

Speaker: Machael Welker
(University of Heidelberg, Germany)

MODERNITY AND POST-MODERNITY AS CHALLENGES TO CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

Modernity and post-modernity are catchwords today which attract all sorts of ideas, hopes, antipathies and fears. Many people on this planet connect modernity with the triumph of a scientific ideology and with the imperialism and colonialism of the European nation states. They welcome the end of modernity and the rise of post-modernity as the dawn of a new and better era.¹ Others see post-modernity as a time in which the markets and the media take over the domination of the world. They fear that the search for truth and justice will be replaced by an enhanced striving for success and power. They see this new era bring relativism and decay, in short a destruction of the binding forms of life.² What are the challenges to Christian theology in connection with this shift of world views and historical settings?

1. BASIC CHALLENGES TO CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AS A TASK FOR TRUTH-SEEKING COMMUNITIES

Christian theology is primarily cultivated in two "truth-seeking communities."³ It is cultivated in both the church and the academy. Because of its commitment to truth Christian theology has to object to all sorts of guesswork and wishful thinking which turn up with grand views on the world and on history. So far many of the general statements about modernity and post-modernity have their roots in such grandiose views. Christian theology should belong to the forces which in their world views demand clarity and historical accuracy and their constant improvement: It should object to and criticise all ideological black-and-white pictures of the world and of the historical situation we are in. It should also self-critically see that we are--by our love for the church or by our commitments to the academy for example--all too easily ready to let our hopes and wishes shape our world views. There is no easy escape from these dangers. It is not easy to avoid viewing the modernity we want or we hate, the post-modernity we long for or we fear. As members of truth-seeking communities, we can, however, to a certain degree protect ourselves and others from these dangers. We have developed standards that work against mere guesswork and ideological wishful thinking. The open striving for historical accuracy, the striving for basic clarity and the striving for a balanced, nuanced judgement are such standards. How do we use these standards in the question of modernity and post-modernity as challenges to Christian faith?

Modernity and post-modernity are terms for complex historical and cultural phenomena. We can only approach and disclose them fragmentarily and in certain perspectives. If we praise or condemn one or the other, we should look for a historical validation of the respective decision. It is easy to historically validate the ideological scientism and the triumph of the imperialistic nation state as a dark side of modern age. It is less easy to verify all the promises connected with post-modernism on historical grounds. We see more clearly what post-modernity opposes, criticizes and fights than what it will bring forth. If we start out with a gloomy picture of modernity, we easily embrace the world view that promises to end it. But we should be careful with such an approach.

The same modernity that led to a scientific ideology and many aggressive nation states grew out of good concerns that are still important. "The consolidation of knowledge under the rubric of 'science' and the unity of the nation state won through political loyalty have been the principle features of modern consciousness. To be 'modern' meant to have escaped a pre-scientific and even mythical world view. It was to stake one's life on the demands for 'scientific' truth. Yet to be modern also required fleeing the tyrannies of the past in order to achieve the rule of law in political life. No longer would birth be a sufficient warrant for political power; political sovereignty rests in the will of the people. And this continued a deeper theme uttered first in the European Renaissance: the dignity of human life is rooted in our capacity to shape our lives and our world. In brief, the 'modern' age was an

¹Cf. Thomas Oden, *The Death of Modernity and Postmodern Evangelical Spirituality*, in: *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, Weaton Press 1995.

²So some contributions in: P. Koslowski et al., *Moderne oder Postmoderne? Zur Signatur des gegenwärtigen Zeitalters*, Weinheim 1986.

³Cf. John Polkinghorne / Michael Welker (eds.), *The End of the World and the Ends of God: Science and Theology on Eschatology*, Trinity Press: Harrisburg 2000, Introduction; John Polkinghorne and Michael Welker: *Faith in the Living God. A Dialogue for Troubled Friends and Educated Despisers of Christianity*, SPCK: London 2001.

escape, a liberation, from the triple threat of ignorance, tyranny, and dehumanization. These are tremendous achievements for a civilization! The task of present thinking must be to move beyond contradictions within the modern world itself, to ascend, into richer, more complex forms of knowing and living. And this must continue the struggle against forces of ignorance, tyranny, and dehumanization."⁴

Once we see that modernity evolved in the fight for truth, freedom and justice, we cannot just look down on its values and achievements. We may bemoan that the search for truth led not only to the triumph of education and the flourishing of the sciences, but also to a scientific ideology with its blindness to religious truths and to cultural complexity for instance. We may bemoan that the search for truth led to a triumph of technical reason, which turned out to be imperialistic and ecologically destructive. But we must not regard an appeal to reason and science as evil in itself. This is what I consider a "balanced view" on the complex historical phenomenon that is modernity.

Similar perspectives have to be taken on the issue of political liberation. We have to become aware of the fact that liberation, the establishment of a public legal system, mandatory education for everybody and the development of many systems of welfare within the nation state was just one side of the modern enterprise. The understanding of this good development needs to be complemented by the knowledge that it went together with aggressive politics and colonialism towards other countries and parts of the world. But we can learn to condemn this latter aspect without depreciating the former achievement. A subtle approach which is open to historical elucidation and self-critical judgement is to be cultivated.

This does not lead to an insecurity of judgement and to relativism, as some people think. It rather leads to a learning relation to complex historical and cultural phenomena, to an ability to "discern the spirits": These are the strong and these are the weak and even dangerous sides of modernity. Such an approach prevents us also from any illusionary perception of post-modernity, which is welcomed and hailed by many people. Once we see both the strong and the distortive elements in modernity, once we test, elaborate and refine our views, we will also develop a subtle approach to the new era. Will it keep the good achievements of modernity? Or will it weaken the strive for truth, freedom and justice? Will it overcome the distortions of modernity? Or does it feast on our dissatisfaction with these distortions and commend itself with vague promises that everything will turn better? In order to gain some clarity on these questions, we have to seek an understanding of the fundamental difference between modernity and post-modernity. Can we determine such a real difference in our historical and cultural situation so that we can differentiate between the epochs of modernity and post-modernity?

⁴William Schweiker and Michael Welker, *Integrity - Dignity - Truth: Beyond the Crisis of Christianity in the West*, Trinity Press 2001.

2. WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MODERNITY AND POST-MODERNITY?

So far there have been many confusing guesses about the difference between modernity and post-modernity. Some people claim that whatever is attributed to post-modernity can already be found in modernity. In this view modernity has not come to an end and the unclear term *post-modernity* which claims to end and overcome the modern era, is an indicator of this. There is, as I will show, some truth to this, because modernity itself includes a conflict which drives towards the new era, for which we do not yet have a proper name. But there is one difference which clearly divides the epochs and which is reflected in many areas and on many different levels. This is **the difference between the highest value and the interpretation of this value** in both epochs. For modernity the value of **unity** is of the highest importance. For post-modernity, the value of **difference** is crucial.⁵ This, of course, includes different understandings and interpretations of both "unity" and "difference" from each side.

For the **modern mind**, unity meant consensus, mutual understanding and harmony based on equality. The striving for universal unity included the fight against tyranny and for justice and equality. Difference meant conflict and disagreement, inequality or even oppression. For the **post-modern mind**, however, difference means freedom and creative engagement with each other. And the talk about unity raises the suspicion of pressure towards adaptation and integration, control and even oppression. The post-modern mind would certainly agree that not all forms of difference are creative and helpful. We have to differentiate between the differences: there are destructive, unavoidable, constructive and creative differences. The post-modern mind would also welcome differentiated forms of unity. That is, all forms of unity have to allow for difference, have to appreciate and even to treasure difference. Otherwise they breed oppressive ideologies.

Many concrete and practical experiences have brought about this shift in orientation. A thinker like the German philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche who was called the "turntable to post-modernity" (Jürgen Habermas) is just the peak of the iceberg. Nietzsche attacked the medieval and modern values, when he called all notions of the whole, the true and the one world a fraud, a swindle and a deception. He saw the oppression involved in these notions, the trick to tell the rest of the world what reality is like. He saw the lust for power that declares one's own perspective on reality to be **the absolute view**. To Nietzsche's understanding all truth-claims are just provisionary. All morals are nothing but attempts to control one another, to impose one's "will to power" on one another. The universal reason and the universal morals are just tricks to control and oppress one another.

Post-modernity has listened to voices like this. But it did not grow out of some philosophical ideas. Very many cultural and scientific achievements and many experiences of oppression and pain led to the new conviction: the world is poly-contextual and we have to welcome multi-perspectival approaches. If we want to maintain the modern striving for truth, justice and dignity, we have to change our world view. Different cultures, different traditions, different rationalities have to be taken seriously.⁶ However, not only the specific "life-worlds" and their perspectives, but also the concrete human individual has to be taken much more seriously than it was taken in modernity. Modernity talked a lot about the value of "the human subject" and its autonomy. But it did not really address the concrete unique individual. Rather, it spoke about the standardized person of the bourgeois value-system: the human being, guided by reason and universal morals. But this approach does not grasp the concrete human beings. They are determined by complex feelings and by different forms of rationality. Some are more impressed by religion than others. Some are devoted to the natural sciences, others are skeptical over against them. Some find their key-values in family and friendship, others look for the common good for more general orientation.

The young Schleiermacher saw the problems of modernity clearly. He charged "Mister Kant" with having standardised modern subjectivity and having attributed too much power to reason. He called for a differentiation between modern standardizing individualism and an individualism that takes the concrete multifarious individuals seriously. I have called the latter concept

⁵Cf. Yung Han Kim, *The 21st Century, Postmodernism and Christianity*, in: *The 21st Century, Postmodernism and Christianity*, ed. by the Institute for Christian Culture Studies, Soong Sil University Press, Seoul 1996, 37: "The crisis of the modern, affirming the end of ideology to need the totality, has been giving rise to the postmodernism to affirm the diversity."

⁶Yung Han Kim, *The 21st Century*, 51, rightly speaks of a "multi-dimensional thinking."

"poly-individualism."⁷ The philosophical and theological existentialism of the twentieth century saw the same problem more or less clearly. From many sides, including theology and faith to a high degree, many cultures of the world worked against the modern mentality.

Modern minds have seen the dangers involved in this challenge. They maintain that a radical post-modernism leads to relativism and to the destruction of all common grounds, intellectually and morally. But this warning all too easily neglects the fact that modernity itself brought forth the phenomena now termed post-modern. To be sure, on the one hand modernity brought the passion for the one reason, the universal rationality-continuum, and it brought the passion for the universal morality. On the other hand it also came up with the differentiation of the social systems, the differentiation of the sciences and the non-hierarchical differentiation of cultural spheres. What does this mean?

Modern societies and cultures have developed a multi-systemic texture. Several social systems work for the sustenance and the well-being of the whole society: politics, the law, religion, education, the sciences, the market, the media, technology, the arts, and the family are seen as such systems. In this multi-systemic order each system--such as the law, religion, the market and politics--performs a function that is essential and indispensable for the whole society. At the same time each system strives for autonomy and defends itself against interferences by other systems. Each system optimises its procedures, its rationalities and its institutional forms. Parallel to the differentiation of the social systems modern societies developed a rich texture of so-called associations. Parties and communities, movements and initiatives, clubs and lobbies of all sorts were initiated in order to influence the social systems (i.e., the law, religion, education, the media etc.). These associations often had universal and even very grandiose claims. But they grew out of the interests and goals of their members. With their members, their interests and goals they emerged and perished. Some associations have had a long life. Some are normatively and institutionally very stable. Others are open to new trends. Still others have short-term purposes. The associations which want to and do influence the social systems are called civil-societal associations. Let me give some examples: Some political parties want to stabilize the current politics; others want to change them. Interest groups want to strengthen the ties between the market and education; others want to avoid such ties. Some initiatives want more law and order; others express their worries that too much legal control in the private and public realms might be dangerous. This complex--but by no means chaotic--interaction between the social systems (the law, education, religion, the market etc.) and the civil-societal associations constitutes what we call pluralistic societies.⁸

The structured pluralism of our societies and cultures is located between modernity and post-modernity. On the one hand it brought a differentiation of rationalities and thus challenged the modern ideal of universal unity. On the other hand it brought a multi-systemic setting and challenged the idea of an endless differentiation and dissociation, which is often connected with post-modernity. In many areas of our life we can discover these multi-systemic settings. Scholars may discuss the question how many social systems there are and how we should differentiate them. But they will all agree that their number is finite and small and that the evolution of a new system--like the media--takes a very long time. The same holds true for the differentiation in the sciences or for the family of confessions in Christianity, which constitute the pluralism of the academy and the pluralism of the ecumene. Our world is much more complex than the typically modern mind would be willing to admit; but it is much less chaotic than those who would like to exorcise the spirits of post-modernity would affirm. What then are the tasks of Christian theology in the midst of this complex situation--beyond the call to work for a historically truthful, clear and subtly balanced diagnosis?

3. THE TASKS OF CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY IN THE MIDST OF THE CHALLENGES BY MODERNITY AND POST-MODERNITY

The first set of tasks for theology in answer to the challenge by modernity and post-modernity is both critical of ideology and

⁷Michael Welker, "We Live Deeper Than We Think": The Genius of Schleiermacher's Earliest Ethics, *Theology Today* 56, 1999, 169-179; Friedrich Daniel Ernst Schleiermacher: *Universalisierung von Humanität*, in: *Grundprobleme der großen Philosophen, Philosophie der Neuzeit III*, hg. J. Speck, Vandenhoeck: Göttingen 1983, 9-45.

⁸Cf. My contribution *Christianity and structured pluralism*; and *Kirche im Pluralismus*, Kaiser: Gütersloh 2. Auflage 2000.

self-critical. Theology should not develop a particular enthusiasm for a particular *Zeitgeist*, for a spirit of the age. It should never finally define itself with or against an epoch or a cultural formation. Of course, it will always discover forms and contents in itself and in other types of theology that are shaped by a certain epoch and its spirit. With these presuppositions in mind we can freely speak of a modern or a post-modern theology. But a theology that does not claim more than to be modern or post-modern is a dead horse.

Christian theology has a history that starts at least with the growth of the biblical canon for over about a millenium. One thousand years of experience with God in different cultural and historical settings make up the **historical weight** of the biblical canon. Christian theology, at least Protestant theology, can not submit this biblical basis to the spirits of a certain cultural and historical era. It will rather--in the name of the *sola scriptura*--be on guard that in the orientation of faith, the scripture remains "the queen," as Luther said, and not a specific tradition and its cultural products.

On this basis, modernity and post-modernity belong to the many cultural settings and spheres on which the **cultural weight** of the biblical traditions has an influence. To be sure, these settings and spheres have an impact on the theological teaching and on our Christian witness. But theology should make sure that none of these epochs and spheres with their traditions dominates and functionalizes the rich scriptural witness that we have to interpret time and again. Modernity and post-modernity are just two voices in a cloud of witnesses that are present in our teaching and in our worship. It is important to see that the closeness of these two voices and their ubiquity in our environments make them particularly loud and powerful. But it is most important neither to adore nor to fear them.

Christian theology as an ecumenical theology across space and time will treasure the voices, the world views and the rationalities of the different cultural settings of former times and of today as soon and as far as they support a clear, truthful and life-supporting witness of God. In order to discern this the **canonical weight** and the **theological weight** of scripture have to be respected which are at the basis of the historical and the cultural weight. Both scripture's complex consistency and its reference to the living God are the foundation for its fourfold weight and its authority. Only on these grounds does it gain its supremacy over all traditions, including modernity and post-modernity.

The cultivation of a careful and relaxed distance to dominant epochs and their spirits is very important in order to keep the right authority and the right freedom in the church and in theology.⁹ We do not only have to see the danger that a theology and a whole church can become dominated by a *Zeitgeist*, the spirit of an age. We equally have to fear the danger that a theology or a church becomes dominated by warfare against a *Zeitgeist*. To be sure, in some cases total resistance indeed seems unavoidable. Examples of such total resistance would be fascism which found its way into the German churches and finally dominated them, or racism which destroyed churches in South Africa. We must become aware of the fact that whether theology and the church turn ideological or whether theology and the church see their identity in fighting ideology--the witness to the living God suffers severely. Christian theology in its work has to carefully avoid both dangers as long as it can.

The first and most important step toward this goal is the rooting of Christian theology in its witness to the living God, a witness which has to relate to its contemporary epoch and culture in a specific way and yet spans the times and epochs. The second step is the striving for historical truthfulness, clarity and balance of judgement in the "truth-seeking community," which I addressed in the first part of this presentation. Both steps are connected with an unavoidable drive toward specificity. We cannot bear witness to God by simply launching general ideas. And we do not reach historical truthfulness and a nuanced judgement when we stay on the level of mere advocacy for, or accusation of, a *Zeitgeist* or an era.¹⁰ The Church as the Body of Christ has room for modern and post-modern voices, as it has room for voices from many different times and epochs. But the Church is not a parliament with deputies who each just represent an epoch or a *Zeitgeist*. The modern and the post-modern voices have to justify their presence

⁹See Karl Barth, KD I/2, §§ 19-21, 1948.

¹⁰cf. John Polkinghorne and Michael Welker: Faith in the Living God. A Dialogue for Troubled Friends and Educated Despisers of Christianity, SPCK: London 2001; Michael Welker, Springing Cultural Traps: What the Science-Theology Discourse on Eschatology Does for the Common Good, Theology Today 2001.

in relation to their witness to God. They are not a value in themselves. What does modernity contribute, what does post-modernity contribute that serves the witness to the glory of God in specific ways? What can we see and express better, more fully with the eyes of a modern or with a post-modern mind? On the other hand, what are the dangers of these mindsets? Where do they tend to blur or even darken our Christian witness?

These questions can never be answered once and for all, if we do not want to end up with an ideological idea of friend and foe. We can only name helpful and dangerous tendencies and learn from encouraging, disappointing or ambivalent experiences. In the case of modernity, one of the most dominant events for Christian theology was that it became fused with an ever-differentiated academic enterprise. It is important to see that already the Reformers greeted and strengthened this development. Already in the very beginning of the Reformation Luther eagerly supported the historical and philological training for theologians at his university in Wittenberg. Only on this basis, he argued, would the right understanding of scripture and of the history of Christ be possible. He warned against scholastic metaphysical speculations about God's majesty, speculations that would not take the historical way through the witnesses of scripture and the life of Christ Incarnate. Those who do not seek God in Christ but in metaphysical speculation will in vain seek for God.

Most of the Christian churches in the world have shared the Reformers' affirmation of an academic theology. They also pushed for an education of their members who were rightly told that they should not leave theology to the academy and the academically trained pastors, but that they all had a share in this theological task. When the Reformers were asked: Why do we need a translation of the Bible? People cannot read anyhow!, they responded: This is why we need schools and education for everybody! And they started nothing less than an educational revolution.

Education for everybody, common search for truth on historical grounds--even the Reformation thus started tendencies that become dominant in modernity. But then parts of modern theology disconnect the historical work on scripture from the witness to the glory of God. Parts of the academic theology disconnect themselves from serving faith and the life of the church. New speculative principles find their way into theology, principles which are no longer primarily rooted in a metaphysical ontology but in anthropology and epistemology. The "protestant principle" is an example of this danger or rather self-endangerment of modern theology and modern faith. This principle says that each person has an immediate relation to God. "This immediate relation of each person to God gives to this person an inviolable dignity. This immediate relation to God and the dignity every single human person derives from it is the ground for the equality of all human beings. In this substantial equality of all human beings universal reason and universal morals are rooted."¹¹

What sounds like a great religious idea turns into a subjectivization and a radical emptying of faith. The self-secularization of faith becomes routine, because the contents and details of faith are no longer important. The "me-and-my-God-relation" is what is of interest. And this relation is no longer the special topic of theology and the religious communication in the church. Philosophy, then psychology and all sorts of theories of religion have claimed to be equally competent in analysing and explaining this principle. Since they do not stick to particular traditions of faith and to particular confessions, they are welcomed as promoters of the "universal" access to religion and as the advocates of the true unity of all believers. An empty and boring relation to a "transcendent ground of being" is all that is needed in a universal religion. Before the background we have described it is easy to see why this program could praise itself as the climax of modern theology. A common religious minimum seemed to serve best the purposes of fighting for universal unity and equality. Today, many well-meaning people still push this agenda in the dialogue between the religions and also in global ethics.¹²

¹¹Cf. Michael Welker, The Protestant Principle in the Culture and Crisis of Modernity.

¹²See my exchange with Hans Küng: Hans Küngs "Projekt Weltethos". Gutgemeint - aber ein Fehlschlag. Evangelische Kommentare, 6/1993, 354-356; Hans Küng, Nicht gutgemeint - deshalb ein Fehlschlag. Zu Michael Welkers Reaktion auf "Projekt Weltethos", Evangelische Kommentare, 8/1993, 486ff and M. Welker, Autoritäre Religion. Zur sachlichen Prüfung von Küngs "Projekt Weltethos", Evangelische Kommentare, 9/1993, 528f. See also Wolfgang Huber, Die tägliche Gewalt. Gegen den Ausverkauf der Menschenwürde, Herder: Freiburg 1993, 171ff.

Post-modernism rightly sees that modernity here turns into a suppressive and even tyrannical form. It systematically destroys the content-based and the communicative forms of faith. It destroys its connection with history and tradition. It reduces the living God to an empty God-thought.¹³ It weakens ecclesial and cultural education and learning. It finally suppresses the specific rationalities of faith that do not fit the dominant scientific rationality or the forms of thought that are culturally dominant. Here, post-modernism promises to open breathing-spaces.

The post-modern mind and spirit travels through the complexity and density of life. It wants to give room to the marginalized and dissenting voices. It rejoices in the discovery of new forms of difference and incompatibility. But in its constructive moves this all too easily leads to a confusion of world views. Serious academic and serious ecclesial perspectives are given up, when, for instance, capitalism, new age spiritualities, icons of the media, and the faiths of childhood are spun into a mixture that must, come what may, suffice for a meaningful life.¹⁴ A merely open-minded, but eclectic post-modernism cannot heal the emptiness of the modern mind. The post-modern mind is correct in its observation that the sciences, religions, forms of common sense, the arts and other forms of thought and experience deal with the reality that surrounds us and that they all find out some "truths" about this reality, but that they are all too often unable to communicate with each other. But when we ask post-modernism for an alternative that moves beyond this mere diagnosis, it leaves us with a multitude of rationalities which do not know how to touch common grounds.

The same seems to hold true for our morals. Fascism, racism, sexism, and ecological brutality have demonstrated that whole societies can become corrupted. With the exception of minorities, outsiders, prophets and martyrs, people paid respect to distortive and destructive modes of thought and behaviour. They withdrew respect for actions that were actually good and life-supporting. What does this mean? Are we bound into "moral markets" that are as hard to predict and as impossible to shape as the weather or the stock markets? The fast changes of our value-systems that the upcoming electronic media have brought about, and the constant encounter with foreign value-systems in all parts of the world seem to speak for a fundamental relativity also of morals.

The diagnostical honesty and the therapeutical weakness of post-modernism has many aspects. It systematically dissolves authoritarian forms that claim universality and self-evidence. It challenges false generalizations. It heightens the sensitivities for diversity. It appreciates rationalities and moral potentials of persons, minorities, of communities and traditions which had been marginalized and even suppressed. But since it has not developed a clear sense for the pluralistic structure of our societies and cultures, along with the enlightenment it has spread much confusion. It has constantly fed the opinion that pluralism is relativism in the negative sense. It has fed the confusion of pluralism and individualism. In fact, even most theorists of pluralism have pictured pluralism as a mere ensemble of multifarious individuals (polyindividualism) or of mere "publics" with different interests and preferences. They have thus succumbed to the ideology of the emergent media-culture, but have in fact hidden or blurred the clear power-structures of the late-modern societies.

Christian theology will only overcome this confusion when it turns to its rich symbols of faith and in this overcomes its own confusion of relativism and pluralism. It has to discover and to proclaim that the body of Christ in its many forms is a complex unity that includes and embraces difference for the deep witness to the Triune God and the rich edification of the community. As the presence of the resurrected Christ was revealed in the breaking of the bread, the perception of his wounds, the modes of address, his opening up of the scriptures, the presence of the resurrected today opens many specific spaces for the members of his body. He does not open an arbitrary "plurality" but a complex interplay of witnesses. From his turning to the children, to the sick, the suffering and the obsessed to his acceptance of outcast people and collaborators in the table-fellowship, there is a multitude of events that can ignite the remembrance of Christ and that can connect us with his eternal life. From the political arguments with

¹³See my exchange with the neo-protestant Eilert Herms and the neo-thomist David Burrell, in: *Schöpfung und Wirklichkeit*, Neukirchener: Neukirchen-Vluyn 1995 (only in the German edition as a "Nachwort" to chapter 1; *Sozio-metaphysische Theologie und Biblische Theologie*). Zu Eilert Herms: "Was haben wir an der Bibel?", in *Jahrbuch für 4 Biblische Theologie*, Bd. 413: *Die Macht der Bilder*, Neukirchener: Neukirchen-Vluyn 1999, 309-322.

¹⁴Cf. Schweiker and Welker, *Integrity, Dignity, Truth: Beyond the Crisis of Christianity in the West*.

the cult of the temple and with the Roman Empire, and analogous arguments in historically analogous constellations, we are drawn into his remembrance and his life on other paths. The dealing with complex normative fields through Jesus' new interpretation of the law and his proclamation of the coming reign of God opens yet another dimension where the members of the body of Christ are challenged to be the bearers of his presence on earth.¹⁵

The immense richness of the eternal life of the resurrected Christ calls for a self-understanding of the Christian church that has to connect different rationalities and morals into a complex and pluralistic unity. The pouring of the Spirit according to the Pentecost story supports this view, when it speaks of the divine power which unites the different traditions and cultures to a common witness without destroying their different identities and heritages. Natural and cultural differences are transformed into different gifts of the Spirit which together witness to the glory of God.

When we look at these genuinely theological tasks, namely to understand, and to witness to, the unity with Christ, the texture of the body of Christ, to understand and to witness to the unity and the community of the Spirit and the unity in glorifying the Triune God we can begin to discover that the double challenge of modernity and post-modernity can become a help rather than a burden for Christian theology. We are not called upon to decide for one time and era or the other. We are not called upon to take sides and to witness to one of them. We are, rather, called upon to turn to the rich contents and structures of Christian faith in order to understand and to practice our Christian identity in these and in other areas of time and history. We are guests in modernity and post-modernity. This is true. We even live, as the Dialectical theologians used to say, "between the times." Thus we are able to learn from both times and eras and to challenge both times and eras. We are enabled to do this because we have a home-land that is more than just a single era in human history and a single example of human culture.

¹⁵Cf. Michael Welker, *Resurrection and Eternal Life. The Canonic Memory of the Resurrected Christ, His Reality, and His Glory*, in: J. Polkinghorne und M. Welker (eds.), *The End of the World and the Ends of God: Theology and Science on Eschatology*, Trinity Press: Harrisburg 2000, 279-290.