

MODERNITY AND POST-MODERNITY AS THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGES

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?

BASIC CHALLENGES TO CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY AS A TASKS 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

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

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

3 Cf. 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 and Fortress: Philadelphia 2001, chapter 9.

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 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 indeed one side of the modern enterprise. However, 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. We have to 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

4 William Schweiker and Michael Welker, *Creation - Dignity - Truth: The Promise of Protestantism in Pluralistic Settings*, Trinity Press 2003.

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?

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN MODERNITY AND POST-MODERNITY?

Until today we have been confused by many guesses about the difference of modernity and post-modernity. Some people claim that all that is attributed to post-modernity can already be found in modernity. So, modernity has not come to an end and the unclear term **post-modernity**, which only 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, that drives towards the new era, for which we do not yet have a proper name. But there is one clear difference, which 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 of highest importance. This, of course, includes different understandings and interpretations of "unity" and "difference" from both sides.

For the modern mind, unity meant consensus, mutual understanding and harmony based on equality. The strive 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. The talk about unity raises the suspicion of pressure towards adaptation and integration, control and even oppression. The post-modern mind would agree, that not all forms of difference are creative and helpful. We have to differentiate between differences: there are destructive, unavoidable, constructive and creative differences. The post-modern mind would also welcome differentiated forms of unity. But 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 ice-mountain. Nietzsche attacked the medieval and modern values, when he called all notions of the whole, the true and the one

world fraud, swindle and deception. He saw the oppression involved in these notions, the trick to tell the rest of the world what the reality has to be. He saw the lust for power that declares the own perspective on reality for THE absolute view. In Nietzsches view all truth-claims are just provisional. All morals are just attempts to control each other, to impose the "will to power" on each other. The universal reason and the universal morals are just tricks to control and oppress each other.

Post-modernity has listened to voices like this. But it did not grow out of some philosophical ideas. Many, 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 greet multi-perspectival approaches. If we want to keep 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.⁵ But not only the specific "life-worlds" and their perspectives, also the concrete human individual has to be taken much more seriously than modernity took it. Modernity talked a lot about the value of "the human subject" and its autonomy. But it did not really address the concrete unique individual. It just spoke about the standardized person of the bourgeois value-system: the human being, guided by reason and universal morals. But the concrete human beings are much more subtle. 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, some are sceptical over against them. Some find their key-values in family and friendship, others look for more general orientation for the common good.

The young Schleiermacher saw the problems of modernity clearly. He challenged "Mister Kant" to have standardised modern subjectivity and to have 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 this "poly-individualism."⁶ The philosophical and theological existentialism of the twentieth century saw the same problem more or less clearly. From many sides, strongly including theology and faith, many cultures of the world worked against the modern mentality.

5 Yung Han Kim, aaO. 51, rightly speaks of a "multi-dimensional thinking".

6 Michael Welker, "We Live Deeper Than We Think": The Genius of Schleiermacher's Earliest Ethics, *Theology Today* 56, 1999, 169-179.

Modern minds saw and still see the dangers involved in this challenge. A radical post-modernism leads to relativism and to the destruction of all common grounds, intellectually and morally. So runs the warning. But this warning all too easily overlooks, that modernity itself brought forth the phenomena that are now named post-modern. Modernity brought the passion for the one reason, the universal rationality-continuum. This is true. It also brought the passion for the universal morality. But it also brought 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 multisystemic order each system like 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 built, to influence the social systems. 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 had and have a long life. Some are normatively and institutionally very stable. Others are open to the trends. Still others have short-term purposes. Those associations, which want to influence and do influence the social systems are called civil-society-associations. Let me give some examples: Some political parties want to stabilize the current politics; others want to change it. Interest groups want to strengthen the ties between the market and the education; others want to avoid these ties. Initiatives want more law and order; other initiatives warn that too much legal control in the private and public realms might be dangerous. This complex--but by no means chaotic--interaction constitutes what we call pluralistic societies.⁷

⁷ Cf. my contribution, "Christentum und strukturierter Pluralismus", in: Andreas Feldtkeller (ed.), *Konstruktive Toleranz - gelebter Pluralismus. Erfahrungen mit dem Zusammenleben von Religionen und Kulturen*, Lembeck: Frankfurt/M 2001, 89-107; and my *Kirche im Pluralismus*, Kaiser: Gütersloh 2. Auflage 2000.

The structured pluralism of our societies and cultures stands somehow between modernity and post-modernity. 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 often connected with post-modernity. In many areas of our life we can discover these multi-systemic settings. Scholars might debate on the question, how many social systems we have to count 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 exorcising 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?

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

The first set of tasks coming with the challenge by modernity and post-modernity for theology are ideology-critical and self-critical-ones. Theology should not develop a particular enthusiasm for a particular *Zeitgeist*, for a time-spirit. It should never finally define itself with or against an epoch or a cultural shaping. 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. In this respect 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 dead horse.

Christian theology has a history that starts at least with the growth of the biblical canon 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**--stay 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 traditions on which the **cultural weight** of the biblical traditions has an influence. Of course, these traditions do have an impact on our theological teaching and our Christian witness. But theology should make sure that not one of these epochs and 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 worships. It is important to see that the closeness of these voices and their ubiquity in our environments make them particularly loud and powerful. But it is most important, neither to adore nor to fear these voices.

Christian theology as an ecumenical theology not only in space but also in time, will treasure the voices, the worldviews, the rationalities in the past and in the present 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 ground the historical and the cultural weight. It is the scripture's complex consistency, and it is its reference to the living God that is the basis 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 our dominant epochs and their spirits is very important to keep the right authority and the right freedom in the church and in theology.⁸ We do not only have to see the danger, that a theology and a whole church becomes dominated by a *Zeitgeist*, a spirit of an age. We equally have to fear the danger, that a theology or a church becomes dominated by the warfare against a *Zeitgeist*. In some cases, total resistance seems indeed unavoidable. Examples are the Fascism creeping into the German churches and finally dominating them or the racism which destroyed South African churches. But in both cases--theology and church turning ideological and theology and church having their identity in fighting ideology--the witness to the living God suffers severely. Christian theology has to work carefully to 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

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

witness to the living God, a witness, which has to relate to its contemporary epoch and culture in a specific way, which yet spans the times and epochs. The second step is the striving for historical truthfulness, clarity and balance of judgement in our "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 witness God in just launching general ideas. And we do not reach historical truthfulness and a nuanced judgement when stay on the level of mere advocacy or accusation of a *Zeitgeist* or an era.⁹ 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 just represent an epoch or a *Zeitgeist* each. The modern and the post-modern voices have to justify their presence 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 blurr or even darken our Christian witness?

These questions can never be answered once and for all, if we do not want to paint ideological friend-foe-pictures. We can only name helpful and dangerous tendencies and learn from encouraging, dissapointing 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 Wittemberg. 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, that would not go 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 seek God in vain.

Most of the Christian churches on this planet have shared the Reformer's affirmation of an academic theology. They also pushed for an education of their members, who were rightly

9 Cf. John Polkinghorne and Michael Welker: Faith in the Living God. A Dialogue for Troubled Friends and Educated Despisers of Christianity; Michael Welker, Springing Cultural Traps: What the Science-Theology Discourse on Eschatology Does for the Common Good, *Theology Today* 58 2001, 165-176.

told that they should not leave theology to the academy and the academically trained pastors, but that they all have a share in this theological task. When the Reformers were told: 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--already the Reformation thus starts tendencies that become dominant in modernity. But then parts of modern theology disconnect the historical work with scripture from the witness to the glory of God. Parts of academic theology disconnect them from serving faith and the life of the church. New speculative principles creep into theology, although they are no longer primarily rooted in an metaphysical ontology but in anthropology and epistemology. The famous "protestant principle" can demonstrate 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."¹⁰

What sounds a genius religious idea turns in a subjectivization and an radical emptying of faith. Self-secularization of faith becomes routine, because the contents and details of faith are no longer important. The "me-and-my-God-relation" is everything that interests. And this relation is no longer the special topic of theology and the religious communication in the church. Philosophy, later Psychology and all sorts of theories of Religion claim to be equally competent to analyse and explain this principle. Since they do not stick to particular traditions of faith and to particular confessions, they are greeted 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 what is needed in a universal religion. In front of the background we have described, it is easy to see, why this program could praise itself as high-point 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

10 Cf. Michael Welker, *Der Protestantismus in Kultur und Krise der Moderne*, in: *Protestantismus im 21. Jahrhundert. Zum Verhältnis von Protestantismus und Kultur*, Hans-Lilje-Forum Bd. 4, hg. E. v. Vietinghoff u. H. May, Lutherisches Verlagshaus: Hannover 2000, 151-174.

agenda in the dialogue between the religions and also in global ethics.¹¹

Post-modernism rightly sees that modernity here turns into a suppressive and even tyrannious 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.¹² 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 postmodern mind and spirit travels through the complexity and density of life. It wants to give room for the marginalized and dissenting voices. It rejoices in the discovery of new forms of difference and incompatibility. Yet in the constructive moves this all too easily leads to a confusion of world views. Serious academic and serious ecclesial perspectives are given up, when, for example, capitalism, new age spiritualities, icons of the media, the faiths of childhood are spun into a montage that must, come what may, suffice for a meaningful life.¹³ An just open-minded but eclectic postmodernism cannot heal the emptiness of the modern mind. The post-modern mind is correct in its observation, that sciences, religions, forms of common sense, the arts and other forms of thought and experience deal with the reality that surrounds us. That they all find out some "truths" about this reality, but 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 to our morals. Faschism, racism, sexism, and ecological brutalism have demonstrated, that whole societies can become corrupted. With the expection of

11 Cf. my critical 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 und 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.

12 See 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 Biblische Theologie*, Bd. 13: *Die Macht der Bilder*, Neukirchener: Neukirchen-Vluyn 1999, 309-322.

13 Cf. Schweiker and Welker, *Creation - Dignity - Truth: The Promise of Protestantism in Pluralistic Settings*.

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 with the upcoming electronic media and the constant encounter with foreign value-systems in other part of the earth, seem to speak for a fundamental relativity also of morals.

The diagnostical honesty and the therapeutical weakness of postmodernism has many aspects. It systematically dissolutes authoritarian forms that claim universality and self-evidence. It challenges false generalizations. It hightens the sensitivities for diversity. It appreciates rationalities and moral potentials of persons, minorities, of communities and traditions that had been marginalized and even suppressed. But since it has not develop a clear sense for the pluralistic structure of our societies and cultures, it has spread much confusion along with enlightenment. It has constantly fed the oppinion, 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 our 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 of 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 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 by 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.¹⁴

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 the glory of God.

When we look at these genuinely theological tasks: to understand and to witness the unity with Christ, the texture of the body of Christ, to understand and to witness the unity and the community of the Spirit and the unity in glorifying the Triune God we can start to discover: the double challenge of modernity and postmodernity can become a help rather than a burden for Christian theology. We are not called to decide us for one time and era or the other. We are not called to take stance and to witness on one of these two sides. We are, rather, called 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 not just one era in human history, and not just one example of human culture.

14 Cf. 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.