VIATORUM

Contents

Book Review

Editorial

Notes from the Coasts of Bohemia or Why We Are Yoked Together with Unbelievers Anyway

Political concerns dominate our lives more than desired. News reports highlight the unravelling of the existing world order. Nearly eighty years of unprecedented peace and widespread prosperity across much of the European continent are now threatened. Suddenly, we question its longevity, as relations between America and Europe have strained considerably, and Europeans face a resurgent Russia. Consequently, rapid rearmament will likely come at the expense of healthcare, construction, and education.

In this context Paul's words "Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor 6:14) receive new appeal. Sure, they would always have a whiff of sectarianism. Qumran and, in the Czech context, Kunvald, places where a small group of believers withdrew from this sinful world (in the former case, it was a Jewish group from the 2nd century BCE known from the Dead Sea Scrolls, in the latter a Czech group that became the Unity of the Brethren in 15th century CE[1]), have always been viewed as a problematic temptation, a deviation from mainstream church involvement.

J. L. Hromádka, who, along with J. B. Souček, founded this journal in 1958, emphasized, after the Second World War, Christians' responsibility for the world, derived from God's love for it.[2] This was combined with his essentially Hegelian view of history as evolving according to its own laws, with socialism as its next inevitable phase. Therefore, he believed Christians should not stand in principled opposition to socialism, but rather engage with it constructively.

It was in the same vein that many of us considered 1989, with its collapse of the totalitarian socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, a gift from God

1 Ota Halama, "The Unity of Brethen (1458–1493)," in Miachal Van Dusen and Pavel Soukup (eds.), *A Companion to the Hussites* (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 371–402.

2 Josef L. Hromádka, *The Field is the World: Selected Writings from the years 1918–1968,* edited by Milan Opočenský and Paul Lehman (Prague: Christian Peace Conference, 1990).

granted to us in and for our lifetime. The involvement of Czech Protestants in building a democratic society in the 1990s far exceeded their proportional representation in the nation[3] We believed the democracy was ours, and that we were finally solely responsible for it, as the conditions in which we live can no longer be blamed on Austria-Hungary, the Nazis, or the Communists. These 35 years of life in a free society have brought the people of Central Europe unprecedented freedom and prosperity, the opportunity to travel, and to integrate into the family of European nations, strengthened by institutions such as the European Union and NATO. Also, we began to discern finer shades than just the dichotomy of dictatorship and democracy. We engaged in the debate between liberal democracy on one hand, and democracy anchored in traditional values on the other hand.

The seemingly idyllic landscape of Western democracy appeared to some to be the final phase of history, having nowhere to improve.[4] However, disruptive voices have always been impacting us, and increasingly so in recent times. The threat of human-caused global warming has become clear to broad public. The end of the last decade, with the COVID pandemic, brought a stark lesson in the fragility of global civilization. Waves of refugees remind us that wars and poverty continue to rage beyond Europe's borders. They also remind us that Western prosperity, built partly at the expense of the rest of the world, cannot be justly distributed without reducing our entitlements.

These crises fuel populist movements, characterized by a nationalistic and isolationist 'ostrich policy.' Furthermore, these crises are causing a disturbingly rapid shift towards unrestrained national egoism and a resurgence of classical imperialism among superpowers. This resurgence disregards post-World War norms of international law; instead, superpowers view the world through the lens of their 'legitimate interests,' which extend far beyond their official borders. Ironically, this fosters unexpected mutual sympathies between them. Rather than the much-criticized bipolar world, we may be heading towards an even more dangerous alliance of superpowers, one that simply divides the world into spheres of influence.

---

3 David Václavík, Dana Hamplová, and Zdeněk Nešpor, "Religious Situation in Contemporary Czech Society," *Central European Journal for Contemporary Religion* 2018/2, 99–122.

4 Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

Does all this corroborate the claim that "the whole world is in the power of the evil one" (1 John 5:19)? And is Paul correct that we should "not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor 6:14)? Before we subscribe to these quotations, we should remind ourselves that as Christians, we are followers of Jesus Christ. His title, which translates to "anointed one" or "appointed to a task", refers to a Davidic king. To confess Jesus as the promised, expected, and ultimately realized "anointed one", has therefore always been a political confession. Jesus certainly did not fulfil many of the expectations of his contemporaries, and proclaiming him as Christ always requires a significant measure of the Holy Spirit. Yet his mission pertained to the political conditions of his time. To Pilate's question, Jesus replied that his kingdom "is not of this world" (John 18:36). Although not *of* this world, it is destined *for* this world, encountering, clashing with, and transforming it.

It may well be that we have reached the end of an era. After all, why should the optimistic idea of linear progress and growth be true? Our situation is perhaps much more similar to that in which the Church Father Aurelius Augustine lived and worked. At the beginning of the 5th century, he witnessed the Visigoths sacking Rome, a civilization that formed Augustine's horizon. In response, he embarked on his major work, *The City of God*.[5] According to it, the community of Christ's followers lives in the midst of the *civitas terrena*, "a secular city" of this world until the second coming of Christ. The *civitas Dei* often clashes with this world because it neither flees from it nor fully conforms to it. With this work, Augustine formulated a programme that inspired Western Christians for many centuries in their engagement with the world: they do not flee from it, yet whilst remaining in it, they turn their backs on it as it were, because they are fascinated by the Kingdom of God, await its coming and attempt to live already now according to its rules. European civilization was built on the backs of those who did not flee from the dilemmas of their time, but sought God's face for their hope amidst them.

As the Czech philosopher Václav Bělohradský recently observed, in our media age, it is more true than ever that „whoever controls attention has power."[6] This simple rule may explain the rise of populism, which weakens

5 Aurelius Augustine, *The City of God* (Harmondsworth: Viking Press, 1972, translated by Henry Bettenson).

6 Václav Bělohradský, public lecture at the Václav Havel Library, March 18, 2025, https://havelchannel.cz/cs/2060 (accessed 27. 3. 2025).

democracy by promoting leaders based on their ability to attract crowds, often through theatrical displays, rather than on the merit of their policies. In the visual spectacle of public rallies, the biblical phrase "do not be yoked with unbelievers" takes on a new meaning. It suggests we should consciously limit our attention to the trumped-up performances of politicians. By withholding the attention they crave, we diminish their power. This is not an act of escapism or isolation, but a practical strategy for strengthening our resilience and, ultimately, safeguarding democratic values for future generations.

March 2025

Petr Sláma
Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University
Černá 9, 110 00 Prague 1, Czech Republic
slama@etf.cuni.cz

DOI: 10.14712/30296374.2025.1

COMMUNIO VIATORUM LXVI (2024/3) 205–226

Theologie der Krise und Krise Gottes[1]

Ulrich H. J. Körtner

Abstract: Theology of Crisis and Crisis of God
The present time can be characterized as an era of multiple crises (polycrisis). This article outlines the basic features of a theology of crisis. In contrast to the conventional crisis rhetoric, a theology of crisis seeks a distinctly theological approach to experiences of crisis, following the path of Dialectical Theology with reference to the biblical concept of the crisis of God. This concept is grounded both in creation theology and in christology – articularly in the theology of incarnation and the theology of the cross. In light of the crisis of God, the idea of God's omnipotence must also be reinterpreted. Finally, as will be shown, a theology of crisis understood from an eschatological perspective is a theology of waiting.

Keywords: Polycrisis; theology of crisis; dialectical theology; crisis of God; omnipotence; theology of waiting.

DOI: 10.14712/30296374.2025.2

Krisenzeit

Krisen sind die Signatur der Gegenwart. Ob Coronakrise, Klimakrise oder Kirchenkrise – der Krisenbegriff und Krisenrhetorik bestimmen die aktuellen Diskurse, wie eine flüchtige Google-Recherche zeigt. Zu Klimakrise findet man rund 19,5 Milliarden Einträge. Verwandte Begriffe sind Umweltkrise (82.600 Ergebnisse) und ökologische Krise (705.000 Einträge). Der Klimawandel wird häufig gar nicht mehr als Krise, sondern bereits als Klimakatastrophe bezeichnet (968.000 Ergebnisse). 3,3 Millionen Mal taucht das Schlagwort „Coronakrise" auf. Die Pandemie gilt als globale Gesundheitskrise, die es auf zusätzliche 154.000 Einträge bringt. Für das Stichwort „Kirchenkrise" gibt es dagegen nur 29.100 Suchergebnisse, was ein Indiz dafür ist, dass dieses Thema außerhalb der Kirchen die Menschen weit weniger als in Kirchenkreisen

1 Vortrag beim Kurs für PredigerInnen der Evangelischen Kirche der Böhmischen Brüder, Pfarrer- und Pfarrerinnenverein der Evangelischen Kirche der Böhmischen Brüder, in Prag, Aula der Pädagogischen Fakultät der Karlsuniversität Prag, am 28. 1. 2025. Der Text basiert auf einem Kapitel aus: Ulrich H. J. Körtner, *Mapping the Fields. Wissenschaftsbiographische Einblicke* (Wien: Evangelischer Presseverband in Österreich, 2023), 129–158. Für die vorliegende Veröffentlichung wurde er leicht überarbeitet. Ich danke allen, die sich auf der Tagung an der Diskussion beteiligt haben. Einige der Wortmeldungen sind in den Schlussabschnitt der vorliegenden Druckfassung eingeflossen.

bewegt. 2008 wurde die Welt von einer globalen Banken- und Finanzkrise erschüttert, die – wenn man beide Schlagworte zusammenrechnet – mit mehr als 1,6 Millionen Einträgen im Internet ihre Spuren hinterlassen hat. Politische Krisen wie die Ukraine-Krise, die Krise der westlichen Demokratie oder ganz grundlegend die Globalisierung als Krise – auch das Schlagwort „Globalisierungskrise" gibt es – runden das Gesamtbild ab. So entsteht das Bild einer von Krisen erschütterten Epoche. Nicht nur, dass eine Krise die andere jagt, es bestehen auch zwischen ihnen Zusammenhänge und Wechselwirkungen. Des öfteren ist daher von einem Zeitalter der Polykrise die Rede.[2] Diese wird durch den fundamentalen Politikwechsel der USA seit dem im Januar 2025 erfolgten Amtsantritt von Präsident Donald Trump verschärft, weil dieser die bisherige Einheit des Westens und auch der NATO als Militärbündnis ernsthaft gefährdet. Innerhalb wie außerhalb der USA kämpft er für die von rechten Kreisen ersehnte „Disruption" – mit allen negativen Folgen für die Demokratie, den Klimaschutz, die internationale Sicherheitsarchitektur und ein regelbasiertes Völkerrecht.

Fester Bestandteil jeder Krisenrhetorik ist der Ruf zur Neuorientierung.[3] Sie hat Appellcharakter, sei es, dass zur Umkehr aufgerufen wird, um die endgültige Katastrophe noch im letzten Moment abzuwenden – es ist fünf vor zwölf! –, sei es, dass die Krise als Chance beschworen wird, frei nach Hölderlins Versen aus seinem Gedicht „Patmos": „Wo aber Gefahr ist, wächst / Das Rettende auch."[4]

Getreu dem Sprichwort: „Not lehrt beten" sollte man annehmen, dass Krisenzeiten Hochzeiten für Religion und Kirchen sind. Das aber ist augenscheinlich heute nicht der Fall, jedenfalls nicht in unseren Breitengraden. Nehmen wir zum Beispiel die Klimakrise. Die Kirchen engagieren sich seit Jahrzehnten für den Umweltschutz. Sie nennen es Bewahrung der Schöpfung. Der weltweite konziliare Prozess für Gerechtigkeit, Frieden und Bewahrung der Schöpfung erzielte in den 1980er-Jahren größere Aufmerksamkeit, ist

2 Siehe z. B. das Projekt „Im Zeitalter der Polykrise: Wie komplexe Krisen entstehen und wie wir ihnen begegnen können" an der Heidelberger Akademie der Wissenschaften. Informationen unter https://www.hadw-bw.de/junge-akademie/win-kolleg/komplexitaetsreduktion/polykrise (abgerufen 26. 2. 2025).

3 Siehe z. B. Kurt Staub and Gertrud Tanner, *Corona-, Klima- und Globalisierungskrise. Anlass genug für eine grundlegende Neuorientierung* (Zug: Schweizer Literaturgesellschaft, 2021).

4 Friedrich Hölderlin, „Patmos", in Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*, Bd. 2 (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1953), 172–180, hier 172.

aber längst kein gesellschaftlicher Motor mehr für Veränderungsprozesse. Nehmen wir als Beispiel die evangelischen Kirchen in Deutschland. Sie suchen neue Allianzen mit zivilgesellschaftlichen Akteuren und erhoffen sich davon auch unter jüngeren und kirchenfernen oder religiös indifferenten Menschen eine neue Attraktivität. Analog zur Bewegung „Fridays for Future" gibt es zum Beispiel in Österreich eine interreligiöse Initiative „Religions for Future"[5]. Aber das Beispiel zeigt, dass die Kirchen vom „Vortrupp des Lebens", wie sie einst Helmut Gollwitzer bezeichnet hat,[6] zur Nachschubtruppe geworden sind, die gelegentlich etwas gekränkt an die eigene Pionierrolle vor mehr als einer Generation erinnern.

Auch die Coronakrise hat den Kirchen keinen Auftrieb verliehen. Dass es in der Pandemie während der Lockdowns zu Neuaufbrüchen und eindrucksvollen Experimenten mit neuen Formaten von gottesdienstlichem Leben und Verkündigung gekommen ist – sagen wir es mit einem heute beliebten Schlagwort: neue Formen der Kommunikation des Evangeliums – soll nicht bestritten oder kleingeredet werden. Euphorische Visionen einer digitalen Kirche der Zukunft, gewissermaßen eines Christentums 2.0, dürften aber doch etwas übertrieben sein. Nüchtern betrachtet, hat sich die Reichweite kirchlicher Verkündigungsangebote wohl nicht dramatisch erhöht. Mag es anfangs vielleicht eine gewisse Erwartung in der Bevölkerung gegeben haben, von den Kirchen und ihren Repräsentanten Wegweisendes und Hilfreiches zur Corona-Pandemie zu hören, hat diese rasch nachgelassen. Teilweise fühlten sich Menschen von den Kirchen im Stich gelassen. Der verschiedentlich erhobene Vorwurf, Schwerkranke und Sterbende nicht begleitet zu haben, ist in seiner Pauschalität nicht gerechtfertigt. Darüber, ob die Kirchen immer mit dem nötigen Nachdruck für ihre Seelsorgerinnen und Seelsorger Zugang zu Krankenhäusern und Pflegeeinrichtungen verlangt haben, ob das Aussetzen von Gottesdienst immer gerechtfertigt war, gehen die Ansichten auseinander.

Die Corona-Pandemie ist Lehrstück und Trigger für die Säkularisierung und Privatisierung von Religion in westlichen Gesellschaften, vielleicht sogar global. Führende Kirchenvertreter sahen es als ihre Verantwortung, der Öffentlichkeit und den Glaubenden zu versichern, Gott habe mit dem Virus ganz gewiss nichts zu schaffen. Wenn aber Gott mit der Existenz und

5 Informationen unter https://fridaysforfuture.at/allianzen/religions-for-future (abgerufen 8. 1. 2025).

6 Vgl. Helmut Gollwitzer, *Vortrupp des Lebens* (München: Kaiser, 1975).

Ausbreitung von Viren nichts zu schaffen hat, wie lässt sich dann die naturwissenschaftlich beschriebene Natur überhaupt als Schöpfung deuten? Läuft die strikte Abwehr der Frage nach Gottes Wirken in der Natur nicht auf eine gnostische Weltdeutung hinaus, nach welcher der Gott der Liebe, der sich in Jesus von Nazareth offenbart hat, mit dem Schöpfer der raumzeitlichen Welt nichts gemein hat? Und besteht möglicherweise genau in dieser latent gnostischen Weltsicht der Grund dafür, dass Kirche und Theologie zumindest in der Anfangszeit der Corona-Pandemie so wenig zu sagen wussten?

Es ist nicht nur der massive Verlust an Glaubwürdigkeit, den die Kirchen im Umgang mit sexualisierter Gewalt erlitten haben, der das dramatische Anwachsen der Austrittszahlen befeuert. Vielmehr führt die Corona-Pandemie aufs Ganze gesehen das Ausmaß theologischer Auszehrung vor Augen, von denen die Kirchen schon lange befallen sind und die nicht bloß einzelnen kirchenleitenden Personen anzulasten ist. Nach Ansicht des Journalisten Matthias Kaman beruht der verbliebene gesellschaftliche Einfluss, den die Kirchen noch haben, „auf einer spezifischen Form des Schweigens“[7], nämlich des Schweigens über die dezidierten Glaubensgründe für konkrete ethische oder politische Optionen. Würden sie sich tatsächlich auf theologische Fragen im engeren Sinne konzentrieren, wäre ihnen ihre gesellschaftliche Bedeutung schon längst abhanden gekommen.

Die Auszehrung lässt sich auch auf dem Gebiet der Schöpfungslehre und Schöpfungsethik beobachten.[8] Nicht wenige Texte zur Schöpfungsverantwortung lesen sich so, dass allgemein anerkannte Forderungen nach praktischen Schritten zum Klimaschutz die man auch ohne religiöse Färbung für vernünftig halten oder mit Sachgründen auch in Zweifel ziehen kann, lediglich in einem leicht erhöhten Ton vorgetragen werden. Wen nimmt es unter diesen Umständen wunder, dass Gesellschaft und Politik auf der Suche nach Orientierung in Krisenzeiten von Kirche und Theologie nicht mehr sonderlich viel erwarten?

Offenbar ist eine Krisentheologie angesagt. Es gilt allerdings zu unterscheiden zwischen einer Theologie der Krise, die sich als Zeitdiagnostik versteht – also im Sinne des Zweiten Vatikanischen Konzils die „Zeichen

7 Matthias Kamann, „Kirche, Medien und Moral“, in: Claas Cordemann and Gundolf Holfert (eds.), *Moral ohne Bekenntnis? Zur Debatte um Kirche als zivilreligiöse Moralagentur* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2017), 53–63, hier 59.

8 Vgl. dazu Ulrich H. J. Körtner, *Vergängliche Schöpfung. Schöpfungsglaube und Gottvertrauen in der Klimakrise* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2024).

der Zeit“ (Gaudium et spes 4) theologisch zu deuten versucht[9] –, und einer Diagnose der Krise, in welcher sich die Theologie selbst in Anbetracht der gesellschaftlichen, kirchlichen und religiösen Umbrüche befindet. Dramatisch sinkende Kirchenmitgliederzahlen sind nur ein Indiz der Krise. Über allen kirchlichen Reformdiskussionen droht aus dem Blick zu geraten, dass es in der Gesellschaft eine verbreitete Gottesvergessenheit gibt, von der sogar die Kirchen selbst erfasst werden, mag in ihnen auch weiter von Gott die Rede sein.[10] Diese Diagnose unterstellt, dass auch in der Kirche ein „Klima des Schweigens von Gott“[11] herrscht, wo das Wort Gott nur noch als Chiffre für eine besondere Weise der Mitmenschlichkeit fungiert und die biblische Rede von Gott in Anthropologie aufgelöst wird. Es lässt sich ein theologischer Auszehrungsprozess beobachten, der nicht allein die Kirche betrifft, sondern auch die akademische Theologie und beide in ihrem Wechselverhältnis.

Die Frage, worin denn eine Theologie in der Krise und für die Krise – kurz eine Krisentheologie – bestehen kann, muss noch weiter vertieft werden. Es geht nicht allein darum, in apologetischer Manier dem Schema von Frage und Antwort zu folgen, also theologische Antworten auf die Krise oder die Krisen als Frage zu geben. Die theologische Aufgabe und Herausforderung besteht auch darin, die gängige Krisendiagnostik und Krisenrhetorik einer sorgfältigen Prüfung zu unterziehen. Was nottut, ist ein dezidiert theologischer Begriff der Krise, das heißt ein biblisch fundierter Begriff, der innerweltliche Krisenerfahrungen transzendiert und dort thematisch wird, wo von Gott, seiner Beziehung zu uns Menschen und zur Welt im Ganzen die Rede sein soll.

9 Vgl. Ulrich H. J. Körtner (ed.), *Gaudium et spes. Pastorale Konstitution über die Kirche in der Welt von heute des II. Vatikanischen Konzils*, GThCh 15 (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt GmbH, 2023), 174–178.

10 Vgl. Günter Thomas, „Gottesvergessenheit. Analyse eines Schlüsselbegriffs Wolf Krötkes“, ZThK 121 (2024), 480–506.

11 Wolf Krötke, „Wovon muss die Rede sein, wenn von Gott die Rede ist?“, in Gunda Schneider-Flume and Doris Hiller (eds.), *Dogmatik erzählen? Die Bedeutung des Erzählens für eine biblisch orientierte Dogmatik* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht GmbH & Co. KG, 2005), 131–143, hier 133.

Theologie in der Krise – Theologie der Krise

Im Zuge der Coronapandemie hat Albert Camus ein Comeback erlebt, genauer gesagt sein 1947 erschienener Roman „Die Pest“[12]. Auch in theologischen Kreisen – man kann geradezu von einer Corona-Theologie sprechen[13] – hat man Camus wieder neu und intensiv zu lesen begonnen, namentlich die Passage seines Romans, in welcher der agnostische Arzt Dr. Bernhard Rieux mit dem Jesuitenpater Paneloux in einen Disput gerät. Der Pater deutet die Pest als Geißel Gottes, als gerechte Strafe, um die Menschen zu züchtigen. Theologen und Theologinnen schlagen sich heute mehrheitlich auf die Seite des Agnostikers Rieux, um dann, im Unterschied zu Camus und seiner Philosophie des Absurden, zu einer christologisch begründeten Theologie des mitleidenden Gottes vorzustoßen, die unter anderem Anleihen beim späten Bonhoeffer nimmt.

Versuche dieser Art, auf die Coronakrise zu antworten, bleiben meines Erachtens theologisch unzureichend, sofern sie das in der Kreuzestheologie – jedenfalls in einer paulinischen Theologie des Kreuzes und ihrer reformatorischen Fortschreibung – enthaltene Gerichtsmotiv abschwächen oder gar ausblenden. Das Motiv des mitleidenden Gottes kann ein starker Trost im seelsorglichen Kontext sein. Wird es aber im Sinne einer Theologie des ohnmächtigen Gottes interpretiert, der die Stelle des in den christlichen Glaubensbekenntnissen als allmächtig titulierten Gottes einnimmt, haben wir es mit einer durchsichtigen theologischen Entlastungsstrategie zu tun, die Gott von der Anklage der Theodizee letztlich um den Preis seiner Nichtexistenz freisprechen möchte. Schon Ludwig Feuerbach erkannte scharfsinnig das Phänomen eines gläubigen Unglaubens, der seinen praktischen Atheismus in einem „blaue[n] Dunst von Religion“[14] verhüllt.

Bei aller Sympathie für Camus scheint es mir hilfreich, an eben jene Theologie der Krise zu erinnern, die nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg unter dem Namen

12 Vgl. Albert Camus, *Die Pest* (Neuausgabe Reinbek: Rowohlt Taschenbuch, 2021).

13 Eine umfassende erste Übersicht über theologische Literatur zur Corona-Pandemie (mit Fokus auf katholischen Autoren und Autorinnen) gibt Elmar Honemann, „Von Allmacht und Aphasie. Literaturbericht zu theologischen Reflexionen über Corona“, ThR 86 (2021), 453–542. Die Doppelausgabe ThR 86, 2021, H. 3 + 4 ist ein interdisziplinäres Themenheft zur Coronapandemie. Darin siehe u. a. Ulrich H. J. Körtner, „Vertrauen und Zuversicht in der Coronakrise. Eine Rede“, 338–354.

14 Ludwig Feuerbach, „Notwendigkeit einer Veränderung“ (1842/43), in Ludwig Feuerbach and Karl Löwith, *Kleine Schriften* (Frankfurt a. M., 1966), 220–235, hier 233.

der Dialektischen Theologie für einen theologischen Neuaufbruch sorgte. In einer von Umsturz und Krisen geprägten Zeit war es zunächst Karl Barth, der in seinem Römerbriefkommentar von 1919 und der zweiten Auflage von 1922, in einem ganz anderen, nämlich viel fundamentaleren Sinne von Krise sprach. Krisis im Sinne der neutestamentlichen Verwendung des Wortes bedeute vielmehr, dass der Mensch und die Welt von Gott radikal in Frage gestellt seien. Wo Gott dem sündigen Menschen begegnet, ereignet sich sein Gericht im Hier und Jetzt. Bekanntlich hat Barths Lebens- und Denkweg über die Anfänge der Dialektischen Theologie hinausgeführt. Dennoch lohnt sich die Frage, welche Potentiale Barths Theologie der Krise für die heutige Zeit bereithält.[15]

Der Begriff der Krise hatte in den zwanziger Jahren des vergangenen Jahrhunderts Konjunktur. Wie Dietrich Korsch gezeigt hat, besitzen die Krisenerfahrungen und -wahrnehmungen nach der russischen Oktoberrevolution 1917 und nach dem Ersten Weltkrieg, in denen sich „objektive Krisenlage und subjektives Krisenbewußtsein aufs intensivste miteinander verknüpft haben“[16], nicht nur historisch-zeitbedingten, sondern einen prinzipiellen Charakter. Die Kategorie der Krise und ihre Verarbeitung am Beginn des 20. Jahrhunderts kann darum auch „zum Zwecke eigener praktischer Zukunftsgestaltung gebraucht werden“[17]. Abseits einer oberflächlichen und inflationären Krisenrhetorik handelt es sich beim Begriff der Krise um einen geschichtsphilosophischen Begriff, der auch in sozialwissenschaftlicher Bedeutung gebraucht wird. Man kann sagen, die Krise ist insgesamt eine Signatur der Moderne, oder um mit Dietrich Korsch zu sprechen: „In der sozialökonomischen Erfassung und der theologischen Vertiefung des Krisen-Begriffs vollendet sich die Moderne.“[18] Die Moderne ist Krise in Permanenz. Der Krisenbegriff avanciert zu einem Totalitätsbegriff, in welchem Sozialtheorie, Theologie, Ökonomie und Religion miteinander verwoben sind, was sich heutzutage sehr gut an den Beispielen der Klimakrise wie auch der Corona-Pandemie zeigen lässt. Sie zeigt sich auch im „Abschied vom

15 Vgl. dazu Werner Thiede (ed.), *Karl Barths Theologie der Krise heute. Transfer-Versuche zum 50. Todestag* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2018).

16 Dietrich Korsch, *Dialektische Theologie nach Karl Barth* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1996), 24.

17 Ibid.

18 Korsch, *Dialektische Theologie* (s. Am. 16), 38.

Prinzipiellen“ (Odo Marquard),[19] d. h. in der unaufhebbaren Pluralisierung lebensbestimmender Welt- und Selbstdeutungen, mit der Folge, dass auch das Christentum und die Kirchen ihre gesellschaftliche Rolle als normative Letztinstanz einbüßen.

Statt sich gegen den Verlust an Systemrelevanz zu stemmen oder ihn kulturpessimistisch zu beklagen, sollten sich die Kirchen jedoch fragen, ob Systemrelevanz überhaupt zu ihrem Wesenskern gehört, wenn selbst Schlachthöfe mit menschenunwürdigen Arbeitsbedingungen in der Coronakrise behaupten konnten, systemrelevant zu sein. Vergessen wir nicht, dass der Begriff Karriere in der Bankenkrise 2008 machte, als es um die Rettung von Geldinstituten ging, die als „too big to fail“ galten. Systemrelevanz ist ein fragwürdiges Gütesiegel.

Nach biblischem Zeugnis ist es nicht die primäre Aufgabe der Kirche, bestehende gesellschaftliche Systeme zu stabilisieren. Schon gar nicht, wenn sie die Menschenrechte missachten, das Ungleichgewicht zwischen Arm und Reich verschärfen und die Ausbeutung von Mensch und Natur vorantreiben, wie der evangelische Theologe Frank Vogelsang zu bedenken gibt.[20]

Das Reich Gottes geht freilich weder in bestehenden noch zukünftigen Weltzuständen auf, sondern es transzendiert und durchbricht diese. Das systemkritische Potenzial der christlichen Hoffnung auf das Reich Gottes, um dessen Kommen Sonntag für Sonntag im Vaterunser gebetet wird, ist daher auch nicht auf wohlfeile Kapitalismuskritik und kirchliche Betroffenheitsrhetorik zu reduzieren.

Im Verlust an Systemrelevanz liegt für Kirche und Theologie die Chance, aus der babylonischen Gefangenschaft einer auf reine Diesseitigkeit reduzierten Moralanstalt befreit zu werden.[21] Der Glaube ist kein Muss. Er bleibt aber eine Option, wie auch Gott nicht notwendig, sondern – mit dem evangelischen Theologen Eberhard Jüngel gesprochen – mehr als notwendig ist und unseren Wirklichkeitssinn gerade dadurch schärft, dass er uns mit Möglichkeitssinn begabt.

---

19 Vgl. Odo Marquard, *Abschied vom Prinzipiellen. Philosophische Studien* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1981).

20 Frank Vogelsang, „Sind Kirchen systemrelevant?“, χ – Mitten unter uns (2020), https://frank-vogelsang.de/2020/05/22/sind-kirchen-systemrelevant/.

21 Vgl. auch die differenzierte Sicht von Günter Thomas, „Sind die Kirchen nicht systemrelevant?“, ideaSpectrum 22/2020 (2020), 16–17.

Um beim Stichwort „Theologie der Krise" bzw. „Theologie der Krisis" nicht ausschließlich an Barth zu denken, seien einige Sätze aus Rudolf Bultmanns Aufsatz über „Die liberale Theologie und die jüngste theologische Bewegung" aus dem Jahr 1924 zitiert, in dem der 1884 in Wiefelstede geborene und seit 1923 in Marburg lehrende Neutestamentler seinen Richtungswechsel zur dialektischen Theologie bekundete. *„Gott,"* so schreibt Bultmann, *„bedeutet die totale Aufhebung des Menschen, seine Verneinung, seine Infragestellung, das Gericht für den Menschen*. Ob Gott adäquat oder inadäquat erkannt ist, ob man in Anthropomorphismen von Gott redet oder nicht, ist ganz gleichgültig. Es handelt sich um nur die Frage: was *bedeutet* Gott für den Menschen? Und wo der Gedanke Gottes wirklich erfaßt ist, bedeutet er eben die radikale Infragestellung des Menschen."[22]

Der Begriff der Krisis taucht bei Bultmann in Verbindung mit der Sinnfrage auf.[23] Er vertritt die These, Pessimismus und Nihilismus hätten ihren Maßstab am menschlichen moralischen Urteil und seinem Glücksverlangen. Bultmanns These bewahrheitet sich meines Erachtens in der Corona-Pandemie ebenso wie in der Klimaschutzdebatte. Die Theodizee ist in der Moderne zur Anthropodizee mutiert. Sofern der Mensch oder die Menschheit als Kollektivsubjekt für das Schicksal des Planeten allein verantwortlich ist, findet eine umfassende Moralisierung aller Lebensbereiche, auch Gesellschaftsbereiche und auch der Sphäre des Politischen statt. Die grundlegende gesellschaftliche und politische Erschütterung, welche die Pandemie ausgelöst hat, sind der massive Kontrollverlust aller Systeme und die Herausforderung, ohne gesichertes Wissen bzw. im Wissen um das eigene Nichtwissen agieren und politische Entscheidungen unter der Voraussetzung bleibender Ungewissheit treffen zu müssen.

Die krisenhafte Begegnung mit dem biblisch bezeugten Gott, die je auf ihre Weise Barth und Bultmann beschrieben haben, kann hingegen als Gericht und zugleich als Gnade erfahren werden. Bultmann sieht im göttlichen Gericht die heilsame Möglichkeit, dass der Mensch von sich selbst frei wird. Soziologisch und sozialethisch können wir auch sagen, dass die moderne Gesellschaft vor ihrer selbstzerstörerischen Selbstüberlastung bewahrt wird.[24]

---

22 Rudolf Bultmann, „Die liberale Theologie und die jüngste theologische Bewegung", in Rudolf Bultmann, *Glauben und Verstehen*, Bd. I (Tübingen: Mohr, 1972), 1–25, hier 18f.

23 Ibid., 19.

24 Vgl. Korsch, *Dialektische Theologie* (s. Anm. 16), 40.

In einer übertribunalisierten Lebenswelt (Odo Marquard)[25] ist auch die traditionelle Erwartung des Jüngsten Gerichts keine apokalyptische Untergangsphantasie, sondern ein geradezu tröstlicher Gedanke, ist es doch kein anderer als der gekreuzigte und auferstandene Christus, der das Gericht hält. Genauer: in ihm hat Gott bereits sein gnädiges Urteil über uns Menschen gesprochen, das es im Glauben anzunehmen gilt. Von ihm und damit vom dreieinigen Gott, der in Jesus Christus Mensch geworden ist, statt von Menschen gerichtet zu werden, ist Gnade. Wer an Christus glaubt, wird nicht gerichtet, sondern ist schon hier und jetzt vom Tod zum Leben hindurchgedrungen (vgl. Joh 5,24; 3,18).

Gottes Krise

Krisenhafte Züge der modernen Theologie rühren nicht nur von der Krise als Signatur der Moderne her. Sie lassen sich auch nicht allein auf den Begriff der Gottesvergessenheit bringen, sondern haben einen noch tiefer liegenden Grund, den man als Krise Gottes bezeichnen muss. Der Begriff der Gotteskrise steht nicht etwa nur für eine Krise menschlicher Gottesvorstellungen oder menschlichen Denkens von Gott. Theologisch ist vielmehr von einer Krise zu sprechen, die in Gott selbst ihren Grund hat.

Inkarnations- und kreuzestheologisch betrachtet, ist das Kreuz Christi wohl das Gericht Gottes über den Menschen und die Welt und zugleich der Ort der von Gott gestifteten Versöhnung. In diesem Akt der Hingabe aus seiner grenzenlosen Liebe setzt sich freilich Gott selbst aufs Spiel. Er liefert sich seinen Feinden aus und erleidet selbst den Tod, auch wenn vom Tod Gottes nur auf trinitarische Weise gesprochen werden kann, weil anders von der Auferweckung des Gekreuzigten gar nicht mehr die Rede sein könnte, durch die erst der Tod Jesu als Heilsereignis begreifbar und wirksam wird.

Wenn Gott im Wort ist und durch das Wort zur Sprache und damit zu uns Menschen kommt, dann ist die in der modernen Gesellschaft zu beobachtende Krise christlicher Glaubenssprache zugleich eine Gotteskrise (Johann Baptist Metz).[26] Ohne selbstkritische Auseinandersetzung mit der innerkirchlichen Gotteskrise und dem Misslingen kirchlicher und theologischer Rede von Gott laufen alle Versuche, auf neue Weise von Gott zu reden, ins Leere.

25 Vgl. Marquard, *Abschied* (s. Anm. 19), 49.

26 Johann Baptist Metz, „Gotteskrise. Versuch zur ‚geistigen Situation' der Zeit", in Johann Baptist Metz, *Diagnosen zur Zeit* (Düsseldorf: Patmos, 1994), 76–92.

Zunächst aber gilt es, die Krise, um nicht zu sagen das Schweigen der Glaubenssprache, auf rechte Weise als Schweigen Gottes zu begreifen, das im 20. Jahrhundert auf vielfältige Weise beschrieben worden ist[27] und auch zur biblischen Erfahrungswelt gehört. Wiederholt fleht der Beter in den Psalmen, Gott möge nicht länger schweigen, sondern sein Schweigen brechen.[28] Im Jesajabuch bekennt Gott selbst, dass er lange Zeit geschwiegen und sich verborgen habe (Jes 42,14; 57,11). Die neuzeitliche Rede vom Schweigen Gottes bleibt freilich in mehrfacher Hinsicht mehrdeutig. Sie kann einerseits so verstanden werden, als sei Gott definitiv zum Schweigen gebracht worden, andererseits aus religiöser Perspektive aber auch so, dass Gott selbst sich in Schweigen hüllt, was wiederum ein höchst zweideutiges Faktum wäre. Es kann einerseits als Gericht, andererseits aber als abgründige Verborgenheit Gottes gedeutet werden.

Sprachlosigkeit und die Erfahrung des Schweigens Gottes sind variantenreich als Folge der neuzeitlichen Krise metaphysischen Denkens erklärt worden. Die Möglichkeit, dass Gott sein Schweigen bricht, kann aber doch nicht abhängig von der Entwicklung metaphysischen Denkens sein, wenn denn der Gott, den die Bibel bezeugt, tatsächlich gestern, heute und derselbe auch in Ewigkeit ist. Walter Mostert räumt zwar ein, man könne – wie bei Heidegger der Fall – die Verborgenheit des Göttlichen als ein Seinsgeschick darstellen, in dem nichts anderes mehr zu erwarten ist als die Selbsterschließung des Göttlichen in einem Akt neuer Offenbarung. „Aber es gibt, wie gerade die Religion zeigt, Zwischenstufen. Denn im religiösen Akt ist jedes einzelne Individuum in die Ausübung religiöser Funktionen einbezogen."[29] Gegen Erklärungen der Verborgenheit, Abwesenheit oder des Schweigens Gottes als eines epochalen Phänomens wendet Mostert ein: „Es erscheint in quantitativer Hinsicht unbedeutend oder gar als Reduktion, ist aber in qualitativer Hinsicht ein Schritt ins Freie, wenn man sieht, daß die Gründe für die Notwendigkeit heilschaffender religiöser Betätigung letztlich nur im jeweiligen Individuum selbst distinkt werden können. Das Aufspüren der Gründe für die Verborgenheit des Göttlichen in geschichtlichen, sozialen,

27 Theologisch ausdrücklich bei Helmut Thielicke, *Das Schweigen Gottes. Fragen von heute an das Evangelium*, Stundenbuch 8 (Hamburg: Furche, 1962), 67–84. Es handelt sich um eine Auslegung von Mt 15,21–28. Siehe vor allem V. 23!

28 Vgl. Ps 28,1; 35,22; 39,13; 64,11; 83,2; 109,1.

29 Walter Mostert, „Glaube – der christliche Begriff für Religion", in Walter Mostert, *Glaube und Hermeneutik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1998), 186–199, hier 197.

metaphysischen Bedingungen verliert sich daher in der Uneigentlichkeit des rein Vorgestellten. Sie werden aber distinkt, wenn das Individuum lernt, sich zur Begründung der Verborgenheit Gottes nicht in die Nacht des Allgemeinen zurückzuziehen, sondern sie als seine persönliche Hybris zu beschreiben."[30]

Eben dazu leitet die Passionsgeschichte Jesu Christi an, wie sie in den neutestamentlichen Evangelien geschildert wird. Von ihr aus kann die Rede vom Schweigen Gottes als theologisch sinnvoll und sogar notwendig erschlossen werden, freilich so, dass wir uns nicht – z. B. auf Heideggerschen Spuren – in die Nacht des Allgemeinen zurückziehen, sondern gerade bei unserer persönlichen Hybris behaftet werden.

Es gibt ein Schweigen Gottes, das Resultat menschlicher Schuld ist. Gott schweigt, weil er von den Menschen zum Schweigen gebracht wird. Gerade wenn Jesus von Nazareth im Neuen Testament als Gottes Wort in Person bekannt wird, muss in diesem Sinne auch von einem Schweigen Gottes die Rede sein. Indem dieser Jesus zum Schweigen gebracht wird, wird auch der sich mit ihm ganz identifizierende Gott zum Schweigen gebracht. Es fällt auf, dass Gott selbst fast nirgends in den Evangelien spricht, höchstens in Gestalt eines Engels im Rahmen der Geschichten von der Geburt Jesu und ihrer Ankündigung. Lediglich an zwei Stellen, die allerdings für das Verständnis Jesu ganz wesentlich sind, wird berichtet, man habe Gott direkt sprechen hören, nämlich bei der Taufe Jesu und bei seiner Verklärung. Nachdem Johannes der Täufer die Taufe vollzogen hat, öffnet sich der Himmel, und während Jesus – aber nur er! – den Heiligen Geist wie eine Taube auf sich herabkommen sieht, ist eine Stimme zu hören, die Stimme Gottes. Während nach Markus und Lukas nur Jesus selbst diese Stimme hört, ist sie nach der Darstellung des Matthäus auch von den Umstehenden zu vernehmen. Sie spricht: „Du bist" bzw. „dies ist mein geliebter Sohn, an dem ich Wohlgefallen habe". Jesus wird bei seiner Taufe also öffentlich zum Stellvertreter Gottes ausgerufen. Bei der Verklärung Jesu (Mk 9,7 par.) wird dies nochmals bekräftigt. Wer Gott sprechen hören will, soll auf ihn hören.

Doch was Jesus zu sagen hat, ist nicht unbedingt das, was die Menschen von Gott erwarten. Er kündigt den Anbruch der Gottesherrschaft an, die mit bestehenden Unrechtsverhältnissen, mit religiösen und sozialen Klassengegensätzen ein Ende machen wird. Er spricht auch jenen die Vergebung der Sünden bzw. die Liebe Gottes zu, die dafür scheinbar nicht die von der

30 Mostert, „Glaube" (s. Anm. 29), 197f.

Religion festgelegten Voraussetzungen erfüllen. Was den Sündern, den Ausgegrenzten und Hoffnungslosen die Stimme der Befreiung ist, bekämpfen die Mächtigen in Staat und Religion als Stimme des Aufruhrs und der Anarchie. Sie wollen diese Stimme zum Schweigen bringen, und zwar endgültig. Der Hohe Rat, damals das höchste religiöse und politische Gremium des Judentums, beschließt seinen Tod und liefert Jesus der Gerichtsbarkeit der römischen Besatzungsmacht aus.

Für ein evangeliumsgemäßes Verständnis des Schweigens Gottes kommt der markinischen Passionsgeschichte paradigmatische Bedeutung zu. Dabei ist nicht nur an Jesu Gottverlassenheit am Kreuz (Mk 15,34), sondern schon an die Szene vor Pilatus (Mk 15,1–5) zu denken. Pilatus konfrontiert Jesus mit der gegen ihn erhobenen Anklage. „Bist du," so fragt Pilatus, „der König der Juden?" Eine mehrdeutige Frage. Ist gemeint, dass Jesus sich als neuer politischer Anführer Israels versteht? Oder als Messias im religiösen Sinne, das heißt als Heilsbringer in der Endzeit? Sprechen also Pilatus und Jesus überhaupt von derselben Sache, wenn Jesus die ihm gestellte Frage beantwortet? Wie auch immer. Jesus antwortet: „Du sagst es." Und das wird bis zu seiner Sterbestunde nach Darstellung des Markus sein letztes Wort sein.

Von nun an schweigt er. Was er zu sagen hatte, hat er im Verlauf seiner öffentlichen Wirksamkeit gesagt. Dem gibt es nichts mehr hinzuzufügen. Die spätere christliche Gemeinde hat Jesu Schweigen im Sinne des Gottesknechtsliedes aus Jesaja 53 gedeutet. Dort lesen wir (V.7): „Er wurde misshandelt und beugte sich und tat seinen Mund nicht auf wie ein Lamm, das zur Schlachtbank geführt wird, und wie ein Schaf, das vor seinen Scherern verstummt." Erst in der Stunde seines Todes öffnet Jesus nochmals seinen Mund. Sterbend ruft er nach seinem Gott und klagt mit Worten aus Psalm 22: „Mein Gott, mein Gott, warum hast du mich verlassen?"[31] Zuletzt aber versagen die Worte. Jesus stößt einen lauten Schrei aus, bevor er stirbt. Der Rest ist Schweigen.

Die Evangelien muten uns den Gedanken zu, dass in der Person des Gekreuzigten Gott selbst zum Schweigen gebracht worden ist. Nicht weil er abwesend wäre, sondern im Gegenteil, weil er ganz gegenwärtig ist, verstummt Gott. Seine Macht ist die Macht der Liebe, die in Jesus von

31 Vgl. dazu ausführlich Ulrich H. J. Körtner, *Wie lange noch, wie lange? Über das Böse, Leid und Tod* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Theologie, 1999), 31–51.

Nazareth menschliche Gestalt angenommen hat. Es ist dies eine ohnmächtige Macht, nicht unwiderstehlich, sondern widerstehlich, verletzbar und zerbrechlich.

Wenn wir diesem Gedanken zu folgen versuchen, dann geht uns auf, dass Gottes Schweigen wie das Schweigen Jesu höchst beredt ist. Es ist und bleibt erfüllt von all den befreienden und umstürzenden Worten, die Jesus zuvor gesprochen hat, von all den Taten, die er im Namen Gottes begangen hat. Dieses Schweigen bleibt erfüllt vom Evangelium, das nun freilich allen zur Anklage wird, nicht nur denen, die Jesus nach dem Leben getrachtet haben, sondern auch seinen Jüngern, die ihn verraten und im Stich gelassen haben. In der Stunde seines Todes sind sie alle Täter, nicht Opfer, diejenigen, die ihm als seine Jünger gefolgt sind ebenso wie seine Gegner.

Jesu Schicksal ist freilich mit seinem Verstummen und Gottes Schweigen nicht endgültig besiegelt. Sondern es wird uns berichtet von seiner Auferstehung, und das heißt von der Auferstehung des göttlichen Wortes. Der Tod macht stumm. Doch mitten im Tod bricht Gottes schöpferisches Wort neu hervor. Es ruft den neu ins Leben, der dem Tod preisgegeben war, und verwandelt diejenigen, die von diesem Wort ergriffen werden, so dass sie von Liebe, von Vertrauen und Hoffnung erfüllt werden.

Das quälende Schweigen Gottes, welches über Golgatha lastet, wird durchbrochen, indem ausgerechnet einer der Henker neue Worte findet: „Wahrlich, dieser Mensch ist Gottes Sohn gewesen“ (Mk 15,39). Mit diesem Bekenntnis antwortet er jener Stimme, die bei der Taufe Jesu zu hören war: „Dies ist mein geliebter Sohn, an dem ich Wohlgefallen habe.“ Es gehört zu den Zumutungen der Christusbotschaft, dass sie eine Hoffnung nicht nur für die Opfer, sondern auch für die Täter verkündigt. Dass sich Gottes Gerechtigkeit gegen allen Augenschein durchsetzt, soll die Hoffnung nicht nur für die Opfer, sondern auch für die Täter sein – freilich nur um den Preis einer radikalen Verwandlung, auf dass die Täter nicht ein zweites Mal über ihre Opfer triumphieren.

Das ist keine billige Gnade, keine Generalamnestie, welche den Unterschied zwischen Täter und Opfer verwischt, sondern eine teure Gnade, die nur um den Preis schmerzvoller Umkehr und Erneuerung zu haben ist. Wir alle sollen verwandelt werden, jedoch so, dass der alte Mensch, der Gott in sich und in der Welt zum Schweigen bringt, indem er sich an seinem Mitmenschen vergreift und sich ständig nur selbst auf Kosten anderer behaupten will, stirbt und ein neuer Mensch ersteht.

Von Gott können wir nur sprechen, wenn er selbst auf neue Weise zur Sprache kommt. Dass dies auch heute geschehen kann, bleibt die Verheißung der biblischen Überlieferung, die uns zugemutet wird. Es gehört zu den Zumutungen des Neuen Testaments zu glauben, dass selbst die abgründigen Erfahrungen von Gottes Schweigen in der heutigen Welt durchdrungen sind vom befreienden Wort des Evangeliums, dass Gottes Schweigen, dessen Erfahrung überhaupt nicht zu leugnen ist, sein Reden nicht dementieren kann.[32] Dass seine Stimme neu gehört wird, richtend und rettend zugleich, dazu muss es zuvor uns die Sprache verschlagen, müssen unsere Worte verstummen, mit denen wir Gott zum Schweigen bringen und übertönen.[33]

Gotteskrise und Allmacht Gottes

Letztlich ist die Krise Gottes als Krise seiner Allmacht zu begreifen, die zu Ostern als Macht über den Tod gefeiert wird. Die Allmacht Gottes wird keineswegs nur von einem Standpunkt außerhalb des Glaubens durch die moderne Religionskritik bestritten. Sie scheint vielmehr angesichts der Erfahrung des Leidens und des Bösen durch Gott selbst in Frage gestellt zu sein. Es gehört zu den theologischen Herausforderungen der Gegenwart, wie von Gottes Wirken in der Welt, in der Geschichte und im Leben der einzelnen Menschen gesprochen werden kann. Diese Frage berührt den Schöpfungsglauben ebenso wie das Problem der Geschichtstheologie. Auch dies ist in der Coronakrise deutlich geworden. Im säkularen Zeitalter erscheinen Natur und Geschichte als Kausalzusammenhänge, deren wissenschaftliche Erklärung ohne Gott als Arbeitshypothese auskommt. Gott ist weder als Letztursache noch als Einzelursache vonnöten. Wenn von Gott und seiner Beziehung zur Welt gesprochen werden soll, kommt es offenbar grundsätzlich nicht mehr in Betracht, diese Beziehung in einem Kausalschema zu denken. Wie aber kann dann noch der biblische Gott gedacht und wie von ihm geredet werden, der im Alten und im Neuen Testament stets als lebendiger und handelnder vorgestellt wird? Der lebendige Gott ist jedenfalls kein abstraktes Prinzip, sondern er handelt an und in der Welt als Schöpfer, Erlöser und Versöhner.

32 Vgl. Michael Trowitzsch, *Technokratie und Geist der Zeit. Beiträge zu einer theologischen Kritik* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 1988), 81f.

33 Vgl. auch Ulrich H. J. Körtner, *Der inspirierte Leser. Zentrale Aspekte biblischer Hermeneutik* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1994), 18–43, bes. 38ff.

Das inkarnations- und kreuzestheologische Motiv der Krise Gottes ist, bei Lichte gesehen, schon der Schöpfungslehre eingeschrieben. Die mythische Erzählung von der Sintflut hat ihr Wahrheitsmoment darin, dass die vorfindliche Welt nicht mehr die ursprüngliche, von Sünde und Entfremdung freie Schöpfung ist, die aber trotz allem von Gott weiter geliebt ist und erhalten wird. Gott stiftet einen Bund mit Noah und seinen Nachkommen wie mit der gesamten Schöpfung (Gen 9,8–17). Er schließt ihn nicht etwa mit Noah als Vertragspartner, sondern errichtet ihn ganz einseitig und ohne jede Gegenleistung.[34] Mit dem Versprechen, die Erde nicht noch einmal vernichten zu wollen, sondern sie zu erhalten, lässt sich Gott auf den sündigen Menschen ein. Das aber bedeutet, „daß Gott die menschliche Entfremdung und Schuld leidet, daß er, Gott, eben diese menschliche Schuld zur Voraussetzung seines Handelns macht"[35]. Der Marburger Systematiker Carl Heinz Ratschow gebraucht zur Beschreibung dieses Sachverhalts den Begriff der Wandungen, der sich schon bei Ernst Troeltsch, Friedrich Gogarten, Ernst Barlach und Rudolf Bultmann findet.[36] Ratschow verwendet ihn, um von der Kondeszendenz Gottes zu sprechen, die gemäß dem Philipperhymnus (Phil 2,5–11) in der Niedrigkeit Christi ihren äußersten Punkt findet. Unter dem Vorzeichen der Sünde, d. h. der Entfremdung von Gott, ist aber die prozesshafte Schöpfung in ihrem Bestand und Fortgang als permanente Krise zu verstehen. Indem Gott sich zur Erhaltung der Schöpfung (*conservatio mundi*) und ihrem dynamischen Fortgang (*creatio continua*) bestimmt, wird die Schöpfung zu Gottes eigener Krise. Erst in dieser Zuspitzung lässt sich erfassen, was es bedeutet, dass in evolutionärer Sicht Gottes ursprüngliches Schaffen und sein fortgesetztes Schöpfungshandeln eine Einheit bilden. Auf diese Weise wird nun aber auch der trinitätstheologische Gedanke der Schöpfungsmittlerschaft Christi kreuzestheologisch erschlossen, nämlich so, dass im Kreuzestod Christi die Krise der Schöpfung und mit ihr die Krise Gottes ihren äußersten Kulminationspunkt erreicht.

Soll in Anbetracht der Krise Gottes weiter von ihm die Rede sein, ohne alle Theologie in Anthropologie und Ethik aufzulösen, wird dies – so meine These – allerdings nur möglich sein, wenn an der Rede von der Allmacht Gottes

34 Vgl. Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11*, BK I/1 (Neukirchen-Vluyn, 1976), 630f.

35 Carl Heinz Ratschow, „Von den Wandlungen Gottes", in Carl Heinz Ratschow and Christel Keller-Wentorf (eds.), *Von der Wandlungen Gottes. Beträge zur Systematische Theologie* (Berlin – New York: De Gruyter, 1986), 117–139, hier 130.

36 Vgl. Ratschow, *Wandlungen Gottes* (s. Anm. 35), 128.

festgehalten wird.[37] Mit ihr steht und fällt alle christliche Rede von Gott, wie ein Blick auf die altkirchlichen Glaubensbekenntnisse zeigt. Nicht nur fällt auf, dass sowohl das Apostolikum als auch das Nicäno-Konstantinopolitanum ausdrücklich von Gottes Allmacht sprechen (*Deus, pater omnipotens*, griech. *Pantokrátor*), sondern, dass seine Allmacht überhaupt die einzige Eigenschaft ist, die Gott in beiden Glaubensbekenntnissen zugesprochen wird. „Sie bringt also nicht nur *eine* Eigenschaft unter anderen zum Ausdruck, sondern stellt heraus, was Gott in Wahrheit ist, wer er *als Gott* ist."[38] Oder um es mit den Worten Rudolf Bultmanns zu sagen: Wo „überhaupt der Gedanke ‚Gott' gedacht ist, besagt er, daß Gott der Allmächtige, d. h. die Alles bestimmende Wirklichkeit sei"[39].

Schmal ist der Grat zwischen Bonhoeffers wirkmächtiger kreuzestheologischen und paradoxen Rede von dem Gott, der uns zu verstehen gibt, dass wir in der Welt leben müssen, als ob es ihn nicht gäbe,[40] und jenem praktischen Atheismus, von dem Ludwig Feuerbach gesprochen hat. Für die Wiedergewinnung christlicher Rede von Gott in unserer Zeit kommt es entscheidend darauf an, diesen Unterschied ins Auge zu fassen. Die biblische Tradition mutet uns zu, den der Moderne entschwundenen Gott als verborgenen, das heißt, allem Augenschein zum Trotz gegenwärtigen zu denken, – vor allem aber: zu glauben. Seine Verborgenheit steht nicht im Gegensatz zu seiner Offenbarung. Vielmehr hat die Selbstoffenbarung Gottes in Jesus Christus die Gestalt der Verborgenheit.

In der Menschwerdung wie im Kreuzestod Jesu offenbart sich die Herrlichkeit Gottes in der Gestalt äußerster Niedrigkeit. Die Herrlichkeit Gottes leuchtet auf paradoxe Weise auf dem Antlitz des Gekreuzigten auf. So kann Paulus schreiben: „Gott, der da sprach: Licht soll aus der Finsternis hervorleuchten, der hat einen hellen Schein in unsre Herzen gegeben, dass die

37 Vgl. Ulrich H. J. Körtner, „Die alles bestimmende Wirklichkeit. Gottes Handeln und die Freiheit des Menschen", in Chr. Landmesser and D. Schlenke (eds.), *Gottes Handeln und die Freiheit des Menschen* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2023), 69–88.

38 Hans-Christoph Askani, „Ist die ‚Ohnmacht Gottes' eine theologische Lösung?", in Hans-Peter Großhans, Michael Moxter and Philipp Stoellger (eds.), *Das Letzte – der Erste*. Gott denken. FS Ingolf U. Dalferth (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018), 1–18, hier 1.

39 Rudolf Bultmann, „Welchen Sinn hat es, von Gott zu reden", in Rudolf Bultmann, Glauben und Verstehen I (s. Anm. 22), 26–37, hier 26.

40 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Widerstand und Ergebung. Briefe und Aufzeichnungen aus der Haft*, hg. v. Christian Gremmels, Eberhard Bethge u. Renate Bethge in Zusammenarbeit mit Ilse Tödt, DBW 8 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1998), 533.

Erleuchtung entstünde zur Erkenntnis der Herrlichkeit Gottes in dem Angesicht Jesu Christi“ (2Kor 4,6).

Die Krise heutiger Rede von Gott, die sich durch das Theodizeeproblem in Frage gestellt sieht, lässt sich nicht dadurch überwinden, dass man auf die Rede von der Allmacht Gottes verzichtet und sie durch die Rede von der Ohnmacht Gottes ersetzt, wie dies nach 1945 in vielen theologischen Texten und Entwürfen geschehen ist. In Gottes Ohnmacht am Kreuz offenbart sich gerade seine Allmacht. Die christologisch begründete Rede von der Ohnmacht Gottes darf daher nicht gegen die von seiner Allmacht ausgespielt werden, es sei denn um den Preis der Auflösung des christlichen Gottesgedankens. Gottes Ohnmacht ist vielmehr als Weise seiner Allmacht auszubuchstabieren.

Inkarnation, Tod und Auferweckung Jesu Christi begründen eine spezifische Form von negativer Theologie, deren *via negativa* nicht darin besteht, im Wege der Nicht-Identität abstrakt von der Welt und somit indirekt von Gott zu sprechen. Sondern die Nicht-Identität von Gott und Welt ist zunächst im Modus von Klage und Buße auszusagen. Es ergibt sich dann aber auch die Möglichkeit, diese Erfahrung im Lichte eines paradoxen Offenbarungsbegriffs zu interpretieren und aufzuschließen für die Möglichkeit, dass Gott inmitten seiner Abwesenheit auf eine höchst bestimmte Weise anwesend ist, richtend und rettend zugleich.

Demgegenüber ist verbreitet eine Rede vom ohnmächtigen Gott anzutreffen, die diesen lediglich als mitleidenden Begleiter der leidenden Menschen oder sogar als Objekt menschlicher Obhut und Fürsorge sieht. Mit Recht fragt sich Johann Baptist Metz, „ob die Rede von einem Gott, der solidarisch mit uns leidet, nicht im Grunde genommen nur eine menschenfreundlichere Projektion ist, so wie man früher, in feudalistischen Zeiten, Gott als den projiziert hat, der als oberster Kriegsherr, als Allmächtiger herrscherliche Macht ausübt“[41].

Wird der Gedanke der Allmacht Gottes preisgegeben, läuft die Transformation christlicher Glaubensgehalte in ethische Appelle auf eine Hypermoral (Arnold Gehlen) hinaus. So „kann eine Theologie des mitleidenden Begleiters aufgrund des starken Veränderungsinteresses – sozusagen mit umgekehrten

41 Johann Baptist Metz, *Welches Christentum hat Zukunft? Dorothee Sölle und Johann Baptist Metz im Gespräch mit Karl Joseph Kuschel* (Stuttgart: Kreuz Verlag, 1990), 34.

Vorzeichen – so moralisch werden, dass [sc. sie] in ihrer auf Dauer gestellten Empörung Gott seine Schöpfung nicht verzeihen kann“[42].

Das Vertrauen auf Gottes Allmacht und sein Handeln in der Welt steht nicht im Widerspruch zum Gedanken menschlicher Eigenverantwortung. Vielmehr befreit der Glaube, das bedingungslose Vertrauen auf Gott, zur Verantwortungsübernahme und zur freien Tat. Das verantwortliche Handeln aus Glauben setzt sich nicht an die Stelle Gottes, sondern wird im Gegenteil ganz im Vertrauen auf Gottes Wirken in der Welt gewagt, wie es klassisch in der Lehre vom *concursus divinus* zu Ausdruck gebracht wird. Auch heutige Rede von Gott soll Menschen in dem Glauben und Vertrauen bestärken, „daß Gott kein zeitloses Fatum ist, sondern daß er auf aufrichtige Gebete und verantwortliche Taten wartet und antwortet“[43].

Mit Gottes Handeln und Wirken ist nicht nur dort zu rechnen, wo Menschen passiv sind, sondern auch dort, wo sie aktiv sind und ihr Leben selbst in die Hand nehmen. Wir führen unsere Leben im Spannungsfeld zwischen Tun und Lassen, zwischen Widerstand und Ergebung. Gottes Wirken erfahren wir nicht etwa nur, wenn wir uns passiv oder gar ausgeliefert fühlen, sondern auch in unserer eigenen Stärke, unseren Begabungen und Fähigkeiten. Wir erfahren Gottes Wirken in, mit und unter Widerstand und Ergebung dem gegenüber, was wir Schicksal nennen. Dann erfahren wir, dass menschliche Lebensführung immer auch ein Geführtwerden ist.

Wartende Theologie

Theologie in der Krise – im doppelten Sinne des Wortes – und Theologie für die Krise hat die Aufgabe zu warten: zu warten auf den je neuen Einbruch Gottes in die Welt, auf sein Kommen und darauf, dass er auf neue Weise zu uns Menschen spricht, indem die Sprache der biblischen Überlieferung für uns auf neue Weise sprechend und ansprechend wird. Solche Krisentheologie ist gerade nicht resignativ, sondern höchst erwartungsvoll.

Das Warten auf die Offenbarung bzw. die Wiederkunft Christi auf die Herrlichkeit Gottes und einen neuen Himmel und eine neue Erde ist ein Grundmotiv im ganzen Neuen Testament. Vom Warten sprechen wir nicht nur in der Bedeutung des Abwartens, sondern auch im Sinne des Hegens

42 Günter Thomas, *Gottes Lebendigkeit*, BSTh (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2019), 41.

43 Bonhoeffer, *Widerstand* (s. Anm. 40), 31.

und Pflegens (Wartungsdienst), im Sinne der Vorbereitung auf das, was kommen mag und also auch im Sinne der Wachsamkeit, zu der die Christen im Neuen Testament aufgerufen werden. Paulus: „Wir warten im Geist und aus Glauben auf die Erfüllung unserer Hoffnung: die Gerechtigkeit“ (Gal 5,5)

Angesichts heutiger Erfahrungen des Schweigens Gottes besteht die Aufgabe der Theologie nicht nur darin, die Erinnerung des Glaubens wachzuhalten, dass Gott vormals zu Menschen geredet hat, sondern auch darin, die biblisch bezeugte Verheißung beim Wort zu nehmen, dass Gott kommt und nicht für immer schweigt. Wo mit dieser Möglichkeit nicht mehr ernsthaft gerechnet wird, mutiert Theologie entweder zur reinen Ethik oder zu einem Zweig der Kulturwissenschaft.

Von der Religionswissenschaft oder Kulturwissenschaft unterscheidet sich die Theologie darin, dass sie die vergangene Gottesrede nicht allein historiographisch oder literaturwissenschaftlich untersucht, sondern sich bei ihrem Nachdenken von der in Ps 50,3 ausgesprochenen Hoffnung leiten lässt, dass selbst Gottes Schweigen sein früheres Reden und die in ihm beschlossene Verheißung seines künftigen, lebenschaffenden und heilsamen Wortes nicht dementiert. Vielmehr muss und darf dann selbst noch das Schweigen Gottes als ein beredtes, von der Sprache des Evangeliums durchdrungenes Schweigen begriffen werden. Selbst noch im Modus des Schweigens bleibt Gott uns Menschen heilvoll zugewandt.

Die Erwartung, dass Gott sich nicht für immer ins Schweigen zurückgezogen hat, sondern auch hier und heute immer wieder aufs Neue zu uns Menschen sprechen will, ist die Grundvoraussetzung jedes Gottesdienstes. Sie gründet letztlich in der biblischen Verheißung, dass der biblisch bezeugte Gott kommt und nicht schweigt (Ps 50,3). Auf diese Verheißung hin werden Sonntag für Sonntag die Texte der Bibel laut vorgelesen und ausgelegt. Sie sind auch präsent im Gemeindegesang oder in der Chormusik. Interessanterweise singen manchmal Menschen in einem Kirchen- oder Gospelchor mit, die sich selbst gar nicht als gläubig verstehen, aber im Modus des Als ob mitsingen: Sie singen, als ob sie gläubig wären.[44] So können sie einerseits zum Medium der Verkündigung werden und andererseits möglicherweise selbst die Erfahrung machen, vom biblisch bezeugten Gotteswort affiziert zu werden. Der Wortgottesdienst evangelischer Kirchen unterscheidet sich in dieser Hinsicht beispielsweise von den Versammlungen der Quäker in ihrer

44 Vgl. Thomas, *Gottesvergessenheit* (s. Anm. 10), 503f.

ursprünglichen Form, der stillen Andacht, in der man auf die Stimme Gottes wartet. Wie es einen Kirchengesang des Als ob gibt, so auch eine Theologie des Als ob,[45] die sich auf das biblische Zeugnis einlässt, in der Hoffnung, dass es vielleicht doch mehr ist als ein bloßer Roman.[46]

Statt aber fraglos zu unterstellen, dass Gott immer und überall zu uns redet, sollten die Erfahrung des Schweigens, die Sperrigkeit und die Fremdheit der biblischen Texte in Theologie und Kirche immer wieder bewusstgemacht werden. Gott auf neue Weise reden zu hören, ist eben das nicht Selbstverständliche. Im Blick auf die mögliche Leichtfertigkeit kirchlicher Gottesrede ist das Motiv der Buße und der Umkehr in Erinnerung zu rufen, das wir ja nicht nur bei den alttestamentlichen Propheten finden, sondern auch in der Verkündigung Jesu von der anbrechenden Gottesherrschaft. Wer freilich die Umkehr zur Voraussetzung dafür erklärt, dass Gottes Wort neu vernommen werden kann, droht in eine moderne Form der Werkgerechtigkeit zu fallen, die menschliches Handeln zur Bedingung für das rettende Handeln Gottes macht. Eine Theologie der Buße droht ins Appellative abzugleiten, wenn die Hoffnung auf Gottes unverfügbares Reden und Tun abgeschwächt wird.

Was Theologie und Kirche zur Erneuerung des christlichen Glaubens beitragen können, ist tätiges Warten.[47] Zu Recht kritisiert die Praktische Theologin Birgit Weyel eine „Art Aufregungsbewirtschaftung à la ‚Es muss etwas getan werden', auch weil angeblich nur noch ein verhältnismäßig schmaler zeitlicher Korridor bleibt, wo man noch etwas ändern kann", warnt aber genauso richtig vor „einem schlichten ‚Weiter so'"[48]. Tätiges Warten ist weder das eine noch das andere. Dietrich Bonhoeffer schrieb seinem Patenkind zum Tauftag als Vermächtnis: „Es ist nicht unsere Sache, den Tag vorauszusagen – aber der Tag wird kommen –, an dem wieder Menschen berufen werden, das Wort Gottes so auszusprechen, dass sich die Welt darunter

45 Vgl. Sebastian Kleinschmidt, *Kleine Theologie des Als ob* (München: Claudius, 2023).

46 Wer beispielsweise meint, die religiöse Frage nach der Rechtfertigung des Sünders erledige sich mit der Nichtexistenz eines gerechten Gottes, dem schlägt der Schriftsteller Martin Walser vor: „Lesen wir's als Roman." Vgl. Martin Walser, *Über Rechtfertigung. Eine Versuchung* (Reinbek: Rowohlt Buchverlag, 2012).

47 Vgl. Ulrich H. J. Körtner, *Theologie in dürftiger Zeit* (München: Kaiser, 1990), bes. 56ff; Hartmut Rosenau, *Vom Warten. Grundriss einer sapientialen Theologie. Neue Zugänge zur Gotteslehre, Christologie und Eschatologie* (Münster: LIT, 2012).

48 Birgit Weyel, „Nachsteuern kaum möglich" (Interview: Reinhard Mawick), zeitzeichen (2020), https://zeitzeichen.net/index.php/node/8052.

verändert und erneuert."[49] Ganz so schrieb auch Luther 1518, die Zeit, wann die Reformation als das Werk Gottes vor sich gehen werde, kenne „nur der, der die Zeit geschaffen hat"[50].

Eine wartende Kirche im Sinne Bonhoeffers „wartet, indem sie arbeitet"[51]. Theologie, die sich mit letzter Redlichkeit einer Situation stellt, in welcher der christliche Glaube eben nicht fraglos gegeben ist, ist wartende Theologie, die nicht zu allem und jedem etwas zu sagen hat, sondern bisweilen nur qualifiziert schweigen kann und auch in Glaubensfragen ihre Sprachnot nicht kaschiert. Sie ist ferner in dem Sinne wartende Theologie, dass sie das Erbe des biblischen Zeugnisses hütet, getragen von der Hoffnung, dass es neu zu sprechen beginnt. Wartende Theologie dient der Einübung in ein Christsein, das, wie Bonhoeffer gesagt hat, in dreierlei besteht, nämlich nicht nur im Beten und im Tun des Gerechten unter den Menschen, sondern auch im Warten auf Gottes Zeit.

Ulrich H. J. Körtner
Institut für Systematische Theologie und Religionswissenschaft
Universität Wien
Schenkenstr. 8–10, A-1010 Wien, Österreich
ulrich.koertner@univie.ac.at

49 Bonhoeffer, *Widerstand* (s. Anm. 40), 436.

50 Martin Luther, *Werke*, WA 1 (Weimar: Hermann Böhlau, 1883), 627.

51 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, „Die Bekennende Kirche und die Ökumene", EvTh 2 (1935), 245–261, jetzt in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Illegale Theologenausbildung: Finkenwalde 1935–1937*, hg. v. Otto Dudzus u. Jürgen Henkys in Zusammenarbeit mit Sabine Bobert-Stützel, Dirk Schulz u. Ilse Tödt, DBW 14 (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1996), 378–399, hier 397.

COMMUNIO VIATORUM LXVI (2024/3) 227–244

Intercultural Church: A Utopian Ideal or a Gospel of Hope?

Kwanghyun Ryu

Abstract: An intercultural church, where people from different cultural backgrounds form one community and aims to create a new reality through mutually enriching and challenging interactions, is presented as one of the new ecclesiological alternatives in today's multicultural situation. However, the fact that this intercultural church is an "intentional" faith-based communal project may raise the question of whether it is a utopian endeavor to dream of an ideal community in this world. Is the intercultural church a utopian ideal or a gospel of hope? What is the motivation and basis for which it is pursued? While considering the ambiguity of the term 'utopian,' this paper attempts to find the answer to this questions. And as a conclusion, it argues that an intercultural church should be understood not as a utopian ideal, but as a gospel of hope.

Keywords: Intercultural Church; intentional; utopian; Christian hope; gospel; witness

DOI: 10.14712/30296374.2025.3

In today's migration context, the church is faced with the challenge of what it means to be a church in light of the ever-growing diversity of the population of a society. Christians may not only help migrants and refugees but also welcome them into their church space. But the question remains: what kind of relationship will the people who have been in the church have with the newcomers, that is, people from different cultural backgrounds? Will the migrants or refugees be expected to give up their culture, language, habits and customs and become part of the church in a way that assimilates into the mainstream culture? Questions can also be posed towards immigrant Christians. What kind of faith community will they form in the society to which they have migrated? What kind of relationship will they have with the churches that already exist there, or with the local Christians who have different cultural backgrounds? Will they isolate themselves from them and live in segregated communities?

An intercultural church is presented as an alternative today. As noted by Guzman and Brazal, "an intercultural church takes the multicultural situation a step further by promoting opportunities for meaningful interaction between various cultural groups toward mutual enrichment and positive

change in the perspective of the other."[1] However, forming a community and pursuing interactions with people from a different cultural background than mine or with people who are not fully known to me involves risk. In an age of "terror," where the stranger on one's threshold may be either the refugee seeking sanctuary or the suicide-bomber bringing unwanted gifts of death,[2] a church that pursues active interaction beyond coexistence among strangers might be perceived, in someone's eyes, as a community of idealists pursuing unrealistic delusions, one of the many "utopian" attempts that have appeared in history. Then, what is the motivation and basis for pursuing an intercultural church? Is it a utopian ideal? Or is it an expression of Christian hope? If it is the latter, what is the basis for viewing it that way? To answer these questions, it would be good to start by first examining what an intercultural church is.

Intercultural Church

'Inter-cultural' is different from 'multi-cultural,' 'cross-cultural,' and 'trans-cultural.'[3] The term 'intercultural' describes the interactions between cultures, aiming to go beyond cultural pluralism. In that sense, an intercultural community is different from a 'multicultural' community. Intercultural includes movement across cultural boundaries, but it focuses more on what happens in-between space rather than on crossing itself. In that sense, an intercultural movement is different from 'cross-cultural' movement. Intercultural aims for something that transcends cultural differences, but it focuses first on the reality of differences. In that sense, interculturality is different from 'transculturality.'

Intercultural relationship assumes porous borders between cultures and pursues mutual interactions in the space of in-between.[4] Beyond mere "peaceful" coexistence between various cultures, it seeks "a mutually enriching and challenging interactions, implying a two-way or multi-directional exchange

1 Agnes M. Brazal and Emmanuel S. de Guzman, *Intercultural Church: Bridge of Solidarity in the Migration context* (San Jose, CA: Borderless Press, 2015), 126.

2 Andrew Shepherd, *The Gift of the Other: Levinas, Derrida, and a Theology of Hospitality* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 82.

3 See, Volker Küster, "The Project of an Intercultural Theology," *Swedish Missiological Themes*, 93/3 (2005), 417.

4 Anthony Gittins, *Living Mission Interculturally: Faith, Culture, and the Renewal of Praxis* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2015), 22.

among different cultural orientations."[5] In this intercultural framework, the lines between cultures remain, but they are porous. Each person or culture is open to be affected by the presence of cultural others. Also, in this intercultural relationship, individuals who remain "at home" in a familiar cultural framework are not assumed. Everyone is indeed "out of place." That is, all are challenged to live outside each comfort zone, and thus no one culture will be allowed to dominate the relationship.[6]

This mutually enriching and challenging two-way exchange cannot be accomplished by coercion. It cannot be imposed by creating an artificial unity which suffocates all differences. It can only be fulfilled by voluntary dedications of every members. Therefore, Anthony Gittins argues that this intercultural project is a communal task based on a common conviction and purpose.[7] That is, an intercultural community shares "intentional" commitment to the common life. Members of different cultural backgrounds in this intercultural community are challenged to create a new culture in which all can live fruitfully.

An 'intercultural church' can be said to be a concept of the church that has emerged in an attempt to reflect this intercultural relationship. Safwat Marzouk defines the intercultural church as "a church that fosters a just diversity, integrates different cultural articulations of faith and worship, and embodies in the world an alternative to the politics of assimilation and segregation."[8] For Marzouk, intercultural church is "a covenantal community that cultivate a *decentralizing unity* and fosters a *just diversity*."[9] What he means by 'decentralizing unity' is that church members realize there are common beliefs and practices that unify them beyond their specific cultures; and by 'just diversity' he denotes the equal representation of the different cultural and theological heritages that are present in a given congregation.

It is clear that this kind of intercultural living is not possible without common commitments from members of the community. In that sense, it is not unreasonable for Gittins to argue that this intercultural project must be not only a communal task with intentionality, but also "a faith-based Christian

5 Roger P. Schroeder, "Engaging our Diversity through Interculturally," *New Theology Review* 30/2 (2018), 65.

6 Gittins, *Living Mission Interculturally*, 22–23.

7 Ibid., 22.

8 Safwat Marzouk, *Intercultural Church: A Biblical Vision for an Age of Migration* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2019), 3.

9 Marzouk, *Intercultural Church*, 16.

practice" toward a new reality grounded in a biblical vision.[10] If the intercultural church is thus an intentional faith-based communal project that pursues such a decentralized unity and a just diversity through mutually challenging and enriching interactions among members of different cultural orientations, it can be questioned whether it is or not a "utopian" endeavor to dream of an ideal community in this world. But in this case, what does "utopian" mean? What does this term mean in relation to Christian practice, including the pursue of intercultural church?

Ambiguity of the Term 'Utopian'

The word *utopia* or *outopia* simply means *no* or *not place*. Thomas More, inventor of the word, punned on *eutopia* or *good place*, and the term *dystopia* or *bad place*, which has the opposite meaning, was added later. Joyce Hertzler understands the essence of utopia as "the delineation of the means whereby the writer's vision of social perfection is to be realized."[11] Darko Suvin defines *utopia* as "the verbal construction of a particular quasi-human community where sociopolitical institutions, norms, and individual relationships are organized according to a more perfect principle than in the author's community."[12] While many past explanations of utopia include expressions such as 'perfect' or 'perfection' like this, Lyman Tower Sargent objects to this. Understanding *utopianism* simply as "social dreaming," he defines *utopia* as "a non-existent society described in considerable detail and normally located in time and space."[13] Depending on whether the non-existent society that the author *intended* a contemporaneous reader to view is considerably *better* or *worse* than the society in which the reader lived, the utopia takes the form of *eutopia* (positive utopia) or *dystopia* (negative utopia).

When utopianism is understood as *social dreaming* following Sargent's definition, Christianity simultaneously accepts and rejects utopianism. For the Christian, utopia is a basic theological problem. Eden was eutopia, a typical earthly paradise, but with the Fall and the expulsion from Eden, the restoration of Eden is now looked forward to. In that sense, Christian eschatology

10 Gittins, *Living Mission Interculturally*, 4.
11 Joyce O. Hertzler, *The History of Utopian Thought* (NY: Macmillan, 1923), 268.
12 Darko Suvin, "Defining the Literary Genre of Utopia," *Studies in the Literary Imagination* 6 (Fall 1973), 132.
13 Lyman T. Sargent, "Three Faces of Utopianism Revisited," *Utopian Studies* 5/1 (1994), 9.

appears to be a type of utopianism. But on the other hand, both Eden's past and Eden's future are beyond human control. As a result of the Fall, the human race is incapable of serious improvement in this life. From this perception, for many Christians, utopianism is considered heretical.[14] Part of the basis for labelling utopianism heretical is the insistence that utopians expect perfection – something godlike. Therefore, by many Christian theologians utopias have been dismissed as weak, cheap, desperate, diseased, and delusional pretenders to hope.[15]

In the twentieth century utopian social theory became more systematic and the differences between proponents and opponents of utopianism became at times central to political debates. Karl Mannheim used the concept of utopia together with that of ideology.[16] Mannheim regarded both ideology and utopia as incongruous with reality. However, whereas ideologies are oriented to the past and serve to legitimate the status quo, utopias are oriented to the future, and are those ideas which transform reality in their own image.[17] His stance on ideology is wholly negative, but his position about utopia is ambivalent: Utopia is essential for social change; still, utopia is not oriented to reality but to a vision of a better life.[18]

This century's tendency to seek social change through utopian thinking has been to equate utopia with force, violence, and totalitarianism.[19] A utopia is a blueprint of what the author believes to be a perfect society. But there is no such thing as a perfect society, and even if there were, it could not be constructed since it would require perfect people, and we know there are no perfect people. When a convinced utopian tries to build a eutopia, conflict arises because, failing to achieve eutopia, he or she will use force to achieve it. Therefore, Karl R. Popper criticizes that the utopian enterprise of creating an ideal state cannot go forward without a strong, centralized government of the few, which will likely become a dictatorship.[20]

14 Sargent, "Three Faces," 21–22.
15 Darren Webb, "Christian Hope and Politics of Utopia," *Utopian Studies* 19/1 (2008), 121.
16 See, Karl Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*. Trans. Louis Wirth and Edward Shils (London: Routledge, 1991).
17 Ruth Levitas, "Educated Utopia: Ernst Bloch on Abstract and Concrete Utopia," *Utopian Studies* 1/2 (1990), 18.
18 Sargent, "Three Faces," 23–24.
19 Ibid., 24.
20 Karl R. Popper, *The Open Society and Its Enemies* (NY: Harper & Row, 1962), 1: 159.

Probably no one today would deny the danger that utopianism could lead to totalitarianism. However, it would be difficult for everyone to agree with the argument that the conclusion of this is the abolition of utopianism. From the position that the image of the future affects the actual future, Frederik L. Polak argues that utopian thinking encourages efforts toward the development of human dignity as well as of the civilization.[21] This is a neat contrast to the Popperian argument that utopia limits human dignity.

For Ernst Bloch, utopia is a standard by which to judge existing practice. The pursuit of utopia is not a loss of freedom but an expression of freedom. For him, freedom means that we are able to perceive alternatives and act to realize preferences.[22] The world is in a constant state of process, of becoming. The future is 'not yet' and is a realm of possibility. Human activity plays a central role here in choosing which possible future may become actual.[23] Utopia embodies both the act of wishing and what is wished for.[24] It caters to our ability to dream, to recognize that things are not quite what they should be, and to assert that improvement is possible. In that sense, far from being the road to totalitarianism, it is the road away from totalitarianism.[25]

For Bloch, utopia is an expression of hope as well as of freedom. But that hope is to be understood "not […] only as emotion […] more essentially as a directing act of a cognitive kind."[26] Yet because the function of utopia is not just express desire, but to reach forward and be the catalyst of a better future, he is also critical of the content of these wishes. He makes distinction between abstract utopia (wishful thinking which is compensatory) and concrete utopia (will-full thinking which is anticipatory). According to Bloch, while abstract utopia may express desire, only concrete utopia carries hope. For Manheim, those forms of wishful thinking which do not serve to effect the future are not utopian at all. For Bloch, however, they are utopian, but largely comprise abstract utopia. Concrete utopia contains abstract elements. The task is to recover the core of concrete utopia from the dross

21 Frederik L. Polak, *The Image of the Future: Enlightening the Past, Orientating the Present, Forecasting the Future* (NY: Oceana, 1961), 1: 53, 445.
22 Sargent, "Three Faces," 26.
23 Levitas, "Educated Utopia," 14.
24 Ibid.
25 Sargent, "Three Faces," 26.
26 Ernst Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 1: 12.

of the abstract elements in which it is embedded. Mannheim's ideology is anti-utopian in function; Bloch's abstract utopia is not.[27]

As such, in the history of utopian social theory there are two incompatible arguments about utopia. In one, utopia is seen as leading inevitably to force, violence, and totalitarianism. In the other, utopia is seen as an essential ingredient of freedom, civilization, and even of being human. Instead of saying that it is possible to reconcile these extremes, Sergent suggests to admit that "there is a basic ambiguity in utopianism that permits the possibility of both positions containing significant truth."[28] Utopia can serve as a mirror to contemporary society, showing flaws in the present by picturing a more desirable alternative. He recognizes this as the most important function of utopia.

In a similar vein, Paul Ricoeur proposes to move beyond the thematic contents of utopia to its functional structure.[29] According to him, positive change in a specific context can be described with the help of the concept 'utopia' – which literally refers to 'no place'. Focusing on the benefit of this extraterritoriality, he argues that from this 'no place' an exterior glance is caste on our reality, which suddenly looks strange, nothing more being taken for granted. It is 'here' where the 'imaginary power of utopia' can open up new vistas for thinking new and differently about society, power, and religion – basically in the sense of a 'fantasy of the alternative.'[30] In Ricoeur's view, this development of new perspectives for alternative way of living defines Utopia's most basic function.

In this sense, Richard Saage makes a distinction (in German) between *utopia* (*'Utopie'*) and the *utopian* (*'das Utopische'*).[31] The first one refers to plans and/or ideas to bring about an emancipation from the misery of reality. The second one refers to how an 'Utopist' sees the future realised in the present. This however demands utopia criticism. Utopia criticism is not anti-utopian – rather it is dystopian, which paradoxically envisions the realisation of an utopian dimension, while exposing false utopias; that is,

27 Levitas, "Educated Utopia," 18.
28 Sargent, "Three Faces," 26.
29 See, Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on ideology and utopia* (NY: Columbia University Press, 1986).
30 Ricoeur, *Lectures*, 16.
31 See, Richard Saage, *Utopieforschung: Eine Bilanz* (Darmstadt: Primus Verlag, 1977). Recited from Tanya van Wyk, "Church as heterotopia," *HTS Theological Studies* 70/1 (2014), 4.

being critical towards utopias.[32] This utopia criticism is also present in the 'heterotopian' thinking, endorsed by Michel Foucault.[33] *Heterotopias* are not fantasy islands, but spaces, literally 'other places' that exist. Heterotopian space is not devoid of utopian ideal. It is not anti-utopian. It is a space of contrast; a space wherein utopia becomes visible and tangible, real and traceable.

As such, there is an ambiguity in utopianism. And there are various perspectives on the word 'utopia.' The term "utopian" is thus a complicated term that requires careful use. As we will see in the next chapter, even in theological statements about Christian hope, the terms 'utopia' or 'utopian' are not used with the same meaning and nuance.

Christian Hope and Utopian Ideal

What is the relation between utopia and hope? Some may think the two have an intrinsic and positive relationship with each other: Hope drives the utopian impulse, and utopianism inspires hope. However, the matter is not so simple. When Ruth Levitas defines utopia as "the expression of desire for a better way of being,"[34] she is implying that there is a utopia that is not motivated by hope. Distinguishing between 'utopia as system', which is willfull act of political transformation, and 'utopia as process', which is centered more around the wish-full act of imagining, she argues that only the former does embody and carry hope.[35] However, to complicate matters further, the procedural utopia, which Levitas regards as a *retreat* from transformative hope, is precisely the mode of utopian expression championed by Tom Moylan as the *locus* of radical hope.[36]

Just as utopia is a highly contested concept as such, so is hope a highly contested category of experience. To focus on Christian hope, Thomas Aquinas says that there is 'hope as the theological virtues' that is distinct from 'hope as passions common to man and other animals'. According to him,

32 Tanya van Wyk, "Church as heterotopia," 4.

33 See, Michel Foucault, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias," *Architecture* (1984), 46–49.

34 Ruth Levitas, *The Concept of Utopia* (Hemel Hempstead: Philip Alllen, 1990), 8.

35 Ruth Levitas and Sargisson Lucy, "Utopia in Dark Times: Optimism/Pessimism and Utopia/Dystopia," in Raffaella Baccolini and Tom Moylan (eds.), *Dark Horizons: Science Fiction and Dystopian Imagination* (London: Routledge, 2003), 16.

36 Tom Moylan, *Scraps of the Untainted Sky: Science Fiction, Utopia, Dystopia* (Boulder, CO: Westview, 2000), 157.

this hope as a theological virtue is infused in us by God so that our will may be directed toward a supernatural happiness that lies beyond our capacity to understand.[37] Afterwards, as mentioned earlier, by many Christian theologians utopia has tended to be perceived negatively, but even within Christian theologies, there are various perspectives on the relationship between hope and utopia. In an article titled "Christian Hope and the Politics of Utopia," Darren Webb presents three theological perspectives on Christian hope in relation to utopia: *Anti-utopian* hope (Gabriel Marcel), *critical utopian* hope (Jürgen Moltmann), and *transformative utopian* hope (Gustavo Gutiérrez).[38] We cannot say that his taxonomy contains all theological perspectives on this subject, but it does provide three representative positions that can be used to analyze the theological implications of a particular Christian practice.

Gabriel Marcel, a French Christian existentialist philosopher, speaks of hope as a mystery and a virtue offered to us by God.[39] He calls this "absolute hope" which takes the form of "I hope in thee for us" to distinguish it from the "limited hope" which takes the form of "I hope that." The absolute hope is the driving force that enables humans on a journey toward themselves to reach their destination by overcoming life's trials and the temptation to despair. For him, this absolute hope is of a different order from desire and its fulfilment lies beyond the realms of human imagination and representation. In that sense, for him, Christian hope is antithetical to utopia. Utopia, as both system and process, is understood to be incompatible with Christian hope due to its imaginative-desiderative nature. In Marcel's view, the central function of hope is to instill patience.[40] Hope represents a "positive non-acceptance" not only of falling into despair in the face of life's tragic dimension but also of offering a concrete solution to them. To hope is to appeal to the existence of a creative divine power operating in the world, and to make oneself available to this power in the spirit of trusting love. As such, for Marcel, the term "utopian" describes the tendency to respond to life's difficulties encountered on the life journey through artificial solutions

37 Thomas Aquinas, The "*Suma Theologia*" (London: Burns Oates and Washbourne, 1927), II: q.62 a.3.

38 Darren Webb, "Christian Hope and Politics of Utopia," *Utopian Studies* 19/1 (2008).

39 See, Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope* (NY: Harper & Low, 1962).

40 Gabriel Marcel, "Desire and Hope," Nathaniel Lawrence and Daniel O'Connor (eds.), *Readings in Existential Phenomenology* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1967), 278.

derived from one's own desires rather than through the hope and power offered by God.

For German Reformed theologian Jürgen Moltmann too, the objective of Christian hope is the radically new and unpredictable future promised by God which, by virtue of its astonishing newness, defies all attempts to depict it. However, unlike Marcel, Moltmann does not suggest that one can say nothing about the coming future. A glimmer of the glory can be discerned in the resurrection of Christ. "As the anticipation of the future of God, Christ becomes the ground of hope."[41] Moltmann argues, echoing Bloch, that the coming future can be expressed as "the negation of the negative, the negation of hunger, oppression, and humiliation."[42] "Those who hope in Christ can no longer put up with reality as it is, but begin to suffer under it, to contradict it […] for the goal of the promised future stabs inexorably into the flesh of every unfulfilled present."[43]

While making it clear that hope inspired by the promise of a coming future demands a passionate critical engagement with the unfulfilled present as such, Moltmann also emphasizes that such hope must avoid becoming fixed on dogmatic prescriptions of the positive awaiting humanity. Referring to the Promethean projects of nineteenth-century utopians, he argues, echoing Popper, that totalitarianism is the inevitable outcome of will-full utopian praxis, through which finite erring beings strive to control and complete an uncontrollable and uncompletable history.[44] In a crucial passage, he speaks of Christian hope as countering and subsuming such utopian hopes:

It [Christian hope] will destroy the presumption in these hopes of better human freedom, of successful life, of justice and dignity for our fellow men, of control of the possibilities of nature, because it does not find in these movements the salvation it waits, because it refuses to let the entertaining and realizing of utopian ideas of this kind reconcile it with existence. It will outstrip these future visions of a better, more humane, more peaceable world – because of its own 'better promises' (Heb. 8.6), because it knows that nothing can be 'very good' until 'all things are become new'.[45]

41 Jürgen Moltmann, "Hope and History," *Theology Today* 25/3 (1968), 381.
42 Jürgen Moltmann, "Religion, Revolution and the Future," Walter H. Capps (ed.), *The Future of Hope* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1970), 114.
43 Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Ground and Implications of a Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM, 1967), 21.
44 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Coming of God: Christian Eschatology* (London: SCM, 1996), 189.
45 Moltmann, *Theology of Hope*, 34.

Moltmann's criticism of utopia is directed toward its fixed goal, its impulse to seek to give direction to the history of mankind, and its tendency to lose its critical character to the status quo and eventually become part of it. For him, presumption is "a sign against hope." Christian hope, in contrast, will provide "inexhaustible resources" for the creative imagination of love in the light of the promised future. In this perspective, Christian hope is *critical* of utopia. The term "utopian" here describes the tendency to pursue a (totalitarian) fixed goal based on a human assumption about a better society or humanity in the ambition to control and complete the history that is ultimately opened to a new future in God.

Gustavo Gutiérrez, a Latin American liberation theologian, reveals a different perspective on Christian hope in relation to utopia. In his critique aimed at Moltmann, Gutiérrez argues that true, emancipatory, hope is not grounded in a Promise from the future, but arises instead through the praxis of the poor confronting and transforming their material conditions of existence.[46] He makes a key distinction between the "coming" of the kingdom understood as a divine gift, and the "growth" of the kingdom understood as a human project to be realized in history. And he argues that while humanity must never confuse any one particular societal order with the kingdom itself, the growth of the kingdom *requires* the creation of one particular social order, that is, utopia. Christian hope thus becomes a utopian endeavor by proxy:

> Christian hope keeps us from any confusion of the kingdom with any one historical stage, from any idolatry toward unavoidably ambiguous human achievement, from any absolutizing of revolution. In this way, hope makes us radically free to commit ourselves to social praxis, motivated by a liberating utopia and with the means which the scientific analysis of reality provides for us. And our hope not only frees us for this commitment, it simultaneously demands and judges it.[47]

The idea that Christian hope rejects the identification of the coming kingdom with one historical stage does not seem to differ from Moltmann's position. The difference lies in the perception of the term 'utopia'. In this quotation, Gutiérrez says that "hope makes us radically free to commit ourselves to social praxis," and the social praxis is "motivated by a liberating utopia." Here Christian hope and utopia are portrayed in a mutually supportive

46 Gustavo Gutiérrez, *The Theology of Liberation: History, Politics and Salvation* (1971) (London: SCM, 2002), 201–3.

47 Gutiérrez, *The Theology of Liberation*, 238.

relationship. Gutiérrez rescues the term "utopia" from its negative connotation and identifies its positive and necessary function as "mediation of the creative imagination."[48] Just as the spiritual attitude of faith has the potential to inspire both political action and utopian anticipation to resist their tendencies to be frozen in historically bound ideologies, so too, in Gutiérrez's view, utopian discourse has the potential to keep faith and politics from becoming limited to present power structures, whether religious or secular.[49] This may be why he put the modifier "liberating" before the word 'utopia' in the above quote.

Defining utopia as "a historical plan for a qualitatively different society,"[50] Gutiérrez argues, in terms borrowed from Paulo Freire, that utopia involves both denunciation (that is, the critical repudiation of the present) and annunciation (that is, the positive anticipation of the not-yet). And Christian hope inspires community members to commit to the social praxis motivated by the utopian vision. In this perspective, Christian hope and utopia are complementary. The term 'utopian' here describes the tendency to motivate members of a community to be free to commit to a social praxis for the transformation towards a qualitatively different society through the mediation of liberating imagination keeping their faith and lives from present power structures.

Intercultural Church: A Utopian Ideal or a Gospel of Hope?

As we have seen so far, within the field of Christian theology, the term 'utopian' is used with at least three connotations: First, from the perspective of Christian hope which is *antithetical* to utopia, the term 'utopian' means the tendency to respond to life's difficulties encountered on the life journey through artificial solutions derived from one's own desires rather than through the hope and power offered by God. Second, from the perspective of Christian hope which is *critical* to utopia, the term 'utopian' means the tendency to pursue a totalitarian fixed goal based on a human assumption about a better society or humanity in the ambition to control and complete the history that is ultimately opened to a new future in God. And third,

48 Ibid., 234.

49 Tom Moylan, *Becoming Utopian: The Culture and Politics of Radical Transformation* (NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020), 51.

50 Gutiérrez, *The Theology of Liberation*, 217.

from the perspective of Christian hope in a *complementary* relationship with utopia, the term 'utopian' means the tendency to motivate members of a community to be free to commit to a social praxis for the transformation toward a qualitatively different society through the mediation of liberating imagination keeping their faith and lives from present power structures. Then, is an intercultural church "utopian" in these senses?

Can we say that an intercultural church is "utopian" in the first sense?
While an intercultural church may be a solution to the problems we encounter in our life journey, it is not an attempt to overcome them through solutions derived from our desires. In today's pluralist societies, we are well aware that when people from different cultural backgrounds coexist in one region or space, it may cause tension, misunderstanding, confrontation, conflict and wounds. In this situation, the choice that is more faithful to our desires would be to block or minimize the possibility of that happenings; that is, an approach to "make them like us" (assimilation) or an approach to "separate us from them" (segregation). In contrast, an intercultural church goes beyond just "peaceful" coexistence between people of ethnic, linguistic, cultural and traditional differences and seeks mutually enriching and challenging interactions among them. Far from being an attempt to overcome life's difficulties through solutions derived from individual desires, it even has the character of going against our desires.

Then, despite the many difficulties and problems expected when pursuing such a relationship, why do some Christians and churches attempt to form such an intercultural community? It is because they believe that in today's multicultural situation it is a desirable way the church exists in line with the Bible and the Gospel. Our Lord Jesus Christ calls all people without discrimination to enter the kingdom of God. This inclusiveness of the Gospel implies that the church is a community that cannot help but include diversity and heterogeneity within it. The early church which was formed after Pentecost initially maintained a Jewish character, but gradually became multiracial and multicultural as the Gospel was spread across racial and cultural boundaries following the work of the Holy Spirit. This situation also caused tensions and conflicts between Jewish and Gentile Christians. However, as Rene C. Padilla says, early church leaders tried to solve the problems by encouraging them to achieve "unity in diversity" in the love of Christ, while rejecting both

"imperialistic uniformity" (assimilationist racism) and "segregated uniformity" (homogenizing grouping).[51]

This approach and effort, as described in Ephesian 2, reflects the theological awareness of early Christians that Christ is the peace breaking down the barriers of enmity between Jews and Gentiles, that is, between people of different races and cultures, and that the church is a community where people of diversity and heterogeneity are built together as a dwelling place for God in Christ. The story of Peter and Cornelius, recorded in Acts 10, impressively shows how intercultural encounters, conversions and fellowships between people of different races, cultures, and traditions are led by the Spirit of God. And the eschatological vision of the kingdom of God described in Revelation 7; that is, the heavenly worshiping community, which comes from all nations, tribes, peoples, and languages and offers praises of glory and honor to God and the Lamb, has been a challenge and hope for Christians of all ages who seek reconciliation and unity in the realities of conflict and division on earth.[52]

As such, the formation of intercultural churches, not only in the early history of Christianity but also in today's multicultural contexts, is not the result of seeking solutions based on individual desires and preferences in the direction of minimizing the occurrence of problems; rather, it comes from the deep theological understanding of the Gospel and the church, from the faithful missional life following the Spirit of God, and from the eschatological hope for the Biblical vision of the kingdom of God. In that sense, a church that aims for an intercultural community in today's multicultural situation cannot be said to be "utopian" in the first sense. Rather, it can be said to be a community pursued with the hope for an ultimate solution by God in the journey of Christian missional life motivated by the Bible, the Gospel, and the Holy Spirit.

Can we then say that an intercultural church is "utopian" in the second sense? While it is true that an intercultural church springs from a vision of a better social life, it is neither based on a dogmatic assumption of the positive awaiting humanity nor directed by a human ambition to control and complete

51 Rene C. Padilla, "Unity of the Church and the Homogeneous Unit Principle," in Gallagher and Hertig (eds.), *Landmark Essays in Mission and World Christianity* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2009), 83.

52 Marzouk, *Intercultural Church*.

history. Rather, in a situation where various cultural orientations coexist, the intercultural church is wary of any one of them being absolutized or totalitarian in the name of the majority. Intercultural encounters and fellowships require emptying oneself to make space for the other and taking a step towards the other. The place where intercultural encounters take place and where intercultural communities are formed is thus not the center of any one country or one culture. It is the periphery of all involved, the point where they meet. The in-between space is recognized by the intercultural church as a hot-spot where differences are negotiated and creativity flourishes.[53] As the expression "Mission from the margin" suggests, this "in-between space" is also recognized as the starting point of God's mission in today's ecumenical mission theology.[54]

Seen from this point of view, an intercultural church where Christians from different cultural backgrounds form one community based on the common confession that Jesus Christ is the Lord and pursue together "decentralized unity" and "just diversity" is not "utopian" in the second sense. Rather, the church so formed is critical and subversive of all such "utopian" attempts in the world that pursue totalitarian fixed goals based on false assumptions about human freedom and world peace. Of course, the church is not perfect, and the people who make it up are weak. Moreover, when various people with many cultural differences are in one community in active interaction, the potential for problems and conflicts that can arise will be even greater. But as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 4, the mission of the Christian community is not to preach itself. It is to preach the lordship of Christ Jesus through our servanthood to others. In other words, the church does not witness to the gospel by revealing its splendid, neat, and perfect appearance, but by demonstrating the power of God at work in the weak and lacking people who make up the church. Apostle Paul expressed this hope of the Christian community as follows: "We have this treasure in jars of clay to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us." (2 Cor. 4:7)

As such, an intercultural church is an attempt to witness to the gospel in the form of a treasure in an earthen vessel. The journey to an intercultural

53 See, Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 1994); and Jung Young Lee, *Marginality: The Key to Multicultural Theology* (Minneapolis, NY: Augsburg Fortress, 1995).

54 Jooseop Keum (ed.), *Together Towards Life: Mission and Evangelism in Changing Landscapes* (Geneva: WCC Publications, 2013), 15.

church is not a matter of following a vague "utopian" ideal, but a practice of Christian hope based on the gospel of Christ's resurrection. The vision of the intercultural church is open to a new reality that will be achieved only by God's intervention and power. In this hope, the intercultural church reveals itself as a channel of the gospel that humbly witnesses to the invisible treasure contained in an visible earthen vessel.

Then, can we say that the intercultural church is "utopian" in the third sense with positive meaning?
An intercultural church can actually give fresh challenge and stimulus to the present church and society. It can also actually present and motivate social praxis to which its members can freely commit themselves in hope. In that sense, the intercultural church has to some extent a "utopian" character in such a positive sense. However, it seems difficult to say that the utopia defined by Gutiérrez is an accurate description of what the intercultural church aims for. His definition of utopia as "a historical plan for a qualitatively different society" seems to imply the possibility and danger that a certain fixed ideal and goal will be forced upon community members in the concrete implementing process to realize it. It is beneficial and necessary to have a communal vision and goal that can provide specific direction, imagination and passion so that members can freely commit themselves to it. However, when it is a closed goal or takes the character of one-sided coercion, the "utopian" practice in the positive meaning degenerates into another totalitarian ideology.

Along with the *missio Dei*, the Christian doctrine of the *Trinity* is referred to as one of the theological grounds for Christian intercultural practice.[55] In a sense, the vision of intercultural church can be understood as a journey to a qualitatively different community based on the Trinitarian relationship that names the reality which human communities ought to image. However, the fact that human beings are manifestly not divine and are inescapably marred by sin and saddled with transitoriness must also be taken into consideration. Therefore, rather than concentrating on the structure of social arrangements, Miroslav Volf suggests focusing on the character of social agents and their relations that reflect the social vision of the *Trinity*.

55 Schroeder, "Engaging our Diversity through Interculturally," 66.

The boundaries of the self are porous and shifting. The self is itself only by being in a state of flux stemming from 'incursions' of the other into the self and of the self into the other. The self is shaped by making space for the other and by giving space to the other, by being enriched when it inhabits the other and by sharing of its plentitude when it is inhabited by the other, by re-examining itself when the other closes his or her doors and challenging the other by knocking at the doors.[56]

This *perichoretic* relationship between the self and the other that Volf describes here shows the character of the community members and their relations that an intercultural church aims for. An intercultural church does not seek direct social transformation through the implementation of any specific social program. It rather aims for faithful witness to the transformative gospel through the distinctive social life of the community that embodies the vision of the *Trinity* and the *Missio Dei*. Such a church has the character of 'heterotopia' as 'other places' that exists. And seen from the missiological perspective that "evangelism is a matter of being present in the world in a distinctive way",[57] such an intercultural church that is motivated by the Christian eschatological hope and embodies a distinctive social relationship has the potential to become a living gospel towards the world. In that sense, the intercultural church should be understood not as a utopian ideal that is merely cooperative with Christian hope, but as a potential gospel that originates directly from that hope.

Conclusion

While the fact that an intercultural church is an "intentional" faith-based communal project may lead to the question of whether it is or not a utopian endeavor to dream of an ideal community in this world, due to the ambiguity of the term "utopian," its application requires great care. When the term 'utopian' means the tendency to respond to life's difficulties encountered on the life journey through artificial solutions derived from one's own desires rather than through the hope and power offered by God, an intercultural church

56 Miroslav Volf, "'The Trinity is Our Social Programme': The Doctrine of the Trinity and the Shape of Social Engagement," in Alan J. Torrance and Michael Banner (eds.), *The Doctrine of God and Theological Ethics* (London: T&T Clark, 2006), 112.

57 Bryan Stone, *Evangelism after Christendom: The Theology and Practice of Christian Witness* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2007), 21.

is not "utopian" in that it is not an attempt to overcome them through solutions derived from our desires but a communal vision pursued with the hope for an ultimate solution by God in the journey of Christian missional life motivated by the Bible, the Gospel, and the Holy Spirit. When the term 'utopian' means the tendency to pursue a totalitarian fixed goal based on a human assumption about a better society or humanity in the ambition to control and complete the history that is ultimately opened to a new future in God, an intercultural church is not "utopian" in that it is wary of any one of the various cultural orientations within it being absolutized or totalitarian in the name of the majority, and also in that it does not seek to witness to the gospel by revealing its splendid and perfect appearance, but by demonstrating the power of God at work in the weak and lacking people who make it up. And when the term 'utopian' means the tendency to motivate members of a community to be free to commit to a social praxis for the transformation toward a qualitatively different society through the mediation of liberating imagination keeping their faith and lives from present power structures, an intercultural church has to some extent a "utopian" character in that it is a kind of communal vision that provides specific direction, imagination and passion so that its members can freely commit themselves to a social praxis. However, it is distinct from other utopian ideal in that it aims for faithful witness to the transformative gospel through the distinctive social life of the community that embodies the vision of the *Trinity* and the *Missio Dei*, focusing more on the character of the community members and their relations than the structure of social arrangements. In that sense, the intercultural church should be understood not as a utopian ideal, but as a gospel of hope.

Kwanghyun Ryu
Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University
Černá 9, 110 00 Praha 1, Czech Republic
fortruth012@gmail.com

COMMUNIO VIATORUM LXVI (2024/3) 245–264

Reformation and the Secularization of Art

Filip Taufer

Abstract: The article examines the Reformation as one of the sources of the secularization of art and simultaneously an impulse for new unintended developments with spiritual potential. It argues that the reformers' attitudes towards art helped facilitate the emergence and development of new secular subjects and renewed attention to ordinary life and its artistic reflection. In this way, it fostered a new kind of aesthetics, which some consider to be distinctly Protestant. At the center of this aesthetic is the reversal of hierarchies, affirming elements of life usually considered low and unworthy of aesthetic attention. Some view this kind of "iconoclasm" as not only Protestant but essentially Christian, as it reflects crucial Christian doctrines, namely the incarnation, where one image of God was destroyed in His becoming human. This newly emerged aesthetic is seen as both a product and a part of the transition from religious images to art in its own right, raising new questions about whether art on its own can be a source of spiritual impulses and thus opening the way towards the sacralization of art.

Keywords: Reformation; art; image; everyday life; the ordinary

DOI: 10.14712/30296374.2025.4

Introduction

This article examines the Reformation as one of the sources of the secularization of art, and simultaneously as an impetus for new unintended developments with spiritual potential. Before exploring this question, it is helpful to revisit the basic differentiation concerning the term "secular." In one sense (*vertical secularity*), art is always secular; whether it is Christian art or any other religious art, it remains worldly in the sense that it is not divine.[1] This basic ontological distinction is important to keep in mind when discussing this issue.

1 This distinction is elaborated in Ingolf U. Dalferth, *Transcendence and the Secular World. Life in Orientation to Ultimate Presence* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2018). The puzzling case may be the so-called acheiropoieta – images made without hands, see Hans Belting, *Likeness and Presence. A History of the Image before the Era of Art* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), especially chapter 4. Heavenly Images and Earthly Portraits: St. Luke's Picture and "Unpainted" Originals in Rome and the Eastern Empire (47–77). But even if these would be made by God, they would still be distinct from Him as the rest of the creation.

In another sense (*horizontal secularity*), art can be divided into two categories: art concerned with religious themes and serving religious purposes, and secular art focused on worldly, non-religious matters – such as civic life, nature, and human experiences. Both of these horizontally distinct forms of art existed in European societies prior to the Reformation. However, during and after the Reformation, genres such as still life, landscape, and portraiture gained prominence, along with an increased focus on the theme of everyday life.[2]

The Reformation was not the sole factor in this development. The influence of the Renaissance and humanism, particularly in countries unaffected by the Protestant Reformation, is undeniable. Additionally, other social, cultural, conceptual, economic, and political changes also played a role. The impetus for this shift lies not only in evolving thought but also in material circumstances, which invariably influence cultural development and are, in turn, shaped by it. This interplay between material and conceptual factors is particularly significant in a subject like art, which is fundamentally a synthesis of both.[3]

Nevertheless, this article focuses on the influence of Protestantism, whose specificity seems to lie in a different rationale for this increase. The Protestant rejection of the Church's mediating role in humanity's relationship with God led to the abandonment of distinctions associated with horizontal secularity. Coupled with a strong emphasis on Scripture and its condemnation of images of God, the Reformation adopted a skeptical view of religious art and encouraged the promotion of secular themes.

The study illustrates, with reference to Charles Taylor and William Dyrness, that Protestantism played a role not only in secularization in general and, consequently, in the secularization of art, but also in the emergence of these new genres and the recognition of certain topics as worthy of attention and representation in art.

2 As William Dyrness suggests throughout his Origins of Protestant Aesthetics, the Reformation developed medieval attitudes in this regard and did not radically break up with them. William Dyrness, *The Origins of Protestant Aesthetics in Early Modern Europe. Clavin's Reformation Poetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019).

3 Ernst H. Gombrich in his classical text points to the role of technical innovation in the shift from "art telling sacred stories" to the one "reflecting a fragment of the real world". At the same time he emphasises that these two ideals do not necessarily clash. Ernst Hans Gomrich, *The Story of Art* (London: Phaidon Press, 1951), 159, 177.

Another theme reopened during the Reformation was the image and the understanding of its function and power. The notion of the Reformation as iconoclastic is simplistic. Rather, the Reformation recognized the ambivalent nature of the image, as Joseph Leo Koerner argues.[4] The image negates itself by depicting something beyond itself, yet at the same time, this "beyond" can only be represented through the image. Even if, or perhaps because, the image negates itself, it gains value and importance by showing something beyond through its own representation.

The article proceeds by briefly recollecting important historical facts and ideas of the reformers, then presents Taylor's notion of the affirmation of everyday life and its development by Dyrness, and finally, the notion of the image in the Reformation as elaborated by Koerner and development of these topics by later scholarship. The aim is not to provide a historical description of this process but to explore this era in relation to the question of the religious potential of non-religious art.

Art and Reformation

The attitude of the Reformation towards the arts is difficult to generalize, as there are significant differences not only between Martin Luther and John Calvin but also among others like Andreas Bodenstein von Karlstadt and Ulrich Zwingli. However, it is fair to say that the Reformation's view on art changed radically from those held by the Western Church before, becoming much more reserved and skeptical about the nature and use of art, especially in places of worship. Christianity before the Reformation can be characterized as intensely sensual and full of imagery, with images being more than just pictorial texts. They were prisms of sacred power, sites of the presence of saints, and not purely passive objects of perception, as Peter Marshall puts it in an introductory text to the Reformation.[5] The position of art in Christianity thus came a long way, from its hesitant acceptance in the early centuries to the highly developed works of van Eyck, Grünewald, or the Renaissance masters in Italy in the century preceding Luther. As Marshall points out, secular commissions were already occurring in this age, but the greatest works were

4 Joseph Leo Koerner, *The Reformation of the Image* (London: Reaktion Books, 2004).
5 Peter Marschall, *The Reformation. A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 94.

still devotional, with the Church being the biggest patron of art.[6] Sergiusz Michalski similarly claims that art was almost exclusively religious in Luther's time, and especially in Northern Europe, there was no division into secular and religious art yet.[7] In the sixteenth century, this changed, and the attitudes of the Reformers played a role in it. Michalski's work offers a comprehensive account of this process and is used in this part to provide a short overview of the most important attitudes, while the article of Reformers are quoted where needed. As it is not the main focus of this article, the discussion is restricted to the most important figures: Luther and Calvin.

Martin Luther

Martin Luther's views on images were multifaceted and evolved over time, influenced by current situations. His writings on art, like many others, were occasional and not systematic. In the early stages of the Reformation, in the *Lecture on Decalogue* (1516–1517), Luther opposed an iconoclastic interpretation of the first commandment – a point of difference between him and other reformers like John Calvin – and claimed that having images was not forbidden in itself. On the other hand, in the *Sermon on Usury* (1519–1520), he condemned unnecessary expenses for church decoration, raising the question of the social cost of art. In the *Sermon on Good Works* (1520), he criticized the attempt to buy one's way into heaven through the arts. This criticism was directed not against image worship in general but against the desire to gain salvation through endowing and worshiping images and sculptures. In particular, he sketched a difference between the worship of God done in faith and the one done without faith. When one bow, kneel or pray not before an idol, but before the holy cross of God or the pictures of His saint and it's done in a belief that God is gratuitous, then it is alright. On the other hand if it is done with an expectation of pleasing him through these works, "then it is all pure deception, outwardly honoring God, but inwardly setting up self as a false god."[8]

6 Ibid., 94–96.

7 Sergiusz Michalski, *The Reformation and the visual arts: the Protestant image question in western and eastern Europe* (London: Routledge, 1993), 2.

8 Complete quote: "Further, when we are dressed up and bow, kneel, pray the rosary and the Psalter, and all this not before an idol, but before the holy cross of God or the pictures of His saints: this we call honoring and worshiping God, and, according to the First Commandment, 'having no other gods'; although these things usurers,

In his famous treatise, *On the Freedom of a Christian* (1520), Luther was again against the visual and ceremonial elements of the church, indirectly opposing the cult of images as well. For him, changing the rites was proof of real freedom, but this did not mean rejecting them altogether.[9] Michalski sees Luther's attitude towards art as shaped by his notion of justification, which renders images as primarily indifferent in matters of salvation, which is achieved only by grace. Images become problematic when beholders hold salvific expectations from them.

This attitude deepened and clarified as the Reformation took an unintended direction. While Luther stayed at the Wartburg Castle (1521) under the solicitous care of the Elector of Saxony, iconoclastic riots, led by the radical followers Zwickau and Karlstadt, began in Wittenberg. When Luther returned from Wartburg to stop this movement, he began his *Lenten sermons*, which are of decisive importance regarding his attitude towards art.[10]

In the third sermon after Invocavit, Luther asserts his position clearly: "The situation with images is that they are not necessary, but free. We can have them or not, although it would be better if we did not have them at all. I am not fond of them either." Luther then recalls the conflict between Roman Emperor and the Pope concerning images, in which one wanted to get rid of them and the later to make them compulsory. Luther argues they were both wrong "because they wanted to turn freedom into a must and God cannot tolerate that." He proceeds by mentioning the prohibition of images in the Old Testament and their simultaneous presence – the altar, the bronze serpent or two Cherubim on the Ark of Covenant – exactly the place where God wanted to be worshiped, which complicates any final decision regarding images and their worship. Luther does not promote their worship in any case, but on the other hand, is convinced that by force, the idolatry cannot be undone and eradicated. He mentions Apostle Paul in Athens, who preached

adulterers and all manner of sinners can do too, and do them daily. […] Of course, if these things are done with such faith that we believe that they please God, then they are praiseworthy, not because of their virtue, but because of such faith, for which all works are of equal value, as has been said. But if we doubt or do not believe that God is gracious to us and is pleased with us, or if we presumptuously expect to please Him only through and after our works, then it is all pure deception, outwardly honoring God, but inwardly setting up self as a false god." *A Treatise on Good Works / Von den guten werckenn* D. M. L., WA, Vol. 6, 202–276.

9 Michalski, *Reformation and the visual arts*, 8.

10 Ibid., 13.

against idols, but did not remove any of them, and thinks he is doing the same. In conclusion he expresses a belief "that external things cannot harm faith. But the heart must not cling to them, must not trust in them."[11]

Luther therefore built upon the idea of Christian freedom present in his earlier work and argued that Christians do not have to immediately abolish existing ceremonies nor necessarily introduce new ones. Instead, they are free to deal with them with respect for the common good of the congregation, including those weak in faith who need images for sustenance.

Luther considered image to be not in "the domain of eternal religious truths, but in the domain of freedom, where all normative deliberations become an offense against God,"[12] that is a domain called *adiaphora*. By this reasoning, he recognized that shifting this issue from freedom to compulsion was akin to the old justification by works – something done to gain God's favor.

Michalski concludes that by 1525, Luther's attitude on this topic was set. After overcoming initial doubts, Luther became fully convinced that religious art should exist and saw a place for it in the new faith.[13]

On the other hand, even if religious art should have a place in Protestant faith and, in general, was part of the neutral field of *adiaphora*, the particular content of artworks was not irrelevant, as Franz Posset demonstrates in his analyses of the iconography of religious art in late medieval Germany and Luther's later writings. The significance of the content of images is evident in the issue of deësis. This intercession motif, which represents John the Baptist and Mary at the sides of Jesus as intermediaries praying for sinners, was criticized by Luther from his specific theological point of view.[14]

Posset highlights the popularity of this motif from around 1200 to the early sixteenth century, when it was attacked by Luther. This depiction of "intercession" at the Last Judgment was also employed by prominent painters of the Reformation era, such as Hans Holbein the Elder, Albrecht Dürer, and Lucas Cranach. However, it was questioned by artists even before Luther, notably by Hieronymus Bosch and Jan Provost. Through their compositions,

11 WA, vol. 10, III, 26–30.
12 Michalski, *Reformation and the visual arts*, 14.
13 Ibid., 29.
14 Franz Posset, "Martin Luther on 'Deësis'. His Rejection of the Artistic Representation of 'Jesus, John, and Mary'," Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme 20:3 (1996), 57–76, 57.

these artists suggested "that the time for intercession had passed" and, as Posset argues, "anticipated with their paintbrushes what Luther articulated with his pen."[15]

Posset quotes these articulations from Luther's sermons and *Table Talks* from 1531–1533[16] and identifies the primary reason for the Reformers' criticism of the deësis motif as its depiction of Mary as the *advocata* and John the Baptist as her assistant. In this portrayal, these figures intercede between Christ and the believer, which contradicts the central Protestant principle of *solus Christus* – Christ as the sole *advocatus* and mediator between God and humanity.[17] Luther, however, esteemed a different kind of depiction of Mary, namely:

> "if they enhanced his theology of the incarnation, and if they featured nothing but Mary as a humble woman. In contrast, he objected to any spirituality (and concurring depictions) which made Mary a mighty mother and which made her and saints like John the Baptist almost more important than Christ (as Luther perceived it)."[18]

Posset's iconographic analysis and exposition of Luther's judgments reveal a more nuanced differentiation in the Reformer's thinking on the subject of art. This differentiation pertains to the content and meaning of images, whose appropriateness is evaluated on the basis of theological criteria.

John Calvin

While Martin Luther's attitude towards images was influenced by his emphasis on justification by faith, John Calvin's stance was shaped by his emphasis on the authority, majesty, and incomprehensibility of God. Michalski claims that Calvin's lesser interest in Christology meant that for Calvin, Christology was subordinated to theology. It might not be a lesser interest in Christology,

15 Ibid., 62–64.

16 For example: "[…] St. John and Mary (are) asking Christ for us on the Last Day; and [that] the mother shows her breasts to the Son who sucked on them. This is taken from St. Bernard's book, and it is not spoken nor painted not done well by St. Bernard, and one should put away these depictions." Posset's translation from WA 33: 83, 25–42. Ibid., 64.

17 Posset gives the following verses, which served as support for Luther's position: "We have an advocate with the Father, the just Jesus Christ (1 John 2:1)", "God is one. One also is the mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus (1 Tim 2:5)". Ibid., 68.

18 Ibid., 66.

but rather an emphasis on the difference between Christ's two natures, which leads Calvin to not count some properties of Christ, such as visibility, as part of God's nature.[19] Making images of God was a huge misunderstanding of His essence. According to Calvin, "We are similar to God only in our souls, and no image can represent him."[20] To attempt to do so is to belittle His majesty. God is Spirit, and as such, no material, bodily image can represent Him. In Calvin's view, body and spirit contradict each other.

In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion,* he developed this position in detail in the Chapter 11 titled Impiety of attributing a visible form to God – The Setting up of idols a defection from the true God. Here he claims:

> "Meanwhile, seeing that this brutish stupidity has overspread the globe, men longing after visible forms of God, and so forming deities of wood and stone, silver and gold, or of any other dead and corruptible matter, we must hold it as a first principle, that as often as any form is assigned to God, his glory is corrupted by an impious lie."[21]

Calvin proceeds by emphasizing the difference in the essence of God and the material object, quoting Isaiah to highlight how absurd it is […] "when he who is incorporeal is assimilated to corporeal matter; he who is invisible to a visible image; he who is a spirit to an inanimate object; and he who fills all space to a bit of paltry wood, or stone, or gold."[22] He argues that although God sometimes manifested Himself in signs, these emphasized His ungraspable and unformable essence – the cloud, smoke, and flame – and denies that the Cherubim on the Ark could justify the existence of God's images as they themselves serve to hide Him and express how blasphemous it is to seek a vision of Him. He also refutes Gregory the Great's argument that images

19 Michalski, *Reformation and the visual arts*, 61–62. On the difference between Luther's and reformed Christology, see Petr Gallus, *The Perspective of Resurrection. A Trinitarian Christology* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2021). Luther's emphasis is on the unity of the person, that is an alexandrian approach, which leads him to assertion that the sharing of divine and human properties is real, as the person is real, and not only verbal. The conclusions of this assertion are the doctrine of ubiquity of Christ's human body and the notion of the death of God on the cross. The reformed position is on the other hand more antiochian and stresses the difference of Christ's natures, which keep their attributes and the radical difference is maintained. 121–123; 136.

20 *Ioannis Calvini Opera Omnia*, ed. W. Baum, vol. 1–58 (Corpus Reformatorum), Braunschweig – Berlin 1863–1900, vol. 26, 150–1.

21 Jean Calvin and Henry Beveridge, *Institutes of the Christian Religion: Translated by Henry Beveridge* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1953), 91.

22 Ibid., 91.

are the book of the unlearned, asserting that anything learned from images about God is futile and false, as it disrespects His character and majesty.[23]

Calvin acknowledges the difference between the supposed image of God and God Himself and believes that even the proponents of sacred images are aware of this distinction. They do not "actually believe them to be gods, but that the power of divinity somehow or other resides in them."[24] For Calvin, this distinction makes no difference because the power or presence of God cannot be connected with a material thing in such a manner.

Regarding the existence of images as such, Calvin is much more approving and does not consider all visible representations unlawful. He views sculpture and painting as gifts from God but insists they should be used purely and lawfully. This means they should not attempt to portray God because He has forbidden it, and any such attempt would compromise His glory. Visible things, on the other hand, can be represented in images and sculptures, which fall into two classes – historical and pictorial. The former can be used for instruction or admonition, while the latter are fitted for amusement. These are approved but should not be present in churches, as ancient churches did not have them either, and Calvin considers this age (the first five centuries) to be more pious. In the church, better symbols are the Baptism and Lord's Supper.[25]

It is interesting that Calvin argues almost solely from the Old Testament, quoting the prohibition of images (Ex, 20, 4–5) and prophets. He nowhere in this examination mentions the Incarnation, as Michalski points out, even though the incarnation played a significant role in the Byzantine strife over images.[26] As it was shown he did not see any benefit in keeping images for the sake of the weak, as Luther did, as it would only lead them into false anthropomorphism.[27] Although he did not completely reject the concept of a visible church and was in favor of some ornaments in church buildings, he regarded sacred images as dangerous due to their inherent idolatry and the superstition they fostered. The cult of images, according to Calvin, led to superstition and a misleading concept of God.[28]

23 Ibid., 92–94.
24 Ibid., 98.
25 Ibid., 100–101.
26 Michalski, *Reformation and the visual arts*, 66. Calvin sees the conclusions of the Council of Nice (787) nevertheless critically.
27 Ibid., 64.
28 Ibid., 68.

Michalski highlights two interesting aspects of Calvin's views on aesthetics: his attention to architecture and city planning, and his allowance for retaining images in private spaces. Calvin provided many concrete instructions on the appearance of churches and stressed the importance of "elegance and splendor" in city construction.[29] Outside of the church, he left space for religious images, especially narrative biblical scenes, and for secular art, as was pointed out above. He believed that by restricting religious images to the secular sphere, believers would not be misguided. Calvin argued, "Certainly, it is permissible to make use of images; however, God wishes his temple to be freed from images. If in a secular place, however, we have a portrait or a representation of animals, this is not harmful to religion […] even idols kept in such places are not worshiped."[30] He considered historical scenes, landscapes, and portraits appropriate subjects and genres of art because they are not venerated but could still be inaccurate and therefore should be restricted to the secular sphere.[31]

This judgment of Calvin fascinated many scholars, who, as Michalski notes, have seen him as a kind of spiritual director of the realistic current in the painting of the Calvinistic Low Countries. However, Michalski warns that this view is disputable, as several other influences were already in play. Nonetheless, he claims that "Dutch art on a general level profited, however, from the secularizing current inherent in Calvinism is, of course, another, quite well-known, matter,"[32] a point that will be explored more deeply in the next section of this article.

The Affirmation of Ordinary Life and Its Impact on the Arts

Before considering art in particular, it is useful to mention a significant related shift in societies influenced by the Reformation, especially by Calvinism. Charles Taylor characterizes this shift as the affirmation of ordinary life, listing it among three major facets of modern identity, alongside inwardness and the notion of nature as an inner moral source.[33] In *Sources of the Self*,

29 Ibid., 70.
30 *Calvini Opera*, vol. 40, 184.
31 Michalski, *Reformation and the visual arts*, 70.
32 Ibid., 72.
33 Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1989), 171.

Taylor argues that this affirmation developed in the early modern period, with the Reformation playing a significant role.

Taylor characterizes everyday life, affirmed during this era, as a life of production and reproduction, encompassing labor, marriage, and family. Historically, since Aristotle, these aspects of life were distinguished from those concerning a good life, which involved theoretical contemplation and participation in the polis. Merely maintaining life was not considered fully human.[34] Taylor focuses on the transition that challenges this hierarchy, positioning the locus of the good life not in a special range of higher activities but in everyday life, and criticizing previous "higher" activities.[35] He sees the origin of this transition in "the Judaeo-Christian spirituality, and the particular impetus it receives in the modern era comes first of all from the Reformation."[36]

The common concern of the Reformers was the rejection of the sacramental mediation, in favor of the mediation through the Word. The concern was not anymore which media are to bring up salvation and take the man to God, but how God mediates himself to humans. This paradigmatic shift led consequently to the rejection of the medieval understanding of the sacred.

The Reformation's emphasis that salvation comes from faith alone and is exclusively the work of God renders any differentiation between less and more devoted Christians, typical of the medieval framework, arbitrary. Whether one was a priest, carpenter, monk, or peasant did not bring one closer to God and salvation, which was only attainable through grace.

This recognition had consequences for the media of salvation – sacraments, mass, and the institution of the church in general. Taylor claims that the Reformers rejected the notion "that there are special places or times or actions where the power of God is more intensely present and can be approached by humans,"[37] and this rejection led to an enhanced status for profane life. The spiritual value was affirmed for lay life on behalf of the priesthood of all believers and Taylor strongly claims that "by denying any special form of life as privileged locus of the sacred, they [Protestant churches] were denying the very distinction between the sacred and profane

34 Ibid., 211–212.
35 Ibid., 213.
36 Ibid., 215.
37 Ibid., 216.

and hence affirming their interpenetration."[38] This positive account of the given development is crucial because it means that the fullness of Christian existence was to be found in one's everyday life, calling, marriage, and family. Taylor believes that "the entire modern development of the affirmation of ordinary life was, I believe, foreshadowed and initiated, in all its facets, in the spirituality of the Reformers."[39] This affirmation stems not only from the indifference of life roles but also from the belief that God, as the creator, affirms this life, as expressed in the first chapter of Genesis. Another biblical source for this reversal of hierarchies can easily be found in the anti-hierarchical character of the gospel.

This shift generated an ambiguous or perhaps dialectic relation to the world. Taylor mentions the Puritans' belief that we should love the things of this world, but our love should pass through them to their Creator.[40] Whether this or any other sophisticated relation to the world emerged, Taylor concludes that ordinary life was to be hallowed. He points out that this hallowing was different from the Catholic tradition, which connects it to the sacramental life of the church. In Protestantism, it came about within this life itself.[41]

Taylor elaborates on the development of these impulses in the new notion of calling, different from the idea of vocation, and its impact on civil and economic life and morality. However, for the purposes of this study, the more important consequences are for culture and particularly the arts. This issue is elaborated by William Dyrness, who explored the indirect impact of the Reformation on aesthetics in several works.[42] He challenges the common assumption that the Reformation represents only the reduction of sacramentals and places where believers can encounter God – such as altarpieces, saint plays, devotional images, or pilgrimages. Although this reduction is true,

38 Ibid., 217.
39 Ibid., 218.
40 Ibid., 221.
41 Ibid., 223.
42 William Dyrness, "God, language, and the use of the senses: the emergence of a Protestant aesthetic in the early modern period," in Sarah Covington and Kathryn Reklis (eds.), *Protestant Aesthetics and the Arts* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020); Idem, *The Origins of Protestant Aesthetics in Early Modern Europe. Calvin's Reformation Poetics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 19–40.

he argues that the Reformation at the same time expanded the aesthetic possibilities of religious, and not only religious, life.[43]

The influence of the Reformation on aesthetics is predominantly in what Taylor described as the affirmation of ordinary life. Therefore, the major aesthetic shift was in the subject matter of the art and its place of display. The change towards secular genres and the relevance of secular patrons of art is clear even from a brief historical observation. The greatest example of this development is the Netherlands, where artists carried over the existing tradition of portraiture and pioneered the art of landscape and still lifes and "the truthful scenes of everyday life known as genre painting."[44] They could not paint for the churches, but they could paint the churches – producing architectural studies of ecclesiastical interiors. Another genre, where religious themes were accepted, was history painting, especially scenes from the Old Testament which were not tempting to devotion. Marshall claims that "Rembrandt van Rijn (1606–69) was the undisputed master of these, giving the lie to any suggestion there is no such thing as Calvinist art."[45] He argues that Protestantism accelerated the separation of art and religion. Although the autonomy of art was not its concern, the conviction that art cannot express the divine or serve as a vehicle for grace helped in its liberation. At the same time, Marshall, similarly as Dyrness, notes that art benefited from this development as the range of possibilities expanded and "new vistas opened for the eye." On the other hand it was "at the price of accepting that there is no ultimate truth in art."[46]

Dyrness highlights other Dutch artist to show that, although the claim for ultimate truth may have been lost, the religious potential of even secular subjects was not. This example is Jacob van Ruisdael. In his painting *Three Great Trees in a Landscape*, we can see "a spiritual drama being played out: there is a broken-down house by the river and three stricken beech trees in the foreground."[47] The picture is interpreted as capturing the tension inherent in our conditions. It speaks about the dramatic presence of sin and fragility through the ruin and the general dark mood of the image on the one hand, and about the hope expressed through light breaking in the

43 Dyrness, *God, language, and the use of the senses*, 19.
44 Marshall, *The Reformation*, 103.
45 Ibid., 103.
46 Ibid., 104.
47 Dyrness, *God, language, and the use of the senses*, 31.

clouds and the men going out to labor on the other. The focus on nature is not on some scientifically neutral nature, but on nature as creation, which, Dyrness argues following Calvin, is both a theater for the glory of God and the dramatic site of sin and brokenness.[48] Additionally, van Ruisdael "offers an image that has extended aesthetic attention to the detailed examination of everyday life. For it is in the everyday life, Calvin claimed, that the drama of God's redemptive work is to be apprehended."[49] Therefore, Ruisdael and other Dutch painters represent one of the concrete manifestations of what Taylor calls the affirmation of ordinary life, foreshadowing later artistic tendencies and movements that transcend the realms of Protestantism's influence.

On the other hand, these works not only foreshadow later tendencies but also continue to explore themes of everyday life, nature, and secular genres that were already present in the painting of northern Europe at the time. This is evident, for example, in the case of Albrecht Altdorfer, a pioneer of landscape painting who worked during the Reformation era. As Christopher Wood points out, even when "Protestantism made inroads into Regensburg," there is "no evidence that Altdorfer strayed from the old faith."[50] Altdorfer's interest in nature was not driven by the new teachings, although he shared many of their sensitivities. While there is a latent iconoclasm in his omission of religious or other subjects in favor of nature, it was "never realized, for

48 In *The Origins of Protestant Aesthetics* Dyrness mentions Calvin's word from the Institution concerning the knowledge of God: "[…] wherever you cast your eyes, there is no spot in the universe wherein you cannot discern at least some sparks of his glory. You cannot in one glance survey this most vast and beautiful system of the universe, in its wide expanse, without being completely overwhelmed by the boundless force of its brightness." Calvin, Institution. Part I., V. 1. The chapter is called The Knowledge of God Shines Forth in the Fashion of the Universe and Continuing Government of It, 52.

49 Dyrness, *God, language, and the use of the senses*, 32.

50 Christopher S. Wood, *Albrecht Altdorfer and the Origins of Landscape* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 347. Wood emphasizes that Altdorfer's landscapes, with their vertical format and composition, resemble devotional panels and, as such, offer an alternative to them: "The empty landscape turned every beholder into a potential wilderness worshipper." However, these landscapes are not always empty; they often include a church or its ruins. Wood concludes that "The forest and the chapel are not antitheses, but extensions of one another." This new complementarity may have resonated with the contemporary cultural climate in Germany, which was marked by dissatisfaction with conventional religiosity and openness to alternatives. This shift included a renewed focus on nature and wilderness, offering a form of spiritual liberation from Rome. Ibid., 208–210.

he did not abandon religious imagery but rather went on making paintings, drawings, and prints of Christian subjects."[51]

These shared sensibilities toward ordinary life and nature also implied a latent opposition to artificiality, raising questions about truth and falsehood in art. This, in turn, led to the fundamental question concerning the nature of the image – the relationship between representation and the represented – which became crucial during the Reformation.

Christian Image as Iconoclastic Image

Joseph Leo Koerner, in his book *The Reformation of the Image*, elaborates on the distinct contribution of the Reformation to art, focusing more on Luther than Calvin. Contrary to the belief that Lutheran art removed church pictures, Koerner argues, as the title suggests, that it renewed them. Lutheran art continued many practices of the Roman Church, appropriated them, and gave them new meaning. This appropriation aimed to conceal differences to facilitate reconciliation, which Koerner terms an act of dissimulation. Nevertheless, the church pictures were not the only feature that Lutheran church has overtaken from Catholic worship: "Wearing traditional liturgical vestments, evangelical pastors administered Communion at altars that were lit by candles, decked in precious cloths, marked by free-standing crucifixes, and backed by altarpieces. They sometimes displayed the host in elaborate monstraces; and when they elevated it in the Mass, sacring bells rang and incense burden."[52]

For the appropriation of images its traction as *adiaphora* was crucial, Koerner notes, but he at the same time proposes an idea of the nature of the Christian image, which he terms "iconoclash", borrowing from Bruno Latour.[53] According to Koerner, the incarnation and crucifixion are crucial because they manifest the core of the Christian image. He contends that the Christian image has been iconoclastic from its inception. This iconoclasm began with the incarnation, where God is manifested in the form of a poor Jewish boy on the periphery of the Roman Empire, and continues through

51 Ibid., 333.
52 Koerner, *Reformation of the Image*, 62.
53 Ibid., 12.

Jesus' life to his humiliating death on the cross – the most ungodly thing imaginable.[54]

Therefore, God was hidden in these events, or rather, revealed under his opposite, as the image displays its object by negating it. The image is never what it shows, and when Luther and other reformers emphasized the absurdity of the belief that an image makes the divine present, they underscored this aspect and liberated the image from false expectations of being a magical object. Koerner argues throughout his work that it is unlikely anyone identified images with God; accusations of idolatry were more common than actual beliefs in such identification.[55] However, reformers felt compelled to oppose the idea of identity and to emphasize the mediating character of the image.

At the same time, Koerner acknowledges that this emphasis diminishes the power of images and represents a reductionist approach to visual representation. He critiques this attitude within his own field of study – art history – as being partly a legacy of the Reformation and also of Hegel's approach, which presupposes that an image has some meaning or points to something beyond itself, independent of the image itself.[56]

By stressing the aspect of showing and the difference between image and model, the image becomes less dangerous and less susceptible to idolatry. But at the same time, it should be emphasized *how* image shows, because it is not only a visible word and its way of showing differs from the verbal, at least in a sense that the meaning is not so clear in the image.[57]

---

54 Ibid., 13.

55 Koerner asks: "Has anyone ever believed in images in the ways described by iconoclasts? Certainly, people sometimes worship images, and treat them as agents that can answer their requests. But this is not the same as identifying the image with the God." Ibid., 96.

56 Ibid., 35.

57 Koerner comments on this misconception: "Art, it is hoped, leaves unsaid an unexchangeable something, distinct from the currency of meaning, which insures that, however much is explained, a minimum deposit will remain. The Schweinfurt canvas seems to empty out this reserve. Its surfaces support word while its depths are filled only with what words refer to." Ibid., 26.
On the distinction between saying and showing, Philipp Stoellger asserts following: "Images show, they show something (as something for somebody), they show themselves (are exposed), they are shown and used, so that something can be shown by them, they can as well show how they show and what it means to show (re-entry, self-reflective), and at any rate they hide a lot, because to show means at the same time to hide 'all the rest' (exclude all other possibilities). To show is de facto a highly exclusive selection, of

One possible way of showing is through contradiction, which points to something by presenting its opposite, as previously mentioned. For the theme of this article, the focus of the Reformation on this indirect method of presentation is crucial, as it leads some to consider it a specific characteristic of Protestant aesthetics and its closeness to ordinary aesthetics. This characterization was discussed in the volume *Protestant Aesthetics and the Arts*, particularly by Sarah Covington[58] and Alex Engebretson[59], and it is worth mentioning.

Covington draws from earlier works by Koerner and Dyrness and focuses on the artistic afterlives of Protestant iconoclasm. She explores the precedents and types of thinking that the Protestant Reformation established and how these patterns influenced later European and Western cultural development. These include practices and strategies such as purification, exposition, and the destruction of false idols, which became prominent not only in modernism but also in other movements. She also demonstrates how the remnants of destroyed traditions served their own strategic purposes – reminding spectators of what had been destroyed and functioning as mementos and tools for identity-making. The nostalgia for ruins and the melancholy of Romanticism draw from these impulses and re-enchant the past. "In this sense, the iconoclastic impulse served not as a disenchantment but a reenchantment of fractured objects, this time on other terms."[60]

Covington questions whether this aesthetic behavior is something distinctly Protestant. She claims that "Protestant iconoclasm led to transformation in aesthetic thinking and artistic practice, thereby embedding itself in the latter's DNA,"[61] but this transformation had an impact beyond one confession; although Protestantism introduced a new sensitivity and the possibility of interpreting fractured and ambiguous objects in the sixteenth century, it influenced broader cultural developments. This concern is particularly relevant to the modernist movement and artists such as Picasso or

course." Philipp Stoellger, "Living Images and Images We Live By. What Does It Mean to Become a Living Image?", in András Benedek and Kristóf Nyíri (eds.), *Beyond Words. Pictures, Parables, Paradoxes* (Peter Lang, 2015), 17–35.

58 Sarah Covington, "Unintended aesthetics? the artistic afterlives of Protestant iconoclasm," in Covington and Reklis (eds.), *Protestant Aesthetics and the Arts*, 113–129.

59 Alex Engebretson, "'Gorgeousness inheres in anything': the Protestant origins of John Updike and Marilynne Robinson's aesthetics of the ordinary," in ibid., 221–234.

60 Covington, "Unintended aesthetics?", 122.

61 Ibid., 126.

Duchamp, who utilized "iconoclastic" practices (and Guernica was acclaimed by Paul Tillich as "the most important Protestant painting of our times"[62]) or Le Corbusier, who embraced the whitewashing and purifying impulses of iconoclasm, along with various instances of fragmentation.[63]

The question of the Protestantism of this aesthetic also arises in Alex Engebretson's study titled *"Gorgeousness inheres in anything": the Protestant origins of John Updike and Marilynne Robinsons's aesthetics of the ordinary*. As the title suggests, the author does not present an example of specifically Protestant aesthetics but instead focuses on the origins of a distinct aesthetic approach. However, he argues that these authors "express and embody a particularly Protestant aesthetic modality, an exuberant attention to the mundane, the everyday, the quotidian,"[64] which can be somewhat misleading. He identifies the impulses of this modality, similar to Taylor and Dyrness, in the teachings of the Reformation, particularly in Luther's and Calvin's writings, and explores them in the works of Updike and Robinsons.

Engebretson contends that Updike was inspired by Luther's views on incarnation and Eucharist, which allowed him to see the potential presence of Christ everywhere. For Robinson, who has written extensively about Calvin in her works, it is Calvin's theology of beauty and perception that enables her to recognize God's glory in the most mundane things. This belief is eloquently expressed by one of her characters in *Gilead*, as the author reminds us: "[w]herever you turn your eyes the world can shine like transfiguration. You don't have to bring a thing to it except a little willingness to see."[65] This statement not only recalls Calvin's words from *Institutes*, as quoted above, but also illustrates Robinson's perspective: beauty already exists in this world, requiring no addition, just a readiness to perceive it. However, Engebretson argues that to perceive beauty in this way, and to recognize it as God's beauty, one needs a background in Christian metaphysics, a requirement applicable to Updike as well.

The influence on these authors is undeniably Protestant, but they are not the only ones to have found the sacred in the ordinary, as Engebretson

62 Ibid., 124.

63 "[…] from the formal fragmentations of earlier Cubist painting to collages and found art to Sergei Eisenstein's dialectical philosophy of film editing and Samuel Beckett's obsession with fragmented speech and the fractured self." Ibid., 125.

64 Engebretson, *Gorgeousness inheres in anything*, 221–222.

65 Ibid., 226.

himself notes, mentioning Catholic authors such as Flannery O'Connor and Walker Percy,[66] or modernist writers like James Joyce, Gertrude Stein or Virginia Woolf, whose relationships with religion were more complex. Therefore, it seems more appropriate to discuss the contribution of Protestantism to the emergence of this type of aesthetics and to debate the extent of its influence, acknowledging that its impact transcends confessional boundaries.

Conclusion

The contribution of the Reformation to the development of art is manifold. It goes far beyond the simplified impression of being a loss for art, although this is true to some extent – the destruction of some images by radicals and the end of certain ongoing artistic developments were setbacks. On the other hand, the Reformation's critique and restrictions concerning art helped facilitate the transition from religious images to art, as Hans Belting suggests[67], thus leading to the emergence of the category and phenomenon of art in its own right. By stripping images of their supposed supernatural powers, the Reformation liberated art for new purposes and purely aesthetic use. In this context, new subjects could flourish, and among them, everyday life took a significant position, as argued by Taylor, Dyrness, and others.

Influences for this affirmation include Luther's *theologia crucis* and Calvin's notion of the world as the theater of God's glory, along with his focus on everyday life as the locus of the salvation story. These theologies seem to have influenced and foreshadowed new artistic developments that emerged in modernity and remain prominent to this day. In these later developments, some artistic movements followed the iconoclastic impulses of the

66 Engebretson explores these authors in the part called The Catholic Other and is aware of many similarities among their work and that of Updike and Robinson and despite the different theological reasons for the appreciation of the ordinary he considered the abandonment of the distinction Protestant/Catholic in this regard. On the other hand he sees an alternative source of difference in the value which is given to the suffering in Catholic tradition and lack in the Protestant. Ibid., 229–230.

67 The subtitle of Belting's above mentioned book: a history of the image before the era of art, nicely captures this transition. On the other hand Belting emphasizes that: "The Protestant Reformers did not create this change of consciousness vis-à-vis the image; indeed, in this respect they were themselves the children of their time. What they rejected in the name of religion had long since lost the old substance of unmediated pictorial revelation." Belting, *Likeness and Presence*, 14.

Reformation and sparked revolutions in the art world, challenging previous conceptions of what art is – Duchamp and Warhol are among the best-known examples.

This development can be considered a secularization of art, or at least part of it. On the other hand, although the Reformation abandoned the devotional use of art, it facilitated a new spirituality connected with a deep respect for everyday life and its dramas. Art seems to be both an expression of this sentiment and a driving force behind this shift. In this regard, Dutch painters and contemporary writers such as John Updike and Marilynne Robinson were mentioned.[68] The discussion has therefore shifted from the question of whether it is possible to portray God, which reformers answered negatively and which seems to be misleading anyway, to whether, through aesthetic perception, one can discern a spark of His glory, which was seen much more positively. This shift has generated many other questions, such as if aesthetics is able to deliver a hint of God, does it make it a religion itself, therefore making art a new religion. As such, the described development would not only be a secularization of art, but at the same time a prolegomena to its sacralisation, though into a different kind of sacred than it was in the Middle Ages.

Filip Taufer
Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University
Černá 9, 110 00 Praha 1, Czech Republic
filiptaufer@gmail.com

68 Many other examples can be found in Richard Deming, *Art of the Ordinary. The Everyday Domain of Art, Film, Philosophy, and Poetry* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018), or Andrew Epstein, *Attention Equals Life. The Pursuit of the Everyday in Contemporary Poetry and Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

COMMUNIO VIATORUM LXVI (2024/3) 265–284

New Machines, Old Ghosts and the Bigger Soul: Opening for the Eschatological Gift[1]

Henrikas Žukauskas

Abstract: The experience of post-Soviet Lithuania suggests that the reductive coercive industrial, mechanistic reconstruction of the human and social world need not prevail. It is especially instructive because the collapse of Soviet project was also a rupture – a period of overall spiritual, cultural, political openness and creativity. Christian faith played an important part in resistance prior to this renewal and resurged in manifold ways contrary to what might have been expected. But while this period was characterized by eschatological moods and promise, its realization felt short. As similar moods resurge, the article will look at this brief moment of openness to the future through the lens of the trinitarian reflection on the activity of the Holy Spirit. The article will contend that the notion of the "event" of the Holy Spirit as eschatological Gift is crucial to assess its potential for ongoing theological engagement, offering a view of human activity and creativity.

Keywords: post-Soviet Lithuania; Yves Congar; Chinghiz Aitmatov; Holy Spirit; eschatology

DOI: 10.14712/30296374.2025.5

Introduction

News cycles and popular imagination are captivated by technological developments. The attempts to decipher the effects of AI (Artificial Intelligence) and automation follow, societies grow accustomed to their presence. Anxieties abound – their effect on employment, use and misuse in education, arts and entertainment – but also excitement. Scenarios range from optimistic to apocalyptic. There are striking similarities in some of them with artistic imagery of the late Soviet epoch. Familiar "ghosts" return in the dystopian vision of industrial and technological effects on human person and social fabric. Perhaps we are undergoing momentous change? The experience of post-Soviet Lithuania suggests that the reductive coercive industrial, mechanistic reconstruction of human and social world need not prevail. It is especially instructive because the collapse of Soviet project was also

1 This work was supported by the research project "Human flourishing and non-alienated labor in the era of automatization" (project No. P-MIP-21-392) funded by the Research Council of Lithuania. The author reports there are no competing interests to declare.

a rupture – a period of overall spiritual, cultural, political openness and creativity. I will look at it theologically because Christian faith played an important part in resistance prior to this renewal and resurged in manifold ways contrary to what might have been expected. But while this period was characterized by eschatological moods and promise, its realization felt short. As similar moods resurge, I will look at this brief moment of openness to the future through the lens of the trinitarian reflection on the activity of the Holy Spirit. I will contend that the notion of the "event" of the Holy Spirit as eschatological Gift is crucial to assess its potential for ongoing theological engagement. It is essential to a wholesome view of a human activity and creativity.

Machines, Work and the Bigger Soul

Contemporary researchers of automation look at technological development in the light of what went before and signal that the undergoing change is immense. Thus, also, will be the effects of technological, social and political developments on human freedom, agency and flourishing more generally. I take cue here from Carl Benedict Frey. Even if contemporary experiences seem disorienting, there are historical precedents. What for Bill Gates is the paradox of our age – "innovation is faster than ever before … yet Americans are more pessimistic about the future" – for Carl Benedict Frey is not a paradox at all.[2] Frey, approaching the issue of contemporary innovation through history with an eye to political economy, gives a helpful analysis and discernment in assessing these developments.[3] His exploration of the advances in automation and the rise of living standards in the Industrial Revolution distinguishes between "replacing" and "augmenting" technologies. He shows that living standards did eventually rise in the long run, but reminds us that "the short run can be a lifetime for some."[4] This indicates that we are undergoing a momentous change which will seriously affect large swathes of people. Frey helpfully does not look at technology in isolation. There is a hope in his contention that the challenge is not primarily technological,

2 Carl Benedict Frey, *The Technology Trap* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2019), 10, 11. The quote from Bill Gates is from E. Brynjolfsson, 2012, Race Against the Machine (MIT lecture), slide 2, http://ilp.mit.edu/images/conferences/2012/IT/Brynjolfsson.pdf.

3 Carl Frey, *The Technology Trap*, 13, 21.

4 Frey, ibid., 295.

but that of political economy. "In a world where technology creates few jobs and enormous wealth, the challenge is a distributional one. The bottom line is that regardless of what the future of technology holds, it is up to us to shape its economic and societal impact."[5]

He insists on the relation of the technological and political, with the latter having to discern and ensure the flourishing of society. There is a dynamism in the technological development that can bring in human and societal flourishment. But also indisputable is the novelty this particular technological advancement brings to human experience and activity in the world. But perhaps this novel development introduces something which is liberating? James Steinhoff challenges the optimistic claim that AI and full automation "heralds the collapse of capital under the weight of its own contradictions" as some say Marx has predicted.[6] Steinhoff looks at AI, understood as "an automation technology" as an "AI industry" and demystifies the optimistic concept of "immaterial labour" which some have associated with AI.[7] He uses Tiziana Terranova's bleak image to make his point: "The Marxian monster of metal and flesh would just be updated to that of a world-spanning network, where computers use human beings as a way to allow the system of machinery (and therefore capitalist production) to function."[8] For Steinhoff, rather, "AI work presents us with yet another example of the fragmentation, deskilling and automation of labour."[9] While these images suggest a new era, this era does not suggest the future of human empowerment, quite the contrary.

This is perhaps best illustrated by Phil Jones in *Work Without the Worker*. The marginalized workers stand invisible behind the automated dream

5 Ibid., 366.

6 Steinhoff refers to Marx, "The Fragment on Machines", in *Grundrisse*: "by mechanizing and automating labour processes, capital 'works towards its own dissolution as the form dominating production.'" James Steinhoff, *Automation and Autonomy* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2021), 46, quote from Karl Marx, *Grundrisse* (New York: Penguin, 1993), 700.

7 Steinhoff, *Automation and Autonomy*, 2. "Immaterial labour" refers to Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000). The argument Steinhoff seeks to dispel is that the information technologies through "the proliferation of information technologies" the "immaterial labourers […] can obtain an increasing autonomy from capital. Eventually, they can throw off capital completely and transition to a new autonomous mode of production." Steinhoff, *Automation and Autonomy*, 7.

8 Tiziana Terranova, *Network Culture: Politics for the Information Age* (London: Pluto Press, 2004), 87. This is not a Terranova's point, but this is precisely what Steinhoff argues for.

9 Steinhoff, ibid., 8.

world of smart devices. They clean data and oversee algorithms in "badly paid and psychically damaging tasks" to make digital lives possible.[10] And, this, according to him points to the end or the apocalypse of work as we know it. The whole concept erodes as the distinction between formal and informal work dissolves, work is becoming precarious, contingent and badly paid.[11] Furthermore, the substantial connection between work and wage is disrupted, the process of work is fragmented into small chunks.[12] This has an effect on how the human being is viewed. There is a shameless reference to "humans-as-a-service,"[13] when occupations turn into pseudo-occupations, this alienates "memory, knowledge and tradition, […] experience itself" and "work as a way of life."[14] The picture shows that this erosion cannot be limited to the non-Western world but actually penetrates into all corners of the world. However, this should not hamper human imagination, but on the contrary, call for new utopias.[15]

For Aaron Bastani the apocalyptic moods are not at all the accounts of resignation. They are rather the calls for struggle, movements and summoning of new Utopias. In *Fully Automated Luxury Communism* (FALC) Bastani proposes such a utopia based on the post-scarcity (in labour, energy, resources, health and sustainability) which is driven by the automation.[16] As to the distorted image of the human being, the utopia spills over into renewal of human agency and participation.[17] He finishes with the third part which is called "Paradise Found." According to Bastani, ours is a rapidly changing world

10 Phil Jones, *Work Without the Worker: Labour in the Age of Platform Capitalism* (London: Verso, 2021), 13.

11 Jones, *Work Without the Worker*, 16, 39. The work is "by default informalized, parcelled into badly paid, erratic piecework, and torn from the regulatory frameworks that legislate pay and rights." Jones, ibid., 80.

12 Ibid., 81, 84.

13 92. Reference here is to Jeff Bezos' marketing of Amazon Mechanical Turk, referring to Moritz Altenreid, "The Platform as Factory: Crowdwork and the Hidden Labour behind Artificial Intelligence," *Capital and Class* 44/2 (2020).

14 Jones, *Work Without the Worker*, 120, 125.

15 On the movements and organization of the wageless and Utopias, like "a Microwork Utopia", see Jones, ibid., 228.

16 Aaron Bastani, *Fully Automated Luxury Communism* (Verso, 2019).

17 "[…] technology is of critical importance, but so are the ideas, social relations and politics which accompany it. Thus in making sense of how we arrived at the present, from AI to synthetic meat, we must look at social movements – from Indigenous land rights to protecting animal welfare – as much as the underlying dynamics of extreme supply. Bastani, *Fully Automated Luxury Communism*, 239.

calling for new utopias, "because the old ones no longer make sense."[18] Several intersections emerge from these readings from contemporary literature on automation. First, it is the effect of technological and political overlap on human experience through human activity of work. It is, according to their account, predominately alienating, disrupting social fabric, numbing human beings, thus destructive. Consequently, this requires political imagination and intervention adequate to the developments in scale and depth. Secondly, its sense of urgency testifies to the emergence of overwhelming challenges extending to the core of human experience. It is here, in this intersection of social, experiential and technological that an apocalyptic and even religious language resurfaces. This, thirdly, calls for and invites a theological perspective and engagement adequate to participate in discussions concerning human agency and creativity.

The distinction of "mechanical" and "mystical" by French philosopher Henri Bergson can pave the way for a theological perspective. Bergson proposes that mechanical evolution is at its source mystical.[19] What was to become mechanization is for him connected with the first "yearnings after democracy."[20] Human being can rise above earthly things, and towards "open" society, only if "powerful equipment" allows humanity not to be "obsessed by the fear of hunger."[21] The development was to lead in this direction, but instead it turned not to the liberation of all, but luxury and comfort for the very few. The essence of mechanization, which began as a spiritual impulse, but proceeded automatically, mechanically, was distorted.[22] It was left with the body extended out of all proportions and with the soul "too small to fill

18 Bastani, ibid., 243.

19 For Bergson in is "the mystical summons the mechanical." Henri Bergson, *Two Sources of Morality and Religion*, 298.

20 Bergson, *Two Sources*, 296. This has to be viewed in the light of Bergson's distinction between "open" and "closed" society, described as "two types of motivation […] obligation and moral aspiration […]. The first acts as a type of pressure, a centripetal movement of closure, fostering a closed model of society (or association) and a static form of religion. The second is an outward, dissociative and centrifugal movement, bearing within it the seeds of open sociability and dynamic spirituality." John Mullarkey and Keith Ansel Pearson, *Henri Bergson: Key Writings* (London: Continuum, 2002), 39.

21 Bergson, *Two Sources*, 298.

22 Keith Ansell Pearson and John Mullarkey point out that for Bergson if closed morality is obedient to the law, open morality works by "'appeal', 'attraction' or call,'" requires a privileged personality, a hero of a religious type, thus "these mystics are creators, transgressing the boundaries of life, mind and society in their inspirational morality. […] In crossing all frontiers, mysticism goes 'beyond the limits of intelligence', the

in […] too weak to guide" this body.[23] Thus initially the mystical summoned the mechanical, but now this body, larger, "calls for a bigger soul, and that mechanism should mean mysticism" and "mechanization will find its true vocation by enabling humanity, to stand erect but look heavenward."[24] The last sentences of Bergson's book are particularly telling:

"Mankind lies groaning, half crushed beneath the weight of its own progress. Men do not sufficiently realize that their future is in their own hands. Theirs is the task of determining first of all whether they want to go on living or not. Theirs the responsibility, then, for deciding if they want merely to live, or intend to make just the extra effort required for fulfilling, even on their refractory planet, the essential function of the universe, which is a machine for the making of gods."[25]

This is a kind of mystical humanity, where the "mysticism of 'dynamic religion'" means a sovereignty over things but not human beings.[26] Bergson's concept of mystical, its effect by attraction, and the role of "mystics" allows for the possibility of a spiritual or religious event to inscribe itself on a mechanized (or automatized) world. But it also might appear unduly optimistic as to human agency. Bergson wrote the book in 1932. I read it from a post-Soviet Lithuanian perspective. What this perspective provides is comparable to the literature from automation and has to be kept in mind before returning to Bergson's proposal with a theological proposal.

Complications of Post-Soviet Lithuanian Experience

For a person who grew up in Soviet Lithuania and then witnessed its transition to the Western world, an encounter with apocalyptic language is not new. It is not the first time in my life-time that the apocalyptic moods come with the questions of personal and political agency, and the struggle for freedom and creativity. Precisely such feeling accompanied the times of Lithuanian restoration of its independence in the 1990s. Independence came after the years of resistance to Soviet regime with the prominent role

ultimate end of mysticism being to establish a partial coincidence with the creative effort which life manifests." Mullarkey, Pearson, *Henri Bergson*, 42.

23 Bergson, ibid., 298

24 Bergson, ibid., 299.

25 Ibid., 306.

26 Ibid., 299.

in it duly attributed to the Roman Catholic Church in Lithuania. The Soviet atheist regime sought to dismantle its communal structures and forcefully secularize the society by industrializing it.[27] It is possible to compare this experience to that from the literature on the new social reality of work with its effects on human experience, but also introduce the dimension of faith. Arguably, this was also a coercive atheist regime, however, sociologists have successfully compared the two industrializations, Western and Soviet, especially in their effects.[28] Then came the collapse of the Soviet regime and a resurgence which had many dimensions, not only spiritual, but also political, ecological, cultural. Resurgence of religious life was also abundant. Such event thus raises two questions. Firstly, keeping in mind the effort at dismantling the religious life and its relation with industrialization, what does a mere presence of this revival tell about the depth of its effects? Sociologists have pointed out that Roman Catholic Church helped to resist russification and played a role in consolidating civil society. However, this role was not sufficient to deal with the challenges that came with democratic pluralism and adjusting to developing and westernizing institutions.[29] So, secondly, what was the theological significance of this event, what was its depth and implications for life of the society if any? Can, in other words, this event be assessed as mystical event of the growth of "soul" averting the effects of mechanization? To assess this, it would be first helpful to look at the artistic image exploring what these effects could look like.

To do this I turn to one of the most dystopic images of suppression of human agency and creativity which comes from the arts, literature and theater. It will help to tie together the experiences of the Soviet period and more recent discussion of effects of technological developments. It is the legend about mankurt, a person turned into non-person by removing his memory. The novel of Kirgiz author, Chinghiz Aitmatov, The Day Lasts More Than a Hundred Years, where this legend is told, was turned into

27 This includes massive displacement of population, dismantling of rural religiosity, lay organizations, religious education, eliminating religious consciousness and promoting even secular rites of passage and state funeral houses. Arūnas Streikus, "Shifts in religiosity in the face of Soviet type urbanization: the case of Lithuania," *Journal of Baltic Studies* 48/2 (2017), 8–10, 235–249.

28 Milda Ališauskienė and Ina Samuilova, "Modernizacija ir religija sovietinėje ir posovietinėje Lietuvoje," *Kultūra ir visuomenė: socialinių tyrimų žurnalas* 2/3 (2011), 79.

29 Valdas Pruskus, "Katalikų bažnyčios kaita Lietuvoje transformacijų laikotarpiu," *Problemos* 63 (2003), 45–61.

a stage performance and premiered in Lithuania in 1983, the last decade of Soviet Lithuania.[30] The drama reconstructed the almost never-ending and multilayered journey of the novel of a protagonist who travels to bury the body of the friend of his youth. He travels to a cemetery only to find out that there is no cemetery, but a cosmodrome. The imagery from this novel lingers in Lithuanian cultural memory, but it is not univocal. It muses about the destruction of the past, also the dawn of the "new" world brought by technology. When read in the contemporary context, the relation of memory and the "new" world brought in by technological advancement is even more pertinent.[31] The success of the story in the last stage of Soviet Union is itself the triumph of creativity over the repression. Yet the story's sting remains. If human memories and the social structures that sustain them are dismantled in a new technological era what is left of human agency and creativity? Viewed from Lithuanian context, can the persons in a new society become active and creative, or perhaps servility persists? What would be necessary to truly address the effects of servility and mount a challenge to the instruments that implement it? These questions lead to explore the legend in-depth.

The mankurt image plays an important role in the novel which immerses the reader into the journey to cemetery.[32] Cemeteries are the places where one is surrounded by the past, but this cemetery in the novel, Ana-Beiit, is also a pantheon. It dated back to the times when Kazakh nomads inhabited Sarozek and this land was attacked by the other people, cruel Zhuan'zhuan. The legend is about the young captive nomad warriors, whom the Zhuan'zhuan turned into slaves. The details of the cruel method betray a gruesome intent:

30 "Ilga kaip šimtmečiai diena," *Menufaktūra* (premiere 1983), https://www.menufaktura.lt/?spk=28709; "Eimunto Nekrošiaus spektaliai," *Lietuvos teatro, muzikos ir kino muziejus*, https://ltmkm.lt/muziejus/spektaklis-kvadratas/ (accessed 29. 3. 2023).

31 Joseph P. Mozur, *The Parables from The Past: The Prose Fiction of Chingiz Aitmatov* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1994) recounts how Chingiz Aitmatov probed the advantages of the late-Soviet era by inserting a chapter called The White Cloud of Genghis Khan into the novel in 1990 (124–129). But he also refers to the caricatures like "remote-controlled human beings," ecological disaster brought about by the large scale irrigation projects, "terrifying side of technology for both man and beast" in the missile launch, and more general implication "that technology has taken away one's basic right to be buried alongside one's ancestors" (121).

32 Chingiz Aitmatov, *The Day Lasts More than a Hundred Years* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1983), chapter 6, 121–147.

> "First of all their heads were completely shaved and every single hair was taken out by the root. When this was completed, expert Zhuan'zhuan butchers killed a nearby nursing mother camel and skinned it. First they removed the heavy udder with its matted hair. Then they divided it into several pieces and, in its still warm state, stretched it over the shaven heads of the prisoners […]. The man who was subjected to the ensuing torture either died because he could not stand it, or he lost his memory of the past for ever. He had become a mankurt, or slave, who could not remember his past life."[33]

The effects of the merging of human person and serving animal were illustrative and devastating. The skin of the animals constricted under the searing sun and the human hair grew into the camel's skin or unable to penetrate it, bent back. Thus, through a person was turned into "a living carcase " of the former self.[34] The interpenetration of human skin with that of the subservient animal made mankurt valuable, ten times worthier than other slaves, because he could not recognize himself as a human being: "deprived of any understanding of his own ego […]. He was the equivalent of a dumb animal, and therefore absolutely obedient and safe […] absolutely impervious to any incitement to revolt."[35] This chilling description culminates in the story of the encounter of one of the mankurts with his mother Naiman-Ana. She heard from travelers about a young herdsman who was talking "as if he had been born yesterday."[36] Naiman-Ana correctly suspected that it might be her lost son, she appeals to his memories and hopes for his awakening. The legend concludes with the mother killed by her mankurt son. Then, the cemetery was named after her "Ana-Beiit cemetery – the Mother's Resting Place" and carries on the memory of the encounter. The mother's image encapsulates the past, the embodied connection with one's roots. The mankurt kills his mother driven by fear as his master threatens that the mother will tear his slavish cap and steam his head.[37]

There are several aspects of the story which are particularly relevant. First, and most troubling, is the invasion through the external effects on the body (torture) into the human memories.[38] Yet Aitmatov does not primarily have torture in mind. Rather, according to Mozur, it is the russification of

33 Aitmatov, *The Day Lasts More that a Hundred Years*, 124, 125.
34 Ibid., 125.
35 Ibid., 126.
36 Ibid., 129.
37 Ibid., 144.
38 "They can take your land, your wealth, even your life," she said aloud, "but who ever thought, who ever dared to attack a man's memory? Oh God, if You do exist, how did You give such power to people? Isn't there evil enough on earth without this?" (140)

Kazakhs, the manipulation of local language through "alphabet reforms" and "national delimitation of the region" in 1924.[39] Thus the external effects of the political actions is evident. But the servility is internalized and this leads to loss of agency, creativity and freedom as evident from the interactions of the protagonist in his journey to the cemetery. Then, secondly, the telling of the legend is interjected by the refrain, "the trains in these parts went from East to West and from West to East" and then the exchange of coded messages on the "aircraft carrier Convention" with cosmonaut controllers "on the Parity orbital station."[40] These are clear images of technological advancement which precipitate the ultimate discovery that the cemetery was levelled for the sake of a cosmodrome. It is thus valid to read the image as a kind of reflection on a new human being formed through industrialization and technology, prepared for a new world, but essentially servile and unable to act in it and yearning for some external control. The key factor is the severance of the human being from the sources of personality and the reduction of his concern to the piece of skin of servile animal, the sign of servility imposed on him. This is a strong and disconcerting (not to mention pessimistic) image.

Theological Vision of Resistance, Its Limits and Pneumatological Potential

The image carries with itself not only the effect of traumatic, violent eradication of the past. It can be read alongside with the effects of automatization on human activity and tradition mentioned earlier. On the other hand, the retelling of the legend is itself a powerful literary sign of human resistance. It is thus also possible to read it alongside Bergson's account of the mystical and mechanical. It is even more relevant as it shows the point of the assault – human body – and human activity, work, which is an embodied social and cultural activity. Turning to the Lithuanian context this helps to appreciate the theological vision of resistance to totalitarianism. In the beginning

39 Mozur, *The Parables from The Past*, 112, 113. The essentially homogenous Turkic territory was divided into "five 'independent' central Asian republics" and then their distinctive contributions were encouraged. Mozur, *The Parables from The Past*, According to Mozur "throughout Aitmatov's novel 'dividers' are cast in the negative light – similar to the *shiri* that constrained the memory of the the *mankurt*." Mozur, ibid., 114.

40 Aitmatov, ibid., 135, 136.

of the 20th century Roman Catholic theologian Yves Congar argued that for the faith to survive, a milieu favorable to faith and to the human existence through "politics of presence" has to be recreated.[41] The theological rationale of this suggestion is a logic of a continuity of incarnation of faith into ever new milieus. Yet such emphasis on the milieu would present a grim picture in the context of totalitarianism and forced secularism bent precisely on disrupting it. These efforts at disrupting, however, were resisted and the remnants of the milieu were maintained.

According to Lithuanian Catholic theologian Ligita Ryliškytė, the image of Rūpintojėlis, which she uses to interpret post-Gulag experience, illustrates this.[42] This Lithuanian image of Christ is a wooden sculpture, a part of popular culture. Its name could be translated "One who cares" or "Dear One, who provides."[43] He provides a kind of continuing touch in a popular religiosity and identifies with the spirituality of resistance, points to Christ's suffering with and for us. However, Ryliškytė also points to the ambiguity of the image and a helplessness it projects. So, she points out the challenge post-Gulag Christology faces, "that of remodeling its approach to salvation and eschatology."[44] Perhaps herein also lies theological potential to cope with the new challenges.

This reference to eschatological when viewed in the context of the collapse of the Soviet regime provides a corrective to a theological perspective and invites a revisiting of the image of "mankurt." Congar, in his later work, was aware of the limits of a focus on incarnation and ecclesiology, and called for the correction of this theological stance with an eschatological perspective. After the initial stage of his work focusing on reform of the church, he argued for a wider theological stance, interpenetrating the Revelation, anthropology and theology of the world. He argued for an "[…] even more radical idea [… that is] the very notion of faith and the correlative idea of revelation […] the idea of God as the living God which is the indissoluble link […] between theology, anthropology and cosmology."[45] To respond to the "modern unbelief" the

41 Yves Congar, "Une conclusion théologique à la enquête sur les raisons actuelles de l'incroyance," *La vie intellectuelle* 37/2 (1935), 248.

42 Ligita Ryliškytė, "Post-Gulag Christology: Contextual Considerations from a Lithuanian Perspective," *Theological Studies* 76/3 (2015), 468–484.

43 Ryliškytė, "Post-Gulag Christology," 473.

44 Ryliškytė, ibid., 479.

45 Congar, *Dialogue Between Christians: Catholic Contributions to Ecumenism* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1966), 23.

intimate connection between the realities of faith in God and the prospect of the divine reign had to be credibly demonstrated.[46]

Dealing with the issue of "mankurtism" provides a way to test this proposal. The collapse of the Soviet Union, the liberation of countries under it and the ushering in of a new era provides a setting to ask if mere revival of the past is sufficient to go forward. The movements which have led to independence, like Lithuanian Sąjūdis, present an intriguing case. They cannot be explained merely as restoring the past. It was also an unleashing of creative energies, empowerment, agency, solidarity, all-about creativity. It would make sense to view it using Bergson's categories of "mystical" in terms of its genuine openness to the future and creativity. In the Lithuanian case, it was a also "Singing Revolution," non-violent popular upheaval, and comprised ecological, popular political dimensions.[47] A theological focus on the continuity of the past is not sufficient. One has to introduce an eschatological dimension to assess such an event.

Holy Spirit: History, Gifts, Event

Reference to eschatology allows us to connect Bergson's insights about mystical event and Congar's theological proposal around the attention to the activity of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, when reflecting on the role of the Holy Spirit in history, which interests me primarily in this article, Congar has Bergson in view. In his article "Theology of the Holy Spirit and Theology of History" Congar quotes Claude Trésmontant: "In biblical thought, as in Bergson, eternity coexists with creative and inventive time. Time is not the unfolding of what had already been given beyond time […]. Time really is the perpetual beginning of unforeseen novelty."[48] And Congar clearly has the

46 Ibid.

47 On Lithuanian Sąjūdis see Martha Brill Olcott, "The Lithuanian Crisis," *Foreign affairs* 69/3 (1990), 30–46. This article correctly marks out the importance of ecological movement beside the political. On the largest non-Catholic religious churches in "Lithuania's bustling 'religious market'" in post-Soviet times, see Gediminas Lankauskas, "The Civility and Pragmatism of Charismatic Christianity in Lithuania," *Conversion after Socialism: Disruptions, Modernisms and Technologies of Faith in the Former Soviet Union* (2009), 108; Ainė Ramonaitė and Jūratė Kavaliauskaitė, "Who led the 'Singing Revolution' across Lithuania? A typology of the pioneers of the Sąjūdis movement," *Ethnologie francaise* 170/2 (2018), 305–318.

48 Yves Congar, *The Spirit of God* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America Press, 2018), 138.

activity of the eschatological Gift, the Spirit, in mind. "[…] The Holy Spirit is, within history, the principle of continuity or identity and the principle of newness, […] the principle proper to the 'new creation,' which looks toward the eschaton [Congar writes 'eschatology'] and rises toward it."[49] This allows us to place alongside each other such an event of vibrancy and manifold creativity (including ecclesial), and the activity of the Spirit, but also to read Congar and Bergson together. In a different article, "The Holy Spirit in the Thomistic Theology of Moral Action," in which he explored the activity of the Holy Spirit in its relation to human activity, he wrote as much. He contended that with the role of the Spirit highlighted, his account "corresponds better to the morality and religion of aspiration than to the morality and religion of constraint, in the sense of H. Bergson in Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion (1932)."[50] Besides evident opposition to constraint, how can such am account of human activity address the challenge raised by the legend of the "mankurt?"

This can be gleaned from Congar's Trinitarian proposal, rereading a Thomist theology of action. Here the role of the Spirit is articulated in the role of "the gifts of the Holy Spirit" and "the New Law" and is set in the general picture of how creatures "are moved and move themselves toward their goal," which is God.[51] Over against the image of an enslaved human being under coercive external rule, it paints the picture of a human being who is free, self-determining and furthermore, creating themselves through their own actions and habits. But crucial for this freedom is that this movement is achieved by the new dynamism, the action of God in them, as God "moves" them, and this works within their very freedom.[52]

This presents to the complex situation of the "mankurt" a divine action, which goes beyond to that which is "outside of human persons," meaning

49 Congar, "The Holy Spirit in the Thomistic Theology of Moral Action," in *The Spirit of God*, 138, 139.

50 Congar, "The Holy Spirit," 159.

51 "God in God's properly divine life, insofar as it is communicable and is in fact communicated by grace, which communication is appropriated to the Holy Spirit." Congar, ibid., 146, 147, 155. Congar provides extensive references to Thomas Aquinas *Summa Theologica* in particular on the "gifts of Spirit" *ST* 1a2ae, q. 68, on God moving human beings through their own freedom *ST* 1a2ae, q.9, a.4 and 6; q. 68, a.3, ad2; 2a2ae, q.23, a.2; q.52, a.1, ad 3. [3]. On "New Law" *ST* 1a2ae, q. 108, a. 1 (body) and ad 2; a. 4.

52 Congar, "The Holy Spirit in the Thomistic Theology of Moral Action," 147.

the "law", but shows a divine help through grace.[53] "Grace" is where Congar highlights the activity of the Spirit, through the gifts (of the Spirit) "the faithful person acts … [beyond the human mode] … [moved by a higher principle]."[54] And this "beyond the human mode" points to that which implies the activity beyond human capacities within human activity. These "gifts of the Spirit" are divine impulses and inspirations, but the role of the Spirit becomes most prominent in the event of the Spirit. This is the intervention of God personally, to give fullness to Christian practice and activity as children of God.[55] So, Congar argues, Thomas makes room for the "event of the Holy Spirit," [italics Congar's] whereby what "is settled" in morality "still calls for the event of the Holy Spirit."[56] Such intervention seems adequate to address the state of the "mankurt." But one cannot look at a human being in this obliterated state in isolation.

Congar's look at the role of the Holy Spirit in human activity does not stop at this personal level. For him (following Aquinas) even the communal structures wherein faith is inscribed or instilled are open to the activity of the Spirit. This point is significant because it reminds us of the "mankurt's" encounter with his mother, who appealed to his memories. Even if there were stories of resistance and dissidence to the Soviet regime, the communal fabric, the milieus, were disrupted. The immediacy of a healing and transformative encounter with the Spirit need not be hampered as Congar's next step, "the New Law" or "the Law of the Gospel"[57] suggests. This new law "consists primarily in the interior grace of the Holy Spirit which produces faith, which is active through love."[58] The emphasis on interior in our context points to its non-coercive, cooperative and free nature. Read against the backdrop of "mankurt", this suggests an interior transformation adequate to the external trauma. It revives human freedom and creativity.

53 Congar, ibid., 148.
54 Ibid., 149.
55 Christians "have their actions normed by something beyond the virtues, beyond reason indwelt by faith, beyond supernatural prudence – by Another, infinitely superior and supremely free, the Holy Spirit, the Third Person, to whom the operations of love and of gift are appropriated." Ibid., 149. See also Yves Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1983), vol. 1, 120.
56 Congar, "The Holy Spirit in the Thomistic Theology of Moral Action," 150, 152.
57 Congar, ibid., 152–161.
58 Ibid., 153.

Congar's concern is primarily ecclesial, so he writes in detail about the relation of this New Law with "the logic of Incarnation:" the necessary connection of interior grace with exterior means, "teaching of faith," "the sacraments," "precepts which order human affections and human actions."[59] In terms of our story twhat is passed on might refer to the "mankurt's" mother. Mere references to memories are not sufficient. Yet, what is passed on externally is not all there is, neither is it determinate. This "New Law is primarily the grace of the Holy Spirit."[60] As it is primarily the grace, then all what is external, even the letter of Scripture, is "wholly subsumed by grace," and it is because of this that "the Gospel Law or New Law can be called 'the law of freedom.'"[61] The picture of the human being which emerges from this encounter with the Holy Spirit is the human being who determines and who does the will of God not out of constraint, but freely and spontaneously. The structures and means that instill this are also porous to the activity of the Spirit and serve it.

The Event of the Holy Spirit Reviewed

Congar's emphasis on the activity of the Spirit can be read with the image of the "mankurt" in mind and present a picture of restoration of human creativity and even more. There is another kind of dynamism due to the activity of the Spirit which goes beyond restoration. This activity subsumes what is external, the structures and institutions that pass on memory. However, the application to the state of "mankurtism" is not evident, neither is it clear how to apply it to the revival which surrounded the regaining of Lithuania's independence. Furthermore, this does not address the eschatological overtones of the event, and the unleashing of creative energies in the political sphere, arts, ecology. Yet for Congar the Spirit is "the eschatological Gift and the agent of fulfilment of God's plan and work."[62] How can it relate to Bergson's call for a growth of a bigger "soul," "mystical" for the expanded mechanized body of humanity? To begin with, Congar sees the activity of the Spirit beyond ethics and he relates his thoughts on the activity of the Spirit to Christianity at large. For him it is not a law and not a morality, while

59 Ibid., 153, 154.
60 Ibid., 154.
61 Ibid., 155.
62 Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 3, 144, 145.

having law and morality, but rather the reality of grace which produces "by the gift of the Spirit of Christ" adequate qualities and behaviors.[63] These come by appeal rather than imposition, in a "mystical" way in Bergson's sense, and this is precisely because of the activity of the Spirit.[64] In this way Congar himself positions Christianity vis-à-vis Bergson's "mystical," and the latter implied the events and personalities. This shows that what Congar has written about the "event of the Spirit" should be extended to apply his theology of the Spirit to the social and political realm.

I propose that to do this the notion of "event" of the French poet and philosopher Charles Péguy as identified by the contemporary French philosopher Camille Riquier is key. Firstly, there is an inscription of the spiritual into the socio-political. Riquier shows that Péguy has extended Bergson's notion of inscription to include social and political dimension.[65] This means, that for Péguy there is "no idea without a body, no mind without matter, no event without the promise for the world."[66] So, if Bergson in his explorations of the relation of body and mind focused on individual memory, Péguy looked at the memories that resonated together and enveloped individual memory and took "dimensions of a people and a civilization."[67] This "insertion" is "an event" and Riquier marks out that for Péguy it encompasses the extraordinary scope of God and world, so that in it the temporal roots are plunged into eternity.

---

63 Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, vol. 2, 126.

64 "[Christianity] is an ontology of grace which involves, as its fruit or product, certain attitudes that are called for and even demanded by what we are […]. The Spirit […] is a law imposed not by pressure, but by appeal, as Bergson commented in his book *Les deux sources de la morale et de la religion* (1932)." Congar, ibid., 126.

65 "Everything is in the incorporation, in the incarceration, in the incarnation. And here again, in this matter, we are compelled to speak the Bergsonian language, and will never speak another. Everything is in the insertion, and insertion is extremely rare. Of God there has been only one incarnation, and even of ideas there are very few incorporations. When, instead of considering an idea in the air, it is all of a sudden taken seriously, this is what is and makes a revolution. And history counts only three or four of these great upheavals." Charles Peguy, *Notes on Bergson and Descartes: Philosophy, Christianity, and Modernity in Contestation* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2019), 153.

66 Camille Riquier, "Charles Péguy. Métaphysiques de l'événement," in Debaise Didier, *Philosophie des possessions* (Paris: Les Presses du reel, 2011), 197–232, 197.

67 "If, for Bergson the body is the point of insertion of individual memory, i.e. what realizes and limits the spirit [mind], for Péguy a people, a race, a homeland, a world must serve as a body if a political and social spirit [mind] is to realized." Riquier, "Charles Péguy. Métaphysiques de l'événement," 201.

This is its theological aspect of reaching beyond the contemporary situation. This eternity for Péguy, Riquier explains, is "not the eternal eternity of God, but rather a temporal eternity" whereby humanity reaches out to its roots in God to receive a "nourishing sap."[68] The "event" consequently is a point of intersection "between the ascending, vertical line of human race and the horizontal line of time" is the birth or event.[69] Congar was aware of this relation between temporal and eternal when he classified Péguy under "natural analogues of prophecy."[70] Reading alongside Péguy's "event" Congar's "event of the Spirit" acquires or is inscribed into the socio-political realm, with memory acquiring a spiritual dynamic of reaching beyond to eternity. This can be placed alongside Congar's earlier mentioned remark on the activity of the Holy Spirit in history.

Secondly, there is a parallel in emphasis on "within" and the experiential dimension. Riquier shows that for Péguy the event is not something which can be explained "from without" nor reduced to historical account. Participation in the event is a Bergsonian "integral experience," not the one of becoming familiar with the thing and then having sympathy for it, but rather an intimate knowledge of participation "I only know a real event when I live it, body and soul, even if I have to return to it from within my memory as time goes by."[71] [italics in the original] It has a "within" character. Riquier refers to a major opposition of Péguy between history/analysis [Clio] and Memory/intuition [Mnemosyne], where Clio as daughter should come after not before.[72] If history revolves around the event and multiplies perspectives on it from the outside, memory "enters it and knows it from within."[73] This "within" is compatible with the "within" character of Congar's event of the Spirit and allows it to be seen as social and political. Such an overlap indicates the potential porousness of the social and political events for the activity of the Spirit if both accounts are viewed together. Furthermore, it also situates

68 Riquier, ibid., 203.

69 Ibid., 203 quoting Charles Péguy, *À nos amis, à nos abonnés*, in Charles Péguy, *Œuvres en prose complètes*, édition présentée, établie et annotée par Robert Burac (Paris: Gallimard, 1988), 1313.

70 Yves Congar, *True and False Reform in the Church* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2011), 186, 195.

71 Riquier, "Charles Péguy. Métaphysiques de l'événement," 205.

72 Major opposition in Charles Péguy's book *Clio*, found in English in Charles Péguy, Alexander Dru and Pierre Manent, *Temporal and Eternal* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 2001).

73 Riquier, "Charles Péguy. Métaphysiques de l'événement," 205.

the "within" of faith within the larger scope of revived creativity, so a comparison might be extended with Congar's role of the Spirit in virtues and spiritual gifts. Péguy reflects on the liveliness of what was initiated by the event. What gives grace to short-circuit time, "never grows old," and "opens a crack to let in, even for an instant, a new beginning,"[74] is the "supernature (holiness) […] grace, hope essentially counter-habit."[75] As was already shown from Congar, for his, grace was the activity of the Spirit, this allows to see it in socio-political setting.

Thirdly, and this is where the political dimension of the "event of the Spirit" can be delineated, are parallels with Péguy's reflections on the revolution. Riquier shows that for Péguy revolution "is not imposed on a people from the outside, it comes from (the depths of) within, and is for each individual a matter of inner conversion."[76] It comes from "within," and thus binds together what has been just said with the social movements. Yet for revolution to have a real novelty, there is "the probe" to be launched "into a deeper tradition if it was to make 'a deeper humanity emerge and arise than the humanity of the tradition it opposes'[77]: 'a revolution essentially amounts to delving deeper into the unexhausted resources of inner life.'"[78] This allows this "probe" and connection with the sources to be read together with a revolutionary event as an eschatological event of the Spirit. And the eschatological dimension can be extended even further, as Péguy's reflections on socialism and Christianity indicate. For Péguy, Riquier writes, "the new socialist city, if it is to exclude no-one, must be older than the old Christian world, and solidarity must spring from a 'deep attachment to life', from an animal or even vegetable 'rootedness' that the Christian still lacks."[79] This allows us to see the event of Sąjūdis as an opening to the encounter with the eschatological Gift with a potential to

74 This new beginning then "like Monet's first Nymphea, which contains all the following ones." Riquier, "Charles Péguy. Métaphysiques de l'événement," 210.

75 Ibid., quoting from Charles Péguy, *Notes on Bergson and Descartes*, 238. This disobeys the universal law of aging, and the event which springs from its interweaving with temporal, cannot be explained linearly by looking at causes and effects but is "time cut by eternity." Riquier, "Charles Péguy. Métaphysiques de l'événement," 211.

76 Riquier, "Charles Péguy. Métaphysiques de l'événement," 217.

77 Riquier quotes from Charles Péguy, *Avverissement au Monde sans Dieu* (1904) in Péguy, *Œuvres en prose complètes*, 1305.

78 Riquier, "Charles Péguy. Métaphysiques de l'événement," 221.

79 Ibid. Riquier quotes Charles Péguy, *Toujours de la grippe* (1900), in Péguy, *Œuvres en prose complètes*, 463.

renew all life, and faith here could have a role to deepen it and permeate the venues the event opens up for it.

This comparison enables envisioning within our post-Soviet experience the "event" of Sąjūdis as a locus of event of the Spirit, an activity of the eschatological Gift. On the one hand, it was overwhelming, capturing and enabling, and on the other, interweaving personal, political, even, ecological awakenings. While faith played an important part in resistance to Soviet experience, this novelty cannot be explained as its result. This novelty itself revived and gave birth to faith in a new context and socio-political fabric. Inscribed within this movement faith required new forms and was challenged by the new tasks. And while feeling eager. it soon enough has faced its limits. True, "mankurtism" was substantially addressed by this event "from within" in the revival of the whole society and its fabric, but it was not a decisive break with it. Subsequent years would reveal the fragility of this experience. Both faith and society did not have adequate ways to reflect on the novelty which overtook it. It is here that the notion of "event" viewed as an encounter with eschatological Gift might play an important role. With its restoring, interweaving and fulfilling availability, but also its non-coercive fragility, this Gift allows for reflection, reorientation and further engagement. On the one hand, our Lithuanian experience challenges the pessimism with which Péguy views the "modern, capitalist, bourgeois world." In it for Péguy "temporal powers and spiritual powers" go in parallel without intersecting.[80] We have experienced this "insertion," the event, the loss of which Péguy laments.[81] On the other, what Péguy writes about attunement to "soul,"[82] can be reread

80 Riquier, "Charles Péguy. Métaphysiques de l'événement," 227. Riquier refers to Charles Péguy, *L'Argent* (1913), *Œuvres en prose complètes*, vol. 3, 791, 789, 790.

81 This pessimism echoes the situation of "mankurt." According to Riquier for Péguy the world "has lost its point of insertion in the real, just as it continues to abandon the event, each time it takes place, in favor of its historical inscription." Riquier, "Charles Péguy. Métaphysiques de l'événement," 228.

82 Riquier, ibid., 231. Riquier calls Péguy new Hypatia and quotes him about Hypatia's attunement with Hellenic soul "with an accord so deep, so interior, reaching so deeply to the very sources and roots, that in total annihilation, […] when the whole world was going out of tune for the whole temporal life of the world and perhaps for eternity, she alone remained attuned even in death." Charles Péguy, *Bar-Cochebas*, (1907), *Œuvres en prose complètes*, vol. 2, 658. So for Riquier Péguy "enslaved by the modern world, he wants to be faithful to the memory of vanished worlds, so that dialogue beyond his generation can be renewed, and in the hope that the event can once again occur and take us into itself."

as the attunement with the eschatological Gift, ever available and potent to produce "event" and unravel its potential.

Conclusion

This article began from the contemporary reflections on the role of the new technologies and their effects on contemporary society, human activity and experience more generally. I have asked what are the possible ways to think about the connection of mechanical and spiritual in the development of human society and turned to Henri Bergson's call for "a bigger soul." But read from the post-Soviet Lithuanian experience this issue evoked the memories and imagery on the brink of collapse of the Soviet regime. The image of the "mankurt" invited us to reflect on the depth of the effect oppressive industrialization has on human beings, their agency and creativity. Our Lithuanian experience, especially the revival of faith communities, fragile and arguably momentary, allowed for a challenge to the pessimism and pointed to the eschatological dimension. Could this address the call for "a bigger soul" and address the challenge of "mankurtism"? I have argued that with a closer look at the activity of the Holy Spirit and expanded notion of "event," it does. The overwhelming event of the Spirit carries with itself restoration, reconnection with all life and opens what is closed for the future. But it is also a non-coercive Gift which calls for attunement and further inscription. Such rereading of the "event of the Spirit" allows us to position it to the contemporary events that denigrate human social, political and ecological existence.

Henrikas Žukauskas
Mykolas Romeris University
J. Jasinskio 4–12, 01112 Vilnius, Lithuania
hzukauskas@gmail.com

COMMUNIO VIATORUM LXVI (2024/3) 285–298

Mission and Colonialism: Ludwig Harms' and the Hermannsburg Mission's Romantic Approach

Jobst Reller

Abstract: The original vision of the founder of the Hermannsburg mission, Pastor Ludwig Harms (1808–1865) was deeply rooted in the period of romantic revival in Germany in the early 19th century. Whole congregations of missionaries and colonists should be sent overseas together. Although critical of colonialism, the mission and its settlers became later part of a colonial and even racist society in South Africa. Did the vision influence the social concept six generations later in the former mission field? Did it slow down the process of indigenization, lock up in racist concepts like "apartheid"? The essay provides many hints in that direction and exposes a specific variant of the interaction of migration, colonialism and mission.

Keywords: Hermannsburg mission; Pastor Ludwig Harms; colonialism; mission; migration; South Africa

DOI: 10.14712/30296374.2025.6

Preliminary Remarks

The issue of colonialism and mission, as well as their mutual relationship, is widely debated. The term "colonialism" is understood in different ways and linked to the phenomenon of "imperialism." The term is applied differently from the 15th century onwards, when Europe started to expand its influence continent by continent all around the globe. Some see colonialism effective until 1800 followed by imperialism.[1] Others would identify "colonialism" as settlement movements in different continents throughout the whole time (for example in Latin America in the 16th century, in South Africa in the 17th century, etc.), while imperial strategies of ruling directly and indirectly were adopted throughout the whole period.[2] According to Hans-Jürgen Prien, the term "colonialism" seems to have been used for the first time when Spanish conquerors on the Caribbean islands discovered that state driven imperial trade and rule was expensive and gave little revenue. In 1495 they started

1 F. ex. Stig Förster, "Art. Kolonialismus," *EKL* 2 (Göttingen, 1989), 1320–1329.

2 Cf. Andrew F. Walls, "Kolonialismus," *TRE* 19 (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1990), 363–369.

to include settlers in small numbers who were allowed to take land, settle, and freely exploit natural resources to their own benefit. Revenues increased. Colonialism would then be perceived as sublimely improved strategy of imperialism and not naturally linked to the migration of vast numbers of people from Europe overseas like in the following centuries.

But the amount of white settling immigrants to Latin America remained small: 150,000 in 1570. Around the year 1550, 1500 settlers from Spain lived in Ascuncion, Paraguay together with few indigenous people and many "Mestizas".[3] The role of mission is ambivalent within the political and social field of imperialism and colonialism. Missions gained advantages and protection from their imperial European powers, acting sometimes as pioneers for following European rule while sometimes as advocates for indigenous people criticizing political power.[4] The relevance of revisiting the epoch of colonialism today needs no further argument. Debates on the restitution of art from European museums to the countries of origin prove the ongoing impact.

This essay intends to study a mission movement in the period of colonialism. The Hermannsburg Mission, started in 1849 in Northern Germany, is one example. While others might be studied as well, the Hermannsburg Mission is especially interesting because of the fact that it expressively combined mission with the settlement of colonists. Terminologically, the transition from "colonists" to "colonialism" is not long. Surprisingly, colonialism was seriously criticized while Christian settlements were considered essential. Naturally, such a study will include competing perspectives – one at home and another overseas. On the side of the founder Pastor Ludwig Harms (1808–1865), a historical Romantic concept on mission can be combined with a conservative view on religious action and practice. On the side of the evangelizers and the evangelized overseas in South Africa, a feudal, colonial, and racist system came into being and seemed to coexist with the mission and it's work from the 3rd generation of missionaries after World War I. It was unquestioned for a long time.

One question will be central and closely linked to the fact that the motivating vison had to do with the prevailing Romanticism and idealism in

3 Hans-Jürgen Prien, "Das Christentum in Lateinamerika," *Kirchengeschichte in Einzeldarstellungen* IV/6 (Leipzig, 2007), 91, 99, 103.

4 Hans-Werner Gensichen, "Art. Kolonialismus und Mission," *EKL* 2 (Göttingen 1989), 1329–1331.

the beginning of the 19th century: Is the original Romantic concept with its apparently big and motivating appeal at home at least to some extent responsible for the conservative tendency to simply function within the framework of colonialism later on? Did the mission lose any critical impact because of this tradition?

Checking the history of mission, one example for settlement strategies from Latin America has been mentioned, while another one might be "reductions," shelter camps for indigenous people which were established by the Jesuits in Paraguay from 1607. These were settlements for protection against immigrant settlements that drove away the indigenous people from their land.[5] Another example may be Ludwig Ingwer Nommensen's (1834–1918) concept to found Christian villages for the newly converted Batak in order to create a Christian culture "Adat" in a mainly Muslim dominated country. This idea may have been influenced by Ludwig Harms' theories.[6]

Historically seen, the Romantic epoch follows after the period of Enlightenment at around 1800. Its terminology reflects changes in cultural history, philosophy, religion, literature, and art. Both periods had their fields of major interest, the former on experimental science of nature and critical philosophy strongly questioning traditional views, the latter on a rediscovery of medieval institutions like the Church, religion and faith, monarchy. The emphasis was more on feeling, belonging, trustworthiness and bearing traditions. It's highly controversial to identify these major tendencies by period or era. Romantic ideas show up before 1800, and critical doubt is effective after that date. So epochs cannot be understood as completely different periods of time. It's rather a change of focus and emphasis than total and exclusive diversity of times.

Wilhelm Scherer writes in his classical "Geschichte der Deutschen Literatur"[7] on the Romantic epoch: "Religious life developed itself everywhere in the 19th century in the most strict contrast to the 18th century. […] Times of

5 Prien, "Das Christentum," 188s.

6 Lothar Schreiner, *Adat und Evangelium. Zur Bedeutung der altvölkischen Lebensordnungen für Kirche und Mission unter den Batak in Nordsumatra* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 1972); Jobst Reller, "Schleswigsche Frömmigkeitsprägungen bei Ludwig Ingwer Nommensen," *Interkulturelle Theologie* 35 (2009), 262–279. Nommensen visited Hermannsburg, which exerted strong influence on Schleswig-Holstein.

7 Wilhelm Scherer, *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur. Mit einem Anhang: Die deutsche Literatur von Goethes Tod bis zur Gegenwart v. Oskar Walzel* (Berlin: Askanischer Verlag, 1918), 508 (transl. by the author J. R.).

emergency had taught to pray. Piety grew in the years of shame, of rebirth, of fighting and liberation [sc. the liberation wars against Napoleon, J. R.]. Wilhelm of Humboldt [1767–1835] himself got engaged in rising up the spirit of religion." Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher (1768–1834) shared this religious focus, when his "Reden über die Religion an die Gebildeten unter ihren Verächtern" came out for the first time in 1799. In the 3rd edition he criticized exaggerating fundamentalist judging pietists. Schleiermacher held a critical position towards both tendencies, personally linking elements from both. The Brothers Grimm discovered "popular poetics," collected popular fairy tales opposing it to "artificial" literature. Focus shifted to the nation. The medieval age was rediscovered, and conversions to Catholicism were frequent.[8] "History replaced constructive reason."[9] These aspects may be sufficient here. They give a clear impression of the atmosphere when the founder of the Hermannsburg Mission grew up in the beginning 19th century.

Pastor Ludwig Harms and the Hermannsburg Mission in Northwestern Germany

Pastor Ludwig Harms, born in 1808 in Walsrode and died in Hermannsburg in 1865 at the age of 57,[10] launched the initiative to turn the local parish in Hermannsburg into a mission community, in German called "Missionsgemeine." This 1846 initiative ended up as the Evangelical Lutheran Mission (ELM), founded 1977. Harms grew up in the times of the liberation wars

8 F. ex. the poet Friedrich Schlegel (1772–1829), the poet Luise Hensel, daughter of a Lutheran pastor, who discovered the "real" church, which Christ established in the Roman Catholic Church; cf. Ekkehard Vollbach, "Luise Hensel (1798–1876). Lehrerin – Dichterin – Romantikerin," in Ekkehard Vollbach (ed.), *Pastors Kinder, Müllers Vieh… Biographien berühmter Pfarrerkinder* (Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2015), 107–115, 111.

9 Scherer, *Geschichte*, 510, 513 (transl. by the author J. R.).

10 Cf. the classical biography: Theodor Harms, *Life and Work of Pastor Ludwig Harms* (Philadelphia: The Lutheran Publication Society, 1900); Hartwig F. Harms, *Concerned for the Unreached, Life and Work of Louis Harms, Founder of the Hermannsburg Mission* (Hermannsburg: Ev.-luth. Missionswerk in Niedersachsen, 1999); Christoffer H. Grundmann, "Mission in Simplicity of Heart and Mind: Ludwig Harms and the Founding of the Hermannsburg Mission," *Missiology* 40/4 (2012), 381–393; Jobst Reller, "Harms, Ludwig, genannt Louis (1808–1865)," in Heinzpeter Hempelmann and Uwe Swarat (eds.), *ELThG* – Neuausgabe II (Holzgerlingen: SCM Brockhaus, 2019), 926–929.

against French imperialism culminating as far as Germany is concerned in the battle of Leipzig in 1813. His father, Christian Harms, served as pastor in Hermannsburg beginning in 1817, and taught his talented son in his private local school before Ludwig became an intern in Celle in 1825 to take the leaving examination at the renowned humanistic school there in 1827. Like many of his contemporaries, Harms was brought up in a spirit of Romanticism, rediscovering Tacitus' ideas about German history in the prehistoric sights in the vicinity of Hermannsburg. A hard and consequent moral code of conduct prevailed in his home based on a supernaturalistic concept of Lutheran theology. From 1827 through 1830 Harms studied sacred theology at the University of Göttingen, encountering more or less rationalistic critical concepts. His sermon for the academic exams in 1830 still reflects an eudemonistic view on Christian life and an enlightened ethical concept of duties. It's quite likely that the death of his elder brother, August Harms, in spring 1830 made him reconsider life and faith. This process ended at Easter in 1831 while Harms served as teacher in the noble family von Linstow in Lauenburg. Now a still strict moral concept and social activities were based on a faith confessing human sin and divine forgiveness because of Christ's death at Golgotha, defeating death and bestowing eternal life.[11] Harms developed widespread activities in evangelism including social welfare for workers and their families, a Sunday School, and, from 1834, foreign missions. He turned out to be a talented pastoral counselor, preacher, and networker gathering people from around Lauenburg in a mission association. His work fits in in the revival movement of these times – conflicts included. When a North German Mission was inaugurated in Hamburg in 1836, Harms ensured his local association in Lauenburg to become a member in this regional initiative, combining Lutheran and Reformed supporters from all over Northern Germany.[12]

To cut a long story short – when Harms arrived in Hermannsburg in 1843 to become a chaplain supporting his father, he was widely known in revival contexts in the region. A mission festival was started in 1846. After the death of his father and final employment as pastor in Hermannsburg,

11 See Jobst Reller, "Der junge Ludwig Harms 1830–1850," in Jobst Reller (ed.), *Seelsorge, Gemeinde, Mission und Diakonie, Impulse von Ludwig Harms aus Anlass seines 200. Geburtstages* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2009), 69–85, 82.

12 Jobst Reller, *Heidepastor Ludwig Harms, Gründer der Hermannsburger Mission* (Holzgerlingen: Ludwig-Harms-Haus, 2008), 103.

Harms dared to host the mission seminary of the North German Mission in Hermannsburg from 1849 onwards. Due to many reasons, cooperation stopped and the Hermannsburg mission grew independently from 1850 on, building a mission ship *Candace* in 1852/3 and sending a first group of missionaries to the Oromo in what is today Ethiopia. They finally ended up in Natal, South Africa in 1854 among the Zulu people. Later on missions among the Tswana in Africa, the Telugu in India, and the Aborigines in Australia were started during Harms' lifetime.[13] Harms' work had it's center in his parish including a mission festival close to St. Johns day in June, journalism in the form of a mission paper, evangelism in Northern Germany, as well as far-reaching pastoral care by letters and welfare initiatives[14] for dismissed prisoners, orphans, and emigrants to both the USA and Latin America etc.

Harms' Romantic Vision

Which vision made Harms to inaugurate this apparently – at least as seen with the eyes of his time – successful and worldwide expanding movement? He never had a chance to work abroad himself or to check up and revise his mission enterprise by personally visiting and seeing the life and work of his missionaries in South Africa, India or Australia – not to speak about indigenous people or newly established congregations. He had only reports, letters, and requests for funding by his agents as feedback, usually published in the *Hermannsburger Missionsblatt*. Meeting indigenous people from the mission fields never happened in his lifetime. Although he may have had some experience with a mission student from India Ramayen in the mission school in Hamburg in mind in the 1840s,[15] this student failed, so these experiences did not seem to promise anything useful in the beginning.

Harms' view on people in the mission fields in Africa was formed by eager reading of the mission papers since 1833. He shared a paternalistic view of the indigenous people – wrong religion resulted in bad moral conduct and

13 Jobst Reller and Hartwig F. Harms, *Gelebte Liebe und deutliche Worte. Der Hermannsburger Pastor und Missionsgründer Louis Harms* (Hermannsburg: Ludwig-Harms-Haus, 2008), 113, 114, 128.

14 Torben Rakowski, "Ludwig Harms' diakonisches Wirken," *LuThK* (2007), 195–247.

15 Reller, *Heidepastor*, 154.

no chance for civilization. This made mission and conversion obligatory.[16] It's interesting to notice that Harms adopted a different view on prehistoric times in Germany. As a talented storyteller on mission festivals and in his mission paper he always depicted the ancient Germans as morally seen excellent people compared to contemporary Germans.[17] The question why wrong religion did not result in bad moral conduct is only to be answered if the intention to tell the story is taken into regard – to stimulate, in this case to take action and get engaged for evangelism and mission. The answer is not to be found on the level of an overall theory, but on the rhetorical level.

When Harms was ready to start and educate missionaries in Hermannsburg in 1849, he revealed both in letters within the North German Mission and in public type of mission he intended to start.[18] Typical for Romantic approaches, he took the concept from the history of mission which turned Germany into a Christian country in the 7th and 8th century C.E. This perception functioned as raw model for his own mission. Groups of missionaries came and settled down among the pagan Saxons. They established monasteries, cultivated land, lived an exemplary Christian life in faith and love attracting the pagan people. Much about this is reminiscent of Nicolaus Ludwig Zinzendorf (1700–1760) such as concepts of unintentional life and work together with indigenous people, and waiting for their questions.[19] Later on, these missions established a system of filiation, sending a new group to another place to create a network of mission centers. When the whole pagan nation finally became Christian, the Saxons with their tradition as warriors built a Christian empire in Germany, turning it into a Christian nation. Exactly the same should happen in Africa, according to Harms. Therefore

16 Reller, *Heidepastor*, 89.

17 Jobst Reller, "Mission und Religion in der Erweckungsbewegung des 19. Jahrhunderts am Beispiel von Missionsgründer Ludwig Harms (1808–1865)," in Michael Eckardt (ed.), *Mission Afrika: Geschichtsschreibung über Grenzen hinweg, Festschrift für Ulrich van der Heyden* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2019), 153–168, 161.

18 The texts are found in Ludwig Harms, *In treuer Liebe und Fürbitte, Gesammelte Briefe 1830–1865, Teilband I. Einleitung und Briefe 1830–1859*, Hartwig F. Harms and Jobst Reller (eds.) (Münster: LIT, 2004), 260: An den Verwaltungsausschuss der Norddeutschen Mission 28. 7. 1849, 267: An das Konsistorium in Hannover 2. 3. 1850; Ludwig Harms, "Das Missionshaus in Hermannsburg," *AELKZ* (1851), 85–88.

19 Helmut Bintz, *Texte zur Mission, mit einer Einführung in die Missionstheologie Zinzendorfs* (Hamburg: Friedrich Wittig Verlag, 1979).

Harms headed for the Oromo and later for the Zulu. Both were perceived as tribes of warriors. The newcomers expected to conquer Africa and make it Christian by combining bottom up and top down mission initiatives.[20] The idea is an indigenous Christian imperialism in Africa. Fortunately, this never came true! Although in an indigenous shape, the idea had in itself some openness for imperialistic and colonial ideas. The line of thought is clearly a Romantic one turning back to national history as raw model.

Putting the Vision into Practice in a Settlers Society in South Africa

Harms assigned his missionaries whom he did not want to send out married[21] to the tasks of preaching, establishing schools, and baptizing. Instead, he intended from the very beginning to send them together with farmers who would settle and establish agriculture of European type with livestock raising (cattle, sheep, pork), gardening, and farming. He himself spoke of "colonists", i.e. settlers in Latin.[22] Johann von Hofmann (1810–1877), later on known as member of the Erlangen school of Lutheran theology, had proposed the cooperation of missionaries and colonists for the first time in 1843.[23] Harms' concept puts the key question on the table whether it is possible to differentiate between missionary colonists and colonialism.

Although Harms built a mission ship arousing fear on the British side that trade was intended,[24] he criticized colonialism as a whole and did not want to be mixed up with colonial attitudes of other European nations "robbing"

20 Reller, *Mission und Religion*, 162. The idea is borrowed from Johann Ludwig Krapf (1810–1881), a missionary in East Africa, educated in Basel and Tübingen, serving in the Church Missionary Society. Krapf datest he concept back to his time in Ethiopia 1837–1845. Gods providence assigns the role to the Oromo, called Galla in Amharic, to conquer and evangelize Africa as the Germans did in the medieval ages: Johann Ludwig Krapf, *Reisen in Ost-Afrika* (Kornthal 1858, Repr. Stuttgart 1965), 93.

21 Harms, *In treuer Liebe und Fürbitte* I, 422: An einen Vorsteher einer lutherischen Gemeinde in Preußen 25. 11. 1854, 433: An die Missionare in Südafrika 6. 1. 1855.

22 Harms, *In treuer Liebe und Fürbitte* I, 261, 268, II, 432, 434, 457; Jobst Reller, "Ludwig Harms Wirkung in Skandinavien," *Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für niedersächsische Kirchengeschichte* 103 (2005), 125–172, 172: Reisebericht K. G. J. Sirelius 1860.

23 Georg Haccius, *Hannoversche Missionsgeschichte Erster Teil, Von der Pflanzung der christlichen Kirche in Friesland und Sachsen bis zur Entstehung der Hermannsburger Mission* (Hermannsburg: Druck und Verlag der Missionshandlung, 1909), 376.

24 Reller, "Ludwig Harms Wirkung," 156: Johann Ludwig Krapf an Waldemar Rudin 1864/5.

African people[25] or behave as educated and civilized over class teaching the uneducated pagan indigenous people and ruling over them. His missionaries should be able to care for their needs themselves. The traditional Hermannsburg self-understanding emphasized the idealistic motives of serving, living, and working together – in Latin called "conviventia."

But where should the line be drawn when the Hermannsburg Mission acquired farms on her own,[26] when Hermannsburg colonists established their farms by taking the land from more or less nomadically living indigenous people and when after Harms' death even the missionaries increasingly earned their living on their own farms? Even the fact that the kingdom of Hanover had no colonies of its own is no argument against the fact that the second generation of Hermannsburg Mission work started to become a part of a colonial system for instance in South Africa under the lead nations of the Boers and the British.[27]

Taking a look at the future development, one may state that at least the third generation of Hermannsburg missionaries shared to a remarkable extent the views of Apartheid when the congregations in Hermannsburg and Natal were split up into one for the whites and one for the others after World War I.[28] Most of the Germans, both former settlers and missionaries, were integrated into the class of the possessing people and in the feudal system that was seen internationally as a part of colonialism and imperialism. This was true in spite of the fact that there always were tendencies to resist racial ideologies even if not the colonial or feudal system in itself. Ludwig Harms perceived the newly baptized indigenous Christians as his "white and black children".[29] Baptism had, according to Harms, an equalizing effect before God

25 Hans Otto Harms, "Kandaze," in Wolfgang A. Bienert (ed.), *Hans Otto Harms, Lebendiges Erbe, Ludwig Harms, Thedor Harms und die Hermannsburger Mission* (Hermannsburg: Verlag Missionshandlung, 1980), 108–125, 109.

26 Wolfgang Proske, *Botswana und die Anfänge der Hermannsburger Mission, Voraussetzungen, Verlauf und Scheitern eines lutherischen Missionierungsversuches im Spannungsfeld divergierender politischer Interessen* (Frankfurt a. M. – Bern – New York – Paris, 1989), 132, 239–241.

27 Proske, *Botswana*, 247, 249.

28 Fritz Hasselhorn, *Bauernmission in Südafrika, Die Hermannsburger Mission im Spannungsfeld der Kolonialpolitik 1880–1939* (Erlangen: Verlag der Ev.-Luth. Mission, 1988), 168.

29 Harms, *In treuer Liebe und Fürbitte* II, 279: An Superintendent Karl Hohls in Südafrika 30. 5. 1863.

and to some extent spiritually in the congregation too. Harms fought against the impact of the caste system in India within the Christian congregation. Missionary Friedrich Fuls (1836–1907) protested against the brutal punishment of an indigenous farm worker by Paul "Ohm" Kruger (1825–1904) in Transvaal.[30] There are many additional examples of spiritual solidarity with the indigenous people throughout Hermannsburg Mission history.

The more confessional Lutheran Bleckmar Mission separated from the Hermannsburg Mission in 1892 due to the establishment of Lutheran free churches in Northern Germany after 1878. The later director of the Bleckmar Mission after World War II, Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf (1910–1982), was one of the few to cling to Harms' view on baptism influenced by the church struggle in Germany from 1933–1945.[31] He had to withstand quite strong aggressions from the side of the German farmers rooted in South Africa. But one must be aware that all this did not happen because of the idea of equal human rights for everybody beyond color, descent, nation, position in society, religion, etc. or because of empathy for either the exploited classes or the option for a change of the feudal and colonial system. It happened because of the fundamentalist biblical argument on baptism matching with the Romantic historiography. In this case this argument had a critical impact towards society.

Indigenization

The Hermannsburg tradition was one of the last Lutheran missions in South Africa to open up for independent indigenous Lutheran Churches. The conference of Hermannsburg missionaries in South Africa in 1961 still talked about "the unity of the Hermannsburg Mission Church." In 1963 the Zulu-speaking congregations broke off and entered the Evangelical Lutheran Church in the south-eastern region. A similar process started among the Tswana-speaking congregations in the same year. While the Swedish Church Mission, the American Lutheran Mission, and the Norwegian Mission society ceased corporate

30 Hasselhorn, *Bauernmission in Südafrika*, 65.

31 Friedrich Wilhelm Hopf et. al., *Kritische Standpunkte für die Gegenwart, Ein lutherischer Theologe im Kirchenkampf des Dritten Reichs, über seinen Bekenntniskampf nach 1945 und zum Streit um seine Haltung zur Apartheid* (Göttingen: Edition Ruprecht, 2011).

independent existence in South Africa in 1968/69, Hermannsburg carried on as partner of the local churches from 1970 onwards.[32]

The second generation of missionaries from the 1890s onwards might have had the chance to further self-reliance of indigenous churches with an indigenous clergy in the times of "Ethiopianism" after 1900.[33] A paternalistic view assuming and stating immaturity slowed down the process for three generations before Wolfram Kistner (1923–2006), Dieter Schütte,[34] and others took side with those who fought against apartheid. Hartwig F. Harms concludes: "As late as in 1984 the ELM (i.e. the Hermannsburg Mission since 1978) formulated a clear statement on the unity of the Church in South Africa against Apartheid."[35] Missionary Siedersleben (born 1930) told an episode[36] from 1956 when he arrived in South Africa and stayed on the farm of missionary Heinrich Fedderke (born 1912) to be introduced in the field work. One evening Fedderke was attacked by a mob and hit on the head. A wire on the porch prevented further injury and saved Fedderke's life. He was standing on the porch with a rifle in his hands asking for persecution and punishment. It's not clear what lay behind the conflict. It had something to do with the free use of lands by the indigenous people and the European idea of ownership, that the mission owned the land to cultivate it. It seems to have had something to do with indigenous religions practices too. Missionary Fedderke didn't want to tolerate them, was willing to use power and violence to prohibit and prevent them. He represents a missionary being fully

32 Heinrich Voges, "Die Arbeit im südlichen Afrika," in Ernst-August Lüdemann (ed.), *Vision: Gemeinde weltweit. 150 Jahre Hermannsburger Mission und Ev. luth. Missionswerk in Niedersachsen* (Hermannsburg: Missionshandlung Hermannsburg, 2000), 233–355, 327, 338.

33 See Jobst Reller, "20 Jahre skandinavische Forschung zur Mission im südlichen Afrika von 1840 bis zum ersten Weltkrieg," *IKTh* (2011), 111–122, 118: der Bambatha Aufstand der Zulu 1906 als vertane "Wasserscheide" zu einer indigenen Kirche (Lars Berge).

34 Dieter Schütte, "Im Schatten der Apartheid," in Hartwig F. Harms et al. (eds.), *Gottes Mission bleibt, Die Hermannsburger Mission im Südlichen Afrika auf dem Weg zum Partner in Mission* (Hermannsburg: Ludwig-Harms-Haus, 2021), 308–329; Dieter Schütte, "Kirchliche Arbeit in der ELKSA-NT (ELKSA-Hermannsburg) unter den Bedingungen von Apartheid und ihre Nachwirkungen," in Werner Klän et al. (eds.), *Mission und Apartheid. Ein unentrinnbares Erbe und seine Aufarbeitung durch lutherische Kirchen im südlichen Afrika* (Oberursel: Edition Ruprecht, 2013), 174–186.

35 Hartwig F. Harms, "Die Missionsanstalt und das Ev.-luth. Missionswerk in Deutschland seit 1959," in Ernst-August Lüdemann (ed.), *Vision*, 127–232, 160.

36 Ernst-Dietrich Siedersleben, *Mein südafrikanisches Tagebuch* (Hermannsburg, 2006, typoskript), 52.

integrated in the upper class of a feudal system using governmental means of power to preserve its own privileges, income, and religious program. Siedersleben, who served in South Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, tells the story in order to show that the Mission clung to outdated ideas.

While checking sources written by European missionaries, it is crucial to take the perspective of the indigenous people into regard. There is one episode from the very early times of Hermannsburg mission work among Zulu people, which was told from the indigenous side too.[37] It is transmitted by missionary Hans-Jürgen Becken (1926–2013), to whom a number of praise hymns telling history in a traditional Zulu way was entrusted. These hymns were handed down orally from one generation to another. Becken translated these hymns into German. The hymns tell frankly why the Norwegian missionary Hans Paludan Schreuder (1817–1882) was allowed to visit Zulu King Mpande (1798–1872). It was because of his ability to heal. Hermannsburg missionaries came in 1858 and were admitted as skilled handicraft workers. According to the hymns they built the "biggest ox wagon" in the whole region for the king including a garage and were allowed to build a mission station in the empire of Mpande. The Norwegian mission had to compete with Hermannsburg and order a bigger ox wagon from Norway to preserve its position at the king's court. In fact, the Gospel was admitted because of cultural progress, medical care, and greater celebrity of the king. Looking to the Hermannsburg sources in the mission papers nothing (except the garage) is told in this regard, neither the episode nor the exchange of gifts of this size and material benefits to start evangelism. Hermannsburg propagates the pure spiritual aspects. The only surprising fact is that the cooperation with the Norwegian missionaries is no longer mentioned. Harms mentions conflicts with the Norwegian mission in 1864,[38] but does not go into details. The Norwegian mission papers do not tell the episode but are more honest to reveal the materialistic side of communication with the Zulu. It's interesting to see that the wagon for

37 The whole story with references is told by Jobst Reller, "Missionare aus Hermannsburg und Norwegen im Spiegel des Zulupreisliedes 'Der Zulu-König und die Missionare'," in Ulrich van der Heyden and Andreas Feldkeller (eds.), ***Missionsgeschichte*** *als Geschichte der Globalisierung von Wissen, Transkulturelle Wissensaneignung und -vermittlung durch christliche Missionare in Afrika und Asien im 17., 18. und 19. Jahrhundert* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012), 319–327, 326.

38 Reller, *Ludwig Harms und Skandinavien*, 156.

Mpande is part of the oral tradition on the side of the missionaries too. Celebrating their jubilee in 1949, they remember a small chariot donated to the old and handicapped king by Hermannsburg missionaries. No status symbol is handed over to a threatening commander in order to be allowed to preach the gospel, but a small vehicle because of the merciful helping attitude of the missionaries. King Mpande completely lost his eminence in the missionaries' memories. There is a climax in the scenes of the praise hymns. The last scene ends with the commemoration of the first Christian martyr of the Zulu nation and the place where he died saying, "The Gospel has arrived among us – in our way."

Conclusion

It's quite obvious that the plans of the founder of the Hermannsburg Mission, Ludwig Harms, came true. The cooperation of missionaries and colonists led to a rooted German population with Lutheran tradition and indigenous Lutheran churches. In a sense the Romantic concept worked out, while in another sense dividing factors like color and social class seemed to be stronger than idealistic unity in church. Conservative tendencies prevailed for a long time and preserved privileges.

Romantic historiography, to some extent fundamentalistic Bible exegesis, motives like faith and love were obviously sufficient to start, make and keep the mission enterprise going in Hermannsburg. Those who supported the mission in the parish, the network or on the mission festivals didn't put further questions and donated abundantly to the mission at least for the auditory in the parish in Hermannsburg or on the mission festivals. Harms' method of preaching and storytelling was highly motivating at home in Germany.

It's odd to see, that the fundamentalist use of the Bible had liberating aspects with regard to baptism, too, at certain times and in some regards. The Romantic mission concept had been modeled from history works in the beginning – the idea of living and working together. On the other hand, one has to face the fact that the Hermannsburg Mission became a part of a feudal, racist, and colonial system three generations later. It is quite likely that Romantic historiography linked to the story of the founder blocked mutual understanding, cemented traditional roles, and made essential what in fact was accidental. And it took another generation to rediscover the

views and attitudes of the indigenous people for whom the Mission was started, to side with them and take political action for them beyond spiritual solidarity. So both aspects are here – deep infliction of missionaries and colonists in colonialism, but also critical advocacy that was at times both weak and strong.

Jobst Reller
Georg-Haccius-Str. 41
D-29320 Hermannsburg, Germany
Jobst.Reller@evlka.de

Book Review

Gijsbert van den Brink, Rik Peels, Bethany Sollereder (eds.), **Progress in Theology. Does the Queen of the Sciences Advance?** Routledge Science and Religion Series, London – New York: Routladge, 2024, 308 pp.

In 2024, as part of the *Routledge Science and Religion Series*, a volume entitled *Progress in Theology. Does the Queen of the Sciences Advance?* was published, edited by Gijsbert van den Brink (Professor of Theology and Science at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam), Rik Peels (Professor at the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam, holding a University Research Chair in Analytic and Interdisciplinary Philosophy of Religion), and Bethany Sollereder (Lecturer in Science and Religion at the University of Edinburgh). This volume is written from multiple perspectives, featuring seventeen contributors diverse in terms of gender, career stage, geography, and Christian denomination.

The volume is dedicated to a thorough and multifaceted analysis of the possibility – or impossibility – of progress in theology. In particular, the authors explore a range of questions related to this topic: Can theology develop in a manner similar to other academic disciplines, and if so, in what areas and forms does this progress manifest? What positive outcomes might progress yield, and what challenges does it pose for theology? In which areas has progress been particularly evident in recent years? How can theology engage with other sciences and religious traditions for its own development? What achievements and challenges in other academic disciplines have prompted a reevaluation of theology, its reintegration into the university setting, and its openness to dialogue with culture, society, and various fields of knowledge?

Almost all the contributors agree that theological progress has occurred in the past, continues in the present, and brings numerous positive outcomes. If Christian theology aspires to develop and remain self-critical, contemporary, and relevant, it must take into account advancements in other fields of knowledge and engage in productive dialogue not only with them but also with other religious traditions.

This volume consists of four parts, each dedicated to a particular aspect of progress in theology. The first part, *Situating the Debate*, clarifies the concepts of "progress" and "theology" and examines their compatibility or common ground. Chapter 1 provides a general introduction to the volume. In

Chapter 2, René van Woudenberg argues that progress is context-dependent: what constitutes progress in one domain may signify regression in another. He emphasizes that scientific progress cannot be entirely free from values. In Chapter 3, Gijsbert van den Brink explores the possibilities for progress in theology, countering the New Atheists' claim that theology is static. He proposes five approaches to understanding theological progress, demonstrating the potential for the development of theological thought.

The second part, *Dimensions of Progress in Theology*, considers various types and levels of progress in theology, both within the discipline itself and in interdisciplinary and interreligious contexts (or what Gijsbert van den Brink refers to as "intra-paradigmatic progress" and "trans-paradigmatic progress"). In Chapter 4, Rik Peels responds to accusations of theological stagnation, pointing not only to epistemic but also to moral and religious dimensions of progress. He provides examples that illustrate the multifaceted development of theological thought. Chapter 5 offers a synchronic perspective on theological progress, developed from historical, theological, epistemological, and doctrinal angles. The essence of this perspective lies not in discovering new truths but in attaining a deeper understanding of those already revealed in the past. Next, in Chapter 6, Hans van Eyghen examines how the use of sources – Scripture, tradition, nature, religious experience – and the integration of interdisciplinary approaches can contribute to theological development. Chapter 7 applies the hermeneutics of testimony to the analysis of theological texts, demonstrating its significance for epistemic progress. In Chapter 8, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen explores comparative theology as a key element in the advancement of theology, emphasizing the importance of engagement and receptive dialogue with other religious traditions as "an act of hospitality, of giving and receiving gifts" (p. 128). In Chapter 9, Oskari Juurikkala draws on the ideas of Iain McGilchrist, arguing that significant theological breakthroughs occur through intuitive rather than merely discursive (analytical) approaches. Juurikkala acknowledges the value of left-hemisphere-related activities but asserts that substantial progress is only possible if theologians (as well as other scholars) also develop right-hemisphere-related skills.

The third part, *Case Studies Illustrating Progress*, presents examples of theological progress. Chapter 10 demonstrates how discussions on free will and divine foreknowledge evolved from Augustine through Boethius to Anselm, illustrating the possibility of conceptual progress in theology over time.

In Chapter 11, Ignacio Silva analyzes the Divine Action Project of the late 20th century and subsequent debates that emerged from it. He identifies epistemic progress in the divine action debate, which supports the claim that theological knowledge can advance. In Chapter 12, Marius Dorobantu examines the impact of artificial intelligence (AI) on theological anthropology, particularly on the understanding of human nature and the *imago Dei*. He suggests that AI, much like the emergence of neo-Darwinian evolutionary theory, can act as a catalyst for progress in theological anthropology, prompting theologians to refine what *imago Dei* means and what makes it unique in light of AI's capabilities. Chapter 13 elaborates on progress in ecumenical theology and dialogues, analyzing two strategies – linguistic reductionism and theological equatism. The latter, being more contemporary, has proven more successful in fostering dialogue, as evidenced by the *Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification*, signed by Lutherans and Catholics in 1999. Chapter 14 warns against a linear view of progress, which often pertains more to change than actual advancement and may even lead to regression – for example, when modern agricultural practices deplete topsoil and contaminate water sources with nitrates, raising the question of whether higher crop yields should truly be considered progress (p. 220). The author seeks to highlight the crucial role of theology in shaping scientific progress and addressing climate change, emphasizing that theological narratives – particularly those related to the Garden of Eden – have historically influenced the motives and goals of scientific progress: exploiting such narratives in isolation from their religious contexts has contributed to ecological crises.

Finally, the concluding section, *The Future of Theology in Academia*, connects theological progress with its future within the academic sphere, examining its scholarly significance and defending its place in the university. Chapters 15–17 explore theology's role in academia and its contributions to society. Johan De Smedt and Helen De Cruz compare theological and scientific methodologies, concluding that theology does not lag behind the sciences in applying rigorous epistemic standards, including the capacity for progress. They identify cognitive similarities in how theologians and scientists assess hypotheses. Katrin Gülden-le Maire analyzes external factors influencing theological discourse and arrives at a pessimistic outlook regarding the future of Protestant theology in continental Europe, particularly within the German academic context. Paul Macdonald underscores the significance of theology for higher education, arguing that it fosters the pursuit of

wisdom, which, according to him, "is the greatest epistemic and educative good" (p. 276).

Overall, this volume presents a comprehensive study of progress in theology, highlighting its complexity, multi-dimensionality, and its adaptability, dialogical nature, and openness to new ideas and traditions. Nearly all the contributors view theological progress as a positive and even necessary phenomenon.

However, the book does not sufficiently address intra-Christian concerns and objections to the concept of progress in theology, particularly the counterarguments from the Orthodox tradition (especially its fundamentalist wing). For Orthodoxy, questions about the (im)possibility of doctrinal and theological development hold fundamental significance.

As a Western publication, the book also fails to consider Orthodox discourse and its potential contribution to discussions on the future of theological anthropology in light of challenges related to AI (see Chapter 12). In my view, the Orthodox perspective on *imago Dei* offers a more adequate response to this challenge compared to the functional, relational, and eschatological approaches. Drawing on the anthropology of the Greek Church Fathers, Orthodox theology goes beyond Pannenberg's eschatological framework, as it links the image of God to the infinite process of theosis and participation in the life of the Holy Trinity – something that can never be subject to AI. According to Orthodox teaching, the image of God in humans represents a divinely bestowed potential for continuous assimilation to God (theosis). Just as an acorn is meant to grow into a mighty oak, the ultimate telos of the *imago Dei* is participation in God's being, wherein human nature is not lost but transfigured.

The absence of this perspective creates the impression that a significant part of the Christian heritage is ignored and left out of the discussion on theological progress. Finnish theologian Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen proposes interreligious dialogue as a means of advancing theological thought. However, before moving in this direction, it is crucial to foster internal dialogue within the Christian tradition itself. Without taking into account the Eastern Christian perspective – let alone integrating or at least engaging with it – the study, like many others, remains incomplete.

Despite these limitations, the book is well-written, informative, and covers a broad spectrum of disciplines with which theology already interacts or could engage in dialogue. These include the behavioral and natural sciences,

philosophy, as well as theological reflection on the exact sciences and various contemporary theories. All of this affirms that theology remains a relevant and evolving discipline. The book certainly makes a significant contribution to discussions on the status and importance of theology in light of contemporary conditions, crises, challenges, and new opportunities emerging in science, education, society, and culture. It is informative, introduces readers to some of the latest developments in theology, and serves as a kind of apologetic against detractors, critics, or those with a low view of theology. The book will undoubtedly be of interest to theologians, particularly systematic theologians, as well as to anyone reflecting on the viability and significance of theology in the modern world – including its critics.

Eduard Sablon Leiva
Georg-August Universität Göttingen, Faculty of Theology
Platz der Göttinger Sieben 2, D-37073 Göttingen
esablonleiva@gmail.com

DOI: 10.14712/30296374.2025.7

PROTESTANT
THEOLOGICAL
FACULTY
Charles University

STUDY THEOLOGY IN PRAGUE!

Study Protestant theology in its systematic, historical, and cultural dimension in an ecumenical context – study for your bachelor's, master's and doctorate at the Protestant Theological Faculty of Charles University!