

Political Emotions as a Moral Theoretical Challenge FS Hilpert/MThZ/4/2017

Summary: In the arenas of political communication, digitally enhanced emotions have gained a momentum never heard of before. This challenges ethics to methodologically focus more strongly on the conditions of emotions being cultivated than discourses on their reasons. This entails a chance for Christian ethics to build profile: Grounded in the interpretation of Christendom as a therapeutic religion, overcoming diffuse anxieties is understood as a theological-ethical task of forming competence for democracy. This is of relevance especially in view to immunization against totalitarian self-aggrandizement of politics as well as populism.

1. Loss of Trust in Democracy

Withdrawal to Post-Factual Irrationality

Presently, trust in democracy as a procedure of rationalization in ethical-political discourses undergoes a crisis: political emotions¹, above all fear of strangers, terror as well as social decline have gained a dynamic in public communication which often contravenes its rational arguments and the demand of a free society. The need to draw clear dividing lines in identical, nationalist or fundamentalist movements dominates the political agenda in many areas. Authoritarian regimes and post-factual patterns of argumentation are on the rise. Political liberalism has been forced onto the defensive. In this, religions play a partly highly ambivalent role; at least they are willingly functionalised for withdrawal to irrationalism as well as ethno-religious promises of identity and claims of authority.²

Especially to Christian social ethics, because of its traditional roots in natural law and reason, this poses as a considerable irritation as it articulates its position exclusively by rational and universal argumentation.³ It is challenged to strengthen trust in universal reason and preparedness for communication crossing cultures and boundaries. In this context, the central contribution of the Church as a moral institution does not arise directly on the level of specific ethical-political reasoning and positions but, above all, on the level of furthering a mentality and framework to be accessible to rational arguments, dialogue and the demand of freedom. In view to the withdrawal to post-factual irrationality, it is challenged to further trust in reason as a condition of democracy and to counteract the abuse of religion for cutting off rational arguments.

As a first step, it is necessary to understand partly justified anxieties as well as the criticism of abstract rationalism and universalism. To the extent that Christian ethics has been in a field of tensions between a universal demand crossing cultures and religious-specific strong emotions related to an ethos stamp, it is challenged in a special way. Against the backdrop of the debate, we find a basic moral-theoretical dispute about the concept of the public use of reason introduced by Kant and understood, within the framework of a liberal theory of society, as an argument for the exclusion of religious, culture-specific and, herewith, many emotional aspects from political discourses.⁴ On this basis, the dispute with the new political emotions can be a real chance to focus on the Christian context of Christian social ethics anew, from there to differentiate the self-image of the Church as a moral authority.

Diagnosis of Society: Angst in Times of Accelerating Change

We live in times of accelerating processes of change and deep social, economic and ecological upheaval. There are some indications that these are not merely isolated singular

phenomena, but rather elements of a “multiple crisis”.⁵ There is talk of a new epoch being ushered in. In his work posthumously published, sociologist Ulrich Beck, who died in 2015, speaks of a “metamorphosis of the world”.⁶ By this he means: While formerly there were fixed points which helped us recognize what remained stable or not, we today experience an all-embracing change which makes us lose our sense of direction. Beck pleads for us to place our trust more strongly on surprising and not planned solutions that mark the course of history in an unforeseeable way.

This diagnosis comes as a kind of disillusionment for the political project of modern times. It is based on the very conviction that society’s agents can engineer the structure, maintenance and changes of social structures. In situations of multiple, inter-dependently reinforcing processes of change, crises and metamorphoses, this trust is being lost. The agents experience being overwhelmed by developments and hardly exert an influence on their shaping and forming. Situations of loss of control evoke a feeling of distress and angst. We presently find ourselves in such a situation. In the perception of processes of change as a crisis, emotions on the level of public and political communication gain a dominant role. Moods, which one can describe as emotions of society,⁷ often appear as more important than arguments. These are strongly fomented by the new digital media and, as a consequence, change the conditions of political opinion-making.

The unpredictability of moods in connection with making up bogeymen and promises of identity have become a decisive factor in politics. Here mention must be made of the Brexit and the European project being put in jeopardy by various neo-nationalisms or the far-reaching insecurities roused by Donald Trump who, with his program “America First” has embarked on a confrontational course against a policy of global solidarity and who hardly seems to be impressed by facts. In Germany, Pegida and AfD are gaining strength as symbols of xenophobia, and fears of social decline and radicalization mark the political climate. All this stems from an emotionally charged state of mind full of fear which often has hardly anything to do with direct risks but can easily be exploited for claims to political power.⁸

The faith in universal reason and unalienable universally valid human rights which has its origin in a specifically European synthesis of painful conflicts between Christian faith and humanism⁹ seems to have become brittle these days. Criticism of it has not only formed since AfD, Pegida and Trump, but has already had as its background a longer ethical-political debate. Not rarely is this subsumed under the heading “Neo-realism”.¹⁰ In view of the looming global conflicts, it is a decisive test for humanistic and Christian ethics as well as for the World Church as a moral authority to take a differentiating stand against it. For this, on the one hand, it is necessary to raise and strengthen consciousness for cultural, religious and social differences and contexts including related emotions, and, on the other, not at all to give up the claim to a universal morality and consensus use of reason in the public and pluralistic societies.¹¹

Multi-Layered Causes of Uncertainty

The lead thesis of the following elaborations is that these new political emotions have to be taken seriously as a striking change of forms in public communication.¹² Here, religion, faith and Church in the climate “new religious intolerance”¹³ are part of the problem as well as a part of its possible solution. The multi-layered societal anxieties cannot be understood sufficiently on the basis of concrete risks and threats. In reference to life expectancy and securing the minimum of livelihood, living life, at least in Germany and many other wealthy nations, has never been more secure than today. Nevertheless, one cannot simply disregard the widely spread feeling of uncertainty as hysterics.¹⁴ It is striking that there is no object-

related fear but rather a diffuse but, nevertheless, not less effective feeling of uncertainty. This has got to do with deeper-lying anxieties not uncommonly arising from the many possibilities that, as a kind of backing the concern to miss out on something in life, are thus produced.¹⁵ It also has got to do with the loss of cultural, religious and familial embedding which, on the one hand, makes possible the increase of autonomy, but, on the other, increasingly is perceived as a permanently too high an expectation by the subject.

The feeling of anxiety is not bad per se. Anxiety keeps us from running risks naively and without security.¹⁶ Anxieties are part of human life. There is need for a differentiated concept to state precisely what forms of anxiety are helpful and which ones are destructive and paralyzing. The massive loss of trust in the context of globalization, accelerated change, terrorism and migration has multi-faceted causes and phenomenal forms which, as a first step, must be analyzed in psychological, sociological, communication-theoretical and political terms. As the moral authority, the Church is being challenged to make its contribution in matters of constructively dealing with respective emotions. Here practices of social inclusion as well as soberly differentiating and dealing with risks in solidarity. Symbolic competence, too, is a key to dealing with emotions and feelings of uncertainty. Social cohesion in society in an increasingly pluralistic global society to a large extent depends on the success of practising again and again communicative competencies for crossing cultures and boundaries.

2. Anxiety at the Service of Totalitarian Systems

Living with nerve-racking anxiety

“What ever we do out of anxiety will come back to us. Like a boomerang... (...) It is anxiety that makes us dependent on an inhumane system. Angst hinders us from being human and free.” This quotation originates from the 18-parts film series “Weissensee”¹⁷, A comprehensive epic on life with angst as well as related disintegration of social relationships and forms of political communication in the totalitarian system of surveillance of the GDR in the nineteen eighties – at the same time a film about love that overcomes anxiety and desperate resistance against anxiety wearing people down which makes them turn into compliant agents of ideological systems robbing their dignity and integrity, forcing them into a life of lies.

The film epic Weissensee is a mirror of historical experiences people have had and still are going through in many similar contexts: someone who is afraid of, be it about him/herself or spouse, parents, children, becomes liable to be blackmailed into becoming an agent of the system, very often by insidious methods, who then, on his/her part, betrays friendships and, by accommodating to the ideology, loses his or her freedom, dignity and independence in a creeping way. The wake- up call is: “Be brave, have no fear of fear, give a face to freedom!” Thus sounds an appeal in the film which made people, at first assembled in the Church, take to the streets in 1989. It calls out to have no more fear of photos and threats by the Stasi (state secret service). The mutual overcoming of anxiety thus turns into an impetus setting the peaceful revolution on its course.

Overcoming anxiety cannot be had for free. It takes a lot of pain, often living through failure, desperation about life full of lies and a mental emptiness before resistance gradually builds up. The film shows the courage to love as the very beginning of overcoming anxiety, and initially unwanted, political resistance. For this stands Julia, the daughter of a singer originally critical of the state, who loves the son of the Stasi officer Kupfer, never renouncing her love despite all the hindrances. She is tortured in prison, deprived of her child, and eventually dies

in despair. Wounds and sacrifices are part of the tedious way to freedom by overcoming fear. – It has been like this in dramatic situations of history up to now and will ever be like this, presently, for example, in the Far and Middle East where thousands of Christians are displaced and killed; under the more soft but often totalitarian power in China where Christendom, among other things, is growing strongly because of the hope of being an alternative to the fear-inspiring and all-controlling state power.¹⁸ To everybody – according to my thesis – in everyday life it is often subtly of relevance: freedom means overcoming anxiety. In this demand, Christian faith and the Church as a moral authority must be open to criticism.

A Great Moment of the Church as a Moral Authority

In 1989, resistance to the totalitarian system in Eastern Central Europe, whose power depended on anxiety, led to a peaceful revolution, a revolution originating from the courage of the citizens in which the Church, among many others, had a share despite deep-going ambivalences through its predominant bringing people into line as a place of humaneness and the “non-political political”, a protest that could not be censored easily. This marked the great moment of the Church as a moral authority in the sense of encouraging undaunted action, a great moment, whose revolutionary force presently has little to show under the conditions of normalcy in the Federal Republic but which is urgently needed in a new way today. In other Eastern European states, too, the Church plays a key role in the resistance to totalitarian reign. Today partly rather courageous individual Christians are giving fresh impetus to freedom rather than the constitutive Churches.¹⁹

In overcoming anxiety lies the revolutionary and humanizing strength of the Christian faith. Not abstract knowledge but the liberation from fear forms the core of its content. This results in considerable consequences for the forms of communication, profile-building and reception of theological ethics. In view of the renaissance of anxiety-ridden emotions in the arena of political emotions, this approach poses as an explosive effect in societal and moral-theoretical terms. Here, the Church is not primarily relevant because of certain, specific arguments, but as an authority for the cultivation of emotions. In a “society of fear”²⁰, democracy depends on connecting good arguments with confidence-building communication reaching people in their everyday life.

Overcoming the influence of fear is a decisive source for building competence of responsible conduct. This applies to every individual as well as institutions, not at least to the Church as a moral authority. The practice of encouragement to freedom and solidarity is more important than any theory. To be more precise: moral theory becomes paltry and weak if it loses its reference to a lived practice of an upright attitude. Vaclav Havel calls this program “attempt at living in truth”²¹. In critical situations, sincerity and truthfulness in everyday life are a decisive counterweight to enforced conformity by totalitarian systems. But it is not only about patterns of behaviour in extreme situations of society, but also about civil courage and authenticity in everyday life. On the basis of credibility, this is a decisive condition of communication for the efficiency of the Church as a moral authority in a pluralistic society.²² Subtle anxieties are the doorway to being manipulated, be it by the displacement of inconvenient truths, by adapting to promises of consumption or perceived economic forces to act or systems of corruption.

3. Faith to Help Overcome Anxiety

“Fides-qua-ethics”

From what has been stated so far, arises the question what competence is attributable to the Christian faith and the Church as a force of overcoming anxiety. In biblical texts, there often is talk about: “My heart is overwhelmed” prays the psalmist (Ps 61, 2). “In the world ye shall have tribulation” sums up Jesus the condition of humankind (Joh16, 33). But Biblical tradition admonishes not to be determined and overwhelmed by anxieties. Anxieties are to come out into the open, but should be reduced and overcome. “Fear not! Don’t be afraid!” run many biblical sayings. Anxiety is juxtaposed with trust in God. From the certainty that God saves, fear and anxiety can give way: “Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompense; he will come and save you. (Is 35, 4) “For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.” (2 Tim1, 7)

Here, overcoming anxiety is not only a moral postulate, a psychological promise or a pastoral aim of Biblical faith, but is constitutive of the act of faith itself: The Hebrew expression for faith is *aman* which can also be translated as trust. *Aman* means “relying on God, placing trust in His reliability to win oneself endurance and reliability, to be firm, secure, reliable”²³. “Believing in the message of the Christian gospel means: belonging to Jesus Christ and being filled with his Holy Spirit (cf. Hebr3, 14 and 6, 4), i.e. to feel so secure in God that one need not live in fear for oneself anymore.”²⁴

The classical distinction between the act of faith (*fides qua*) and content of faith (*fides quae*) can be interpreted in a way that faith is to be conceived of as phenomena of building trust and not as esteeming as valid matters of content.²⁵ Contemporary fundamental and pastoral theology explicates the act of faith mostly as a form of trust connecting it with strengthening a positive self-image.²⁶ Starting from this perception, very promising references can be established to what is called feeling of coherence in the research of resilience.²⁷ Trust in God makes it possible to regard the world as meaningful despite all its crises, catastrophes and contradictions. Someone who can build on this, namely that life has got meaning, will never be standing on shaking ground when individual and social systems of control fail. S/he will not be overwhelmed by anxiety.

Applied to ethics, one can draw the analogy: It takes a balanced proportion between “fides- quae” and “fides-qua-ethics”, i.e. between positions of content, on the one hand and, on the other, forms of communication for building confidence. Both are locked inextricably. Against this background, one must critically examine if and how Christian morality can support basic attitudes and patterns of meaning which help search for solutions to problems in a constructive perspective free of fear. Such mental and emotional basic dispositions in dealing with individual anxieties, societal moods and economic or technical risks are e.g. the balance between concern and serenity, prudence and courage, optimism and pessimism, persistence and change and, last but not least, the distinction between what one can change and what cannot be changed. For this, it takes the ability of thinking and acting on different horizons of time and contexts.²⁸ The core of Christian faith is a specific form of overcoming anxiety narrowing horizons which enables the individual to freedom and responsible action. Morality needs hope that cannot be proven but, at the most, can be reconstructed as a condition for reason and humaneness.²⁹ It is necessary to bring home again and again this confidence which harbours a decisive constitutive importance to the morality of Christendom as a “therapeutic religion”³⁰.

If this is to be made fruitful in view of the specifically post-modern political emotions in ethical terms, there is need of a deeper understanding of the multi-layered phenomena of anxiety.³¹

Kierkegaard: Existential-Philosophical Deepening

The first author, who systematically reflected on anxiety as part of Man's existence, was Søren Kierkegaard whose work on basics "The Notion of Anxiety. A simple psychology-orientated elaboration aiming at the dogmatic problems of Original Sin" was published in 1844. Kierkegaard strictly distinguishes between anxiety and fear directed to something concrete and frightening. Angst is something without object and undefined. "In it, the self itself feels threatened, namely from inward whereby fascination, too, fuses with being threatened."³² Vagueness is its core, as anxiety – according to Kierkegaard – is a direct look ahead to one's own yet untouched possibility.³³ Anxiety is the boundary of freedom, the scare of its possibility which the individual cannot grasp him/ herself though wired to it by his/her mind, namely to a synthesis of the finite and infinite. Only in anxiety to miss out on his/her freedom does the self discover itself, turn into a theme, does consciousness of itself, thus self-awareness, spring into being.³⁴

To Kierkegaard anxiety is a negative prerequisite for faith, the becoming aware of one's own limits which threaten to fail the meaningfulness of one's own existence or reach fulfilment, but in a way that Man cannot guarantee on his end.³⁵ In anxiety, Man senses that he does not rest in himself but depends on a 'you' turning to him, makes meaning possible for him, shows him appreciation and holds him accountable. According to Kierkegaard, anxiety basically is the fear to miss out on the meaning and freedom of one's own existence.³⁶ The question about a saving God arises only from anxiety. However, faith here is, at the same time, overcoming focussing on anxiety of salvation and constant concern about oneself.

Kierkegaard connects these thoughts with a new interpretation of the doctrine of the Original Sin which he, in existential-philosophical terms, understands as a self-fixated anxiety of salvation, the overcoming of which he regards as a necessary condition for freedom, morality and happiness.³⁷ Through the phenomenon of anxiety, the possibility of sin is explained which is not banal at all because traditionally (cf. Thomas Aquinas referring to Aristotle) the good is what is wanted according to which nobody wants the bad but strives for it mistakenly. After Kierkegaard, sin does not originate in freedom but from lack of freedom, from entanglement in anxiety. Not a cognitive error but lack of inner freedom to want the good is decisive. Therefore, a pedagogy, moral teaching and pastoral set on inculcating knowledge or primarily anxiety of sin must be looked upon as counterproductive in the end.

With these reflections, the Danish philosopher, who dared publishing his writings only anonymously, has given groundbreaking impulses for the origin of psychology as well as existentialist philosophy. Heidegger and Sartre, for example, used this source. With his analysis of anxiety, Kierkegaard has formulated the topic of a far-reaching interpretation of existence which has also served as a model of many novels. Kafka's main works "The Castle" and "The "Trial": two novels about the undefined anxiety entangling people in the corridors of power, in an imaginary having-to-defend-oneself from an unknown accusation, waiting for the permission to enter through "The Gate of Law", the gate to life and to one's own identity, a waiting until time is over and it will be closed ("Before the Gate of Law"). Handke's "The Goalkeeper's Fear of the Penalty Kick" tells such a piece of drama about missing out on life because of anxiety which here is located in the diffuse superficiality of a drifting, conformist biography losing itself in bourgeois normality. Or, to again put in perspective a political example: Herta Müller's novel "Die Atemschaukel"

(lit. transl. "Swing of Breath") narrates the breath-taking anxiety in Romania and Ukraine under Soviet rule. Anxieties directed to concrete dangers could and should be addressed by rational strategies of risk aversion.³⁸ However, the object-free, diffuse anxieties as a specific modern feeling of life are of a dimension relatively independent of concrete dangers which rather have to do with the feeling of loss of metaphysical security than the increase of risks.³⁹ Because of this, they are not at all weaker nor can they be overcome more easily. If they become dominant, they massively can put at risk the democratic cohesion of society. They are

the reason for the up to now more exegetically, dogmatically and existential-philosophically unfolded reflections on the meaning of the Christian faith to be replaced by elaborations on overcoming anxiety also in moral and societal-theoretical terms. The following paragraph deals with this aspect.

4. Coping with Contingency by Abstaining from Closed Systems of Morality

Involving others as a Program of Democratic Politics

Values originate in the ability of changing perspectives and transcending oneself.⁴⁰ They arise from the exchange with and “getting involved” with others. In the confrontation with diversity and differences that make up us people and cultures, one’s own convictions are often put in question and must be justified, adapted, modified or given up. This makes self-reflection grow as an important basis of moral competence. ”Involving the others”⁴¹, not fearing them is the basis of a bond to values that go far beyond one’s own self, interests, needs and, at the same time, lead to a fundamental program of democratic politics. Anxieties lead out of solidarity and end up in “closed” cultures. These, on their part, are not able to learn, and, if illiterate run the risk of stagnating and, not uncommonly, to “go under”. Democracy is institutionalizing one’s preparedness to always be open to better arguments and to learn from them. Anxiously cutting oneself off, jeopardizes its core.

Moral appeals are no remedy for anxieties. There is no use in calling to someone who is possessed by anxieties: Be brave in your resistance to political oppressions, be free from the pressure of social expectations, show solidarity for the poor and strangers, welcome refugees with an open heart! He will refuse all these unreasonable demands respectively regard them as impossible as long as anxiety dominates him. Only to a minor extent can anxiety be neutralized by an act of willing. If you take this finding seriously, considerable consequences for a theological moral theory result.: Paul is of the opinion that the moral appeal of law does not suffice but only salvation which he hopes for through the grace of God (Rom 7, 15-25).⁴² In Christian theology, the indicative of salvation being granted systematically precedes the imperative of moral postulates. Someone – thus is the hope – who immerses in God’s healing and sheltering lines of force can be cured from that anxiety that fixates him on strategies of self-defence. Instead he is enabled to grasp the opportunities of responsible freedom as well as meeting strangers and the poor with the solidarity of his hands.⁴³

The Problems of Refugees as an Example of the Lack of Smooth Solutions

The importance of the Church as a moral authority in today’s society can be exemplified by the debate on refugees: it does not primarily consist of arguments that are not accessible to others. The persistent hint to the unconditional dignity of every human being as an image of God is really an important corrective logic of compromises and national interests inherent in politics. However, the unalienable dignity of every human being is also anchored in the Basic Law and can be, in “secular” terms, be reconstructed with Kant’s transcendental philosophical ethics. Nevertheless, on the ethical-political level, there is always the need for weighing between expectations, possibility and unintentional effects (e.g. danger of maelstrom effects which eventually are counter-productive for the countries of the global South). This requires ethical analyses and decision-making processes of their own kind which cannot be dealt with and shortened beforehand by theological ethics. As an authority of the moral of border-crossing solidarity, the Church gains persuasive power only in connection with the lived practice of confidence-building integration of strangers as well as the decisive engagement for improving living conditions in the countries people are fleeing from. At the same time, there

is need of a clear consciousness of the entitled plurality of different perspectives if the split in society is to be avoided and the democratic learning processes kept going.

It is just the awareness of the lack of smooth solutions that is decisive for the moral communicative competence and would also be a central competence from a theological perspective which the Church could contribute in debates on ethics. Insofar as theology has got to do with God, i.e. infinity, it is no “system of closing” but an opening of unavailable horizons. Someone who is a believer has learned to deal with the open questions and uncertainties of our existence. This also applies to ethical questions, an approach which occasionally has yielded decisive progress through the insight into a necessary restraint of forming judgment (e.g. procedural law). Coping with contingency in moral-theoretical terms necessitates the ability of putting up with the tension and openness of situations with insoluble conflicts. It is the opposite to anxiously taking refuge in closed systems of interpretation, morality and politics. This does not mean freedom from obligation in normative judgements but distinctions of levels. Thus the Church, as the moral authority, should insist on the yardstick of global solidarity, but not on alleged knowledge about easy solutions.

Confidence-Building a Key-Competence

The key meaning of confidence-building for the specific relevance of religion in modern society can also be unfolded in sociological terms. Niklas Luhmann takes as a starting point that the societal function of religion lies in coping with contingency.⁴⁴ The larger the complexity, the larger the demand for authorities of confidence-building.⁴⁵ This competence of coping can, for example, become manifest in faith and trust in God as important resources for overcoming anxiety-ridden patterns of reaction in the context of accelerated societal change. In times of upheaval we presently are going through worldwide, courage for changes is in high demand, because a “society full of angst is incapable of reforms and thus for shaping the future.”⁴⁶

Against this backdrop, one should not play off the task of confidence-building as a core competence of religion against, especially in view as the Church as a moral authority, the challenges of rational argumentation. Emotions in their capacity of driving actions and as regulators of social living together are of a decisive relevance in social-ethical terms. However, they require cultivation as well as transparent orientation to the demands of reason. It is the very field which has been strongly neglected by ethical, especially social-ethical research. Because faith is so strongly bonded with emotions, their cultivation offers a decisive chance for Christian ethics to sharpen their profile in the context of heated political debates of the present.

Religion cannot replace or prove rationality but can offer a room of possibilities in borderline situations. Reconciliation with a reality that often cannot be comprehended creates emotional conditions for taking up the risk of freedom and reason. Only somebody who stubbornly holds on to the faith in the untouchable dignity of Man, though often mistreated, will reliably stand up for democracy. This trust in the dignity of Man, also in situations of poverty, physical and mental challenges, illness and guilt cannot be proven by abstract terms but can only be stabilized by a culture of humaneness. The Church, too, will be measured by its respective contribution as a moral authority. It must prove itself in experiences of contingency on the fringes of life and society. Such a social, religious and cultural as well as emotional and cognitive coping with contingency is of high societal explosiveness for the future of democracy in view of people opting out from the demands of humaneness and reason originating from the feeling of being helplessly exposed to the uncontrollable processes of change and injustices. Essentially, coping with contingency is an issue of praxis. Therefore,

there is always need for undaunted civil courage to fight by the side of the poor and ostracized and to contribute to their not losing faith in law and justice.

Criticism of Religious Self-Aggrandizement in the Political Realm

Religions are a strong potential of resources for symbolically structuring political orders and their legitimizations.⁴⁷ “Faith” in the unalienable dignity of Man – and, thereby, in the transcending meaning of life in every concrete achievement – makes possible observing and appraisal of political processes. The theological-ethical speech patterns which aim at absolutely valid values not at disposition, however, harbour the risk of inviting self-aggrandizement to religious groups in “the particular will of this group being equated with God’s universal will, one to one.”⁴⁸ As a consequence, it is not theology’s task to “show, in drawing strict lines, an attitude of commanding a larger knowledge about ensuing problems resulting from certain scientific strategies of research than the experts concerned”.⁴⁹ In the process of research, it must rather foster an institutionalized reflexivity and to confront these with elementary ambivalences of the processes of progress.

In the interest of individual freedom, especially freedom of religion, theology must raise its voice against the wrong public use of religion.⁵⁰ Referring to the aspects critical of rule in the Biblical tradition (e.g. prophets’ messages), Christian Social Ethics can contribute to demythologizing political power and unmask religious self-aggrandizement in the political realm. Religious awareness reveals ambivalences of modern times which, for example, lie in the attempt to expect the identity of the human being from its setting up its self as an isolated ‘point-like self’ and not as the result of conveyed self-relatedness to others and otherness pointing to the openness of an absolutely other entity.⁵¹ “Being called by God to the transcendence of oneself puts the self-image of Man in his proper right, but places it at the same time under the principle of responsibility.”⁵² “Courage to be”⁵³ in the sense of being open to dialogue and existence in solidarity is an anthropological-ethical basis of societies capable of democracy.

5. Christian Social Ethics in Tension between Rationality and Faith

Morality in the Context of Lived Praxis

“Is an action good because God commands it, or does God command it because it is good?” This classical question about the proportion of rationality and religion has been around since Plato (Euthyphron 10a)⁵⁴ “If one seeks a solution to this tension, neither narrowing morals on the side of religion to a *Divine-command-ethics* nor a reduction to the offer of what is understood as universal reason for orientation in actions can be regarded as convincing.”⁵⁵ To Christian Social Ethics, too, as a scientific discipline, the demand for unrestricted rationality applies, in the sense of a methodologically exercised reflection on moral concepts governing human action. It understands ethics not exclusively as seeking universal justifications but rather aims at the hermeneutics of morals which conceives of morality from the context of lived praxis in which frequently religious convictions and related strong emotions play an essential role.⁵⁶ Thereby room is made to grasp the theological contribution to ethics of the ethos of religiously moulded forms of living with its social embedding, emotional hues and symbolic interactions instead of reflecting on the relationship solely on the level of universal generalized rationality as an alleged relationship of competition or subordination.⁵⁷

This strained relationship cannot be resolved in any direction: Religiously stamped ethos, too, must face up to the demand of generalizing rationality. Thus morality cannot be understood as

a mere derivative of morals and ethos. To the same small degree are morals and ethos reciprocally simply applications of a universal demand of morality. The debate shows “that the alternative between universalistic ethics abstracting from morals and ethos and ethos-ethics setting priority on purely hermeneutical proceedings cannot be the final word.”⁵⁸ In specific cultural, often religiously formed and emotionally charged ethos

The moral demand becomes concrete and a guideline for actions. In its rational reflection, it becomes reflexively open to scrutiny and communicable beyond the respective context.

Overcoming Particularity as a Program of Christian Ethics

“Fides quaerens intellectum” – Christian faith is geared to rationality, Anselm of Canterbury formulated already in the 11th century. In regard to the relation between Christian Social Ethics and rationality this means: The demand made by God on Man is not outwardly and, therefore, even what is good for Man not principally distinguishable and understandable:

“Just in the identity of the demand made by God for the highest good and its universality for Man, a demand directed to all people, does the *exclusivity* of God’s reign gain prestige. An ethos that does not principally before everyman and to all other ethical concepts prove itself capable of the more comprehensive, generally agreed on Should but only has ‘statutes’ set up, would contradict the Biblical gospel and the God it preaches.”⁵⁹

On the one hand, as Christian ethics cannot consistently be understood as the Church’s intra-mural morality, it calls its own, stemming from its inherent dynamics, a universal demand, on the other, it exposes itself to the criticism of secular reasoning. The specific element of Christian ethics does not show up in an excluded special area, but in being orientated to a basic overcoming of particularity and thus reaching communicability.⁶⁰ Linking back to the Christian faith is no alternative to the demand of rational justification, but rather a horizon of meaning which offers a stimulating, criticizing and integrating function.⁶¹ The specific element of Christian ethics is not the exclusiveness of the contents of its norms but the radical demand of a love of all people which must prove itself in situations of suffering, failure, conflict and guilt and thus can keep open on the horizon of meaning the faith in unalienable dignity. In this sense, Christian Social Ethics understands faith, hope and love as the basis of morals which cannot be derived rationally but rather strengthens and opens to experience Man as being a subject and, thereby, the possibility of rational ethics giving actions a new intentionality.⁶²

Faith “makes possible for reason to do its work in a better way and to better see what is of its own. This is the very spot for Catholic Social Teaching to set off: It does not want to give the Church power over the State. It does not want to force insights and ways of conduct on those who are affiliated to faith nor on those who do not share it. It simply wants to contribute to clearing reason and to help that what is right is acknowledged now and here and can be carried out.”⁶³

In all this, the Church is no superior agency for morals with the claim to an ultimate judgement which outdoes political ethics in theological terms (after the motto “Without God anything goes, and there is only deadly relativism”). Theological ethics is rather a partner in the discussions in a concert of voices from society which must make itself heard through plausibility, credibility and active communication in civil society. Communicability and rational reflection do not only serve communicating with the outside world but, at the same time, are a medium for examining and conveying the ethical demand within the respective human conditions and experiences. Christian ethics, being no mere intra-mural morality, pushes to a universal demand on the one hand, but, on the other, exposes itself to criticism by secular reason. It must prove itself as unfolding the destiny of Man according to reason and

creation and put up to the test within conditions of anthropological structures.⁶⁴ The Christian horizon of meaning renders a criticizing, stimulating and inspiring force on ethics, especially in the context of experiences of an anxiety-ridden refusal to communication.⁶⁵

The Meaning of Religious Language for the Self-Image of European Modern Times

Christian Social Ethics' claim to rationality does not mean abstention from theology but rather reason-led reflection capable of dialogue about religious implications of normative questions raised by modern society.⁶⁶ However, seeking dialogue is no one-way-street. Even a liberal political culture can expect secularized citizens not to off-handedly deny a potential of truth in religious world views, not to deny religious fellow-citizens the right to make contributions in public discussions in religious language and to take part in efforts to translate relevant contributions from the religious into a publicly accessible language.⁶⁷

“Language” of Christian morality also entails social practices as well as symbolic and emotional forms of interaction.

Christian Social Ethics is a place of origin of God's speech in view of asserting religiously deep dimensions to the basic terms of the modern free constitutional state.⁶⁸ The “post-secular” awareness of the necessity to constantly raise consciousness of the spiritual-cultural roots of law and politics in democratically constituted societies, to understand its terminology, to keep alive its ethos and not to let its interpretation of law become rigid pose as a high demand on the Church as a moral authority. The necessary assertion cannot sufficiently be achieved through legal regulations of conflicts or philosophical justification of morals, but essentially is the task of cultivating a culture of open, ready to learn as well as responsible morality, capable of solidarity.

The threat to such a democratic-free ethos by the rampant spread of authoritarian, nationalistic-identitary and anxiety-ridden political patterns requires from theological ethics new forms of communication. Cultivating emotions in the sense of alleviating anxieties, which can be exploited by totalitarian demands of power, becomes the condition of possibility of democracy and cohesion in society. The change of forms of political communication requires a shift of accent in moral-theoretical reflection from discourses of justification to the cultivation of processes of discourse as well as the social, mental, intellectual and emotional conveyance of seemingly plain but partly acutely threatened basics of humane living together in a free society. The dispute with the new digital media has gained a key prominence, especially so because of its related dynamics of the emotionally charged formation of relatively closed social “bubbles”, immunized against criticism and the mass effects of debates fomented in public awareness.

A decisive factor for success in moral communication in the media of society is authenticity. On the Church's side, this essentially depends on linking theoretical reflection with lived practice. Moral postulates to the address of society must also be lived inside, e.g. ecclesiastical labour law or the formal standards of resolving conflicts. Church morality must face up to the test on the fringes of life of poverty, migration, loneliness, injustice, guilt, violence, destruction of the environment, mental and physical challenges, illness and death. As high complexity and worldwide interdependence of late-modern society often demand too much from the individual, there is need for strengthening and globalizing solidarity. This practice is not only to be located on the level of individual moral and pastoral matters, but also to be anchored in political structures. Only by linking up with a reliable political framework can success become feasible to constrain the processes of escalating anxiety, violence and ostracizing.

¹Vgl. zu dem Konzept „politische Emotionen“, das Martha Nussbaum in kritischer Auseinandersetzung mit der Vernachlässigung der emotionalen Dimension im liberalen Politikverständnis entwickelt hat: *Martha Nussbaum*, Politische Emotionen. Warum Liebe für Gerechtigkeit wichtig ist, Frankfurt 2016, bes. 11-44. Weltweit lässt sich eine Formveränderung politischer Kommunikation erkennen, die den Liberalismus auf den Prüfstand stellt; vgl. dazu Mittelweg 36 (2015/1–2): Affekte regieren; *Heinz Bude*, Das Gefühl der Welt: Über die Macht von Stimmungen, München 2016.

² Vgl. *Martha C. Nussbaum*, Die neue religiöse Intoleranz. Ein Ausweg aus der Politik der Angst, Darmstadt 2014; zu dem gemischten Befund aus christlicher Perspektive vgl. auch *Professoren der Katholisch-theologischen Fakultät der Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität München* (Hg.), Tribalismus und Ethnoreligiosität – Anfragen an Theologie und Kirche. MThZ 2/2017.

³ Vgl. *Vogt; Markus*, Theologie der Sozialethik (Questiones disputate 255), Freiburg 2013, bes. 7-20 sowie 229-326.

⁴ Vgl. *Bernd Irlenborn; Franz-Josef Bormann* (Hg.): Religiöse Überzeugungen und öffentliche Vernunft. Zur Rolle des Christentums in der pluralistischen Gesellschaft (Quaestiones disputatae Band 228), Freiburg 2008; *Reder, Michael; Schmidt, Josef*, Ein Bewusstsein von dem, was fehlt. Eine Diskussion mit Jürgen Habermas, Frankfurt 2008; *Markus Vogt*, Das Spannungsfeld theologischer und philosophischer Ethik als Ausgangspunkt für die Gliederung normativer Reflexion, in: Wilhelm Korff; *Markus Vogt* (Hg.): Gliederungssysteme angewandter Ethik. Ein Handbuch nach einem Projekt von Wilhelm Korff, Freiburg 2016, 711-737.

⁵ *Ulrich Brand*, Die multiple Krise. Dynamik und Zusammenhang der Krisendimensionen, Anforderungen an politische Institutionen und Chancen progressiver Politik, in: *Ulf Hahne* (Hg.), Globale Krise – Regionale Nachhaltigkeit. Handlungsoptionen zukunftsorientierter Stadt- und Regionalentwicklung, Detmold 2010, 9-28.

⁶ *Ulrich Beck*, Die Metamorphose der Welt, Frankfurt 2016.

⁷ Vgl. *Heinz Bude*, Das Gefühl der Welt (wie Anm. 1).

⁸ Vgl. *Bude*, Das Gefühl (wie Anm. 1); *Paul M. Zulehner*, Entängstigt euch. Die Flüchtlinge und das christliche Abendland, Ostfildern 2016; Mittelweg, Affekte regieren (wie Anm. 1).

⁹ Vgl. *Konrad Hilpert*, Theologie und Menschenrechte. Forschungsbeiträge zur ethischen Dimension der Menschenrechte. Teil 2, Freiburg i. Br. 2016.

¹⁰ Vgl. *Chantal Mouffe*, Über das Politische, Wider die kosmopolitische Illusion. Frankfurt 2007; *Markus Vogt*, Weltstaatlichkeit und Weltbürgergesellschaft. Theologisch-ethische Perspektiven zu Abstufungen der Verantwortung, in: *Stephan Stetter* (Hg.), Leben in der Weltgesellschaft – Regieren im Weltstaat. To Live in World Society – To Govern in the World State (Schriftenreihe der Universität der Bundeswehr München, Band 07), Neubiberg 2014, 53-59.

¹¹ Vgl. dazu am Beispiel der Menschenrechte *Konrad Hilpert*, Begründungsoffen und doch mit universellem Anspruch? Zur Genealogie und Interkulturalität der Menschenrechte, in: Amosinternational 2/2013, 18-15; *Hans Joas*, Die Sakralität der Person. Eine neue Genealogie der Menschenrechte, Berlin 2011.

¹² Vgl. *Nussbaum*, Politische Emotionen (wie Anm. 1).

¹³ *Nussbaum*, Die neue religiöse Intoleranz (wie Anm. 2).

¹⁴ Vgl. hierzu am Beispiel von Pegida: *Werner Patzelt; Joachim Klose*, Pegida. Warnsignale aus Dresden, Dresden 2016.

¹⁵ Zur Verunsicherung durch den Verlust eines Horizontes von Transzendenz, der dazu führt, dass das ein erfülltes Leben durch den „kinetischen Imperativ“ der ständigen Verdichtung und Optimierung

von Projekten gesucht wird, vgl. *Hans-Joachim Höhn*, Handeln über den Tag hinaus. Zeithorizonte der Sozialethik, in: *Markus Vogt* (Hg.): *Theologie der Sozialethik*, Freiburg i. Br. 2013, 96-120. Auch der Soziologe Heinz Bude analysiert die Angst, angesichts der eigenen schier unendlichen Möglichkeiten etwas zu verpassen, als signifikantes Merkmal der gegenwärtigen „Gesellschaft der Angst“: vgl. *Heinz Bude*, *Gesellschaft der Angst*, Hamburg 2014.

¹⁶ Vgl. *Sabine Döring* (Hg.), *Philosophie der Gefühle*, Berlin 2009; *Eva Weber-Guskar*, *Die Klarheit der Gefühle. Was es heißt, Emotionen zu verstehen*, Berlin 2009.

¹⁷ *Erstes Deutsches Fernsehen*, *Weissensee Eine Berliner Liebesgeschichte*. 18 Folgen. Drehbuch/Regie: Annette Hess und Friedemann Fromm, Deutschland 2010ff.

¹⁸ Vgl. *Peter Neuner*, *Kirchen in China zwischen Untergrund und „Religionsfieber“*, in: E. Hellgardt; L. Welker (Hg.), *Weisheit und Wissenschaft*, München 2013, 125-140.

¹⁹ Vgl. dazu *Konrad Hilpert*, *Glaube und Widerstand. 70 Jahre „Weisse Rose“* (LMUniversum 15), München, 2014.

²⁰ *Bude*, *Gesellschaft der Angst* (wie Anm. 15).

²¹ *Václav Havel*, *Versuch, in der Wahrheit zu leben*, Reinbek 1990. Die aufrechte Haltung wurde der Regierung in Prag zum Spiegel, in der sie ihrer eigenen propagandistischen Lüge ansichtig wurde. Trotz des Angebotes, außer Landes zu gehen, blieb Havel und nahm Haft in Kauf. In seinen „Briefen an Olga“ spricht er von den „Siegen in den täglichen Niederlagen des Gefängnisses“ (*Václav Havel*, *Briefe an Olga. Betrachtungen aus dem Gefängnis*, Neuabdruck Reinbek 1989, 310).

²² Nicht ohne Grund kommt Konrad Hilpert in seinen moraltheoretischen Reflexionen immer wieder auf die Schlüsselrolle von Authentizität zu sprechen: *Konrad Hilpert*, *Authentizität und Wahrheit*, Berlin 2012.

²³ *Thomas Hieke*, „Glaubt ihr nicht, so bleibt ihr nicht“ (Jes 7,9), in: *Theologie und Glaube* 99/2009, 1.

²⁴ *Peter Knauer*, *Der Glaube kommt vom Hören: Ökumenische Fundamentaltheologie*, Freiburg i. Br. 6/1991, 15.

²⁵ Vgl. *Clemens Sedmak*, *Innerlichkeit und Kraft. Studie über epistemische Resilienz*, Freiburg i. Br. 2013, 274.

²⁶ Vgl. *Elias Stangl*, *Resilienz durch Glauben. Die Entwicklung psychischer Widerstandskraft bei Erwachsenen*, Ostfildern 2016, 125f.

²⁷ Zur Resilienz vgl. *Sedmak*, *Innerlichkeit* (wie Anm. 25); *Stangl*, *Resilienz* (wie Anm. 26); *Markus Vogt*; *Martin Schneider* (Hg.), *Theologische und ethische Dimension der Resilienz*. MThZ 3/2016

²⁸ Vgl. *Höhn*, *Handeln über den Tag hinaus* (wie Anm. 15), 102-108.

²⁹ Vgl. *Höhn*, *Handeln über den Tag hinaus* (wie Anm. 15), 108-120.

³⁰ Dieser Ansatz prägt die gesamte Theologie von Eugen Biser grundlegend; vgl. *Eugen Biser*, *Theologie als Therapie*, Heidelberg 1985.

³¹ Dazu grundlegend: *Fritz Riemann*, *Grundformen der Angst. Eine tiefenpsychologische Studie*, München 1975.

³² *Gerd Haeffner*, *Angst. I. Philosophisch*. In: *LThK* 1, Freiburg 1993, 672.

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- ³³ Vgl. *Sören Kierkegaard*, *Der Begriff Angst*, Frankfurt 1984, 40-43.
- ³⁴ Vgl. *Kierkegaard*, *Angst* (wie Anm. 33), 75-89.
- ³⁵ Vgl. *Kierkegaard*, *Angst* (wie Anm. 33), 141-147.
- ³⁶ Vgl. *Kierkegaard*, *Angst* (wie Anm. 33), 198-140.
- ³⁷ Vgl. *Kierkegaard*, *Angst* (wie Anm. 33), 44-49.
- ³⁸ Auch daran fehlt es häufig; vgl. *Ortwin Renn*, *Das Risikoparadox. Warum wir uns vor dem Falschen fürchten*, Frankfurt 2014.
- ³⁹ Vgl. *Wolfgang Beinert*, *Heilender Glaube*. Mainz 1990; vgl. auch *Reder; Schmidt*, *Bewusstsein von dem, was fehlt* (wie Anm. 4)
- ⁴⁰ Vgl. *Joas*, *Sakralität* (wie Anm. 11); vgl. dazu auch den Beitrag von *Jochen Sautermeister* in diesem Heft.
- ⁴¹ So fasst Jürgen Habermas unter diesem Titel Studien zum politischen Liberalismus zusammen: vgl. *Jürgen Habermas*, *Die Anerkennung des Anderen. Studien zur politischen Theorie*, Frankfurt 1999.
- ⁴² Vgl. dazu systematisch: *Beinert*, *Heilender Glaube* (wie Anm. 39) sowie *Biser*, *Theologie als Therapie* (wie Anm. 30).
- ⁴³ Vgl. *Zulehner*, *Entängstigt euch* (wie Anm. 8).
- ⁴⁴ Vgl. *Niklas Luhmann*, *Die Religion der Gesellschaft*, Frankfurt 2002, bes. 7–24.
- ⁴⁵ Vgl. *Niklas Luhmann*, *Vertrauen. Ein Mechanismus der Reduktion sozialer Komplexität*, 4. Auflage, Stuttgart 2000.
- ⁴⁶ So der kürzlich verstorbene Bundespräsident Roman Herzog; *Roman Herzog*, *Aufbruch ins 21. Jahrhundert. Berliner Rede*, 1997, 1; vgl. http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/DE/Roman-Herzog/Reden/1997/04/19970426_Rede.html (Abruf am 23.8.2017).
- ⁴⁷ Vgl. *Friedrich Graf*, *Die Wiederkehr der Götter. Religion in der modernen Kultur*, München 2004, 274.
- ⁴⁸ *Graf*, *Wiederkehr der Götter* (wie Anm. 47), 274; vgl. dazu auch den Beitrag von *Jochen Sautermeister* in diesem Heft, der sich wesentlich auf die Analysen von Hans Joas zur Kirche als Moralagentur bezieht.
- ⁴⁹ Vgl. *Graf*, *Wiederkehr der Götter* (wie Anm. 47), 272.
- ⁵⁰ *Friedrich Graf; Heinrich Meier* (Hg.), *Politik und Religion. Zur Diagnose der Gegenwart*, München 2013.
- ⁵¹ Vgl. *Charles Taylor*, *Quellen des selbst. Die Entstehung der neuzeitlichen Identität*, Frankfurt 1994, 288-290.
- ⁵² Ebd., 121; vgl. *Markus Vogt*, *Grenzen der Verantwortung*, in: *Jochen Sautermeister* (Hg.), *Verantwortung und Integrität heute: Theologische Ethik unter dem Anspruch der Redlichkeit*, Freiburg i. Br. 2013, 165-174.
- ⁵³ *Paul Tillich*, *Der Mut zum Sein*, Stuttgart 1968

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- ⁵⁴ Vgl. zum Folgenden auch *Konrad Hilpert*, Ethik und Rationalität. Untersuchungen zum Autonomieproblem und zu seiner Bedeutung für die theologische Ethik, Düsseldorf 1980; *Volker Gerhardt*, Glauben und Wissen. Ein notwendiger Zusammenhang, Stuttgart 2016.
- ⁵⁵ *Ludger Honnefelder*, Im Spannungsfeld von Ethik und Religion, Berlin 2014, 12.
- ⁵⁶ Vgl. ebd., 69; vgl. auch *Reder; Schmidt*, Ein Bewusstsein von dem, was fehlt (wie Anm. 4).
- ⁵⁷ Vgl. dazu *Markus Vogt*, Das Spannungsfeld theologischer und philosophischer Ethik (wie Anm. 4).
- ⁵⁸ *Honnefelder*, Spannungsfeld (wie Anm. 56), 70.
- ⁵⁹ *Ludger Honnefelder*, Die ethische Rationalität der Neuzeit, in: Handbuch der christlichen Ethik, Bd. I, 19-45 1993, 20.
- ⁶⁰ Vgl. *Franz Böckle*, Fundamentalmoral, 5. Aufl. München 1991, 290.
- ⁶¹ Vgl. *Alfons Auer*, Autonome Moral und christlicher Glaube, Düsseldorf 1989, 189. Zur Entfaltung dieser drei Funktionen als zusammenfassendes Ergebnis seiner ethischen Reflexionen, vgl. ebd. 189-197.
- ⁶² Vgl. *Honnefelder*, Rationalität der Neuzeit (wie Anm. 60), 20.
- ⁶³ *Benedikt XVI.*, Deus Caritas est (Verlautbarungen des Apostolischen Stuhls 171), Bonn 2005, Nr. 28.
- ⁶⁴ Vgl. *Wilhelm Korff*, Wie kann der Mensch glücken? Perspektiven der Ethik, München 1985, 9-118.
- ⁶⁵ Vgl. dazu *Auer*, Autonome Moral (wie Anm. 62), 185-189.
- ⁶⁶ Vgl. dazu das Konzept der Öffentlichen Theologie bzw. des Öffentlichen Protestantismus: *Reiner Anselm; Christian Albrecht*, Öffentlicher Protestantismus: Zur aktuellen Debatte um gesellschaftliche Präsenz und politische Aufgaben des evangelischen Christentums, Zürich 2017. Vgl. auch *Vogt*, Theologie der Sozialethik, (wie Anm.3), bes. 229-278,
- ⁶⁷ Vgl. *Jürgen Habermas*, Zwischen Naturalismus und Religion. Philosophische Aufsätze, Frankfurt 2005, 115.
- ⁶⁸ Vgl. *Jürgen Habermas*, Glauben und Wissen. Ansprachen aus Anlass der Verleihung (Friedenspreis des Deutschen Buchhandels), Frankfurt 2001.

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