plus nuancé. De telles entreprises doivent, dans la mesure de leurs possibilités, collaborer à l'abolition de la vénalité. Mais dans la pratique, l'auteur concède qu'une entreprise puisse exceptionnellement avoir recours à faire des présents, si cela apparaît comme un moindre mal que l'impossibilité d'intervenir.

Le troisième paragraphe s'occupe du niveau inférieur, celui des individus, à la condition que ce ne soient pas les représentants officiels de firmes ou de complexes économico-politiques. Ce qui est condamnable dans la vénalité, c'est qu'elle porte atteinte à la confiance. L'auteur pense que, dans un cas limité, il est légitime de recourir à des pratiques vénales lorsqu'il s'agit de se procurer des produits de première nécessité ou de soins médicaux. Il ajoute qu'on peut (d'une manière analogue à l'option de non-résistance) s'engager résolument dans un refus de toute corruption, même lorsque celle-ci apparaît comme éthiquement justifiable. Une telle attitude ne peut être maintenue que dans l'attachement à Jésus-Christ et dans le désir de le suivre.

Quoique la norme éthique à laquelle nous devons tendre soit une absence totale de corruption, Paul Kleiner pense que, dans la réalité pratique, il peut se produire des cas d'espèce qui doivent être envisagés isolément et qui pourraient légitimer, au point de vue théologique, le recours à des présents. Il va sans dire qu'une telle conclusion ne sera pas acceptée par tous dans les milieux chrétiens. Personnellement je me suis senti parfois mal à l'aise en lisant ces pages. Certaines conclusions isolées sont contestables. De plus, la vieille difficulté apparaît: comment tirer des critères éthiques à partir des déclarations bibliques et quels sont les destinataires d'une éthique chrétienne?

L'ouvrage se situe dans la tradition des Églises de multitude, mais les principes des Églises de professants sont aussi pris en considération. Le livre encourage le lecteur à prolonger la réflexion, et aussi, nous l'espérons, à prendre des décisions responsables dans le domaine de l'éthique.

La thèse est bien accessible, même pour des non-théologiens. La clarté de l'exposé et les résumés insérés ici et là y contribuent. On souhaiterait qu'elle soit méditée par ceux qui ont des décisions à prendre au plan de l'économie, de la politique et de la société, et qui désirent exercer leur profession dans une perspective chrétienne conséquente. Il s'agit d'une contribution importante à un débat



hélas! toujours plus tranché. Nous remercions l'auteur pour ce travail.

Bei der vorliegenden Studie handelt es sich um eine von der Theologischen Fakultät der Universität Zürich angenommene Dissertation. Ihr Verfasser hat nach Studium (FETA Basel, Uni Zürich) und Ordination zum evange.-ref. Pfarrer als teilzeitlicher Mitarbeiter der Vereinigten Bibelgruppen (schweizerischer Zweig der IFES) Theologiestudierende beraten und ist gegenwärtig als theologischer Lehrer in Angola (Afrika) tätig. Das Thema von Kleiners Studie, das besonders in Entwicklungsländern von hoher Aktualität ist, hat biographische Wurzeln. Der Verfasser hatte eigene Kontakte zu Missionsfeldern und Entwicklungsländern.

Das Buch beginnt mit einer Bestimmung des Phänomens 'Bestechung' und der damit verbundenen Problematik, die in die Stichworte 'Vertrauensbruch' und 'Ungerechtigkeit' gefasst wird.

Im ersten Hauptteil ('Bestechung heute') werden Aspekte dieser Handlung aus der Sichtweise verschiedener Lebens- und Wissenschaftsbereiche (Gesellschaft, Wirtschaft, Rechtswesen, Politik) zusammengetragen. Anschliessend wird das, was Bestechung ist, in Abgrenzungen gegenüber verwandten Phänomenen (Werbegeschenk, Schmieren, Vetterliwirtschaft) auf den Punkt gebracht: Charakteristisch für die Bestechung ist der heimliche Einsatz von Mitteln zur unrechtmässigen Erlangung von etwas eigentlich Unkäuflichem. Daraufhin werden die Regelmechanismen (Gesetze etc.) angeschaut, mit denen man versucht, dieser Verhaltensweise Herr zu werden.

Der zweite Hauptabschnitt lautet: 'Bestechung in Theologie und Philosophie'. Der gegenwärtige Forschungsstand der Thematik wird geortet und dieser ist in der Theologie—auch interkonfessionell und international gesehen—ausgesprochen dürftig. Das erfordert ethische Grundlagenforschung, d.h. Sichtung biblischer Aussagen auf diese Fragestellung hin. Im Alten Testament findet sich namentlich im hebräischen *šohād* (vgl. Ex 23,8; Dtn 16, 19; 1 Sam 8,3 u.a.) eine begriffliche Bezeichnung des Sachverhaltes. Richterliche Verantwortungsträger werden aufgefordert, ihre Urteile unbestechlich zu sprechen, denn Gott ist selbst unbestechlich (Dtn 10,17). Im Neuen Testament fehlt ein entsprechend signifikanter Begriff, nicht aber die Sache selbst. Beispiele finden sich etwa in Mt 28, 11–14; Lk 19, 1–10; Act 8, 18–24; 24, 26f. Der exegetische Ertrag wird nun von Kleiner in die ethischen Beurteilungskriterien: Gerechtigkeit, Vertrauen und Wahrheit umgemünzt.

Am interessantesten ist der dritte Hauptteil des Buches ('Bestechung in theologisch-ethischer Perspektive'), geht es hier doch um konkrete, von Kleiner vorgeschlagene Handlungsweisen. Obwohl es immer Menschen sind, die bestechen, scheint es ihm doch ratsam, drei Ebenen von Handlungsträgern zu unterscheiden: Auf der 'Makroebene' der politischen und gesellschaftlichen Systeme sind Verantwortungsträger angesprochen, die in Auftrag und Funktion dieser Systeme handeln. Auf dieser Ebene ist Bestechung kategorisch abzulehnen. Als Massnahmen gegen solche Verhaltensmuster werden die Kultivierung ethischen Verhalten (v.a in der Familie), eine klare Gesetzgebung und der Kampf gegen unlauteren Wettbewerb und Wettbewerbsbeschränkungen vorgeschlagen. Die mittlere Handlungsebene ('Mesoebene') hat Unternehmen (inkl. Missionsgesellschaften und Entwicklungshilfeorganisationen) im Visier. Das Urteil fällt hier zurückhaltender aus. Unternehmen sollen nach ihren Möglichkeiten an der Überwindung von Korruption mitarbeiten, in der Unternehmenspraxis wird aber Bestechung nach einer Güterabwägung als Ausnahme zugestanden. 'Bestechung wäre dann also erlaubt, wenn der negative Einfluss auf die Makroebene für das kleinere Übel gehalten wird als der Konkurs des Unternehmens.' (224).

Im letzten Abschnitt ist die 'Mikroebene' im Blickfeld, das Handeln von Einzelpersonen, insofern sie nicht als Funktionsträger von Firmen oder politischen ökonomischen Systemen auftreten. Das Verwerfliche der Bestechung erweist sich insbesondere im Vertrauensbruch. Der Verfasser hält die Bestechung im Sinne eines Kompromisses bei einem echten Konflikt bzw. als Grenzfall aufgrund eines eindeutigen und hohen Nutzens (z.B. die Beschaffung elementarer Lebensnotwendigkeiten wie Nahrung oder medizinische Versorgung) für legitim. Allerdings kann auch (in Analogie zur Gewaltlosigkeit) der Weg der Bestechungslosigkeit beschritten werden, d.h. der bewusste Verzicht auf eine ethisch gerechtfertigte Bestechung. Getragen werden kann solch ein Entscheid durch die Zugehörigkeit zu Christi, in einem Leben der Nachfolge im Raum christlicher Gemeinschaft.

Obwohl ethische Norm, auf deren Realisierung es hinzuarbeiten gilt, eine bestechungslose Handlungsweise ist, sieht Paul Kleiner doch in der konkreten Wirklichkeit die Möglichkeit ernster Interessenskonflikte, die von Fall zu Fall eine Bestechungshandlung als theologisch legitim ausweisen können. Dass eine solche Annahme in christlichen Kreisen, Widerspruch provozieren kann, sei hier nicht verschwiegen. Auch mir selber sind beim Lesen Fragen auf-



getaucht. Abgesehen von einzelnen Schlussfolgerungen entzündeten sich diese an altbekannten Grundsatzfragen wie der Umsetzung biblischer Aussagen zu ethischen Kriterien oder derjenigen nach den Adressaten einer christlichen Ethik. Die Arbeit steht im Traditionshorizont einer 'volkskirchlichen Ethik', der Weg einer Minderheitenethik (Nachfolge-Ethik) findet aber auch Erwähnung. Das Buch regt auf jedem Fall zum Nach- und Weiterdenken und—hoffentlich auch—zu ethisch verantwortlichem Handeln an. Die Dissertation ist auch für interessierte Nicht-Theologen recht gut zu lesen. Dazu hilft die

übersichtliche Stoffdarbietung und die immer wieder eingestreuten Zusammenfassungen. Als Leserpublikum wünscht man sich auch (angehende) Entscheidungsträger in Wirtschaft, Politik und Gesellschaft, die ihren Beruf in christlich verantwortbarer Perspektive ausüben wollen. Das Buch ist ein wichtiger Beitrag zu einem leider zunehmend brisanter werdenden Thema. Dem Autor sei dafür gedankt.

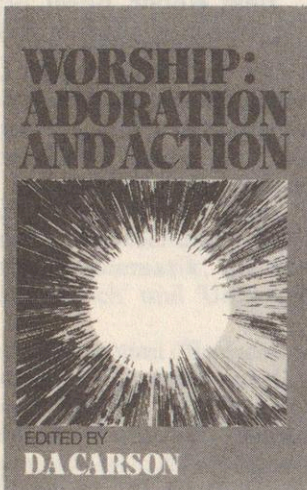
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D'autre part, nous aimerions aussi recevoir de nos lecteurs des renseignements sur des ouvrages qui devraient être considérés pour la revue des livres dans cette publication.

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