

REFORMATION THEOLOGY

»NON EXTRA USUM«:

WHAT HAS HAPPENED TO REFORMATION THEOLOGY IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY AND WHAT MAY HAPPEN? – FROM A GERMAN PERSPECTIVE

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The *given* question – a dangerous gift from the editors – is far too broad to be answered. But the question is unavoidable; in some ways it is always being and is already answered by several contemporary theologians by what one has in mind in retrospect, by the historical horizon one has in one's memory. What remains possible for me in this essay is to sketch »a« theological memory from a German Lutheran Protestant perspective (with a little Swiss thrown into the mix).

Now the question may be asked on a smaller scale: What *has* happened to Reformation theology in the twentieth century in Germany? And what may happen in the future? The transformation of Reformation theology can be sketched from my perspective not exclusively, but primarily in view of developments taking place in German-speaking Lutheran contexts. I can only offer here a case study in order to show some significant and symptomatic aspects of these developments. I consider at least three different issues: confession, theology (in the narrow sense of the word), and culture. What has happened in the *churches*, north and south, east and west, Swiss, German and Austrian? What may change? What has happened in *theology*, and what should change? Finally, what has happened in the *surroundings* – in culture – as the context of these changes?

I approach the (given) title in three parts:

First: some brief remarks on what has happened to the churches – and their relation to theology.

Second: a sketch of some developments that have taken place in the wide world of Protestant theologies and the problems associated with these developments.

Third: some hints as to the »virtues« of theology by contrasting common expectations with possible supplements.

I ASPECTS OF LUTHERAN PROTESTANTISM IN VIEW OF THE CHURCHES

The contemporary ecumenical context is characterized by close approximations between Lutheran and Reformed Churches, and between Lutheran and »other« churches, for example: Roman-Catholic, Anglican, Orthodox. But while hearts are open, minds can be closed. I cannot *not* see a tendency of a Lutheran approximation to Catholicism in topics of ecumenical rapprochement. For example: the topic of office, be it the bishop's or the pastor's; the concept of justification; paying obeisance to the bishop of Rome; and finally the ecumenical struggle for the »Joint Declaration on the Doctrine of Justification«.

More recent ecumenical co-operations and conflicts tend towards an odd combination: a (neo-)confessionalism versus the drive to »de-theologize« theology (e. g. by translating it into a sociology of religion) on the one hand; and a drive to re-catholicize Protestantism on the other by addressing specific doctrinal topics, for example ecclesiology.

While these tendencies shape the theological horizon, the horizon of »everyday life« in Lutheran Churches is dominated by the financial crisis plus a bit of neo-liberal diagnosis and therapy. Lutherans in the church's administration try to sustain the old model of the *Volkskirche*, while in »real life« they reveal some aspects of the *Freikirche* - not least in burdening pastors with a strong dose of moralization.

One can see some principles at work in ecumenical discussions that are neither helpful nor necessary. One of these principles is essentialism. The presupposition in ecumenical discussions, significantly between Protestants and Roman Catholics, seems to assume a specific essentialism in concepts of truth, sociality, faith, and understanding: truth is one, it is given, it can be represented in propositions, and that coming to a common understanding about propositions facilitates the reaching of an ultimate consensus. In my opinion, this model is symptomatic of a Platonic hermeneutic. It moves from consensus through inferior differences back to final consensus. It results in community and unity - of Rome at last (or at least?). Such a position can be called theological or hermeneutical *essentialism* in a Platonic tradition. It is represented, for example, by colleague Professor Ratzinger. More than a few Protestant theologians agree that ecumenical dialogues have to come to a consensus and a final visible unity.

Why and for what purpose? Isn't Christianity plural and in conflict from its very beginning? Did it not flourish amid these differences? Christianity is

in the continuous process of differentiation – and not without success in either the Eastern Churches or the American ways of Christian life, or in the Asian contexts, or in Africa, or South America. Christianities do not need to end up in the new Roman »ultramontanism« under the primacy of the bishop of Rome. One implication of this hermeneutic is a visible unity that entails strong exclusion: all the others are neither churches nor true. They reveal a false relativism, a false pluralism, and a false religion.

I am, of course offering a caricature of the contemporary situation, which is perhaps not completely false. I suppose the exclusions characterizing the position favorable to Rome are the consequence of a diastatic model – essentialism versus relativism – which produces an ideology of »others as strange and mistaken«. If one follows this model, one ends up fabricating one's enemies or at least excluding them. (Note: The political theology of the Bush administration and parts of the Bible-Belt in the U.S. have similar consequences. Protestantism as an ideology of the »theology of empire« is no less dangerous than Roman Catholic exclusivism.)

There are alternatives to the theologies of empire and exclusion that are rich and true. Some are even capable of producing insights and orientations that one can hold to be true and by which one can live. I offer an alternative to a hermeneutic of primordial and final consensus; I recommend a *hermeneutic of differences*. Distinctions rendered by past and present communications are foundational for present and future discourses. We live in these differences because they offer us an orientation to living and acting and offer the necessary distinctions between alternatives. There is no need to think about differences as inferior to consensus and unity or consensus. Even Schleiermacher thought that consensus (or dissensus) is the goal of communication.

One should *not* prefer relativism over essentialism. Relativism would be as confusing as essentialism. A test that could detect the *transformations* in Reformation theology is the following question: What has happened to the *particulae exclusivae*? Is the *sola scriptura* criticized (*sola traditione*?) or on the contrary intensified (*solo verbo*) in an attempt to emphasize it? Do we find relativizations, historicizations, or substitutions (*non solus, sed etiam ...*) for the *solus Christus*? Is the *sola gratia* moralized (*sed etiam ... a little effort, at least coram Deo*)? And finally is the *sola fide* sometimes pluralized (*pistis Iesou* as gen. subj.; *fides* as *experientia*, as a way of life, as »gelebte Religion«)?

Relativism is often a chimera, a ghost of metaphysics. The problems we have in the churches today are mainly beyond the relativist option. Consider, for example the concept of *truth*. Truth is not by necessity a concept of »the one and only«. The historicity and perspectivalism of *every* approach (and

model) of truth must be integrated into the concept of truth itself. Truth is *given* only in differing perspectives – and is not »the real thing« beyond all. Truth is »given« to one; one can approach the *possible* truth only *from one's perspective*. There is no way out. I am pointing in the direction of seeing truth as a critical regulative »beyond« all approaches. In my estimation, truth as a regulative idea facilitates a beneficial critique of one's own method. Truth in this sense is never a possible possession. Protestantism can be considered a paradigm for this insight.

One can further explore this direction, for example, by referring to the modalities that conceptualize (not only) theology. Does a **theological thesis** hold by necessity? Is necessity the best of all modalities for reaching certainty? Everyday evidence seems to support this claim. The German theologian Eberhard Jüngel however has criticized this metaphysical (and Hegelian) view: God, like faith, is not a necessity.

Are God and faith »more than necessary« (to use Jüngel's famous formulation)? Let us entertain this idea for a moment. This idea seems to me to follow the model of surpassing the others. It thus ends up in an excess of excellence. I doubt the plausibility of this result and prefer not to follow this line of reasoning.

God, like faith, is »less than necessary«. God and faith are *contingent* in an »essential« mode. For some, they are merely contingent while for others they are the contingencies by which life is lived (and died). God and faith are crucial and decisive contingencies – like being born or being loved. I will refer to these contingencies later in this essay as *passivities*.

2 PROTESTANT THEOLOGY – AND ITS USES

Protestant theology – or better, Protestant theologies – has inherited a few »gifts«. Some gifts are fruitful for further development and some are not. Therefore, one has to identify the problems of the Reformation tradition. Some of the burdens of the Reformation tradition are: first, the emphasis of inwardness and the primacy of the »inner man«; second, the focus on individuality and subjectivity (sometimes with a lack of awareness for sociality); third, the idiomatic aspects of anthropology (with its misunderstandings of sin, free will, and bad conscience); fourth, a lack of awareness for externality in a political horizon, i. e. a deficient consideration of structures, institutions, and cultural dynamics; fifth, the normative concentration on language, by which an »iconic incompetence« is sustained.

The *transformations* of Reformation theology work out these burdens. I would like to explicitly state my main thesis: *the Reformation tradition is what is made out of it*. I do not want to advance an argument for a free floating constructivism. My suggestion is merely a (in my view necessary) supplement to seeing tradition as a *gift*. A gift is to be »used« in such a way that it can also be transformed.

Why and what for? Tradition is not only a »neutral« gift, but in certain circumstances, it is also dangerous. On the one hand, tradition is the space in which one can move forwards and backwards. On the other hand, it is a burden and inheritance by means of which theology can be frozen to mere tradition keeping. The gift is not only an appropriate metaphor for grace, it is also a hint at the dark side of social interaction. Gifts, like forgiveness, are in indirect ways also gestures of self-empowerment (what Nietzsche called in German »*Selbststeigerung*«). If God is construed as the ultimate origin of gift - Christ as the gift of gifts - then the model of »thinking God« leads into a trap in which God is the sovereign beyond whom no sovereignty is possible. Theology then becomes a theory of power and force, of empowering its own highest concept - *aliquid quo maius cogitari nequit* as the God who is more than necessary. One might call this an escalation of the concept of God that results in theology's self-authorization.

The hints and suggestions I have offered so far lead to a second aspect of how Protestant theologies have contributed to the transformations of Reformation theology. This aspect is concerned with the *reception of Reformation theology as its pluralization* in particular combinations. The first and fundamental stage of this plural transformative process is the rediscovery of Lutheran theology in the Luther-Renaissance (associated with names like Karl Holl, Emanuel Hirsch, and Rudolf Hermann). Later on in the mid-twentieth century Lutheran theology was radicalized in the Nazi era and separated from the Reformed tradition that was rediscovered by Barth in opposition to the Lutheran tradition.

What occurred in the second half of the twentieth century? It seems to me that the primary obsession of these decades was the work against the performance of Barthianism: Pannenberg and Rendtorff, Graf or Wagner, Ebeling or the Schleiermacher-Renaissance, Lutherans and hermeneutics. All these theologians and movements provided answers and alternatives to the Barthian tradition.

What happened in this late twentieth-century juxtaposition to Barth? A lot, of course. The transformation of Reformation theology included: the hermeneutical turn from Bultmann to Ebeling's launch of contemporary

hermeneutics; Troeltsch's farewell to Old-Lutheran theology, and the emergence of Neo-Protestantism (against Old Protestantism). The opposite movement also returned. Old Protestantism was revitalized sometimes as a neo-confessionalism or neo-conservatism, The *United (Unierte) tradition* stemming from Schleiermacher re-emerged as well as a neo-historicism and a crisis of confessional theology.

What about the current situation? On the one hand, theology seems sometimes to dissolve into its neighbors, such as: Reformation theology dissolves into isolated disciplines; faculties dissolve into philosophical departments; some prefer Bible School education instead of academic theology. On the other hand, some continue to follow in the footsteps of the above-named traditions as if nothing had ever happened. Nevertheless, theology is and continues to be challenged by its changing contexts.

If one tries to do *hermeneutical* theology, one would have to pay attention to the profound critiques of hermeneutics. In response to these critiques, one would have to reconceptualize hermeneutics in light of semiotics, system-theory, and semiology, or other theories of interpretation.

Or, if one tries to explicitly continue within the tradition of *Lutheran* theology, one would have to transgress the mere historical or philological repetition of Luther that seems to be required for the sake of doing theology in line with Luther. One would have to move decisively beyond the repetition of Luther in a new context. Take for example theological anthropology. Luther's insights in this field are still helpful and can contribute to contemporary discussions. Yet if his insights are merely repeated without further development, they become scholastic. Take the free will debate as another example. Those scholars who either critique free will or articulate an apologetic for free will do not deal with the christological and hamartiological questions. Conversely, it is misguided to pretend as if Luther's critique of free will would fit neatly into contemporary anthropological questions. Free will is a culturally encoded regulative idea for human beings. It is a claim about human nature that establishes a difference between humans and other beings, for example machines or mere nature. Thus a defense of free will is theologically inevitable - and not at all in conflict with Luther. On the other hand, Luther's insights concerning the manifold *passivities* of human life can and should contribute to contemporary discussions of anthropology and aesthetics. Passivity is a helpful category for other discourses that seriously take autonomy, independency, self-sufficiency, and so on. Modernity seems to have lost the language of passivity. In talking of passivity, sensitivity, and passive synthesis, there are insights in Reformation theology that are helpful beyond theology.

I suggest the following hypothesis to orient in the discussion of Reformation theology: *Reformation theology is given »non extra usum«*. The tradition is as manifold as its *uses*. It is what is made out of it.¹ The principle »*non extra usum*« is a challenge to theology to make use of the tradition and to extract something meaningful from it. Tradition entails taking it seriously as one's own responsibility with regard to past and future. The *reference* to Reformation theology is *not a reverence*, but a *challenge* to make something plausible from it in the contemporary context. One is challenged not only in death, but continuously every time one uses one's own theological tradition.

I list the following points in order to argue for the plausibility of my pragmatist perspective of theology's *use* of its tradition:

1. Every text needs a reader and even a good text needs an intelligent reader. Otherwise, the result won't be a good reading. The same rule applies for every structure we live in and by: institutions or administrations produce mere nonsense if they are not handled with a little intelligence and sense for individual cases and actual needs. This is a hermeneutical remark (like a grammatical remark) about the pragmatics of given structures: they are given, but nevertheless they need an intelligent use. Otherwise a society is cut off from future possibilities, rather than being open for them.

2. My argument is not *as* trivial as it sounds. As a plausible argument we need to ask about how it distinguishes between structure and use, or between something given and what is made out of it. The distinction can be made both in semiotic and in hermeneutical terms. To put it in a hermeneutical frame: The reader's role is »to make sense« of the text. The reader's work and task is to perceive, for example to see a book and its symbols. The reader's task is also to connect meaning with words, even if the words »have« meaning in common usage. The reader's responsibility is to synthesize signs and sense. Last but not least, it is *the reader* who understands something, if she understands anything at all. The task of understanding is a challenge that addresses each and everyone – like death. But the difference between understanding and death is that communication always takes place even if no one understands anything. That's not merely ironic. The remarkable power and performance of communication consists of the fact that communication func-

¹ This hypothesis might provoke one to hold an essentialist position: Will a Radical Orthodoxy appear in Protestant guise?

tions without understanding or other, more intimate operations. But if one considers theology or religious speech as mere communication – is this a plausible suspension of understanding?

3. Understanding and communicating do raise the question of what might happen in church and theology. Are these inter-subjective processes cultural forms that take place under the necessary conditions of understanding – for example: the condition that no one can believe on behalf of another or that one cannot believe for someone else? Or are these processes forms of scientific and religious communication? That depends! But on what exactly? The determination of whether these processes take place under certain conditions or whether they are forms of specific communication depends on the model one uses to reconstruct church and theology. Such a determination gives credence to the thesis I have outlined that tradition does not exist *extra usum*. Of course, the choice of model is not an arbitrary one. There are no »discourse-police« controlling whether »the right« or »the true« model is followed. This idea is already nonsensical.

The choice for determining the model of communication is not an arbitrary one. It is just as free, as one may be. The choice depends on one's traditions, contexts, and importantly on the purpose of communication. What does one want to see, show, and make visible to others? A problem of invisibilization (making *invisible*) appears: what you see may be what you get, but you won't get more than your model shows. The limits of the model establish the parameters of visibility.

The Reformation was concerned with the critique and transgression of Aristotelianism. In the »juxtaposition« between Reformation and Aristotelianism, Platonism became attractive again. Similarly, Neo-Aristotelianism became popular with Protestant Orthodoxy in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. I self-consciously use the term »juxtaposition« to refer to the problem associated with one's being obsessed by an alternative. One is even more obsessed with an alternative if the alternative is really plausible. The problem is also a historical one. As time goes by, one becomes more and more similar to one's opponents. Protestant theology became scholastic, but not only in the seventeenth century. The attitude of orthodoxy has recently become attractive again as a *new confessionalism*. A neo-conservative turn in the contemporary period is partly combined with a modern foundation. Nevertheless the turn to orthodoxy is mainly retrospective, and possibilities of its repetition do arise in Lutheran churches and theologues.

Tradition is what you make out of it. One *may* transform tradition by assigning it an *anti-catholic*, closed and fixed identity. But what for? In order to better identify it? In order to strengthen one's identity in pluralistic times? Or to reveal again what has disappeared from view for a long time? This revelation can appear a bit like the dream of an imaginary and glorious past. Might this dream be attributed to the great »Luther Decade« in which we find ourselves today?

4. Kant's critical philosophy or subjective idealism became »state of the art« in (so called) modernity. Kant gave to modernity the (ambiguous) gift of the theory of subjectivity as the basic condition for participation in modern discourse. The theory of subjectivity has been presented as the *conditio sine qua non* of participating in modernity. Theology has complied with this modern condition, but in the process has lost its history. Theology's horizon has become more and more narrow. Theology has focused on *one and one problem alone*: the foundation of the transcendental constitution of subjectivity and thereby of religion, (and finally perhaps Protestantism as the *telos* of religion's development). The model resembles the *demonstratio religiosa, Christiana* and *catholica* in Catholic fundamental theology.

The legacy and burden of this background is not to fall victim to a juxtaposition *against* this tradition. I suppose the threat is no longer immediately relevant, but it still hovers over this background. We should therefore make the best out of this tradition (for example, Schleiermacher) because the mere critique of the tradition of subjectivity becomes a problem as well. It will stick to the same path and will remain confined by the never ending attempt to terminate the »old« modernity. The question is how to overcome an old paradigm (or obsession) without repeating it (and you repeat it only by permanent critique). The only way is to change one's perspective, to perceive by means of another model. The construction of past, present and future will change by expanding the horizon in which the tradition is perceived.

Which model can help overcome the idealistic theory of subjectivity? A few options can be identified: a new anthropology instead of mere subjectivity; a semiotics or semiology instead of transcendental philosophy; hermeneutics and more recent theories of interpretation; discourse analysis; system-theory; new phenomenology; new theories of culture. The question is open and thereby the horizon as well. Yet this is not the worst situation.

5. The same problem of a narrowed horizon is present in the »other« tradition of modernity: the philosophy of history from objective idealism until Pan-

nenberg. This version of the modernization of Protestantism has two results: either left or right-wing. The left-wing Pannenberg School leads to an idealistic philosophy of religion, to a theory of the Absolute as the ultimate version of theology. The right wing tends to historicize theology, as for example, theology as *history* of theology (like the history of ideas). A robust Hegelianism can be found to haunt both positions.

The philosophy of history, like its theological version »theology of history«, is a late consequence of the Hegelian way. It was a transformation of Hegel's philosophy of history by nineteenth-century historicism and by the twentieth-century school of J. Ritter: the history of concepts as final form of philosophy. The problems are well known: *Universalgeschichte* like *Heilsgeschichte* is the normative and all-encompassing horizon into which everything must be integrated (in order »to be«).

Totality and universality are problems that appear in a certain version of hermeneutics. Heideggerianism or its »urbanized« form in Gadamer also represents and undergirds a philosophy of the *one and only* history (*Wirkungsgeschichte*). The family resemblances between history and hermeneutics on this point of universality make for a quite interesting comparison with Roman Catholicism. The view of history, the all-encompassing horizon of horizons, and its normative teleology all converge. These three converging points are burdens that are neither necessary nor very helpful, either for historical studies, or for dogmatics, or ethics.

What are possible alternatives? Some options include: poetics and hermeneutics; deconstruction; other theories of history like Ricoeur's, Blumenberg's or Rösen's; »genealogy« in line with Foucault and Agamben. These alternatives can help expand the horizon.

6. A third option for theology (though not really) is to *de-theologize theology* by transforming it into a *sociology* of religion. Some theologians are currently working to modernize Protestantism in line with the Troeltsch-tradition (and Max Weber), and are transforming it profoundly. Rendtorff thought that dogmatics had to be turned into ethics as the modern form of dogmatics. But in the end Graf seemed to turn dogmatics into an *antidogmatic* (and anti-theological?) sociology of religion (a sociology of the early twentieth century). Theology appears *as* history. Theology appears as a sociological observation in contemporary theological formulations. The antagonism between dogmatics and anti-dogmatics seems to hold for the necessary antagonism between Old and Neo-Protestantism. Does the new one claim to be »beyond« Reformation theology? Does the new one suppose it is still a »reception« of Reformation

theology or is it more of a farewell (with a small gesture of overcoming »Reformation«)?

7. Behind these »short stories« are some basic antagonisms in the Reformation tradition today. There is still one serious antagonism that is at work amid these other basic antagonisms underlining the modern forms that Reformation theology has taken on. This is the antagonism between *Barthianism and liberalism*. It is an unfortunate alternative and exposes the unhappy consciousness of contemporary theology.

Barth's and the so-called »Barthian« criticism of modernity succeeded in giving Protestantism a new image and outlook. The Barthians revitalized the Reformation pathos, ethos, and logos against a totalitarian state. But, as the Rendtorff School has shown, the revitalization occurred at the expense of the dialectic that I have already mentioned: as time goes by, one becomes more and more like one's enemies. The juxtaposition between Barth and modernity led to an anti-totalitarianism in the name of a higher total authority. Barthianism became anti-liberal. These anti-liberal tendencies are obvious in the left-wing Barth School, especially in the political theologies advanced in Barth's name.

But is the revival of liberalism the right antidote to Barthianism? The answer depends on the goals of liberalism and on its function. Neo-liberalism in theology can become an enduring anti-Barthianism. The last Barthian will be a liberal who is obsessed and bewitched by Barth, while he cannot *not* oppose him. The final form (*Gestalt*) of Barthianism seems to be anti-Barthianism. This telos is not merely ironic, but a common development in the history of science. The critique of a past paradigm is much more enduring (or durable) than the paradigm that was actually criticized.

8. A more interesting question for theology appears behind the struggles between Barthianism and liberalism. The precarious separation between *dogmatics and historical theology* is an antagonism that identifies an important problem in Reformation theology. The problem is presupposed by questions concerning the *sola scriptura*. Historical studies led to the questioning of the merely formal authority of scripture. The notion of *sola scriptura* seems now to be almost irrelevant. Historical studies are interested with everything, but rarely with the exclusive and normative impact of the scriptures. Dogmatics, like ethics, answers its questions often without referring to scripture. Is the *sola scriptura* therefore worthless? I prefer not to draw this conclusion. Scripture still has and must have a regulative function. As regulative, scripture informs a framework that implies exclusions and inclusions. Scripture informs

both the perspective by which Protestantism lives and the horizon that gives »us« the ability to see differently from others. If one ignores this critical function of scripture, one would eradicate a fundamental building block of theology.

How can modern Reformation theologians respect scripture in its regulative capacity and make use of scripture in a way that attends to its function in framing modern Protestant thought? In a few words: no deduction or unquestioned normative claim is possible. Theologians must answer their questions by taking a responsible position vis-à-vis the tradition's understanding of scripture as significant for Protestant theological framing. Of course not in regards to the *tota scriptura*, but to the key Protestant topic: the *theologia crucis*. And what about the historians? Aren't they free to do whatever they want? I suppose, as theologians, they are committed to answering the challenges of theology.² Their contributions point to the relevance and results of historical studies for theology.

9. Reformation theology was primarily envisioned as an emancipating and freeing of »science« in the name of the worldliness of the world. It was conceived as an act of legitimating the profanity of the profane. Academic theology is therefore not limited by an eternal doctrine. Whenever it is, theology is *in the making* of theology. The limitation provided by a critical regulative idea (that I have mentioned above) is not a limitation that disqualifies certain topics. Rather theology's limits *qualify* certain topics and orient these topics by making the relevant and appropriate *distinction* for theology.

Limitation in this precise sense becomes a problem in these late-modern times of inter- and transdisciplinarity. Just as biblical exegetes often prefer to cooperate with their neighbors who specialize in the Ancient Near East or other related disciplines, dogmatic theologians often prefer to cooperate with philosophers or sociologists, etc. *Theology is accustomed to academic neighbor-love*. And that, of course, is not a disadvantage, quite the contrary.

The love of one's neighbor does not transpire without problems, at least in an academic milieu. If theologians obey the mandate to »love neighbor more than self« too rigorously, they dissolve their discipline into their beloved neighbor-disciplines: biblical studies are dissolved into philology or religious studies; church history into mere history; practical theology into educational

² Editors' note: Biblical scholars and church historians who work from a historical perspective are considered theologians in the German context, whereas in an Anglo-American context they are not.

studies or aesthetics; dogmatics into philosophy; and theological ethics into law or philosophical ethics.

The result is a »theology in dissolution«. Theology is no longer *Reformation* theology, but is the *dissolution* of theology. Neighbor-love can become dangerous if it ends up in self-denial. I offer a corrective to this danger. Theology is interesting in an inter- and transdisciplinary context only if it offers a distinct *theological* perspective. This commitment to theological distinctiveness does not mean that the role of a neo-conservative theologian is inevitably assumed. Rather it means that *theology must be a challenge by virtue of its own perspective*. If theology no longer issues a noteworthy challenge, it will no longer be noticed.

10. To generalize a little: the contemporary struggle in the reception and transformation of Reformation theology consists of the struggle between *De-theologizing and Re-theologizing*. I have referred above to the unfruitful and unhappy dialectic between theology's de-theologizing by neo-liberals and its re-theologizing by neo-conservatives. The latter has a double result: a new confessionalism that stresses its own Lutheranism or more often in parts of ecumenical discussions, the re-catholization of Protestantism.

All three options – the de-theologizing and the re-theologizing of theology that ends up stressing either Lutheranism or Roman Catholicism – are ultimately transformations as *dissolutions*: a dissolution of Protestantism into culture; an ecumenical dissolution merging back with Rome; or a dissolution of Lutheranism into regional congregations.

The relation of theology and the church is remarkable because there is a symptomatic divergence between the two: theology without the church (or even against it) and theology strictly for the church. Both tendencies are not without problems that result when the divergence is either extended or dissipated. If the church supports theology, the church is merely advancing its own agenda; it produces pastors, facilitates the increase of membership in times of membership decline, etc. Conversely theology without the church »doesn't« care anymore and becomes indifferent or even polemical.

Theology must obviously carve a middle ground between the two extremes. Theology was for Luther and for the Reformation movement *not* only a background theory that would advance the church. Theology was against the »old« and for the »new« in the name of its origins. Theology's relation to the church is always pro and con. Theology is free to be and sometimes has to be against the church, but simultaneously in its opposition it must be in favor of a *different* church. Theology is *only theology* if it is sometimes free *not*

to follow the church's interests. But whatever decision theology makes in view of church, theology can never lose its relation to the church without losing its character as theology.

3 OUTLOOK: POSSIBLE VIRTUES OF THEOLOGY

In the above two sections I have attempted to more or less answer the question (the gift) of the editors. In this section I think it helpful to I expose some outlooks for the ways in which theology in the Reformation tradition can be used. Let us imagine the following struggle between theology's vices and virtues:

1. Ascriptions to and expectations for theology are often the following: theology gives normative orientation (an epistemic, ethical, and worldview function); it is the guardian of values and normativity (an ethical function); it gives the modern state what it by itself cannot guarantee (a political function; Böckenförde etc.); it is the foundation and essence of culture (a catholic substance or ontological function); it provides quality management for the churches (an ecclesiological function); and it serves as the institution in which pastors and teachers are educated (an educational function).

Theology can »fulfill« all these functions. Whether these functions are fulfilled or not, they are arguments for theology's presence in the late-modern state and in the academy. But these functions are general external ascriptions and expectations. They are theology's tasks but I suppose they are merely extrinsic. They insinuate that theology has primarily a doctrinal form (*Gestalt*) and normative impact. Theology supports state and church and is thought to be useful for the public sphere (if one admits that theology *has* a right or even a duty to enter into the public sphere).

I have nothing against these ascriptions if (and only if) theology remains free to decide how it will respond (and react) to its ascriptions. Response implies a critical distinction between ascription and the way in which the ascription is actualized. Unfortunately a financial crisis (in state, economy, and churches), or the conditions of Bologna, or of a »new public management« threaten the preservation of both this critical distinction and of academic freedom.

2. Theology must be »free« to respond to these challenges in a responsible way. Theology's challenge and possible *gift* to the public sphere consists of its

response to the challenges. The theological responses of course never »fit« exactly with the expectations. A carefully nuanced answer may offer less, but maybe partially more and perhaps differently than was initially anticipated by the question. The example of Protestant ethics is relevant here. Protestant ethics is concerned both with preserving values in order to stabilize the state and the state's destabilization by prophetic critique. An appropriate place for Protestant ethics is in between the critique of the state in favor of differentiating ethics from politics and the transformation of the public sphere. Protestantism has historically been a paradigm for a fruitful methodology in pedagogy (until the Jesuits stepped into its shoes). Protestant schools are an attractive alternative today to the state school system.

Theology's responses are challenges and gifts by themselves. The duality of challenge and gift consists of the following. First, theology's response is a challenge to speak in one's own words (like Levinas who draws the distinction in French between *dire* and *dit*); do not only quote or repeat the authorities. This challenge has an ethical dimension: to respond by accepting one's own responsibility for the response. Second theology's response is a gift because the response (*not* the answer) *gives more* than was asked for. The following danger remains: Protestantism criticized the Roman Catholic tradition for its attitude of the *beati possidentes* with their *thesaurus*. Protestantism runs the same risk as time goes on.

3. Reformation theology can offer an alternative to the neo-liberal ideology currently reigning in universities and local congregations. Reformation theology has a significant affinity to *an economy*. It has a sense for the gift and communication taking place beyond economies of exchange (as Derrida has pointed out). Reformation theology can »cultivate« this sense by pointing out the differences between exchange and gift. For example, »to share« something, like bread or fish, means to live in community together *without* asking for a reward. Sharing is also a mode of living together that is *beyond* mere altruism (as in the egoism of a species or group). The wonderful metaphor of gift may inspire theologians to look for modes of communication in the spirit of »communion«. My suggestion might be called a mere »request program«, which is more imaginary than real. That may be true, but the editors of this volume have issued the request for further transformation. Such requests may be (more or less) wishful thinking, but these imagined directions can be more real than what is actually true if they become real by orienting theological development and research. Transformations of Reformation theology should not only be seen as syllogistic, but also as *abductive* or *imaginative*. The

path of discovering that which is not already »given« (in French, *dit*; in English, *said*) means to invent and imagine future possibilities. Theology cannot live without imaginative possibilities.

4. Is it possible to imagine an »*investigative* theology«? What might it look like? Such a theology might, for example, provide a perspective in society (in culture and in the critique of culture) for investigating what is overlooked and missing in the public sphere. Ethics usually takes up theology's task to look at the public sphere. However, every discipline should assume a public and political task. Critical hermeneutics can even be used to investigate public discourse.

Similarly »*inventive* theology« might sound - even for Protestants - heretical. Doesn't theology have to say what the thing actually is (*quod res est*)? Theology's task is usually not seen in terms of invention, but in terms insisting on doctrine (of justification, etc.) and on the truth (of Christian faith). Yet Luther was quite innovative in his linguistic and theological construals; Schleiermacher as well, Barth, perhaps, and so on. The inventive character of theology usually becomes visible where it becomes readable and audible.

5. Imagination, investigation, invention - but what about the *iconic competence* of theology - especially in the Reformation tradition? There is in my view one last but not least transformation required in the Reformation tradition. The situation is urgent. Protestant theologians have been well educated to pay acute attention to texts, literature, words, language, and speech. Linguistic competence is a requirement for theology. But theology shows an amazing iconic incompetence. I find this to be a serious problem. The religion of the word becomes illiterate in the time of icons. Iconic illiteracy is a dire situation especially today in view of the visual culture in which we live (and perhaps even live *by*). But how can one develop a deep theological understanding of icons or religious images? By revitalizing the cult of saints? I would prefer not to go in this direction. By the multimedia-transformation into Mega-Churches? Again, I would prefer not to, because I fear that this transformation is solely an iconic imitation that overwhelms its spectators.

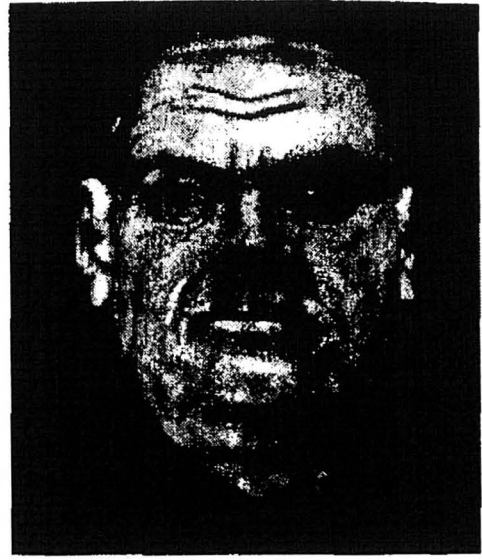
Incarnation theology is a familiar theological resource that favors images. This resource for cultivating an iconic literacy is possible, but it would be a strictly kataphatic way of legitimizing images. The more Protestant theological locus that legitimates images is the *theologia crucis*. The first and central image of Christianity is the scene of the crucifixion. That may give rise to the idea of an original impression (*Urimpression*) of the image of Christ and Christ as an image. The image in this sense has an intrinsic connection to

death and may have a life after the death of the one depicted on the cross. The ability to make present what is absent is the strange power of the image. Is it possible that images can compete with the sacraments (especially with communion)?



To give an example: Let us recall the fabrication of the *effigies Lutheri*. These effigies were representations of Luther in enormous nineteenth-century statues. Another example of an effigy is the sculpture that makes Luther present like the presence of a King *in effigie*. Such a presence has been a reality since 1663 in the Marian Library (*Marienbibliothek*) beside the Market Church (*Marktkirche*) in Halle an der Saale. Lukas Schöne used the original wax replicas of Luther's head and hands for his construction of Luther's life-size effigy. Thus Luther's »real presence« is staged.





There is a remarkable difference between Luther's death mask and its revised version in the effigy that could be the topic for another paper. The mask represents Luther's »saved presence« in a modest and tactful way. Its revision in the Schöne sculpture shows it in a strange light. The baroque vividness and realism contribute to the scary impression. The revision shows a complete head, modelled in wax. Natural hair was added and the facial expression was worked out, mouth and chin, glass eyes placed into the opened eyelids. The revision seems to simulate a revival, if not a »resurrection« by its iconic presentation. The complete figure was exhibited in the library until 1943, when it was transferred to a safe in a bank. The head and the hands are now shown in a separate room in the Market Church.



Whatever one may see here, it is more than a mere representation of Luther. It is an indexical, iconic, and symbolic presentation of Luther's death mask in an artificial way – perhaps not only for the sake of memory, but as imagined presence.

6. Last but not least, Reformation theology has a broad complex of cultural and anthropological insights. It might be a worthy endeavour to interpret culture today in light of these insights, which include: the complex of *passivity*, affects, and nature. I highlight just one aspect. A traditional Reformation insight, often thought to be quite ridiculous, is that we are justified »merely passively«. Modernity privileges the opposite: activity, autonomy, and autarky; modernity cannot make any sense of this claim of Luther's soteriology. I want to suggest that the Reformation insight into mere passivity can inspire us to think about humanity and culture in the current crisis of subjectivity and autonomy. Insofar as the active and autonomous subject is the model of modern perception and rational reconstruction, this active subject might appear as *lacking in passivity* or, at least, lacking sense *for* passivity.

Passivity is not only a lack of activity. Passivity is not only a suffering and the inconvenient situation of illness. We live by other passivities, such as: being born, being loved, being exposed to others, being seen and being heard, etc. We find ourselves fundamentally in passive positions. What does this mean? These passivities can become the driving forces of life: *vita passiva* as passionate life. *Man and culture are driven by passions*: but how and by which ones?

»Passions' performance« means that religious symbols are symptoms of basic forms of passivity (in creation, in sin, in redemption or salvation, etc.). Religion therefore *is* a culture of passivity and theology needs to cultivate a special sense *for* the diverse passive positions of (religious) life. In this regard, it may be helpful to develop a hermeneutic of religion by considering religion's passions and passivities. At the very least, God's »*pathos*« and *faith* are two crucial passions. They signify a challenge to theology to understand these »*calculated absurdities*« as symbols for living with or against these passivities. Insofar as life flourishes when one lives together with these passivities, they are »*salvific*«. Insofar as life is a living hell when one lives against and without them, they are »*evil*«.

If *faith* is not primarily cognition or agency (or will), but a feeling, as Schleiermacher put it; then *faith* is *pathos* rather than *logos* or *ethos* (cognition or will). Is *God* primarily determined by God's cognition or will? Scholastic theology has advocated both positions, either in the Thomistic or the Fran-

ciscan tradition. If »God is love«, is God *not* primarily determined by cognition or will, but by *the* passion of being a »loving father«, i.e. by God's passion for human persons and their salvation? It is love then that moves God. It is love that determines the concept of God.

One might object that love as metaphorical attribute of God is not merely a passion or an emotion, but that it is the rational and the purely good.³ I do not want to contradict myself, but the model for cognition and speech here is a (conceptual) metaphor taken from the field of passions and emotions, no more, but no less either. This entails thinking and speaking of God in the mode of *pathos*, as a significant Reformation tradition.

³ I am not asking that the narratives (and history) of the concept of God be »purified« from revenge or anger.

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