

“AND ALSO UPON THE MENSERVANTS
AND THE MAIDSERVANTS IN THOSE DAYS
WILL I POUR OUT MY SPIRIT”

On Pluralism and the Promise of the Spirit¹

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This note takes up a recent discussion that Frances Schüssler Fiorenza and David Tracy have carried on with Jürgen Habermas, in which the North American theologians point out a lack of sensitivity in Habermas to religious and aesthetic symbolics, and a resulting uncertainty about the actual cultural differences that are at work in pluralism.² They claim that Habermas has not been inclined or able to characterize adequately the special position of the church in civil society, and that he is therefore able to identify only vaguely the institutional moorings for the discussions about justice that are so important to him.

I agree with this critique and want to carry it forward. However, I am concerned with a broader development of the sociological and theological bases for the critique. Is it enough to understand a pluralistic civil society as a conglomeration of associations, or must one develop new connections between the initiatives of systems theory and the theory of associations? In these remarks I will attempt to make clear the theological bases on which the critique can be mounted. What are the religious symbols and symbolic relationships that might support and promote the perception of our situation called for by Tracy and Schüssler Fiorenza?

¹ Editor's Note: The present translation is the work of the Soundings staff, which takes full responsibility for any errors, inaccuracies, or problems of style. We are grateful to Professor Welker for his generous cooperation and patience.

² This discussion is documented in Don S. Browning and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, eds., *Habermas, Modernity, and Public Theology* (New York: Crossroads, 1992).

Pluralism and the "Circulation of Powers"

[Machtkreislauf]

Only slowly and laboriously have the pluralistic cultures of our world come to terms with their own inner makeup. There are many forms of "multiplicity" and "plurality." These range from ways of "living-somehow-beside-and-with-each-other," which do not manifest any recognizable order, to societies formally organized by social classes and structures. But how, out of the many forms of "manyness," is the plurality we call "pluralism" put together? The commonly heard assertion, "Pluralism is ultimately individualism," will not do. "Individualism" can take on and produce thoroughly erratic, bizarre forms which derange any sense of community. Nor is individualism immune to creeping homogenization and conformity, and it is certainly not free of the traces of elitism. Yet all of these features are incompatible with pluralism.

More promising suggestions for a definition of "pluralism" have grown out of the insight that a so-called "pluralistic" society must be understood as a multiplicity of multiplicities, or perhaps as a community of communities. This insight has emerged much earlier in the multicultural contexts of North American experience than in other lands. In North America as early as the 1970s sociological lexicons and encyclopedias were defining a "pluralistic" society as one which comprises different self-constituting groups living next to each other in different communal structures but bound together through the state and through the market.³

Under this definition a problem of pluralism comes immediately and sharply into view which is thinly concealed beneath talk about "variety" and "individualism." Pluralism faces the task of binding together a multiplicity of distinctive subcultural forms of community, normativities, and morals with the social forms and norms of the whole society. Not only must the multiplicity of understandings of community, normativities, and morals be made compatible with the overarching general political, legal, and economic forms, but the overarching general forms must be so constructed that they sustain and strengthen the multiplicity. The definitions of pluralism we have so far identified provide no satisfactory answer as to how the relationship of such diverse forms of community and normativity are to be thought out.

³ See for example F.C. Coker, "Pluralism," in the *Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. E. Seligman, 15 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1963) 11:171-72; U.S. Kariel, "Pluralism," *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, ed. D. Sills, 17 vols. (New York: Macmillan and Free Press, 1968) 12:168; for a more recent elaboration on this term see P.Q. Hirst, "Pluralism," *The Blackwell Dictionary of Twentieth-Century Thought*, ed. W. Outhwaite (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993) 471ff.

An important shift of fundamental perspective in discussions of "pluralism" has taken place over the last ten years. Pluralism has appeared as an emerging fact of certain regions of the world, a fact that raises problems of understanding, problems of political and legal organization, problems of tax structures, and so on. The learned and intensive discussions that have been carried on especially in North America since the 1980s concerning themes like pluralism, the public sphere, the effects of the mass media, and so-called "civil society" have cast the whole question of "pluralism" in a changed light.⁴ What is becoming recognizable as a not altogether stable product of this evolution is a fragile and variously endangered societal form, on which the quality of democratic politics and of a free and human life together depends.

Democratic politics can only be guaranteed by a society which secures the conditions for a plurality of political influences while it fosters a multiplicity of free alliances.⁵ These free alliances are commonly known in the recent disciplinary literature as "civil society" [Zivilgesellschaft], or more exactly, "civil-society associations" [zivilgesellschaftliche Assoziationen].⁶ Although these associations stand in mutual interaction with the state, with the legal system, with the market, with the mass media, and other functional systems, they must resist being made over by these systems. They must remain attentive to the difference between the functional systems (law, politics, economy, the mass media) and their own special shape and form. The so-called civil-society associations (churches, political parties, labor unions, citizen groups, interest groups, etc.) will for that reason, as we shall see, always be interested in the maintenance of the comprehensive societal systems and in a mutuality of control.

Although the maintenance and differentiation of the societal function-systems must be

⁴ The decline of state socialism has also sensitized many to the fact that social forms are no longer self-evident, and has sharpened the awareness of qualitative differences in pluralistic cultures. The recent North American discussion is examined in the Foreword to the latest edition of Habermas's *Strukturwandel der Öffentlichkeit: Untersuchungen zu einer Kategorie der bürgerlichen Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1990) 11 ff. See also his *Faktizität und Geltung: Beiträge zur Diskurstheorie des Rechts und des demokratischen Rechtsstaats* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992), especially Chapter 8.

⁵ These important observations can already be found in Alexis de Tocqueville's *Democracy in America* (1835-40).

⁶ Habermas, *Faktizität und Geltung* passim: "Die Zivilgesellschaft setzt sich aus jenen mehr oder weniger spontan entstandenen Vereinigungen, Organisationen und Bewegungen zusammen, welche die Resonanz, die die gesellschaftlichen Problemlagen in den Privaten Lebensbereichen finden, aufnehmen, kondensieren und lautverstärkend an die politische Öffentlichkeit weiterleiten" (443). The ingenious reflections of Antonio Gramsci are taken up and further developed in *Gefängnishaft 4*, ed. K. Bochmann, et al [Hamburg: Argument-Verlag, 1992] 729f, 783,882f. See also C. Calhoun, *Habermas and the Public Sphere* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1992) and J. v. Soosten, "Civil Society: Zum Auftakt der neueren demokratietheoretischen Debatte mit einem Seitenblick auf Religion, Kirchen und Öffentlichkeit," *Zeitschrift für evangelische Ethik* 37 (1993): 139-57.

important to the civil-society associations, they are also interested in the qualitative transformation of those systems. The demand for transformation arises because the associations want to bring their own interests forward, their own sense of the law, their ethos, their representations of the good life, and so on ... although they are in concurrence with each other in seeking to influence the comprehensive function-systems, and are obliged to take an interest in this concurrence. The maintenance of the function-systems is of necessary importance to them in their diversity, but the maintenance of the variety and diversity of civil-society associations is indispensable. But the comprehensive societal function-systems must also be interested in a pluralistic culture and in a multiplicity and differentiation of civil-society associations – not in order to relativize and play the different interests and voices off against each other, but in order to enhance opportunities for, and thereby always to stimulate afresh, a mutuality of control.

Pluralism therefore requires us to keep in view and to maintain a relationship of three kinds of differences: differences among the various comprehensive societal function-systems (e.g., politics, law, business, media); differences among the various civic-society associations (churches, political parties, labor unions, interest groups, etc.); and, finally, the difference between the comprehensive functional systems and the civic-society associations. Only in the deliberate cultivation of this three-fold set of differences, in this complexly structured "plurality," can the subtle balance of power and the demanding "regulation" of the "circulation of powers"⁷ which are characteristic of the pluralistic societies of our time and world become possible.

Habermas on Endangerments to the "Circulation of Powers" in Pluralism

Tolerating these differences, not to mention deliberately and purposefully cultivating them, is by no means easy. Of course most men and women as members of a church, or a party, or a citizens' group, or an interest group, are willing to allow other men and women to belong to another church, party, initiative, or interest group. They are also quite willing for these other associations to strengthen and seek their own goals. At the same time many people are pained by the separation of the churches, or by conflicts of value between parties and interest groups. They widely complain that the other associations do not cultivate the differences with other function-systems in the same way they do, or mean to do. So we see interest groups corrupted

⁷ Habermas uses this term frequently in *Faktizität und Geltung*, e.g., 10, and 226.

by business interests, the indifference of political parties to the common good, the moral fatigue of the judicial system, and the abuse of power in the mass media. And as a rule others see the same or similar defects in the associations to which we belong. It is not entirely simple to rejoice in the differences among civil-society associations, much less to rejoice in controversy and culture war.

Why, with all these tensions, are the multiplicity of civil-society associations and the differences among them of such great importance? We might all wish to be members of a church that is strong in public resonance, of a political party that is always victorious, of advocacy groups that usually have their way, of interest groups whose campaigns are invariably successful. And indeed, what of the prospect that our ideal ethos might actually be realized everywhere? What if the true faith, the correct politics, the imperative cause, and the deserving initiative (from our point of view, of course) all were to come together in realizing a common goal? At the same time we are justly terrified by the overwhelming power of popular movements, and we want to see the "concentration of the gullible, indoctrinated, populist masses" inhibited.⁸ As the supporters of a pluralistic culture, we want to know that a homogeneous ethos and a thoroughly ideologized set of causes (even if they should be our very own) will not be allowed to dissolve the differences among the civil-society associations. That is to say, if the differences among civil-society associations were to be swallowed up in an encompassing, unified, popular movement, other kinds of difference would also be in danger. Such a movement would unify all the comprehensive societal function-systems with uncontested force. The function-systems, most certainly politics and the mass media, which in pluralism are absolutely dependent upon societal resonance, would have to accommodate the movement. They would be the means by which the resonance of the movement would be broadened and strengthened. Unhappily, modern history tells us that it would only be a matter of time before the judicial system would be compromised also.

The yearning for movements of "social unification" is therefore misplaced. As against such movements, pluralism requires a special discipline. It needs, on the one side, to work toward the universal achievement of an ethos that will be acknowledged as right, good, and true, and on the other side it needs to protect, and wherever possible nourish, the interest in alternative goals and aspirations. This discipline would owe much to the pursuit of completeness and truth ingredient in the will to communication and discourse. The mentalities and social spheres which are fundamental to pluralism arise out of a readiness, accompanying all

⁸ Habermas, *Faktizität und Geltung* 462.

assertions and transactions, to persuade by means of conversation and argument, and to be persuaded and instructed by a better argument. Wherever this quality of persuasive speech and argumentation is absent, the civil-society foundations of pluralism will disappear.⁹

The civil-society associations of pluralism are endangered not only by populist concentrations of power, by the repressive dictatorship of the majority, or by other totalitarian developments, but they can also be corrupted by epidemics of egoism or ground down in routine and conformity. Hannah Arendt, with great skepticism about the strength of pluralism, expressed the fear that mass society would destroy social groups and lose therewith the potential for freedom.¹⁰ She clearly did not trust mass society to nourish new civil-society associations or build a "public sphere." Arendt feared that the realm of the public and the political would give way to the murky interplay of administration, procedure, and self-restraint [Verwaltung, Verfahren, und Sich-Verhalten].

Habermas believes that the civil-society associations are endangered on yet a third side. Even if civil society were able to keep itself vital in pluralistic interplay and in the differences among its associations, and even if it could be protected from populism, the tyranny of the majority, and totalitarianism, and even if there lurked within the societal communications processes as such no tendency toward rigidity and inarticulacy, civil society would still have to contend with the encroachment of the function-systems.¹¹ There are a variety of ways in which a dismantling of the differences between free communications processes and associations of society and the function-systems can occur. In *Facticity and Value* Habermas analyzes a range of such "systematically paternal" encroachments. He warns that the function-

⁹ The foundational form of pluralism is not to be found in a state-sponsored balancing of egoistic group interests. Eberhard Jüngel has, in any case, not clearly distinguished his effort to elucidate the meaning of pluralism from this misunderstanding: "Heute indessen wird unter Pluralismus nicht mehr eine dem Egoismus entgegenstehende Denkungsart verstanden, sondern vielmehr eine Gesellschaftsordnung, die ein gehöriges Maß an Egoismus (Gruppen-Egoismus) voraussetzt und auch legitimiert. In der pluralistischen Gesellschaft soll der Staat den Egoismus nicht etwa bekämpfen, sondern vielmehr in für alle Bürger vorteilhafte oder zumindest doch erträgliche Bahnen lenken" (Eberhard Jüngel, "Kirche im Sozialismus – Kirche im Pluralismus: Theologische Rückblicke und Ausblicke," *Evangelische Kommentare* 26 (1993): 6ff. Habermas seeks the foundational form of pluralism not in a domesticated egoism but in a kind of concern which is sensitive to differences and to the formation of opinions on a discursive level. He holds correctly that this is not simply accomplished by the achievement of a general point of view. The vitality of pluralism is gaged by the quality of public opinion; this again is based upon "the procedural characteristics of its means of production" (*Faktizität und Geltung* 438f).

¹⁰ Hannah Arendt, *Vita Activa oder Vom tätigen Leben* (München: Pieper, 1992), especially 38ff.

¹¹ According to the theory of Niklas Luhmann this encroachment is almost fully complete. See his *Ökologische Kommunikation: Kann die moderne Gesellschaft sich auf Ökologische Gefährdungen einstellen!* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1986) 165: "Man kann darauf hinweisen, dass wir 'lebensweltlich' trotz allem immer noch auf den Beinen stehen. Aber das sind gleichsam Trotzrecreationen: Abwehrsemantiken. . . (236). Quite rightly Luhmann does not question the fact of social movements, but he sees in them only the entirely inadequate basis for the efforts of modern societies to get by with "deficits in their self-descriptions." See also his *Soziologie des Risikos* (Berlin: DeGruyter, 1991) 135ff, and Michael Welker, "The Selfjeopardizing of Human Societies and Whitehead's Conception of Peace," *Soundings* 70.3-4 (1987): 309-27.

systems will abandon their properly instrumental role.¹² In warning about the "supervised state,"¹³ he fears, for instance, that the "societal discussion" carried on by the authorities may simply result in the fusion of function-systems and free associations.

Above all, there is the danger that in the changing relationship with electronic mass media the strengths of civil society will be misdirected or destroyed. Through the selection and repression of themes, through the manufacture of the illusion of communication and participation, the mass media, as Habermas formulates the matter, are all too clearly imposing their power structures on [vermachten] the public sphere. They contribute to the collapse of the "level of discourse."¹⁴ "The sociology of mass communication certainly presents us with a sober picture of the disempowered public sphere of Western democracies as they have been governed by the mass media ... the associations of civil society are sensitive to these problems, but the signals they send out and the impulse which they provide are generally too weak to break in on the short-term learning processes in the political system or to influence the decision process."¹⁵

One major problem of civil society is that the "public sphere" which is constituted through civil society is not tangible enough. Because of its fluid and pluralistic makeup, civil society must live with a demanding and precarious difference between seeming and being. On the one side, many, like Habermas, want to hold fast to the belief that the relationships among free associations are the "organizational substratum" of all forms of the public. On the other side, they must also agree with him that the associations are not "the most conspicuous element of a public realm, which is governed by the mass media and large agencies, watched over through the institutions of market and opinion research, and covered over with the public relations, propaganda, and advertising of the political parties, and unions."¹⁶

¹² Habermas, *Faktizität und Geltung* 427; cf. 425.

¹³ Habermas, *Faktizität und Geltung* 418ff.

¹⁴ Habermas, *Strukturwandel* 27ff, describes the areas of civil society particularly governed by mass media as powerless areas in which the real control of relevant communicative relationships has been successfully hidden" (28). Compare this with his comments in *Faktizität und Geltung* 444f.

¹⁵ Habermas, *Faktizität und Geltung*. "[Es] stellt sich die Frage, wie autonom die Ja- und Nein-Stellungnahmen des Publikums sind – ob sie einem Überzeugung« – oder doch nur einen mehr oder weniger kaschierten Machtprozess widerspiegeln" (451). Habermas notes that, sadly, research into this "cardinal question" offers no answer (453). In the same passage he himself takes consolation in the opinion that the more the dynamics of one's life world are left alone, the more the civil-society associations are able to operate unhindered. Yet what would follow from that? Would it be the development of uncertain strategies against the colonization of the life world?

¹⁶ Habermas, *Faktizität und Geltung* AW.

Critique of the Habermas Diagnosis: David Tracy and Francis Schüssler Fiorenza

Is the hope that civil-society associations have a limitless capacity to regenerate themselves, accompanied by a healthy skepticism about that capacity, the limit [die Grenze] of all insight into the driving forces of pluralism? The complexity of associational relationships, in my opinion, has as yet been fully illuminated neither in systems theory nor in the theory that Habermas has developed. This problem, again, is connected with a certain blindness, an insufficiency in the account Habermas provides of the role of the churches and of the "function of religion." Systems theory in fact despairs over the code of the putative function-system that "religion" seeks,¹⁷ and Habermas fails to distinguish the church, which he identifies as a civil-society association, from other such associations. A few self-styled intellectual critics of the church might find it amusing to see in Habermas's listing of civil-society associations the churches ranged alongside debating clubs, hobby organizations, and sports clubs.¹⁸ In fact these listings also betray an important deficiency in the care with which the theory has been developed. They point to an unsatisfactory understanding and representation of civil society, and to an insensitivity to the power of symbols in the activation and direction of free communication as well as the diverse qualities of these symbols.

This critique may by no means be limited to sociology. It also affects theologians and church leaders, and their own versions, or rather caricatures, of the church in the context of pluralism. But on what basis might the understanding of the church as a civil-society association be corrected, or in what direction should it be further developed?

The critical questions put to Habermas by Tracy and Schüssler Fiorenza can in my opinion help to lay deeper foundations for a theory of pluralism and at the same time gain a clearer perspective on the role of the church in a pluralistic culture.

Tracy has called attention to the fact that Habermas's perception of civil society bears the traces of the typical prejudices of modern thought.¹⁹ "The technologization of the public

¹⁷ Niklas Luhmann, *Funktion der Religion* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1977); see also Michael Welker, *Theologie und Funktionale Systemtheorie: Luhmanns Religionssoziologie in theologischer Diskussion* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1985) 76ff, 93ff; Luhmann, *Soziologische Aufklärung 4: Beiträge zur funktionalen Differenzierung der Gesellschaft* (Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag, 1987) 227ff; *Gesellschaftsstruktur und Semantik: Studien zur Wissenssoziologie der modernen Gesellschaft*, Book 3 (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1989) 259ff; of related interest is Michael Welker and W. Krawietz, *Kritik der Theorie sozialer Systeme: Auseinandersetzungen mit Luhmanns Hauptwerk* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992), especially 302ff and 355ff.

¹⁸ Habermas, *Strukturwandel* 46; *Faktizität und Geltung* 431; see also his treatment of the "more or less spontaneously arising associations, organizations, and movements," *Faktizität und Geltung* 443.

¹⁹ David Tracy, "Theology, Critical Social Theory, and the Public Realm," in Browning and Schüssler Fiorenza, eds., 19-42.

sphere, so well analyzed by Habermas under the rubric of the colonization of the life-world, is bound up in modernity with the marginalization of art and the privatization of religion."²⁰ However, this dispossession strikes right at the theory of civil society. Tracy identifies an important deficiency in Habermas's conception of aesthetic and religious phenomena and of the processes of communication. He finds it both intellectually and sociologically unfortunate that Habermas largely ignores religiously inspired social movements, not to mention the innovative discourse of theologians and scholars of religion.²¹ Habermas also fails to recognize the significance of the public character of symbols in his view of art.²² As Tracy sees it, the traces of reason in our life-world cannot be made clear or communicated without reference to religion and art.

The diffuseness in Habermas's presentation and understanding of the relationships among civil-society associations is everywhere connected with this blindness, or with his distorted perception of religion and art. According to Tracy, Habermas misses this perspective on the fundamental regeneration of civil society and has trouble actually comprehending the pluralistic culture of difference and assessing its significance.²³ The notion of a diffuse ensemble of associations in civil society involves a self-deception on the part of middle-class culture and reason, and easily justifies a rationality which does not straightforwardly seek, strengthen, or tolerate genuine difference. In passing, Tracy also mentions feminist criticism of Habermas.²⁴ (Habermas has reacted with uncertainty to the feminist critique of his conception of communicative reason).²⁵ Tracy's concluding judgment is that the vague concept of civil-society associations shares in large measure the dilemma of the modern, that "[it is] partly a dilemma to find forms of communication which respect differences as much as commonalities."²⁶

²⁰ Tracy 38.

²¹ Tracy mentions the discussions concerning the meaning of myth (Eliade), symbol (Ricouer), neo-classic metaphysics (process thought), and the conceptions of multicultural and interreligious dialogue (Geertz, Panikkar, W.C. Smith) (33).

²² Tracy S7ff.

²³ Tracy 35.

²⁴ See for example Sheyla Benhabib, *Critique, Norm, and Utopia: A Study of the Foundations of Critical Theory* (New York: [publisher], 1986); of related interest are Nancy Fraser, "What's Critical About Critical Theory: The Case of Habermas and Gender," and Iris Marion Young, "Impartiality and the Civic Public: Some Implications of Feminist Critiques of Moral and Political Theory," both in *Feminism as Critique: Essays on the Politics of Gender in Late-Capitalist Societies*, ed. Sheyla Benhabib and D. Cornell (Cambridge and Oxford: Polity Press, 1987) 31-56, 57-76; and S. Moller Okin, "Justice and Gender," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 16 (1987): 42-72.

²⁵ Habermas, "Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in this World," in Browning and Schüssler Fiorenza, eds., 226-50, 242f; *Strukturwandel* 19f, 34.

²⁶ Tracy 41. Habermas's reaction shows that he has obvious problems in dealing with Tracy's criticism: ". . .

Schüssler Fiorenza shares and expands this critique.²⁷ He reproaches Habermas for having a vague and all-inclusive understanding of religious symbols and their use. Habermas has clearly perceived neither the transformation of the churches in the modern era nor the part the churches play in public discourse. In fact it strikes one as almost naive, this wholly opaque continuing talk about "religious world-pictures" and their "function of legitimation" – world-pictures which in the modern era are replaced by "rationally motivated information."²⁸ Schüssler Fiorenza rightly demands that, in place of simplistic representations of "salvation history" as the ground for moral justification,²⁹ more precise accounts of the normative religious traditions be brought forward. Habermas can develop an adequate institutionalization for his discourse ethics." Schüssler Fiorenza advocates "concrete discursive communities for questions of ethics and justice."³⁰ He believes that "the churches as communities of interpretation of the substantial normative potential of their religious tradition can provide such an institutional site."³¹ Habermas acknowledges that solidarity and justice can be religiously grounded.³² In his discourse ethics, however, he fails to bring substantial as well as formal claims for justification of righteousness into view. Schüssler Fiorenza concludes with a plea that the churches become communities for public discourse on "questions of justice."

Is there only a formless wishful thinking at work in these questions and proposals? Are illusory self-recommendations being expressed here? On what basis could the churches fulfill the expectations that Tracy and Schüssler Fiorenza raise? Are the expectations formulated here as directed to the existing churches fully persuasive? Or could it be expected that on the basis of their spiritual foundations, the churches might carry forward symbols and encourage a discourse that is sensitive to differences, that strengthens the culture of pluralism, raises the level of discourse and thereby brings the complex thematic of justice back into the center of

.religious symbolism should not conform to the aesthetic, that is, to the forms of expression of an expert culture, but must maintain its holistic position in the lifeworld" ("Transcendence from Within, Transcendence in this World" 241).

27 Francis Schüssler Fiorenza, "Die Kirche als Interpretationsgemeinschaft: Politische Theorie zwischen Diskursethik und hermeneutischer Rekonstruktion," in Habermas und die Theologie: Beiträge zur theologischen Rezeption, Diskussion und Kritik der Theorie kommunikativen Handelns, ed. Edmund Arens (Dusseldorf: Patmos, 1989) 115-44. The english translation of this essay is included in Browning and Schüssler Fiorenza, eds., 66-91.

28 See Schüssler Fiorenza, "Interpretationsgemeinschaft" 120.

29 See Habermas, *Moralbewusstsein und kommunikatives Handeln* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983) 178.

30 Schüssler Fiorenza, "Interpretationsgemeinschaft" 132.

31 Schüssler Fiorenza, "Interpretationsgemeinschaft" 132; cf 116, 128, 138f, 142.

32 Schüssler Fiorenza, "Interpretationsgemeinschaft" 140; see also Habermas, "Gerechtigkeit und Solidarität! Eine Stellungnahme zur Diskussion über 'Stufe 6,' " in *Zur Bestimmung der Moral*, ed. W. Edelstein and G. Nunner-Winkler (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1987) 291-318.

discussion? And might this not lend greater clarity to the communicative processes of civil society and offer orientation for their development and direction?

The material theological foundations which Tracy and Schüssler Fiorenza implicitly rely upon must be brought clearly into view. This may be possible, in my judgment, if we look toward a clearer understanding of the Holy Spirit and of the working of the Spirit.

The Pluralism of the Spirit and Its Power of Orientation

According to its portrayal in various Old Testament and New Testament traditions, the Spirit of God is working to effect a special kind of unity and concord. The Spirit aims not for a homogeneous or homogenizing unity, but for a differentiated unity of the creaturely, a differentiated unity of the people of God, as well as a differentiated knowledge of God. Just in that way the Spirit brings about a life and a knowledge [eine Lebendigkeit und eine Erkenntnis] which corresponds to the life of God [Lebendigkeit Gottes]. In the so-called "unity" of the Spirit there is a power at work that combats unjust differences but supports creative differences and creative complexity. In light of this characteristically differentiated and indeed differentiating unity, it is entirely possible to speak of the "pluralism of the Spirit." That the Spirit of God is a power which works in, with, and under the differentiated multiplicity of humans and of groups of humans, is not proclaimed only in Paul's familiar teaching about charisma, where the building up of the community through the different gifts of the Spirit - very typical gifts indeed - is emphatically described. Nor is it only found in his talk of the "Body of Christ" with its different members and different internal relationships, with its unity-among-the-many ordered "within the Spirit."

The classical texts which elucidate the "pluralism of the Spirit" are, to begin with, Joel 3:1-5 and the story of Pentecost. The promise that God will pour out the Spirit on all flesh is expressed by Joel in terms of an emphatic differentiation: "... your sons and daughters will prophesy, your old men will dream dreams, your young men will look upon visions, but also in those days will I pour out my Spirit over the menservants and the maidservants ..."

As in other sayings related to the Spirit,³³ the equal placement of men and women here is remarkable. For patriarchies and for cultures that think in terms of hierarchies of the old and the young, the emphatically equal placement of the old and the young, female and male recipients of the Spirit is likewise remarkable. Finally, the Spirit's equal placement of so-

³³ See for example Galatians 3:28; I Corinthians 12:13; Luke 2:25ff, 36ff.

called free men alongside menservants and maidservants is expressly given prominence.³⁴ An abstract sameness or uniformity of "all subjects" may by no means be read into this enumeration. The talk about the pouring out of the Spirit is far more explicitly open to a development which humanity has perhaps still before it: a transition from an abstract and pretentious ethics of sameness (in which doubtless there might be the greatest advantages) to a dynamic ethics of equality that is sensitive to differences, that is not satisfied with formal protestations of equality and with only partial honoring of the same. The promise takes a giant step beyond all concepts of community which stop with sameness (where a specific group may dictate just how unity and equality are going to be provided). The community's creative praise of God and its own relationships bestow form and shape within differentiation, by supporting the work of differentiation, most especially within the tensions brought about by differentiation.

That there is nothing simple under consideration here about the governing communicative relationships is strikingly apparent in the words about the "outpouring" of the Spirit. Just as rain gives life to an entire region, so the Spirit crafts non-hierarchical relationships of interdependence and communication between different kinds of humans and groups of humans.³⁵ Even more clearly than the promise in Joel, the story of Pentecost requires that well-established differences between humans and groups of humans who have been stirred by the outpouring of the Spirit continue to be taken seriously. The new commonality is explicitly displayed in the midst of received cultural, national, and linguistic differences. The lists are downright long-winded: many different cultural, national, and linguistic origins are named, none of whom understand each other.³⁶ The promise in Joel is brought forward and confirmed with a long quotation, so that the differentiation of many peoples, of Jews and Gentiles, is dramatically strengthened through the emphatic differentiation of men and women, young and old, maidservants and menservants.

Here, going beyond an individualism which somehow allows many different individual perspectives to count equally, a great number of different common identities come into view,

³⁴ For the connection here to the foundations for the principle of mercy see Hans Walter Wolf, "Joel und Amos," *Biblischer Kommentar Altes Testament* 14.2 (1975): 80.

³⁵ See Isaiah 32:15ff, 44:3; Ezekiel 39:29; Joel 3:1 ff; Zechariah 12:10; Proverbs 1:23; Wisdom 9:17; Acts 2:1 ff, 10:45; and I Peter 1:12.

³⁶ See R. Pesch, "Die Apostelgeschichte," *Evangelisch-Katholischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament* 6.1 (1981): 105, and J. Roloff, "Die Apostelgeschichte," *Das Neue Testament Deutsch* 5 (1981): 42f for the suggestion that this list is supposed to represent "all peoples" and thus "illuminates the horizon of the Jewish world."

which nevertheless become transparent to each other and able to communicate.³⁷ Only with this plurality of distinctive identities, forms of life, and forms of communication, each relatively stable in its own right, is the level of pluralism reached. The wonder of the outpouring of the Spirit is grasped only when it is understood as an improbable general understanding under the conditions of linguistic, cultural, and social opacity [Intransparenz]. The point of the Pentecostal experience and of the outpouring of the Spirit is not the unintelligibility of glossolalia but instead a miraculous intelligibility. Without dissolving or suspending the different languages, the different loyalties and historical customs, a differentiated, differentiation-protecting experience of community is established. Where there are no apparent natural preconditions for success in becoming intelligible to each other, men and women who have been brought together through the Spirit, grasped and caught up in the outpouring of the Spirit, can as a commonality hear the message of "the mighty works of God."³⁸

The event of Pentecost makes real, signally, the promises of the messianic traditions that the different peoples will turn toward the God of Israel, that they will identify this God as their own, and their own God as this God. It is worth noting that precisely with the outpouring of the Spirit there comes according to many witnesses the unveiling of the face of God, the concentrated presence and gift of God's countenance.³⁹ Not a bewildering and unsettling, merely nominal "pluralism," but the concentrated presence of God which is bound up with the difference-maintaining agreement and intercession of witnesses and prophetic testimonies. "Beholding the countenance of God" or "coming before the countenance of God" is, of course, an expression for the worshipful gathering of the congregation. The gathering, the constitution of the congregation, which includes work and play together, and so also the bearing together of tensions, indeed the cultivation of contrasts and differences, so far as it is oriented toward the presence of God, is indebted to the working of the Spirit. Yet how does this centering achieve form and specificity? Does this "life in the Spirit" allow of overall

³⁷ This is not understood in terms of the polarities of "individuality and plurality" or manyness and oneness." Compare this with Wolfhart Pannenberg's explorations of the "outpouring of the Spirit" in his *Systematische Theologie*, 3 vols (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck, 1993) 3:25ff, especially 30.

³⁸ The Pentecost story describes a xenolalia, i.e., a speaking in foreign tongues, not a glossolalia which is unintelligible in itself. Pesch conjectures that Luke substitutes xenolalia for glossolalia (Pesch 104f). However, neither the text nor other speeches about the outpouring of the Spirit argue for this. Furthermore, the other passages in Acts which deal with this issue specify neither the consequences of the outpouring, nor do they give special prominence to any proclamation associated with it. In both individual cases in which glossolalia is mentioned as something that follows from the outpouring, it is specifically emphasized that this is always accompanied by prophetic speech and with the visible praise of God.

³⁹ See Ezekiel 39:29, as well as Psalms 51:12ff and 139:7,10.

understanding, in the face of the inescapability of the power of God which "comes over" men and women?⁴⁰

The working of the Spirit gains clarity in messianic traditions which the New Testament relates to Jesus of Nazareth. These texts speak of a repose, an abiding in the bearer of the Spirit, one chosen by God, who will bring to Israel and to all peoples justice, compassion, and the knowledge of God. Justice, compassion (protection of the weak and the marginalized, as well as their reintegration into the community), and the knowledge of God – here we have in view the fundamental intentions of God's law. All parts of the law deal in varying degrees of emphasis with these three fundamental forms of definition: justice, compassion, the knowledge of God.⁴¹ The messianic bearer of the Spirit will bring universal fulfillment of the law, the establishment of the righteousness intended by God. Not only Israel but also the peoples, even the most remote regions of the world, are to arrive at the experience of the relation between righteousness, lovingkind-ness, and knowledge of God, and to a life characterized and shaped by these three.

The tensions laid out here in this international "public" sphere are considerable, but note that they are not resolved.⁴² It is explicitly emphasized that the promised bearer of the Spirit does not avail himself of the typical unifying political and moralistic ways of building power and loyalty. He gathers the non-mono-hierarchical [nicht-monohierarchische] community of the people of God out of public powerlessness, indeed out of public misunderstanding and public contempt.

How can this apparent paradox be explained? It is the gospel of cross and resurrection, which raises up the semblances of the numinous and of paradox into the working of the Spirit. From the point of view of the gospel (that is, at the cross), it is obvious that the beneficent powers of the law can be systematically ignored and misused by all men and women, by Jews and Gentiles alike, carrying out, whether purposefully or helplessly, what H. G. Geyer calls the "will to distance God" [Willen zur Ferne Gottes]. Jesus of Nazareth is brought to the cross in the name of Jewish and Roman law, in the name of religion, in the name of the ruling politics,

⁴⁰ The assertion that the Spirit "blows where it will" is so strongly emphasized in a very few passages (especially John 3:8) that the many hundreds more biblical references which speak of the work of the Spirit as accompanied by the sound of very loud wind become obscured.

⁴¹ In *The People Called: The Growth of Community in the Bible* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1986) the Old Testament scholar Paul Hanson argues that, according to biblical tradition, these provisions are also criteria for the building up of the community.

⁴² For the decisive meaning of the tension-filled eschatological community of hope which is the church and Israel, see "The Church and Israel: Romans 9-11," in the *Princeton Seminary Bulletin*, Supplementary Issue 1, ed. Daniel Migliore (Princeton: Princeton Seminary, 1990) 124ff.

and of actual public opinion. Against this danger of sinful enfeeblement of the law, the Spirit of God makes real the righteousness that God commissions.

In the face of this tension between the good intentions of the law and the possibility of its complete perversion, the pluralism of the Spirit and the culture of difference are hardly luxurious or extravagant attainments. They are, on the contrary, healing necessities. How is God's good will to be accomplished under the conditions of finitude, if persistently and in manifold ways there menaces the danger of the sinful perversion of the good purposes of the law? Through the Spirit, through the various ways and forms in which different human groups, times, and cultures seek to make real the connection between justice, compassion, and the knowledge of God. Forms of openness to the Spirit and to the righteousness of God can be distinguished from all kinds of self-righteousness and forgetfulness of spirit, precisely through their mutual relativization and challenge to each other, and their capacity for revision and readiness for improvement.

Can it be that there is an inner connection between pluralistic – culture and the central most convictions of faith? The answer would be "Yes," if the pluralistic culture

- 1) is steadfastly oriented toward the perfection of justice, and if
- 2) the standard for perfection is presented as steady improvement in the protection of the weak; if
- 3) this perfection is accompanied by a search for the knowledge of God – and that means in secular perspective: with the open presentation of comprehensive accounts of self and reality which commit themselves to a demand for truth; and if
- 4) the systematic corruptibility and possibility for abuse of the goals of the law are recognized and therefore
- 5) joy in the creative and inescapable differences in a common search for justice, mercy, and the knowledge of God can become a living reality.