



Wallace M. Alston

# LOVING GOD WITH OUR MINDS

## *The Pastor as Theologian*

✧ ESSAYS IN HONOR OF WALLACE M. ALSTON ✧

*Edited by*

Michael Welker and Cynthia A. Jarvis

WILLIAM B. EERDMANS PUBLISHING COMPANY  
GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN / CAMBRIDGE, U.K.

2007A 7820

© 2004 Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.  
All rights reserved

Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.  
255 Jefferson Ave. S.E., Grand Rapids, Michigan 49503 /  
P.O. Box 163, Cambridge CB3 9PU U.K.

Printed in the United States of America

09 08 07 06 05 04      7 6 5 4 3 2 1

ISBN 0-8028-2857-4



[www.eerdmans.com](http://www.eerdmans.com)

## Contents

<i>Preface</i>	ix
<i>Introduction</i>	xi
<b>I. Cultural, Social, Political, and Ethical Challenges</b>	
“Who Is the Other?” Embodying Difference through Belonging <i>Denise M. Ackermann</i>	3
“A City upon a Hill”? The Religious Dimensions of American Self-Understanding and Its Crisis Today <i>Gerhard Sauter</i>	17
We Are Not Our Own: On the Possibility of a New Christian Humanism <i>William Schweiker</i>	31
The Moral Roots of the Common Life in a Global Era <i>Max L. Stackhouse</i>	50
Theology in the Crisis of Humanity <i>Carver T. Yu</i>	62

Serving God in a Time When a World-view Collapses:  
The Pastor-Theologian at the Beginning of the  
Third Millennium 74  
*Michael Welker*

**II. Dialogue with the Sciences and the Humanities**

A Scientist Looks at Theological Inquiry 91  
*John Polkinghorne*

Open Order of the Natural World and Human Mind:  
Is There a Future for the Cooperation of Natural Sciences  
and Christian Theology? 98  
*Botond Gaál*

Saint Gregory of Nazianzus as Pastor and Theologian 106  
*Brian E. Daley*

“... The Doing of the Little Righteousness”:  
On Justice in Barth’s View of the Christian Life 120  
*Dirk Smit*

Guilt, Shame, and the Face of God 146  
*Niels Henrik Gregersen*

Theology and the Human Sciences: Critical Familism  
and the Law 164  
*Don Browning*

**III. Preaching and Teaching**

Preaching and Teaching the Old Testament 181  
*Patrick D. Miller*

Praying with Eyes Open 195  
*Jürgen Moltmann*

In Pursuit of Good Theological Judgment:  
Newman and the Preacher as Theologian 202  
*John S. McClure*

The Preacher of the Word and a Southern Recipe  
for Creeds and Politics 220  
*Milner S. Ball*

“Not That We’ve Done Anything All That Bad . . .”:  
Pastoral-Theological Reflections on Sin 226  
*Allen C. McSween, Jr.*

The Missing Spirit of -uality 236  
*Virgil Thompson*

A New Liberalism of the Word 248  
*Fleming Rutledge*

The Story That Shaped Paul’s Way with Women 265  
*L. Ann Jervis*

**IV. Reformed and Ecumenical Theology**

The Scope of Biblical Interpretation in the Reformed Tradition 283  
*Thomas W. Gillespie*

The Not-So-Plain Meaning of Scripture 291  
*J. Harold McKeithen, Jr.*

Midrash and the Recovery of Biblical Authority 298  
*Cynthia A. Jarvis*

Christ Outside the Walls 317  
*A. J. McKelway*

On the Ascension 331  
*Robert W. Jenson*

The Truth . . . and the Spirit of Truth: The Trinitarian Shape of Christian Theology <i>Colin Gunton</i>	341
The Spirit of Reformed Faith and Theology <i>Daniel L. Migliore</i>	352
The Theology of Worship within the Reformed Tradition <i>David Fergusson</i>	367
<i>Contributors</i>	381

## Preface

In 2003 Wallace Alston had served the church and the academy for forty years. In 2004 he celebrates his seventieth birthday. Pondering this, friends and colleagues from the church and from the academy have contributed to a Festschrift in his honor.

I first knew Wallace as the Pastor of Nassau Presbyterian Church in Princeton and was deeply impressed with him. His pastoral energy and spirit radiated throughout the whole congregation. When he left to assume the office of the director of the Center of Theological Inquiry (CTI), the church had a very difficult time finding a successor. One day a member of the church said laconically: "We'll have to wait for the second coming of Jesus Christ to find a suitable successor to Wallace."

With Wallace the CTI turned into a theological "powerhouse." The international scope of the scholars in residence increased; female scholars and younger scholars of high quality joined the circle. Instead of one multi-year international and interdisciplinary consultation, Wallace launched four consultations simultaneously which covered a broad range of topics: Science and Theology on Eschatology; Globalization; The Common Good; Faith and Reason; The Identity of Jesus; Human Personhood and Dignity — these were treated by teams of high-profile scholars from all over the globe. With his quick eye for academic and theological quality Wallace accompanied all of these research processes. Relentlessly he pushed the groups for results that would serve both the church and the academy.

As a great missionary entrepreneur Wallace also organized consultations in parts of the world which are religiously and academically in crucial transitions: South Africa, Middle and Eastern Europe, and India. The topics

## Serving God in a Time When a World-view Collapses: The Pastor-Theologian at the Beginning of the Third Millennium

Michael Welker

The office of the pastor has always been, and will continue to be, a difficult one. Pastors are expected to proclaim the word of God, the presence of Jesus Christ. They have to witness to the creative power of God, to the pouring of the Holy Spirit. They are to announce the coming reign of God, and they have to promise the forgiveness of sins. Any one of these is a task beyond the capacities of a human person.

Karl Barth's description of the dilemma the pastoral ministry faces is to the point: "As ministers we ought to speak of God. We are human, however, and so cannot speak of God. We ought therefore to recognize both *our obligation and our inability* and by that recognition give God the glory."<sup>1</sup>

To have to speak of God — and yet not to be able to do so: this is possibly still worse in times like ours which put an enormous trust in professional skills and grant credit only after having tested the competence of the person in office on a regular basis. In recent decades the loss of much of the aura of the pastoral office has intensified the difficulties and greatly increased the burden of the ministerial task. In many parts of the world, at least in the Protestant churches, the second half of the twentieth century brought a change in the common attitude toward the pastoral office. What had happened?

This contribution proposes that a complex change in the world-view is to a high degree responsible for this shift. We are witnessing the slow collapse

1. Karl Barth, "The Word of God and the Task of the Ministry," in *The Word of God and the Word of Man*, trans. Douglas Horton (1928; 1957; reprint Gloucester: Peter Smith, 1978), pp. 183-217; 186.

of an old and the emergence of a new world-view, which theology (both in the church and in the academy) has not yet fully diagnosed, but has described in misleading ways. "Breakup of tradition," "growing individualization," and "from unity to plurality" are formulas often applied to this change. This loss of the old world-view has meant that teaching and preaching in the church have indeed lost a complex basis, be it in terms of the worldly "foundations" they used to trust, be it in terms of the images of "reality" they used to oppose. Instead of concentrating on the main task of the pastor — namely to take up the challenge presented by the word and the Spirit of God — they were absorbed in fighting the change in the world-view. The following contribution will examine the misleading formulas and will try to show in what way they will have to be revised or at least qualified in order to avoid the traumatizing disturbance of the real pastoral and ministerial task.

### Do We Suffer Only from "a Break in Tradition"? How the "New World" of the Media Supplants "Cultural Memory" and Religion Based on It

One of the often repeated diagnoses for the change in world-view is the following. The classical main-line churches of the Western industrialized nations, their theologies and their church life are in a crisis, because our cultures have experienced a "break in tradition." This diagnosis, however, actually veils the problems. In our cultures we experience breaks in tradition all the time. The post-war years, decolonization, the sixties, the Vietnam war, the oil crisis, the end of the cold war, the break-down of Marxist-Leninist socialism, September 11, 2001 — we have experienced the break of tradition in numerous complex events in the past years. Sometimes the break is accompanied by laments, sometimes by hopes for a better world. Breaks in tradition as such are a recurrent phenomenon in the world of the twentieth century and of our days. The diagnosis aims at something else, but does not name it. It aims at the problem that *in the past decades a radically transformed attitude towards the world has developed.*

This new attitude towards the world arises in tandem with the spread of the electronic media, especially in connection with the rapid and global spread of television and the internet. Attendant on this worldwide spread of television and of the internet is a *fundamental twofold devaluation of "cultural memory,"* of the hierarchy of the classics, of what is canonical, and of the idea that historical memory can provide orientation in contemporary crises. The first devaluation of cultural memory is connected with the fact that the new media are

bringing the huge inflation of a river of data that constantly demands our attention. *The concentration required to grasp the world of today and of the proximate future is increasing enormously. The "inhabiting" of the past and the shared "bringing to life" of the past are diminishing drastically.* The individual and the shared activity of remembering and reconstructing the past, of citing traditional texts, and of working on a formative continuum are being replaced by another type of "world formation" and "self-formation." The formula "detemporalization of the world and spatialization of the world" has been used in an attempt to grasp this process.<sup>2</sup> The extremely intensified and exhaustive collective attention to the present and the proximate future is suppressing the cultivation of "cultural memory." A continuous stimulation and excitement go hand in hand with the requisite attention to the present and the proximate future. This stimulation masks the fact that *the suppression of shared remembrance and of cultural memory leads to a "cooling off" of human life together.* The Heidelberg Egyptologist Jan Assmann has further developed insights of Claude Lévi-Strauss and distinguished between "hot" and "cold" memory.<sup>3</sup> "Cold memories" remove what is unique and extraordinary from past events. They remove the history-shaping power from events, and from the society that both is affected by these events and attributes these events to itself. Or they do not even allow this power to be developed. History from the perspective of "cold memory" is no longer "inhabited." It no longer is a shared realm of experience amenable to ongoing formation. The media abound in stimulations for "cold" memory, since they are continually offering past events and interconnected sets of events to our attention. The abundance of memories, the way in which they are presented, and the dominance of attention to today and tomorrow are responsible for a continual cooling off of remembrance, indeed for a continual expulsion from "inhabited" history.

The second devaluation of cultural memory intensifies and accelerates the first, and is in turn intensified by the first devaluation. *The media's presentation of the world calls any naive view of the "unity of history" and the "unity of the lifeworld" radically into question.* Previously it was the preserve of science and art to call these cultural "self-evident assumptions" into question. Now so-called common sense also does so. The otherness, indeed the foreignness of forms of life, of holistic conceptions, and of appeals to tradition in other regions of the world, becomes strikingly clear on a daily basis. Wonder is becoming routine. We are becoming familiar with the experiences of foreign-

2. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge: Blackwell, 1990).

3. Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* (Munich: Beck, 1999); Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Das wilde Denken* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1970), p. 270.

ness, with lifeworlds that we ourselves cannot inhabit. The knowledge of the particular values and good impulses that emanate from foreign traditions and lifeworlds leads not only to the enrichment of one's own lifeworld, but also to broken and distanced attitudes towards one's own lifeworld. These effects are heightened by mass tourism.

The way in which the media sensitize us to foreign lifeworlds and traditions transforms not only our relation to the world as a whole, but also leads to human beings becoming sensitive to differences of lifeworlds and of ways of connecting to tradition within their own culture. In the midst of what seems to be familiar, that which is foreign becomes evident. The distance to "foreigners" can diminish, while the distance to some relatives, neighbors, and members of one's "own people" can increase. This differentiated and complicated view of the world requires a new orientation. It no longer seems advisable to let one's own tradition and one's own "classics" exercise a monopoly in providing orientation. The situation seems to call for uncertainty, experiments with one's identity, caution in making commitments, and in any case a rejection of overly strong attachments to every form of "cultural heritage." If memory is to be cultivated at all, then let it be as "cold" as possible!

This attitudinal change has repercussions for many other apparently self-evident cultural assumptions. And all of them affect religion deeply. The cultural evaluation of the relation between old and young is changing. The complex world with its rapidly changing "today and tomorrow" no longer requires primarily "life experience" and the calm, sober wisdom of maturity. It requires the ability to pick things up quickly and nimbly; it requires an intelligence capable of change and adaptation. The "old world" is relegated to specialists and museums. The real world belongs to youth!

But the concept of educational formation is also changing. *The educational ideal is shifting from the acquisition and cultivation of ordered knowledge to a skillful selectivity that is adequate to the situation and function in question.* The laptop with internet access seems to make it superfluous to have one's own familiar collection of books, and indeed for there to be libraries at all. When kindergarten and school — at least in Germany — expect children to memorize something, the requirement acquires a bad reputation as burdensome. Indeed it almost attains the level of bodily injury.<sup>4</sup> Flexibility of attention must not be disturbed by tying memory down.

The worldwide spread of the electronic media is transforming views of

4. For the American situation, see Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1988).

the world and perceptions of reality. These transformations go hand in hand with a worldwide intensification and acceleration in the transport of both freight and persons. The world's conversion to automobiles and paved roads, the intensifications of maritime shipping and of rail transport, but especially the explosive development of air travel run parallel to the development of the electronic media. The two developments are mutually reinforcing. Both lead to an acceleration, intensification, and globalization of economic developments. *The economy and the media appear as the leading factors in shaping the world and reality.*

The global spread of the electronic communications media and of the transportation system goes hand in hand with a triumphalistic development of new consumer technologies. New consumer technologies intensify the flow of economic communication, and at the same time increase the need for new economic goods. As economic communication intensifies, so does electronic communication, which in turn increases the need for new technologies and economic goods. *The political system, the education system, and the family must adjust themselves accordingly. Where they — with law and religion — oppose the dynamic of the market, they are put hopelessly on the defensive. A litany of laments has accompanied consumerism, the routinization of both parents working outside the home, and the attendant stress on families, the school system, and the health care system — all developments that would lead to the destruction of the nuclear family and to the functionalization of the education system.* Religion and churches, which had specialized in the stabilization of the nuclear family, its sexual morals, and its role structures, had depended on the support of the classical education system and tried helplessly to catch up with these developments. With each acceleration of the circulatory system of economy-technology-media, religion and churches — always a day late — lost influence and the possibilities to play a formative role in the development.

The global circulatory system of technology-economy-media is changing the world-view of individual human beings, along with their attention, their memory and their expectation, and their evaluation of tradition, age, and education. *This global circulatory system has also changed the fixed orientation of individuals and of societal subsystems towards the nation-state and towards politics.* Religion and churches, politics, and society have not only been required to experience the enormous weakening of historical orientation and of "hot" memory, but they have also lost the standardizing modern individualism important for the Protestant understanding of faith and freedom. And they finally lost the dual or dualistic world-view that had long been cultivated in phrases such as "church and state" or "church and society."

### Do We Suffer Only from "Individualization"? Why Western Cultures Look for Their Heroes and Heroines in Competitive Sports and in Entertainment Music

The claim that the crisis of Christianity can be traced back to the "break in tradition" is superficial. The other frequently repeated statement that "individualization" initiated the crisis, is plainly deceptive. Most people connect or even identify "individualization" and "the development of personality." They think: if what the churches, theology, and the augurs of the spirit of the age claim is true, namely that individualization, read: the development of the personality, is connected to the break in tradition, then tradition has lost. (This seems a further reason for the relativization of history and cultural memory.)

Such an attitude is supported by a number of developments that hardly anybody would want to deny. In Western industrialized nations, we have experienced *an enormous explosion in education and the sciences* in connection with technological, economic, and media developments. This brought with it great possibilities for the *development of the individuality* which could be considered among the positive aspects of the growth of personality. This is true of the *emancipation of women*, particularly by their entrance into the complete education system, of the changes in the role behavior in the family, and of some changes in the sexual morals in the past decades. However, those who criticize "the individualization" aim at something different.

The formula "the break in tradition and individualization" is not really concerned with the development of personality, but rather it complains about the *systematic isolation of individuals. It laments the individualization and the loss of "connectivity."*<sup>5</sup> The lament is that in our contemporary Western industrialized nations life's powers of connectivity — bound to justice, caring, and truth — are being weakened, that the social loyalties and solidarity are being dissolved. The lament that human beings are becoming incapable or unwilling to enter into long-range obligations and commitments and that it is becoming increasingly unlikely that one can depend in an enduring way on such obligations and commitments, has many — far too many — empirical confirmations. The contemporary crises of religious communities and churches, of parties, unions, and many kinds of clubs, and above all the dissolution of the classical familial forms, confront us daily with the fact that we are in a problematic cultural situation. For many years now, politics, ecclesiastical and secular social services, cultural analysis, sociology, and psychology

5. Cf. Jan Assmann, *Ma'at. Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im Alten Ägypten* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1990), esp. pp. 283ff.

have used catch phrases like “breakdown of solidarity,” “the autistic society,” “from social state to social market,” and “amusing ourselves to death” to issue warnings about the destructive consequences of this development.

But are the claims correct that people in the Western industrialized nations have lost all “connectivity,” that they are on their way to becoming a horde of couch potatoes, web idiots, cyber sex freaks or bizarre, shrill, erratic types who seclude themselves more and more from the processes of communication of real life? These claims blur the search for new forms of connectivity and prevent their critical valuation.

Why is it that the electronic media in their connection with competitive sports and entertainment music get so much resonance? Why do sports and music take up so much social space alongside the picturing of “the world” in the news and commentaries, alongside the ever new stories of virtual families and outbursts of violence? The success of these forms teaches us something about the search of our cultures for “connectivity” and about the search for a picture of the human being (*Menschenbild*) that is generally convincing.

The new cultural fixation of individuals on the present and the near future as well as the constant cooling down of memory can be successful only if there is a continuous agitating of attention, a constant distraction. In their connection with competitive sports and electronic entertainment music, the media have found ways to guarantee this endless flux that accumulates attention and stimulates distraction. Countless ads connect media, market, and the persons and icons of sports and music. The connection of media with competitive sports and entertainment music appeals to the emotions and allows for many short-term connectivities and fleeting demarcations. With others I can admire some athletes, while I differentiate myself from them by my preference for different songs. But my musical tastes link me to still other people. A vast network of emotionally charged communalities and differences is thus easily built up and as easily altered.

It is still quite unclear what the inflation of electronic and globalized entertainment music means for mentalities, and, more specifically, for the cultural and ecclesial memory. Again and again we are assured that *sports are the backbone of our culture, since they concentrate people on fairness, justice, achievement, individual effort, etc.* This is quite correct. At the same time, however, *sports bring to bear in a society a Nietzschean ethos, an “olympic ethos,”*<sup>6</sup> which situates youth, the fit body, and competition within a knock-

6. Wolfgang Huber, *Die tägliche Gewalt. Gegen den Ausverkauf der Menschenwürde* (Freiburg: Herder, 1993); also W. Huber, “Den Menschen entdecken. Zukunftsaufgaben der Diakonie,” in *Brennpunkt Diakonie: Festschrift für Rudolf Weth*, ed. M. Welker (Neukirchen-

out system, that is, an absolute will to succeed. Competitive sports, by pushing these demands into people’s consciousness and unconsciousness, thus lend a hand in the brutalization of the ethos.

But why do competitive sports and electronic entertainment music gain such an enormous cultural influence? The observation is certainly correct that the media feed the need for the constant agitation of emotion without great demands of interpretation. Today people have access to a wild variety of entertainment, without having to leave their homes, without having to enter a real public, and without much effort. This possibly has a drug-like influence on many. But why? Why exactly these forms? Why exactly these heroines and heroes?

Competitive sports and entertainment music combine the universally possible identification with human actions and forms of expression with radical singularity, absolute individuality. Thus they seem to provide for an integration which is of top-most importance for people, namely *the connection of the radical uniqueness and the universal meaning of the individual*. In modern thought, basic concepts such as person, subject, individual, and the I also connect both aspects: “The I” is this singular human existence, but at the same time “the I” is a representative of the species. But there is an important difference between what the media offer as connectivity and the concept modern thought developed. The modern ideal of personality and education asked how people in their autonomy and their freedom could best express and realize what is general to the human species. In the suppression or at least control of the sensual inclinations the autonomous person grew as a rational and moral being. This need for an “elevation” of the person to a general reasonable and moral being has entered a deep crisis in the changes of the world-view described above.

Current culture searches for increased integration, for connectivity, but in a new way. The ideal is no longer the modern dream of a universally adapted rational and moral identity. Today’s culture is obviously interested in *how people can express their radical singularity in a way that can be grasped universally*. At rock bottom, radical individuality seems to be situated in bodily existence and in the individual emotions. Body and emotions seem to provide the basis for what is “authentic.” *Competitive sports and entertainment music are forms in which bodily existence and emotions can be grasped*

Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1997), pp. 39-47; and Hermann Barth, “Die Würde des Menschen kennt keine Einschränkungen. Wider den Götzendienst am Starken und Leistungsfähigen,” in *Brennpunkt Diakonie: Festschrift für Rudolf Weth*, ed. M. Welker (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener, 1997), pp. 65-82.

*universally. The persons who successfully present themselves in these forms today offer models in the search for the ideal of humanity.*

The countless talk shows in which people publicly open up their intimate lives as if they stood before God demonstrate that the publication of one's own body and emotions marks the area where current culture is directing its search for genuine human life. This diagnosis is supported by the fact that — considering what magazines, movies, and TV offer — there is an unbroken progress of Western societies in becoming more shameless. To be sure, ever more graphic depictions of sex and also the latent or open glorification of violence are means for the media to fight becoming stale. With ever cruder appeals and ever shriller stimulations the impression is countered that the media is only an apparatus which offers "second-hand life." In fact, the media is shaping our existence. The enormous attention on a world-wide level paid to media developments backs the judgment that here we can see a deeper human search for life which should be taken seriously. It is a matter of the human ideal, the depiction of the person, of her or his ennoblement that is at issue.

#### Why the Church Is No Longer Seen as the "Second Sovereign Power beside the State," and Why the "Aura of the Pastoral Office" Seems to Fade Away

Up to the time after the Second World War, the Western industrialized nations kept up what could be termed a Hegelian world-view. One's own history is the center (or at least one center) of history. The state is the highest secular instance of integration and dominance in the public sphere. To be sure, this was only a world-view. The arts had long known better. Sensitive scientists knew better. And the economy knew better. Really a proper biblically-oriented Christian theology should have known better, namely that this is only one form among others of the construction of the social world. It is a problematic one because it kept up an endless chain of wars. But the place the Church gave itself and which also was assigned to it was as the second sovereign power beside the state. "The church was understood to be a sovereign power analogous to the state and allied to the state in a partnership, a societal macro-institution" (Wolfgang Huber). *The presentation of the public sphere in terms of duals (church and state, church and society) was taken as a reality.* This construction may have helped moral renewal after fascism and after the derangement of the "family of peoples" in the world wars. Dense resonances for the church corresponded to this self-presentation and understanding of the church. The pas-

tor's office profited from this situation. In smaller places the pastor held a position immediately after the Lord God and the Lord Mayor. There is no doubt that in the cities he belonged to the elite. He stood apart from the rest of the society: he wore a dark suit and had a slightly set off and renouncing smile. *In the pastor the aura of the "office" was visible and perceivable.* This aura was cultivated and strengthened week by week when the pastor entered the church — which, as a rule, was well attended — to serve God's word.

But it was not only the public power of "the Church" that provided the pastor's office with resonance. The aura of the office was also strengthened by the education the pastor had, by his personality, and his manner of living. The pastor knew about the depth of things. He had a way to grasp abstract and basic concepts: dignity and morals, the essence of the human being, the good and the true, and certainly faith and sin. Hardly anyone among the members of the bourgeois society would have publicly declared dignity to be a problematic concept, truth to be a chimera, and sin to be the invention of hypocrites. Nietzsche did not yet enjoy academia's consent, and the declared atheists who held a public office were known. The position of Christian religiosity and the churches was reinforced by the "Cold War" and the ideological opposition of Marxism-Leninism to capitalism. The "poor brethren and sisters in the zone occupied by the Soviets," as they were then called in West Germany, were more or less handed over to "the atheists" without protection.

The spiritual official owed his public respect not only to the fact that it was acknowledged that he knew about the abstract concepts and their spiritual foundations. Even the competence he had in the "old languages" (Hebrew, Greek, and Latin) was respected without fail although the public could only vaguely imagine its benefits. In the same way that most of the children stood up in trams to make room for the elderly, most of the parents would show reverence for the knowledge of the old languages, the old cultures, and traditional values. But not only did the aura of public resonance and classical education surround the pastor and his office. Also the vicarage was considered a protecting sphere where an exemplary family life and an exemplary married life were assumed to exist. The grace of the pastor's daughters and the easy education of his sons were proverbial. In those times the pastor's office seemed to offer a proof of the verse in the Bible that "all things work together for good for those who love God . . ." (Rom. 8:28). *A pre-pluralistic view of reality, structured by dualizing political mega-ideologies and not yet shaken by the electronic media and consumerism, was the basis for an effective and radiant interplay of tradition, classical education, the setting of moral standards in family life, and an impressive religiosity.*

In the past decades the aura surrounding the person and the office of

the pastor in the Church service, in his/her public standing, and personal life has at least been diminished. As can be expected, this did not just happen from the outside. The pastors themselves got rid of their black suits and their renouncing smile. Confronted with the loss of the aura many sought refuge by engaging themselves in social agendas or in attempts to become knowledgeable in the variety of cultural innovations. Others turned to metaphysical and mystical forms of abstraction. Still others adopted a rhetoric of "Perhaps it is yet worth it" or "And yet. . ." The defensive attitude in the face of a public that appeared more and more diffuse and had forever more disparate demands could frequently be observed.

Many pastors faced conflicting expectations in their congregations. Some now found the pastors far too human, others regarded them as still displaying their office's authority too much; some thought them too progressive, others too traditional; for some, they were too active in social concerns, for others, they were too much oriented on piety and liturgy. *The inflation of demands, and the conflicts between the expectations, rushed upon the office once the aura that had belonged to it was diminished or even eliminated.* To be sure, most of the pastors found their own way, their own form, style, and tone. But the awareness that a part of the congregation was "frustrated away" or could not be attracted into a vital faith life so that one had to live with a more or less small "clientele" has been distressing. Of course even in the time of the intact "aura of the office" not everything the parson did suited everybody. But there is a world of difference between the calm or slightly self-critical consciousness that what one does does not suit everybody, and the haunted consciousness that it really suits hardly anybody at all.

So, the complex interrelation between the nation state and the church has dominated much of the modern ministry. However, in many respects matters were different in countries without national churches.<sup>7</sup> During the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the United States, for instance, missions and immigrations from nations with State Churches, like the Methodist missionaries from the United Kingdom, German Protestants settling in the nation's heartlands, groups representing the so-called peace churches, found themselves in a radically different social environment. In this context churches organized themselves less on the model of the state and more in terms of civil associations.<sup>8</sup> This is to say, churches came to understand them-

7. I owe the following insights to conversations and cooperation with William Schweiker.

8. On this, see H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Kingdom of God in America* (Middletown, CN: Wesleyan University Press, 1988); James Luther Adams, *Voluntary Associations: Socio-Cultural Analysis and Theological Interpretation*, ed. J. Ronald Engel (Chicago: Exploration Press, 1986).

selves as voluntary associations and in the process developed the uniquely American phenomenon of "denominations."

This development placed specific pressures on the churches. On the one hand, it meant that each religious community was competing for membership, a competition that was often carried into the expansion of the Western frontier. Pastors had to be not only community organizers and bearers of tradition, but also missionaries and managers. This managerial self-understanding is currently seen in the demands for "church-growth." But, second, the existence of the churches as part of civil society meant there was a constant need to show the contribution of the community to the project of the nation. In this sense, the political force on the churches in terms of loyalty was often more extreme, but also more subtle, than in classical European churches. As the current debate in the U.S.A. about church and society shows, churches constantly worry about their social or public role. This has given rise not only to conflicts about the exact meaning of the non-establishment clause of the Constitution, but also to the development of "public theology."

Of course, all of these developments and the pressures they put on the churches had profound impacts on theology. *While European churches and theologians often worried about the threat of the political power and its claims to loyalty, in nations without an official State Church the socio-political problem centers on questions of diversity and moral relativism.* Because of this, pastors often became not simply managers but also the stewards of public morality and voices of understanding and mediation between diverse and often conflicting ethnic and racial groups. The social function of the churches was helping to preserve the peace of the civil order. This led to the search for "great ideas" at a level of abstraction that all could accept. Indeed, Walter Rauschenbusch and other Social Gospel theologians could speak of "Christianizing the social order." This meant, simply, the social embodiment of Christian "ideals." Yet these "ideals" were all too often indistinguishable from the purposes of democratic polity. Indeed, if the struggle for "justice" or "solidarity" or "health" becomes the message and mission of the church, who would not agree? These abstractions, these great concepts, provide the way to manage cultural, ethnic, and racial differences at the level of civil society. *Thus the search for great concepts in these churches contributed to the loss of their distinctive voice. With that loss the churches, like too many European churches, were in fact subsumed into the social and political agenda of the nation state.*

It would be too simple to ascribe the loss of the aura of the pastor's office only to the fact that the church is no longer seen as the second sovereign power beside the state or that the church can not keep a distinctive voice.

Along with the change of the world-view through the circulation of power of the media, technology and economy, beliefs about person and personality, as well as the notions of education in the sense of "paideia" (*Bildung*), changed radically. How could Christianity in its theologies, its "paideia," its religious communication inside and outside of the churches respond to this challenge?

### The Pastor-Theologian at the Beginning of the Third Millennium

It belongs to the many good insights and initiatives of Wallace Alston's to state publicly that the crisis of the churches in Western industrial societies is — not only but to a high degree — a theological crisis, and that consequences must be drawn. When theology loses its power to diagnose the current situation, when it looks for support from philosophers and theorists who themselves are helpless before the complexity of the contemporary situation, it is indeed bad enough. But the real trouble and agony of theology set in when its helpless wrestling with an inadequate world-view becomes confused and identified with the theological challenge presented by the word and the Spirit of God. When the wrestling with God's calling becomes confused with the wrestling with an outdated and fading world-view or with an unclear and seemingly threatening new world-view, or is even replaced by it, then theology is in deep trouble.

In this situation it is important to identify the structural and conceptual difficulties which led to the impression that classical theology was very well equipped to deal with monistic, dual, and dualistic world-views, but was not able to deal with structured pluralistic settings. Only a vague "plurality" (of persons, settings, contexts, mind-sets, and institutions) could then be conceived, which was to be integrated by conservative or liberal figures of thought. In dealing with such pluralities which operate like markets and are constantly changing, the media simply did much better than the academy and the church. Although certainly each and every teacher and pastor always has to do with a "plurality" of individuals and groups, the theological challenge is much more compelling — and promising. Starting from the community constituted by the pouring of the Holy Spirit with a specific constellation of gifts, and the church as the "body of Christ" with a specific constellation of members, through the biblical canon with a specific constellation of witnessing voices to the ecumene with a specific constellation of confessions and church-movements, theology has to face forms of spiritual life and orientation with a complex pluralistic structure. A structured complex, not a chaotic and rela-

tivistic ensemble, has to become focused. The same holds true for societal pluralism, rightly understood.<sup>9</sup>

To learn to decode these structured pluralistic forms, and to understand their inner dynamics seems crucial if we want to become familiar with the emergent new world-view which is polycontextual and polycentric. Above all, it is crucial to notice that theologians are not at a loss in this situation, because their very content of faith is simply not totally bound to monistic and dualized or dualistic world-views. To be sure, in the biblical traditions and in the dogmatic and religious-philosophical heritage there are many monistic and dual or dualistic forms of thought and orientation. But, as indicated, the biblical canon, the law traditions, and certainly most notions of the Holy Spirit, the notion of the body of Christ, the very texture of creation, and many other basic contents of faith exhibit a rich and pluralistically textured structure. Likewise, the trinitarian understanding of God (if not reduced to binitarian dualism or vague sociability) challenges and explodes conventional modes of understanding and discourse.

An analogous observation can be made on the level of anthropology. A long and influential philosophical and theological tradition feasted on the Cartesian concept of personhood and, when it turned religious, on an intimate relation to its "inner other" which it called "faith." This notion confused the typically modern "subjectivization" (with its standardized notion of reasonable and moral personhood "which all of us are," with its claim that we are all equal and near to our God), and the post-modern unique individual who tries to cultivate and live out his/her singular emotional-bodily existence. An escape from the highly reductionistic anthropology provided by the typically liberal modern mindset and an avoidance of the opposite danger of the illusionary postmodern self of "unlimited possibilities" and a "longing for ultimate fulfillment" (achieved by reaching the narcissistic peek) are equally important if theology is to witness the sustaining, rescuing, and ennobling God as the ground of human personhood. Thus in anthropology, too, the pastor theologian is directed back to the triune God, who is "a complex God" (Mark Heim), in order to discover in this light, what God in his divine glory has provided for us.

This is no easy task. Quite to the contrary. It is a most complicated, even an impossible task to speak of God and God's intention with his creatures when we know that we are humans and will never in this life be equipped to rise to this challenge. However, when despite this knowledge the pastor ap-

9. Cf. Michael Welker, *Christianity and Structured Pluralism* (Valparaiso, 2004); *Kirche im Pluralismus* (Gütersloh: Chr. Kaiser, 2000).

plies himself/herself to this task and really wrestles with God and God's word and guidance, without dismissing the task of critically evaluating coming and going world-views, serious attention, respect, and support will sooner or later be regained. To this end it is necessary to differentiate between the absolutely minor (though necessary!) task, namely to come to grips with past and present world-views, their emergence and their decay, and the primary task of the pastor-theologian to take up the challenge of God's word.

## **II Dialogue with the Sciences and the Humanities**