

# **A QUEST FOR HOPE**

**Searching for ways out of postmodern nihilism  
into new reality**

**Jan Chr. Vaessen**

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In lively memory of Paul Ricœur  
and grateful for the wealth  
of his  
textual legacy

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May this text find its way and be a blessing.

Gasselte, December, 2008

Jan Chr. Vaessen

## Preface

If you want a quick fix for your preaching, if you want an easy-to-master homiletical technique, this is not the book to read. But if you want a profound exploration of the philosophical and cultural forces that have spawned the ethos of our age, and if you want a theologically informed way of understanding the challenges and possibilities that now face preaching, this is a book that richly repays the demands it makes on the reader.

I know that what Vaessen writes is very useful to preachers because several years ago, when I directed the Doctor of Ministry program in homiletics at Iliff School of Theology in Denver, Colorado, Vaessen came and taught the substance of this book as a guest lecturer. The students were active pastors and preachers, and while it took them a little while to catch where he was headed, by the end of the process they evaluated his work with them to be one of the most helpful courses they had ever taken.

Vaessen is concerned with big questions, and he understands that answering them requires that we explore the intellectual frameworks that we have inherited through our forms of thought and the language that we speak. Tracing the philosophies that have helped to shape our consciousness, he demonstrates that “the postmodern claim that there is no final truth at all, no big story that gives content and direction to human life has a long preparatory history *in* modernity.” His book grows out of his passion to respond in a theologically responsible way to the chaotic character of a world that appears to have become totally decentered: “Thrown into an infinite vacuum that can no longer be visualized, will postmodern man be left in a cacophony of fear and disorder at the mercy of nothing...?” (p. 71). In the hands of someone less experienced and seasoned as a pastor and preacher than Vaessen, this kind of existential question might result in an ever expanding amount of abstract thought. But the strength of the book is that Vaessen realizes the practical implications of understanding western intellectual history for preaching the gospel in a postmodern era: “Preachers are usually not aware of the great impact of philosophical and hermeneutical models that reign in their age and

in their own thinking. Well then, not only does insight in their own hermeneutical processes offer preachers some lucidity in a dark area, but it also increases their freedom.” (p. 99).

Vaessen acknowledges that the issue of how to interpret the Bible in a postmodern age is not just an intriguing academic question, but something that personally grips him as a preacher and pastor. Speaking about a sermon of his own, included and analyzed in the book, he writes: “The problem of this sermon – how to respond to postmodern nihilism in a relaxed and creative way – has haunted me ever since and became the main theme of this book.” (p. 115). The two adjectives “relaxed and creative” are significant. They reveal how Vaessen does not want to respond out of panic, but rather from a stance that takes seriously the challenges of post-modernity while at the same time drawing on the assurance and creativity that characterize authentic faith. As a result Vaessen finds that no matter how daunting the challenges may be, he still is able to hear “some exciting new melodies” (p. 153), some exciting new ways that preachers can declare the gospel with integrity to our fragmented world.

Those exciting new melodies turn out to be rooted in reclaiming the gospel of grace. Grace for Vaessen means openness to possibilities that our nihilistic age cannot conceive: “I do see a very important role for the preacher in his or her role as minister of grace. Of course s/he has to rise above the passive status of victim of chaos to the active status of minister of God’s grace. In my view it is helpful in this realm that we become aware of thought patterns and interpretative models that play a role in our culture and make responsible choices here when we prepare sermon on a certain Bible text . . .” (p. 157)

Vaessen makes us aware of our “thought patterns and interpretive models” by tracing differences between Greek and Hebrew cultures and the relative dominance of spatial and temporal dimensions in their thought and language. His discussion is not at all antiquarian. He uses the differences between Greek and Hebrew to help us see the limitations of dominant western thought, and to re-conceptualize our understandings of faith and meaning.

Vaessen’s work on the history of western thought and especially the hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur lead him to a new definition of the sermon or homily as an “intimate encounter or intercourse . . . as a playground where people with different backgrounds and opinions may meet and playfully interact on subjects that pertain to many different aspects of life.” (p. 206) If

this statement had opened the book, I might have put it down as too lightweight. But the depth and breadth of Vaessen's exploration of western thought and its relevance to preaching prepare us to understand why the metaphor of the "playground" is appropriate. Instead of nihilism and its deconstruction of every world of meaning, he helps us to see that reality itself is playful. God has fashioned a creation that has openings for grace, openings for surprise, openings for new revelations that we never dreamed possible. Vaessen, through his arduous thought, refreshes our sense of wonder and awe so that we can imagine and preach anew the great good news of the gospel. And there is nothing any homiletician could do more practical than that!

Thomas H. Troeger

Yale Divinity School and Institute of Sacred Music

Advent, 2008

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## Prelude

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Being a Christian theologian interested in philosophical questions, I want to serve three goals with this book. First, I want to locate modern Western thought patterns emerging out of a specific underlying worldview in a broader perspective that also includes premodern (naïve) and postmodern (nihilistic) thought with their respective worldviews. Second, I want to investigate the close relationship of these modern models of thought with various models of interpretation and give some tools for interpreting reality or (Bible) texts that focus on this – in many ways transcendent - reality. Third, I would like to search in Hebrew patterns of thought for an alternative to postmodern nihilism.

Notions of truth and normativity change through the different stages of Western thought - as expressed by different philosophical systems - with the worldviews that generate this thought. Modernism with its development of hermeneutics - different models of interpretation – does not stand on itself. As a radical criticism on premodern naivety it has in turn attracted radical criticism upon itself by the postmoderns. Already within the modern era factual truth retreats more and more from human control until in postmodernism it vanishes completely. And so I think it is time to have a closer look at modern interpretation of Western thinking so deeply rooted in a form of Christianity that was informed by the ancients Greeks. As Western thinking is apparently - although I think not necessarily - annihilating itself in postmodern radical criticism, why not look for alternative notions of truth and normativity outside of Western thought as well?

Living for several years in an African country has taught me to look at reality from a non-Western point of view; and there I also learned to read the Christian Old Testament as TeNaCh, as the Hebrew Bible, that is as a thoroughly non-Western document. The problem of how to respond to postmodern nihilism in a relaxed and creative way has kept me busy during the re-

cent years and has become the main theme of this book. Hebrew thinking offers itself, among others, as a fascinating source for such a response.

## Truth and normativity

The search for truth is as old as mankind itself. But what is truth? The question is only recently raised and on rare occasions. Wouter Slob in his book, *Verily, I Say unto Thee, rhetorical normativity after postmodern theologies*, gives a short history of truth where he explains why this question is a typical postmodern question (Slob, 2002, 67-97; DR, 33-67)<sup>1</sup>. We will come back more extensively to Slob's book, but in rough lines this history can be seen as follows. In premodern times man lived within the truth. Saying and being were one. The Ptolemaic or geocentric worldview had the earth in the center of the universe and man at the center of the world. The axioms or premises as basis of knowledge were given and could be explored by the different sciences. Logic had to watch that the right conclusions were derived from these premises by a correct way of reasoning. The Aristotelian axiom "A is not  $\neg$ A" served as a solid basis of syllogistic reasoning that could be trusted to arrive at the right conclusions. However, when Copernicus and others discovered that not the earth but the sun formed the center of the universe, the notion of truth changed as well. In the heliocentric worldview, the earth, man and his truth were pushed out of the center of the universe and so was human knowledge. Truth could not be taken for granted any longer but had to be searched for by means of interpretation. Since Kant, reality was divided in two realms, the noumenal world of which no knowledge is possible and the phenomenal world, to be known by the senses. The subject thus confronted with his object under investigation "felt" that there was more to it than the senses could tell, but how could he be sure? Human knowledge had become subjective and problematic, had become interpretation. Saying and being were split apart. Somewhere out there was an only partly knowable truth, but how did this truth correspond to human consciousness of truth? This question became even more intense when in the second half of the twentieth century the natural sciences (Hubble) discovered that instead of one solar system there were an infinite number of solar systems. So even the awareness of a center - in the heliocentric worldview - disappeared and was substituted by an infinite flux of particles, small and big. Anything may be the center of anything; anything may be true. However,

there is no way to determine what is central or what is true. And now the question “what is truth?” becomes relevant.

Aristotle gave the following definition of truth “To say that what is is , and what is not is not, is true” (*Metaphysica*, 1011b). In the premodern time, this was crystal clear. Being must correspond to saying. If not so, your thoughts and speech are false. In modern times, however, the question was raised how being corresponded to saying. If being was only partly knowable how could one say: “this is true”? At least some normative suppositions about truth became necessary. Of course the true being of things had to be *interpreted* by a subject investigating an object and the knowledge produced by this interpretation is always partial and provisional. But how can an investigating subject rely on the truth of his – admittedly small and provisional - discoveries? A whole range of positions has been developed in this realm, from the correspondence theory, at one side, to the deflation theory at the other (cf. Slob, 2002, 47-58; DR 12-24). The first holds on to the correspondence of reality - although only partly knowable - to human reflection and relates knowledge directly to this reality. And this corresponding relation between fact and thought is normative: if the correspondence is absent, your thoughts about reality are false. The defenders of the deflationary theory, on the other hand, ponder upon the unknowable status of reality and the unreliability of its truth in an extended sense; they neglect the - as they call it - factual truth (of being in itself) and concentrate on extensional, that is, produced or derived, knowledge of truth by humans.

When in (post-)modern thought truth is fragmented and has become a flux of changes instead of anything stable or reliable, any normative relation with the “truth” is gone. And when in postmodernism the mere thought of a solution becomes principally inconceivable anything goes in truth and normativity. Deconstruction of truth and values has shown the grand stories that encompass reality and give norms to direct human behavior within that reality to be mere illusions. Language is a structure describing differences – a system of voids actually - and has no real relation with reality, if there is any such thing as reality which is unclear. And so mankind is looking into a great black hole, a grand void as its future. No wonder that people are looking desperately for normative grounds to live on and to regain new hopes for their future. The question is however where to look. Many go back to premodern and modern relations that Western thought has developed with the truth, only to discover that these notions throw us back in ancient times and that some violence is needed to repress all the subsequent developments of

the mind. Apart from the question if such a regression through repression is desirable it is even more questionable if it is possible. Can we deny that man has set foot on the moon? Because falling back on former relations between being and saying brings nothing and postmodern notions of truth produce nothing either, I would like to look for alternatives outside of Western thinking. After all, what cannot be denied is that mankind is equipped with a set of brains that produces a number of different intelligences as Howard Gardner has shown convincingly in his book *Frames of Mind*<sup>2</sup>. Not only are different intelligences used to solve concrete problems in different cultures but also to formulate new problems and understand man's relation with truth and reality be it transcendent or not. And so the human search for truth will not stop even if postmodernism has exploded the idea of a constant and reliable ground of truth and normativity for man to live on and extinguished his hope for a meaningful life on any ground.

## **Hermeneutics and rhetoric**

Making a "true" or at least meaningful text to be read in private or recited out loud – scholarly, literary but also a religious text like a sermon - is an art. It is - in terms of modern experience of truth - the art of integrating analytic and literary activities through an interpretative act of creative imagination.

In the arts there is always a two-way communication going on: meaning is both received and given. Apart from the illustrative function attached to it since the nineteenth century, the word "rhetoric" is usually related to the meaning that a *rhetor* or orator has given to reality and expressed in a speech and to the effect that this speech has on its listeners or public. The word "rhetoric" obtains a manipulating connotation because it is restricted to the power of the *rhetor* - speaker instead of enriched by the matter under discussion. Usually "rhetoric" is about the relationship of a speaker and the audience and about the meanings that are given and transferred in a one-way direction. The relationship that the speaker has with reality from which different meanings are received and interpreted in his or her speech is very rarely discussed in rhetorical realms, and whenever: this relationship is univocal and non interpretative.

All this was quite different in classical rhetoric. Aristotle's rhetoric, for instance, is expressed in terms of logic of probability and philosophizing on "the nature of the matter" is a beloved activity. The French philosopher, Paul



Ricœur, illustrates this especially in his theory of the metaphor (Ricœur, 1975, 13-51)<sup>3</sup>. The problem with Aristotle, however, is that he saw the metaphor as a figure of speech on the level of denomination, that is to say the level of the single word. For Ricœur however, the metaphor is active on the level of a complete sentence or expression. In every linguistic sentence there is a dialectic going on between structure and event, between the static noun referring to the system and the dynamic verb happening in time, between timeless object and time-related subject. This dialectic, basic characteristic of all discourse, makes language a living reality in which not only univocal meaning is received from remaining objective structures but also disappearing interpreting subjects give meaning. Metaphor breaks down structures of meaning that are taken for granted. Metaphor shocks and gives new insights in reality by bringing together two hitherto totally unrelated and even opposed realities. And by bringing in symbols, through which deep and hidden layers of meaning are received, metaphor can even extend its creativity to the pre-lingual domains of reality. In so doing rhetoric - especially when expressed by means of metaphors and symbols - will become a powerful tool to interpret reality in new ways.

In rhetoric - in analytical treaties as well as in literary stories - not only univocal meanings are given and transferred and their effects on an audience measured, but also meanings are received from a multiform reality based on - consciously or unconsciously made - hermeneutic decisions. So for Ricœur rhetoric has - through his theory of metaphors and symbols - clear hermeneutical implications. By expanding the theory from denomination through words to proclamation in the sentence he is moving, in a very modern way, from one truth to many truths. We do not live within the truth anymore as premodern people did. Truth has to be extracted from reality, becomes an *interpretandum* that has to be *interpreted* by an *interpreter*. Since Descartes, Ricœur says, we doubt the existence of things, and since Marx, Nietzsche and Freud we even have to doubt our own consciousness of things. And so the modern mind has become an interpretative mind. The receiving and giving of meaning are integrated in an ongoing hermeneutical process inherent in and reflected by every rhetorical act that uses language as its vehicle.

## Hebrew notions of truth based on Torah morality

The very postmodern film *The Matrix* speaks of the code of Zion, a code that thus far had escaped the agents that control and watch the matrix. In this film our Western culture as we know it is portrayed as a computer simulation – a matrix – totally artificial, exhaustively variable and thus completely controllable by information technology. And so man had become a prisoner of the computer and all his “truths” were deconstructed as utterly fake. However, there was one realm where people were still free of this technical domination by machines and this was the city of Zion. This film made one wonder, why Zion? What was the supposed secret of its code. Is there something in the Hebrew language that is not quantifiable, that cannot be digitalized and yet does express or touch a truth that cannot be controlled by humans but nevertheless enables them to live a free and meaningful life?

Western languages - Greek, Latin and many languages derived from them – have developed a grammatical system with an inherent desire to try to describe reality, time and space as exactly and precisely as possible. The verb usually has many tenses related to all sorts of points in time. Not only are past, presence and future distinguished, but also within these three categories lots of new distinctions are made. The Hebrew verb on the other hand only knows two tenses: the *perfectum* and the *imperfectum*. The first describes the past that ends in the present. The second describes the future beginning in the present. So past and future overlap in the present and therefore *perfectum* and *imperfectum* are not closed systems used to describe (events in) time. In narratives the *imperfectum* is even used to describe events in a long gone history. So the past is open towards the future and vice versa culminating in a highly sensitive present. Likewise, the past is also open towards pre- and proto-history and the future towards eschatology beyond human experience, knowledge or imagination culminating in a non totalitarian sense of the present that holds ever new perspectives for man and mankind.

All this is reflected by the Jewish celebration of *Rosh Hashanah* – New Year – in the seventh and not the first month of the Jewish year. Being closely related to the Creation of Heaven and Earth, *Rosh Hashanah* celebrates the beauty of God’s Creation and God’s grace to let humans live in it, but also the finitude of this Creation, as we know it, and the infinity of the Creator. He existed long before He created heaven and earth in a realm that humans cannot know and will not know however hard they try. So any image of this God is provisional, too small to idolize, as is said in the first

commandment. And this brings into human life a basic uncertainty, which is not removed but compensated for by the love of this eternal God who cannot be known exhaustively or manipulated recklessly by human beings. Living on the basis of the love of this God, acting according to his loving will as it was laid down in the ten commandments of his Torah, praising Him, communicating with your wife and neighbor in such a language means having peace with a basic uncertainty in life and numerous possible but yet unknown other constellations in and beyond human reality.

As far as I can see, this gives an interesting alternative to the almost neurotic claiming and hassling with regard to “truth” in Western thinking. One truth, many truths, or no truth at all, I would say, we need a new way to deal with truth. In Western thinking normativity is derived from human conception of truth. When the solid basis of correspondence between fact and thought has to be given up, morality is at a loss and becomes a floating affair that finds expression in the very abstract concept of “normativity”. In Hebrew thinking it is just the other way round. Not our conception of truth is the basis of normativity but concrete Torah morale forms the basis of always provisional and imperfect grasping of “the truth”. And we might find these Hebrew notions of truth based on Torah morale in the ancient, “holy” and culturally alien - that is non-Western - texts of the Hebrew Bible. We will need creative imagination fed by analytical and literary activities, but will also be inspired by the rather natural integration of these two in the Hebrew texts. It remains to be seen if such a new basis is not a matter of regression, falling back on ancient fundamentals, that calls for violence and aggression or that it may be really new and will give the postmodern world new perspectives of hope and love.

## **The quest for hope**

My actual quest for hope was in a way foreshadowed by an experience that I had, when I was in my teens, and working as a bellboy on the Dutch ocean liner SS *Nieuw Amsterdam*. It was the same year when the Apollo 13 space mission nearly crashed, which disastrous event had been foretold by a famous American fortuneteller. At the time we made Atlantic crossings from New York to Rotterdam and back. Now, the same fortuneteller had foreseen that on this very trip we would hit a fierce storm in the middle of the Atlantic. Our ship would crash and disappear in the ocean. The rumor passed

throughout the ship when we were a couple of days offshore and everybody got frightened, passengers and crew. It was our luck that the storm sneaked in suddenly and quickly. No time for panic which is the greatest threat in such a situation on a ship with almost two thousand people aboard. The passengers were all too seasick to be able to move, and most of the crew – without having much else to do – was coping with death. Our huge ocean liner had become a tiny little play ball of twenty meters high ocean waves swept by a hurricane.

I had learned to cope with seasickness by going outside to get fresh air; and it also helped to look the danger right in the eyes. We were of course not allowed to go on the front deck; with the bow of the ship diving into every wave you wouldn't survive there for long. And so I went way up to the top or boat deck. There I was all alone in the middle of a very small, dark, and fierce world, roaring nature showing its extreme force and power, coping with my own death. The deepest emotion I have ever had in my life, I had it there. It was like experiencing the holy, *fascinans et tremendum*, attractive and repulsive at the same time, and in one feeling. And so I said to God, if you want to take me, it's okay with me. But please God, think of the others, I am not the only one on this ship. The result was inner peace and a profound joy of being able to live through and observe this storm on the Atlantic and experience every bit of it with all my being.

Gradually the thick clouds dissolved, the sky turned into a deep blue and the world around the ship became bigger and bigger, while the winds swept the waves as fiercely as before. Now, when a wave reaches its summit it breaks and leaves a curtain of water behind, while the bright sun paints a beautiful rainbow in that curtain. And there were of course hundreds of breaking waves around us and, needless to tell, rainbows all over the place as far as we could see. Suddenly I was no longer alone. Some crew members had joined me on the top deck to enjoy the spectacle. We were just speechless, went down deck by deck when the storm calmed down to remain at the same level of the breaking waves with their countless rainbows. We had not perished and were surrounded by hope. The unstructured chaos of nature in its elementary force had carried us through and now produced hundreds of rainbows as if God was saying: do not fear, you may be vulnerable, but you are precious in my eyes. Now live, and be precious to one another.

This is the image that comes to my mind when I think of postmodern chaos and nihilism, in which Western, or should we say Greek, thinking had to end

up in one way or the other, due to its premodern and modern patterns of thought. An unstructured chaos, in which many innocent people get lost, but in which each element also bears the sign of hope. There are rainbows all over the place, if only you would take the time and make an effort to watch.

## Outline of the book

So the question that will occupy us throughout this book and that will be its organizing principle can be formulated as follows. Can we find a meaningful ground for postmodern man to live on, now that postmodern radical criticism has deconstructed every solid ground that has served Western man as a basis for truth and morality? The goals I have set for this study are:

- to broaden the perspective from modernism to pre- and postmodernism,
- to give some tools for interpretation processes within the modernist setting, and
- to search for an alternative to postmodern nihilism in non-Western and notably Hebrew thought.

To meet these goals I will take the following steps.

In chapter 1 some paradigms of premodern Western thought will be highlighted. Ancient Greek philosophy and the elaboration thereof in medieval Christianity will be discussed. Emphasis will be laid on the *logos* as the one and only logical space of truth, the solid house of truth where being and saying, factual and extensional truth still formed an unproblematic unity. After this we will turn to Western thought in the modern era and highlight some of its paradigms by discussing a number of different philosophies. Here the turn to the interpreting subject is important and the loss of security of one logical space of truth. The subject has to make choices, even when it comes to foundations of truth. In short, interpretation comes to the fore.

Chapter 2 will give a number of interpretative models that resulted from the subsequent philosophical patterns of thought discussed thus far – premodern and modern. They play an important role in the interpretation of Bible texts. Preachers may not be aware of this and let their interpretative processes have their own way in their unconscious mind. However, personal

hermeneutical clarity will stimulate the rhetorical force of their sermons. So it's worthwhile to give some thought to interpretative models that work in sermons. This chapter will therefore close with an analysis of Bible interpretation in one of my own sermons on postmodernism.

The middle chapter 3 will function as a sort of turning point and begins with a short summary of Western notions of truth and normativity in the premodern, modern and postmodern eras. Then we will concentrate on the postmodern collapse of truth and normativity in discussing Derrida's concept of *différance*, Lyotard's concept of *terreur de l'irreprésentable* and the postmodern film *The Matrix*. This collapse that resulted in the general negation of postmodern nihilism has furthermore led to different reactions of theology and churches to our postmodern culture in which churches are trying to survive. The first reaction is regression into the premodern worldview that we see in orthodoxy and evangelicalism. The second reaction is more progressive in the sense that postmodernism is not denied but applied when and where ever this is possible. However, decisions about the applicability of postmodern concepts are made on a modern basis, as can be seen in *Theology for preaching* by Allen, Blaisdell and Johnston. A third reaction is the interesting and very original concept of *rhetorical normativity* coming from Wouter Slob who founds truth in a truly postmodern way in responsible dialogue.

In chapter 4, I will develop the idea of *normative rhetoric* that is not based on a conception of truth or logic but on universal love as guide for action. Such a normative rhetoric will have to take postmodern criticism seriously and must provide for satisfying answers to postmodern nihilism. First, I will go into the question whether Ricœur's use of dialectical reasoning in his hermeneutical phenomenology has to lead to postmodern negation or that it leaves room for more positive alternatives. Then an effort will be made to transcend the limited perspective of *vision* as basis of Western thought. Thomas Troeger has drawn attention to the different senses that are favored by different cultures in his book *Preaching and Worship*. Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences explains that the sense of vision serves especially the spatial and logical-mathematical intelligences – so important for Western, i.e. Greek thinking. That the human brain accommodates for more intelligences using other senses can also be observed in the flow of energy through a system of chakras that was developed in the ancient Eastern Veda literature which served as a basis for Hinduism and Buddhism. It is now used by Anodea Judith to arrive at universal love that gathers the cultures

under the hopeful sign of the rainbow. This universal love is an important incentive to reconsider Lyotard's "terror of the non-representable" and may be a first step towards a compensation for postmodern nihilism. Finally, I will develop a normative rhetoric based on universal love for the praxis in some concrete fields that I am familiar with: homiletics, liturgy, ecclesiology and authentic leadership.

Chapter 5 will take a closer look at Hebrew notions of truth based on Torah morale and see if it can meet the conditions of universal love set for the normative rhetoric developed in the previous chapter. For Ricœur there is no way back in the movement from first naivety (premodern) through critical analysis (modern) to a second naivety taking up former stages developed in the history of Western philosophy. In the present study I am especially interested in the following question. Is it possible to reach Hebrew notions of truth and normativity through the gateway of Ricœur's textual hermeneutics applied to Bible texts and, if so, can this result in a second naivety that is an alternative to postmodern nihilism? Then we will turn explicitly to Hebrew notions of truth and normativity as expressed in the codes of Zion with Thorleif Boman's book *Hebrew thought compared to Greek*, a comparison performed by means of a thorough analysis of the Hebrew and the Greek languages. This analysis will lead to Hebrew notions as hearing, speaking and practicing the Word – the Love, the Law - of the Lord, i.e. living according to Torah love. Now, Hebrew thought has developed and changed during the ages. This can already be noticed in the Biblical texts from different historical periods and that did not stop after the Bible became canon, Holy Scriptures. The Jewish mind became thoroughly Hellenized in the Diaspora and many Jewish scholars gave great contributions to Western thinking in general. Will the return to Biblical frames of mind undo all this and result in a short sighted, narrow, even violent fundamentalism, or will we find "something" that inalienably belongs to the codes of Zion and that is sufficiently universal to support our normative rhetoric? To get an answer to that question we will focus on contemporary Jewish philosophy and study *Der Stern der Erlösung* by Franz Rosenzweig and *Totalité et infini* by Emmanuel Lévinas.

I will end this study with three examples of a normative rhetoric inspired by the codes of Zion. The first is a small prayer from the *Tefillah*. The second is an interpretation of Psalm 131 that I made following Ricœur's interpretative model. Finally, I will give an enlarged view of Pentecost, thereto inspired by Troeger's idea of "All of us for all of God". With a short medita-

tion, in the spirit of philosopher Stanislas Breton and theologian Paul Tillich, on Marc Chagall's painting *The White Crucifixion* and Isaiah's *Suffering Servant* I will close my book and step with new hope into an uncertain future.



## Chapter 1

### **Some paradigms of Western thought**

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Of course, much more can be said of Western thinking than will be done in this chapter. This goes for the number of philosophers as for their individual philosophies that will be treated here. However, being a theologian and not a philosopher it is not my intention to write a history of Western philosophy. In this survey I take some general works in history of philosophy as a guide and here and there I will make use of original philosophical texts<sup>1</sup>. The choices I have made here serve a theological more than a philosophical purpose. By focusing on a few highlights, I want to get some clarity about the different worldviews of the subsequent eras of Western thinking and to give a philosophical background for Biblical interpretation and rhetoric in these periods. Realms that are closely related, as we will see.

#### **Premodern era, ancient Greece to the Renaissance**

##### **Ancient Greece**

The sixth century B.C. was an interesting century. In India the Buddha started to ask critical questions about everything that had always been taken for granted in Hinduism and gave a new turn to Eastern spirituality. Suffering could be fought and enlightenment could be reached on a more personal level and this had far reaching consequences for the experience of the metaphysical realm. In Israel the great prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah criticized the claiming of the privileged status of the people of Israel being the people of God that no harm could be done to. The traumatic experience of the exile in Babylon being the result of this arrogance was interpreted as a just punishment but also broadened the view towards God's grace and universality. In Greece the metaphysical realm was also experienced in a different way as

important philosophers started to raise critical questions upon the myths of the Olympic gods that Homer had told them long before. They turned towards the more immediate human experience of nature, and the laws that formed the foundation of the natural phenomena, and how man had to relate to this reality in ethical, political and religious ways. What was new in all this, was that – although bound by many relations, human and divine - man also had the liberty and the obligation to make personal choices and these choices were important.

### **Natural philosophy before Socrates**

It was not so much the question of how anything could have emerged out of nothing that haunted the old Greeks. They assumed that “something” had always existed. “Nothing can come out of nothing”, Parmenides (530-444 BCE) said and “nothing really changes”. For Parmenides the changes could be written on the account of the illusions caused by the senses. What remained stable and reliable could only be traced by reason. But what was this “something”, this primordial substance out of which nature develops? Could it be fire, or air, or earth, or water, or ...? On the other hand the attention was attracted by the constant changes in nature. As Heraclitus (540-475) said: *panta rei* – everything flows like a streaming river. For Heraclitus, however, the senses could be trusted, because everything is created by the constant flux of the elements and collision of opposites. Although the totality of this universal flux and collision of the elements was embraced or sustained by some universal reason, *logos*, the reality within this totality was a dynamic one. Well then, should we let reason dictate that nothing can change and thus not trust our sensory perception or rely on our senses that nature is in a constant state of change? From this early time on philosophers have been struggling to reconcile these two opposite positions, to unite reason and senses.

Empedocles (490-430) is interesting here. He holds that both Parmenides and Heraclitus are right. Water cannot change into a fish. Parmenides has a point there. But we also must believe what we see and trust our senses, a newborn will be a grownup in due time. We can get both views together if we reject the idea of one single basic substance but presuppose the four basic elements that were considered before (fire, air, earth and water) and see all natural processes as a coming together or falling apart of these four basic elements. In nature two different forces are at work with the elements considered as substance. Love binds the elements together, while strife separates

them. Democritus (460-370) builds on the work of his predecessors in a materialistic way with his atom theory. *A-tom* means un-cutable: a tiny little basic particle that cannot be cut into more elementary pieces. The whole of reality is made from these basic particles, infinite in variety and number, but eternal and unchangeable in themselves. The different combinations of the atoms make different forms of being until they fall apart again only to form others in due time. Also the human soul is made from round, smooth soul atoms that follow the same natural and necessary process, which makes the soul as mortal as everything else, not bound to one person and the necessity of a higher intelligence, a ruling principle or eternal God to regulate the natural processes superfluous.

### **Socrates, Plato and Aristotle**

From the constant flux of ever changing combinations of atoms obeying natural laws to the wide variety of human individuals obeying social conventions seems to be a small step. Tired with all the speculations about gods and nature, the Sophists turned to man and his place in society. People had to learn how to live together. However, like the metaphysical and natural riddles also the human riddles were hard to solve. What was good or bad had to relate to a person's needs. But some needs were naturally induced while others were purely social convention. What was estimated as good by society was good. Protagoras, for example, doubted the existence of the gods but because society accepted their existence it was good to be religious (Russell, 1984, 87). So the majority decides what is good, but as social conventions change, no objective truth could be found, nor absolute norms concerning good or wrong.

### **Socrates' ethics**

Socrates reacted to the Sophists who claimed that "man is the measure of all things" (Protagoras 485-410). Not only did Socrates ridicule the Sophists because they were well paid for their "wisdom", but even more because he thought that there are norms to be found out there that are absolutely and universally valid. In various ways Socrates (470-399) shows resemblance with Jesus of Nazareth (Gaarder, 1996, 66). Both of them didn't write a thing. Everything we know about them has been written down by others (Plato in the case of Socrates, the four evangelists in the case of Jesus). Both were extremely thorough thinkers, they followed their lines of thought up to

the very end. They didn't care at all if their thoughts were socially accepted or not and both had to pay for their ideals with their own life in the end.

Socrates seems to have been an extremely ugly man. But he couldn't care less about his looks or his social acceptability, because truth does not manifest itself by outward appearances. Beauty was found inside and for Socrates this was a divine voice in man that used reason to find out what was good and what was wrong. The real quest was to find those absolute and universally valid norms that surpassed unstable social conventions, tragic fate and mythical superstition. The right insights would eventually lead to the right actions. Only he who *does* right is virtuous. When you do wrong it is because of a lack of insight in what is good. That is why it is so important to continue learning. And so he tried - like a midwife - to help people acquire and utter, give birth to the right insights. His method was a real philosophical one: questioning without end. Wisdom was not merchandise to benefit from but a friend to serve who in turn would lead you to new unexplored territories where new friendships could flourish. "The greatest wisdom, oh man, has he who like Socrates knows that wisdom is in fact worthless" (Russell, 1984, 95), says Socrates and so he asks questions. Irony comes in when the know-it-alls prove this axiom by showing - preferably in public - their ignorance. And so Socrates principally put every certainty into question that people had built their lives on. The *polis* - city-state - of Athens didn't like this, and Socrates was accused of introducing new gods and poisoning the young people with bad ideas. And so he was sentenced to death.

I still remember reading Plato's *Crito* (Koolschijn, 1988, 122-125)<sup>2</sup> in a course of Attic Greek in the first year of my theology studies. Crito tries to persuade his friend Socrates to flee from the prison where he would have to drink the cup with poisonous hemlock. The guards were bridled already and lots of friends were waiting outside to receive him with warm and loving hospitality. "Really Socrates nobody wants you dead. Not even the ones in power who initiated your trial, nor the citizens of Athens. When they look deep into their hearts and try to be honest they regret what they have done to you. Everybody would be glad if you got away safely. Now then, the path to freedom being open, you'll only have to walk it. We will bring you outside this cursed city that sent you on the road to death." But Socrates objected to Crito's way of thinking. "At a certain point of my life Crito I decided to live in this city and thus I also chose to live by its laws. Don't you think I should have left when I didn't agree with the laws or should have tried to change them? I did not leave, so the only option for me was to criticize and if possi-

ble change unjust laws and to reinforce people's right insights in what is good. All I have ever wanted was to promote the construction of laws - by means of right insights - that would induce good actions. Would it be wise now to tell all the people of Athens that the life of one man is more important than a whole body of just laws by running away from them? Do you think the gods will be pleased that at the most critical point in my life I chose not to obey the laws but to become an outlaw?" However, Crito had his objections: "But Socrates you know that the laws are unjust!" And Socrates replied: "My dear friend, would running away from these very laws make them any better? Is the unjustness of the laws that others made an excuse for becoming unjust yourself? Wouldn't it be much better for me to drink the cup, remain in harmony with myself, with the people of Athens and with the gods and die in peace?" And so Socrates drank his cup in the company of his dearest friends and died in peace. What struck me most in Socrates way of communicating with Crito was that despite his superior way of reasoning Socrates never sought superiority over Crito but kept on trying to improve their mutual and honest friendship by means of better insights.

And now – in a temporal and intellectual sense - the scene is set for man's acquirement of more insight in the realm of the gods, in the laws of nature, in right and wrong in human behavior on the great stage of human reality supported by the universe. In all this, Socrates' idea of a divine voice was compatible with human reason so that man was in principle held to be able to reach and incorporate the absolute and universally valid norms. In contrast to the Hebrews the old Greeks - and the Romans after them - disposed of a language that seemed to be capable of describing the state of affairs very precisely. Where the Hebrew verb only knows two tenses the Greek verb has three – including a separate tense for the present. And within these tenses there are again lots of ways to indicate each isolated point in time related to the standpoint of the subject in the sentence. Moreover particles differ with the function of each element in the sentence so that the relations between subject, object, and so on can be established in a very exact way. This Greek precision, which has principally functioned as the model for many ages of Western thinking has its counterpart in the almost visible closure of established systems of thought, be it metaphysical, ontological, natural, social or ethical. So the Greek perspective out of which reality was studied and described was a very humane one. Living in the geocentric worldview man was one with the universe, lived within the truth, the truth was attainable if hu-

man reason was used correctly. Not everything was clear yet but would be in time. Plato and Aristotle continued on this trail although they differed in their starting point.

### **Plato's rehabilitation of the myth**

In the Academy, the school that he had founded just outside of Athens and named after the Greek hero Academus, Plato (428-347) instructed his students on knowledge with a myth.

Imagine, he said, a cave deep under the ground and far away from daylight. The only light in the cave comes from a fire burning near the back wall of the cave. In front of the opposite wall a bunch of prisoners is tight on a bench. Their feet, hands and heads are also tight up so that they only have one option in their miserable life and that is to look at the wall and watch what is happening there. Between the prisoners and the fire there is little wall hiding people who are walking up and down holding up all kinds of carved images of cows, birds, people, trees, etcetera. The light of the burning and flickering fire then projects vague shadows of the moving carvings on the wall facing the prisoners. While this is all they get to see in their lives the prisoners think that real life is made up of what they see on the wall. Now, imagine that someone unties the prisoners' heads, so that they may look around. The first thing they see behind them are the moving carvings above the little wall and they realize what they had always been watching on their own wall and had considered as true life were only shadows of something more real. Then the prisoners' hands and feet are untied and they are free to move around. Once they reach the space behind the little wall they discover that the carvings do not have a life of their own, but are dead images, moved up and down by other people. So the carvings too must also represent something more real. In their search for the real thing behind the shadows they find a long and curvy stairway leading out of the cave. On their way up, the weak light of the burning fire in the cave is gradually replaced by beams of sunlight coming from outside. Some are reluctant to proceed and turn back. Others continue their search. But once they set foot in the outside world they are completely blinded by broad daylight and cannot see a thing. Only gradually their eyes – used to the flickering light of the fire in the cave – adapt to the new situation. And then they see what the images had represented, real trees, real animals, people, birds, etc. Happy with their new life the prisoners don't even think of returning to the cave, but they are sent there on a mission to liberate other prisoners who stayed behind.

And then Plato asked, how do you think the missionaries will feel back down there in the dark cave. They will have great difficulties in adjusting to the shadowy reality, which they know now to be a faint reflection of how the world really looks like. When they will start telling about the real world their misery will grow even worse as nobody down there believes them and no one wants to follow them into freedom. They will prefer the comfort of their dark prison and will try to kill anyone who wants to lead them out of there. The eye in this myth, Plato explains (Koolschijn, 1988, 187/8)<sup>3</sup>, can be compared to the human psyche. The world observed by the senses is a dungeon represented by the cave; the light of the fire in the cave stands for the power of the sun. When the psyche ascends to the world of thought, it is climbing the long and difficult stairway out of the cave. Out there I expect to find true value and only god will know if this value will correspond to reality. But after long and hard efforts in the world of thought and knowledge this value will become transparent. And one will have to conclude that this value is apparently the cause of all that is just and good: that it has produced in the observable world the light, and the cause of light, and that it is central in the world of thought and makes insights in the truth possible. And one will also have to understand that without this value it will be impossible to organize one's own personal or social life. However, the efforts made in the observable world to do so are numerous and call for pity.

What is real, eternal, or immutable? The pre-Socratics had searched in nature. For Empedocles the four elements had this everlasting character, for Democritus it was the atom. Socrates searched in the human reality for norms that were absolutely and universally valid. Plato However, tried to combine the natural and the human reality in a new theory. For him the natural reality was principally a "flowing" reality - in the spirit of Heraclitus - without any eternal, immutable quality. But the astonishing feature in nature was that it could reproduce itself in more or less the same forms. Although there are many differences between horses a horse will never reproduce itself as a monkey. So somewhere there must exist an ideal, immutable form "horse", a mold by which nature can reproduce the same species again and again with only minor differences between the individuals. The "idea" horse however cannot be observed directly, only grasped by reason. The same principle applies to morals and law. Somewhere there has to exist an ideal law, a universally valid norm that people can live by. And so if we use our reason well, we can try to find these laws and build a just society. Thus, Plato thought to have found the principle to find the eternally good, the eter-

nally beautiful and the eternally true. It was to be found in the World of Ideas, not by using our senses - we will only perceive the “flowing and impermanent states of affairs - but by using our reason that will lead us to true knowledge of the eternal and immutable forms that mould reality. Humans belong to both realities: the changing body to the flowing world of the senses, the immortal soul to the eternal world of ideas.

In *Phaedre* Plato has Socrates reflect on the World of Ideas, justice as it is in itself, wisdom as it is in itself, science as it is in itself in a discussion with Parmenides. He situates this World of Ideas outside the universe, the place above the heavens that has not yet been celebrated by our poets and will never be celebrated with enough dignity. And yet we have to dare talk about it because it also belongs to the realm of truth (Thonnard, 1946, 41). And in the same line of reasoning also the existence of God - ideal form of the gods - as the first principle that brings movement to all other things is concluded from the existence of the immortal soul that Plato also defines as the substance that can move all by itself and governs all movements on the earth and in heaven as well (Thonnard, 1946, 61-66). However, most people are perfectly content – according to Plato – to live in the sensory world of shadows. Only some let themselves be guided by the memory of their immortal soul of the world of ideas, of something more real that the flickering projections bring back to mind. These few - the philosophers - should be given great responsibility to build the just and righteous state.

From a postmodern point of view, the universe has no final barriers. There is always a beyond in relation to the known or suspected reality and thus reality as a whole is not meaningful. Knowledge even becomes suspect in a negative sense. For Plato the known or supposed reality was defined, limited as you wish, by reason. Even though the World of Ideas is not yet known completely - I expect to find true value, but only god will know if this value will correspond to reality - it can be explored thanks to “reason”. The journey of the mind from the mythical world through the world of the senses to the World of Ideas, from superstition through the experience of the flowing elements to the contemplation of the sublime and everlasting forms - that Plato called the dialectical process (Thonnard, 1946, 46) - is an exciting adventure. But Plato was so obsessed with the ideal immutable form that he seemed to forget about the flowing world of the senses in which the human mind also resides. Because the ideal forms cannot be grasped by the senses



our knowledge of the abstract ideas is totally dependent on the “reasonable definition” of these eternal forms by the (limited) human mind. The mythical truth of the changing and quarreling gods on the Olympus is replaced by true unchanging knowledge (*épistèmè*) of the eternal and ideal forms. However, a new myth is born, the myth of the sophisticated mind enlightened by reason separating the mind completely from the senses and leaving plenty of room for and even becoming liable to the speculations of the immortal soul - even when guided by “divine” reason but imperfect memory - about the sublime forms “as they are in themselves”. From now on these are the models that give the criteria for our decisions on what is true, good and beautiful. For Aristotle However, it was precisely this speculation concerning the basis of “true” knowledge that formed a big problem in Plato’s theory and therefore he started his exploration in the empirical world that could be grasped by the senses.

### **Aristotle’s categories**

The Italian painter Raphael (1483-1520) painted Plato and Aristotle descending the stairs before the Forum in Athens. Plato is depicted pointing with his finger upward while Aristotle points downward. Rafael gave the generally accepted interpretation of the controversy of these two perhaps greatest thinkers of Western philosophy. Plato the metaphysical thinker who derives in a deductive way the whole of reality from an ideal world of perfect “ideas” and Aristotle, the empirical thinker, starting in the world of the senses who proceeds in an inductive way to end up with great theories on reality as a whole.

Aristotle (384-322) did not believe in something like Innate Ideas, Plato’s perfect forms that were superior to the sensory world. The idea or form of a horse might be eternal and immutable, but did not have an existence of its own. It was simply a concept that summed up all the characteristics of a horse that man had created and linked to the horse after having seen many different horses. Thus man created with his mind a category “horse”, with all the characteristics that horses have in common, relying on his senses. The eternal form of things is not to be found outside but inside each creature making up its peculiar characteristics – exactly as it is stated by modern phenomenology. The real horse is as inseparable from its form as the body from the soul. Nature is the real world. For Aristotle the highest reality was not made of ideal forms that we imagine with our reason as reflected by our immortal soul, but what we perceive with our senses – the soul reflecting

what is in nature. What is innate is not the perfect Idea, but the power of reason – man’s most distinguishing characteristic - that helps us to organize all sorts of observations of reality into categories and classes.

So for Aristotle form is tied to the world of the senses. Many different things have different forms, but Aristotle was not satisfied with a completely unstable “flowing” reality that is totally unpredictable. He kept looking for some kind of unity. And so for him reality consisted of many different “things” in which form and substance are united. Substance then is what things are made of and form is what they have become. Now, it is tempting to consider substance as the general entity that form uses to create a new individual. But that would be too Platonic. Actually it is just the other way round. Form is the general principle of characteristics belonging to a certain class of things, animals or persons; and, although it is found inside each individual, it is considered as part of the *universalia*. Substance, on the other hand, as the material of which each a “thing” is made, is linked to the individual and considered as part of the *particularia*. Gaarder explains: when a horse dies its substance is still there – its corps – but its form has vanished – moving elegantly, breathing gently, carrying men and burden (Gaarder, 1996, 108). And now form appears more as an outside than as an inside feature.

Aristotle links substance to the subject and proper name, form to more general concepts like predicate and adjective (Russell, 1984, 164). Thinking in an Aristotelian way form gives unity to a certain amount of material. So with form we can categorize reality. There is dead inorganic material and living organic material. The organic material can be divided in plants, animals and humans. Animals can be divided in vertebrates and non-vertebrates, and the vertebrates into mammals and non-mammals. Mammals are manifold, and horses belong to this category. There are big horses and ponies, thorough bred and cold blood, in different sizes in each group. Let’s take a thorough bred pony. We have the New Forester, the Dartmoor, and many more. Within each category we have free time and sports ponies. My daughter has a New Forester sports pony, and this pony matches all the criteria to be able to enter the competition. But her pony has more characteristics. Not only is she very clean in her stable, but pony Evita is extremely calm and responsive when my daughter, Deborah, is with her. She can do with that pony what others cannot and never will, because the pony trusts its rider completely. And this characteristic - Evita’s trust in Deborah – makes this

pony unique to my daughter. Now, is this uniqueness still a matter of universal form? Or is it particular substance?

In other words, we can categorize until we reach a particular individual, but where in all this should we draw the precise dividing line between form and substance. The same question can be asked of form in relation to other concepts. Form and content for instance. Thanks to form content can become a concrete thing. Every thing has to be limited and this limitation constitutes its form. Now “form” is situated at the outside of concrete particular things, seems to give unity to a certain amount of material and is not an inside characteristic that directs a certain substance into a concrete material person, animal or thing. However, Aristotle also holds that the form of a thing is its essence and primary substance. Content without form is only potentiality. Therefore, form as primary substance and independent of content through which it acquires concreteness is – like Plato’s idea – more real than content. And here Plato’s world of ideas re-enters through the backdoor. The ideal forms to be discerned in all living beings and dead things are more real than the concrete things themselves. “The soul is the form of the body” is another one of Aristotle’s expressions that situate the form inside, meaning that the soul gives unity to the body, its goals and other elements that are connected with a growing organism. The soul however cannot function separately from the body - just like an eye cannot see without a body to support it – and will die when the body does as was held by Democritus. But then again Aristotle distinguishes between soul and spirit that takes part in the divine spirit and will continue its existence also after a person has died. So there has to be a final or first cause behind all material and psychic change and movement – God the unmoved Mover. Everything in nature has a purpose and we can comprehend this necessity with our divine reason. Finally, the term “essence” is not as unambiguous as it seems to be as well: that what I am by my own nature, what I cannot lose without losing my identity. But not only individuals have an essence also species have. Again one could ask where is the dividing line beyond which the identity is lost? Russell may be right when he says that Aristotle combines Platonic metaphysics with sound common sense and that makes him very difficult to understand. Especially when he deals with vague concepts like substance and essence – that sound like unchanging, immutable, measurable, but are linked to the most “flowing” element of the whole system i.e. the individual – clear distinctions are no longer possible (Russell, 1984, 162).

As we have seen many of the Platonic topics are picked up but viewed from a different angle by biologist Aristotle. He is the practical thinker that starts in the world of the senses but is not always consistent in his terminology while drawing the big lines. Nevertheless his influence was enormous in the time to come<sup>4</sup>. Politics: the free individual is as dependent on his community or *polis* as the eye from its sustaining body. Ethics: always find “the golden mean” between two extreme opposites: enough is not too much and not too little. In logic we find the famous Aristotelian syllogisms. The perfect syllogism, related to *scientia*, using axioma’s like: “A does not equal – A” (in sharp contrast with for instance Parmenides and Far Eastern thinking where the senses only perceive illusions) demonstrates necessity. The imperfect syllogism, related to *opinio*, demonstrates probability like “A may equal B”. Perfect syllogisms require nothing, apart from what is comprised in it, to make the necessary conclusion apparent; imperfect syllogisms require additional proposition that follow from the terms in the syllogism but are not comprised in it (Slob, 2002, 70; DR, 36)<sup>5</sup>. And the latter derive their validity from the former. Furthermore, Aristotle developed ten logical categories as operators in his syllogisms: substance, quantity, quality, relation, place, time, position, condition, action and affection.

Using all his insights in physics and in rhetoric, Aristotle has set the scene for Western thinking during the whole Middle Age period. The Greek term for nature *phusis* means something else than what we usually understand in the word nature. It is more than a set of laws that describe the ways of nature. In *phusis* also the “innate” goal of each specimen is present - the seed already carries the tree it will eventually become - and the driving will behind this development. Moreover animals, humans and the gods in heaven represented by the stars form the top of nature’s hierarchy because they move all by themselves. The most perfect movements can be seen in the circular movements of the stars around the round globe of the earth. Now, Aristotle thought that all planets and objects at this side of the moon were made of the basic elements water, air, fire and earth, but beyond the line demarcated by the orbit of the moon all objects were made of a fifth element – a quint-essence - that was stable, eternal and immutable. What caused nature’s movements at both sides of the demarcation line was the will of the unmoved Mover - God. The further away from planet earth and the nearer to the gods the more perfect the movements were and the balance of the constituting elements. And so Aristotle built a comprehensive system in which nature’s changes were in perfect equilibrium with a stable immutable power

that was at rest eternally. This worldview reigned until two thousand years later when Copernicus, Galilei and Newton discovered that not the earth is the center of the universe but the sun, that the movements of the stars are not as perfect as Aristotle would have them, and that nothing in the universe is eternal, but that every planet and star has a beginning and an end.

When it comes to rhetoric truth is at stake. Aristotle gave a definition of truth in which being has *ontological priority* over saying: “to say of what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true” (Slob, 2002, 68; DR, 34). Now, for being to coincide with saying you need a certain commensurability between the two and this is given in the notion of the *logos*, pervading both the ontic rationality of being and - in its meaning of the Greek word for “word” - the saying as well. *Épistèmè* – perfect unchanging and even absolute knowledge of what is eternal - is the result. Aristotle tried to gain access to this knowledge with his categories. Although the term “category” is not a univocal term – being applicable to both nature and to logic in two forms, necessity and probability – it is the only operator that can capture what is eternal, changeless. And thus he considers the categorical syllogism as producing genuine knowledge or *épistèmè*, the validity of imperfect syllogisms being derivative from and reducible to the perfect ones. The world is made up of essences and so is our thinking. And it is precisely this “sameness” of essences that constitutes world and mind and makes them one. However, this sameness reflected by the *logos* can be corrupted by selfishness, vice and wrong opinions. Therefore, virtue is promoted because virtue leads to wisdom, and wisdom as the highest of goods is the gateway to truth and righteousness. “*Scientia* derived its normative force from the *logos* that penetrated both the order of being and syllogistic reasoning, but *opinio* also derived its normative force from the *logos*-doctrine. Wisdom purified human *logos*: better people had a better access to truth” (Slob, 2002, 73; DR, 39). So some people had better access to truth than others, but the latter are supported by the authority of the former and may therefore share in the purified human *logos* as well.

The ancient Greeks had learned from the Sophist that the spoken word may become empty and even dangerous when it is related to power without real authority. In that case *opinio* is falsely presented as *scientia*. Therefore, Aristotle connected rhetoric or the *technè* of persuasion – in court, the forum, and other public arenas - with the production of proof. This production is not merely reproducing what the senses have found, this would restrict rhetoric too much to probability and *opinio*. Also something new is created in order

to bind rhetoric proof to necessity and *scientia* as well. Although the logical basis of the rhetoric proof that Aristotle demands for the public arena is more closely related to existential probability than mathematical necessity it surpasses mere contingency. Aristotelian rhetoric is therefore not restricted to amusement or flattery of a public for one's own purposes but serves in its own way the search and discovery of truth in a philosophic and speculative way (Ricœur, 1975, 17, 41)<sup>6</sup>. One might even consider the whole Aristotelian project comprising metaphysics, logic, physics, ethics, politics, rhetoric, although it started very down to earth, as an interplay of necessity and probability in syllogistic reasoning, granted reliability by *logos*.<sup>7</sup>

In either way, the rather common prejudice concerning Plato being the deductively reasoning metaphysical dreamer and Aristotle the sober inductively proceeding empiricist has to be adjusted. Plato's myth of the ideal world of perfect forms was induced by the concrete world around him and Aristotle derived the validity of his imperfect syllogisms from the perfect ones. Moreover Plato the mathematician relied much more on categories of necessity and imposed them on reality than Aristotle ever did. The latter felt himself much more forced by reality – inorganic and organic - to admit probability in his thinking. However, both of them did not conceive of a space, reality or realm that could not be reached and explored by human – that is Platonic or Aristotelian – vision nor reason. How could they, since the world of human mind and the world of universal being were still one? Regret it or not, for Christian theology both philosophers have had tremendous influence in the millennia to come.

### **Greek philosophy in mediaeval Christianity**

Aristotle more or less marked the end of an extremely creative period in human thinking in ancient Greece. After him the Cynics, the Sceptics, Epicureans and Stoics continued meditating about universal coherence and important things in life, but they didn't come up with anything really new. And so Plato and Aristotle could continue to influence thinkers in the ages to come. Plato has been more influential in the Christian world (St. Augustine and St. Anselm of Canterbury) than in the Islamic realm where Aristotle has always been the provider of basic thought patterns (cf. Leezenberg, 2001, 26-43)<sup>8</sup>. However, Aristotle also made his entry in the Christian world from about the

eleventh century C.E. through Arab influence in Spain and thinkers like St. Thomas Aquinas.

### **St. Augustine and original sin**

Time is a weird thing. We live in the present, but when you really think about it, the present does not exist at all. St. Augustine (354 – 430 CE) gave some serious thought to this enigma. He writes “when someone asks me about time I know, but when I want to explain it I don’t know anymore”. And he is right. When I say “now”, the word has sounded in an indivisible moment of time, may even echo for a long time afterwards, but at the moment it is expressed it already belongs to the past. So if we do not live in the present what is left? We cannot go back in time and repeat our lives. The past may have a certain importance, but is totally irrelevant if it doesn’t help me to make my decisions here and now. But then again if we turn to the future the problem even grows bigger. There is nothing more unreal for the human mind contemplating in the present than the things to come. There are so many variables that may influence the course of affairs, and that simply cannot be taken into account, that you have to conclude complete uncertainty of any expectation of future developments. St. Augustine found a remarkable solution that respects the Biblical linear course of time from past through present to future, but concentrates it in the present consciousness of man. He distinguishes between the present of the past – memory, the present of the present – experience, and the present of the future - expectation. With this move St. Augustine lays full emphasis on the present human consciousness of reality. This does not turn reality into a virtual reality without substance. Time – how ever mysterious it may be - is an important element of reality and that what happens and remains in time cannot be denied. However, it does change the balance in favor of human consciousness in the sense that reality is only of any importance in so far that human consciousness of it is possible. But this consciousness will always contain a mysterious realm as well because there is a limit to philosophical knowledge and beyond this limit consciousness is a matter of faith.

Now for the old Greeks, time – as well as space - had always existed and in this system God could be considered as the impersonal principle of First or Unmoved Mover. St Augustine followed the Biblical picture in which God had created everything - including time and space – out of nothing, the *creatio ex nihilo* and at the same time closely connected thereby to the Greek

idea of First Mover. God does not exist *in* time. He exists in an eternal present, and although He created time for man to live in, He is not subjected to time schemes and cannot be captured in any time schedule. He created the universe in perfect harmony according to “ideas” that existed in his own realm and here comes in Plato’s world of ideas. Thoroughly influenced by the Gnosticism and Neoplatonism of his time St. Augustine located Plato’s world of ideas in the Divine Mind and thus he further Christianized Plato’s philosophy.<sup>9</sup> However, he did give it a highly original turn. St. Augustine was haunted by the idea of evil – he had experienced the emptiness of sensual life himself as can be read in his *Confessiones* – and he saw the perfection of the human mind and will and with that the entire human race completely lost by the fall of man into evil and sin. Being eternally present God knows how man’s life will develop, but this does not take away man’s responsibility and free will. Predestination is one of St Augustine’s beloved themes. Most people subjected to the senses live a sinful life and will be damned. Some of them – living a spiritual life - will be saved from damnation, according to God’s free will. Man has a body that is subject to matter and decay, but he also has a soul with which he can know God. And although there is an insurmountable barrier between God and the world, the Kingdom of God and the Kingdom of the world struggle for mastery in each person. In this struggle the Church representing the Kingdom of God will eventually prevail.

And so we come to St. Augustine’s most famous and debated idea of original sin as an inborn tendency. Ricœur explains this concept in its quality of a rational symbol that operates more or less as a metaphor. Two worlds that do not belong together and even collide – the biological and the juridical – are brought together in one concept. The collisions of these two worlds - life in predetermined forms and the free will - that result from collecting them in one concept, cause a shock to the interpreting mind and opens the mind to the real mysteries of evil. This mystery is so great that man will never be able to solve it, deserving salvation all by himself. He will need the even greater mystery of God’s free Divine grace to be saved from evil - God sending his only Son to die on the cross to take away the sins of the world. And here St. Augustine moves away emphatically from both Gnosticism with its reign of *gnosis* (knowledge) and Pelagius and his reign of the free will, stretching as far as the realm of salvation from evil (Ricœur, 1969, 265 ff)<sup>10</sup>.

So, St. Augustine further intensified the use of Plato’s philosophy in Christian faith. He picks up Plato’s thoughts of the world of ideas and of the soul



that can know God. Plato thought that as time had always existed, God as the impersonal principle of First Mover gave form to some sort of elementary matter that existed as well, whereas St. Augustine – following the Biblical picture of Genesis – held that a personal God not only gave form to but also created this elementary matter. Closely connected to the principle of First Mover St. Augustine nevertheless maintains a distinction. For him the ideal forms are not induced from existing reality, but reality was created long ago by the living, eternally present, triune God of the Bible - following the ideal forms in his own Divine Mind - and will be brought to its perfect destination in the future. And maybe man - fallen into evil but living a life of faith within the Church - will be part of this divine salvation. And yet it remains questionable whether St Augustine's theological system is so very different from Plato's philosophical system ...

### **St. Anselm of Canterbury's faithful intellect**

Does God exist? For Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) this was not a question, because in his faith he was sure that God exists without beginning and without end. But how can we establish His existence rationally, how can we know that He does exist? Centuries have gone by and it has become clear that there is more “between heaven and earth” than our philosophical investigations can establish as *épistèmè* - immutable, never changing knowledge. But can this surplus be established reasonably, maybe even proved rationally? St Anselm gave it a try with his ontological “proof” of God's existence. Faith for him was not only a floating consciousness of the realm that surpassed rational knowledge. He describes faith as *fides quaerens intellectum* - faith searching for comprehension. For him God is “something greater than which nothing can be thought”.

Now, you can approach St. Anselm as a scholar searching for a critical philosophical minimum or as a believer searching for a faithful theological maximum. The first impression one gets from his writings (as in *Proslogion*) is that he is the believer asking God for understanding in long prayers. And yet he tries to prove God's existence rationally. So for St. Anselm faith and criticism were very close. Steel holds that since St. Anselm describes God as “*something*” he is not speaking as the believer looking for a more intimate and personal relation with God but as the philosopher looking for a rational system in which a higher entity can function that can later be filled in with the triune God of the Bible (Steel, 1981, 50)<sup>11</sup>. And indeed in a complicated

argument – drawing heavily on the *absurdum* – St. Anselm proves that that which exists in the intellect must exist also in reality. In short: if that something greater than which nothing can be thought only existed in the intellect and not in reality than one can *think* that it is also in reality which is greater; and so something greater than that something “greater than which nothing can be thought” *can* be thought and just that is impossible, absurd. So this “something” must exist in the intellect and in reality. But then again St. Anselm says in one of his prayers that he wouldn’t dare to compare his intellect with the Highness of God and he asks humbly for a little understanding making him the believer again (Thonnard, 1946, 295). And further, he asserts that God is not only that something greater than which nothing can be thought, but also something greater than what can be thought (Steel, 1981, 91). But this second something is also God and so St. Anselm can concentrate on what can be followed by the faithful intellect.

St. Anselm picks up some themes that St. Augustine had worked on before him and elaborates them further. We already saw that God has no beginning and no end and therefore is eternally present. Another theme is the problem of evil that St. Augustine answered with his concept of predestination. St. Anselm now comes up with his theory of satisfaction, slightly different, drawing more heavily on the rationally understandable righteousness and goodness of God. Sin is not to recognize the subordination of our guilty will under the perfect will of God, to rob Him of what is rightfully His. God’s honor not only requires the restitution of what is being robbed but also a compensation, atonement or satisfaction of being robbed. To deny God this compensation would mean to hurt His honor, righteous order, His divine righteousness. Man is too much enwrapped in sin and evil to give such a *satisfactio* and thus only punishment and damnation remain. But damnation of His beloved Creation is not possible for God, and so only satisfaction is left as a possible solution. And while only God himself – being free of evil - can give this satisfaction, the Son of God takes care of this job. By giving his life voluntarily on the cross he gives God a satisfaction of infinite value that God in return will reward by making mankind heir of this value (Heussi, 1979, 200)<sup>12</sup>.

In St. Anselm, rationality and spirituality meet and intermingle in a highly original way. With St. Augustine he accepted the *creatio ex nihilo* and thus he did not start his thinking in an impersonal principle of First Mover of some pre-existent elementary matter – that the ancient Greek philosophers assumed – but in the personal Creator of this matter, the triune God of the

Bible. And likewise the redemption of evil is not in the hands of man but has to be directed by God. However, for both St. Augustine and St. Anselm, God placed in Plato's "world of ideas" has been an important starting point for their – deductive – system of thought, even more than it has ever been for Plato himself. And, even though St. Anselm admits that mysterious aspects of God can be thought that escape human reason and faith, it is the human – intellectual and faithful - consciousness that continues to set the frame of reference of our knowledge of reality.

### **St. Thomas Aquinas' intellectual faith**

It is time to descend once again from the Divine world of ideas, with its ideal forms and the spiritual struggles of good and bad, to the down to earth reality that people live in. St. Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) made this move and he relied heavily on Aristotle in doing so. He used the Aristotelian system of categories – from inorganic matter through plants, animals, humans and angels way up to God - and Aristotelian logics – the distinction between the logics of necessity and probability. In all this he wanted to make clear that faith and reason did not have to contradict each other.

When ascending the categorical hierarchy the available knowledge of God grows. For man, equipped with natural reason, there are two ways to attain knowledge of God – the path of faith, i.e. the Christian Revelation of the Bible and the path of reason. The path of faith is the surest because when using reason alone one can be easily led astray. However, the two paths need not contradict each other because there are some natural theological truths that can be demonstrated as being necessarily valid. Different books tell different things according to the expertise and interest of the author. A history book on Alexander the Great will tell other features of horses than a book on horse breeding will do. Then again by just reading the book you still don't know much about the author. You will have to read an autobiography to get acquainted with the personal circumstances of the author himself. Well then, reading the book of nature – Creation as we know it - we can acquire some knowledge of its author – God the Creator - by using our senses and reason. We even can prove the existence of God and the immortality of the soul. But if we want to know more about God we will have to read his autobiography. In God's self-revelation in the Bible, we can learn all we want about the trinity, the incarnation, the judgment day, etc. And so man disposes of a theology of faith and a natural theology to know God.

Man is privileged above all other living creatures with goals in themselves, that he can dispose of these two paths to know God and to live according to his will. However, this knowledge does not come all by itself, man has to struggle to attain it. And some are more intelligent and use their power of reasoning better than others who can rely on their faith. The angels do not know this struggle because they have no natural and mortal bodies like humans. They are pure reason and have direct access to the eternal knowledge of God. And above all this is God himself. He can see and know everything in one single coherent vision (Gaarder, 1996, 185) as He is not subjected to our category of time in his eternal presence.

How then can we prove God's existence with natural reason? St Thomas uses five paths or proofs to attain this knowledge, relying on Aristotelian categories of logic. There has to be something that starts all movement – an unmoved Mover. There has to be a first Cause of everything. There has to be a source of Necessity. There has to be an absolute Perfection as source of all sorts of perfections we find in our reality. These four proofs build on the impossibility of infinite regression – every series must have a beginning. As for the inorganic matter that has no innate goal, they nevertheless serve a goal and someone must direct them to this goal (Russell, 1984, 412/3). And so St. Thomas demonstrated the necessary existence of God – also known as the cosmological proof of God's existence – who fulfills all the claims that reason can present on a natural basis.

In doing so nature regained its positive even spiritual notion of being created by the God of the Bible instead of being sinfully subjected to lust and material decay. This will be of utmost importance in the developments to come, especially the one we call the Renaissance. But in my opinion St. Thomas, although he has become the hero of the Roman Catholic Church, has also been of tremendous importance for the Reformation, more orientated on St. Anselm. Russell has no great esteem for St. Thomas as a philosopher – he has not much genuine philosophical spirit (Russell, 1984, 419) – and his only originality may have been the revitalization of Aristotle's thoughts for the Christian faith. Nevertheless he has served a certain kind of emancipation of the human mind from a dark world of sin, superstition and subordination to all kinds of authority towards a more positive and healthy attitude as far as human possibilities and capacities in faith and reason are concerned. We see the sharpening contours of the subject show up against a clearing but still enveloping sky.

It should be clear by now that Greek thinking has thoroughly influenced medieval Christianity. Although each church father had his own favorite philosophies and used them in his own peculiar way, they were all deeply indebted to Greek thought as expressed by Plato and Aristotle. The Biblical faith in God who created heaven and earth *ex nihilo* may have deepened the awareness of the mysteries of evil and grace but they are still described by means of Greek terminology and within the logical space provided by *logos*. However, the premodern worldview is about to be replaced ...

### **Evaluation of the premodern worldview**

The premodern stage of Western thought can be characterized by the univocal Ptolemaic or geocentric worldview, easy to visualize, simple at the outset and closed in itself. In this worldview the earth was the center of the universe and all the planets – including the sun – circled around it in perfect circular orbits. Man as center of the earth was destined to cultivate a reasonable and faithful relation with the gods and to live a morally perfect life. Many ways to obtain knowledge of the gods or God and his perfect will were available and truth was principally held to be accessible. This worldview survived as the important ancient Greek philosophical themes were Christianized by the early church fathers already living in a thoroughly hellenized atmosphere. They may have emphasized the mysteries of evil and sin, the even greater mystery of God's free and graceful will, God as Creator of elementary matter, and time as a created category, still God and his Divine mind relating to his creation were accessible and provided a firm ground for man to live on. Not subjected to the time-schedules humans live in, God is nevertheless eternally present and thus accessible for man. Let us turn to Wouter Slob for further explanation about the character of the logical system that dominated the premodern era.

In Greek philosophy the notion of *ontological a priori* turns up when it comes to truth, something in virtue of which we hold our believes to be true or false. Wouter Slob gives Aristotle's definition of truth to clarify this notion of *ontological a priori*: "to say what is that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true". Slob now distinguishes between factual truth: "that what is", and extensional truth: "to say that it is" (Slob, 2002, 68/9; DR 34/5). For the ancient Greeks, truth is that these two truths, factual and extensional, being

and saying coincide. In this, nature has priority over human experience, being and saying share some sameness and signs representing the truth have secondary status. In other words factual truth has ontological priority over, is *a priori* in relation to extensional truth. Now, for being to coincide with saying you need a certain commensurability between the two and this is given in the notion of *logos*, pervading both the ontic rationality of being and - in its meaning of the Greek word for “word” – the saying as well. It is *logos* that makes *épistèmè*, perfect unchanging and even absolute knowledge of what is eternal, possible.

Now, as we have seen, Aristotle tried to gain access to this knowledge with his categories. Although the term “category” is not a univocal term – being applicable to both nature and logic in two forms, necessity and probability – it is the only operator that can capture what is eternal, changeless. And thus he considers the categorical syllogism as producing genuine knowledge or *épistèmè*. As we saw, Aristotle distinguishes between perfect and imperfect syllogisms. Perfect syllogisms require nothing apart from what is comprised in it, to make the necessary conclusion apparent; imperfect syllogisms require additional propositions that follow from the terms in the syllogism but are not comprised in it. Now, the validity of imperfect syllogisms is derivative from and reducible to the perfect ones. Aristotle does show by giving many examples *that* his perfect syllogisms are valid, but not *why* they are so. There is no external instance whatsoever that grants them validity. On the contrary their validity is internal, self-identical, non dependant of an external arbiter. The unity of being and saying that they reflect is taken for granted. If the world is intelligible it must be understandable by man equipped with rationality and reason. No need to distinguish between objectivity and subjectivity. The world is made up of essences and so is our thinking. And it is precisely this “sameness” of essences that constitutes world and mind and makes them one. However, this sameness reflected by the *logos* can be corrupted by selfishness, vice and wrong opinions. Therefore, virtue – *alètheia* – is promoted because virtue leads to wisdom, and wisdom as the highest of goods is the gateway to truth and righteousness.

For Aristotle truth was not a problem. The order of being determined the structure of reality and thinking. And truth determined the validity of the syllogisms, directly in the perfect ones and indirectly in the imperfect ones. Truth was never put at a distance, being as a separate abstract notion in itself was absent: being was always being something. And genuine knowledge may have been stable and unchanging but not a-temporal: Aristotelian

knowledge is expressed with occasion sentences. Truth was all around, not hidden somewhere but simply and directly available. That something is and that it is said it is are one. Truth cannot be fundamentally inaccessible. Man lived *within the logical space of truth*. (Slob, 2002, 71/2; DR, 37/8). And this logical space of truth was the *logos*, in which being and saying form a unity and in which morality stimulates the participation in truth.

This ancient Greek, Aristotelian logical space of truth had important consequences for the Christian Faith. First of all, there is the *logos* concept that played such an important role in the ancient Greek notions of truth. The being of eternal and cosmic structures and the naming of these structures by the human mind that coincide in the *logos* concept was first applied to Christ in the Gospel of John. In the prelude to his Gospel John writes: in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. In Christ as the *Logos* - the Word - the everlasting truth that pervades everything is present. He is the universal truth that encompasses all reality and provides for its ultimate unity. In the *Logos* universal structures of being and the particular ways of naming these structures come together. And so Jesus becomes for John: the way, the truth, and life. In this, we can reason along the lines of necessity of the perfect syllogisms that root in the being of things (*scientia*) and along the lines of probability of the imperfect syllogisms, credibility of a claim on the basis of a certain authority (*opinio*). Both lines derive their normativity from the *logos*, as the structures of reality were determined by the order of being and the validity of perfect and imperfect syllogisms was determined by accessible truth. “*Scientia* derived its normative force from the *logos* that penetrated both the order of being and syllogistic reasoning, but *opinio* also derived its normative force from the *logos*-doctrine. Wisdom purified human *logos*: better people had better access to truth” (Slob, 2002, 73; DR 39). So some people had better access to truth than others, but the latter are supported by the authority of the former and may therefore share in the purified human *logos* – absorbed in *Logos* Christ - as well.

Closely connected to this ancient Greek *logos* concept is the premodern *typological* reading of the Bible. Here the same combination of universal reality and particular thinking or knowledge is at work as in the *logos* concept. “Typology involves that the stories in the Bible *both* refer to their own historic meaning *and* display the truth as revealed in Christ” (Slob, 2002, 73; DR, 39). Literal and figurative meanings can be easily combined because the truth is one and accessible. And thus the unity of the Scriptures could be

maintained, early stories and personalities being a figure of the later one related to Christ, who was the essence of all structures of being. But not only the Old Testament stories were included in *Logos* Christ, also the reality of the ancient Greek philosophers and Christian mediaeval theologians was overarched by the same truth - operative in the *logos* concept - that held Old and New Testament together. "History had no autonomous existence outside the Biblical narrative, because there was nothing outside the universal truth as depicted in the Bible. ... It was impossible to ask after the historical truth of the Bible because it was the Bible that set the stage. In like manner, it was impossible to question the truth of Christ. The *logos* set the stage and there was no "place" from which this truth could be scrutinized. ... The Aristotelian, premodern truth provided the logical space and could for that reason not be problematic. ... Typology consisted of understanding a unity in which one oneself took part."(Slob, 2002, 74; DR, 40)

I think Wouter Slob has touched a very important point that cannot be stressed enough. The premodern Ptolemaic or geocentric worldview which served as the frame of reference for the early Christian theology was equipped with the logical space of truth that stemmed from ancient Greek philosophy culminating in the notion of *logos* and syllogistic reasoning. Virtue *alètheia* promotes wisdom *sophia* and thus serves immutable knowledge *épistèmè*. And they become one in the *logos*, the solid house of truth. This closed system of truth around man and his sensible and logical reality in which God was incorporated as well is incommensurable with the Hebrew notion of truth of TeNaCh. There, humans are extremely careful with the divine realm, avoiding to catch the encompassing reality of God in language what eventually and consequently led to the refusal to even pronounce the name of God.

This difference in Greek and Hebrew relations to truth could be related to their different relation to time and space categories. For the old Greeks time had always existed, was some kind of structure or space in which everything was principally open to reason. What was important was to search for that knowledge that did not change during the elapse of time. As a painter they tried to set time still at different moments in order to gain control over changing experienced time and trace the remaining immutable state of affairs in cosmic time. The Greek word for theory, *theorein*, means to see. Greek *epistèmè* employs the eye. And so they developed a language that



could set time still, indicate every precise moment they wanted to, created syllogistic systems that yielded certain knowledge and invented a religion in which the gods or God became visible, even if only in imagination. It is not pure and meaningless coincidence that the blind – and not the deaf – visionary Tiresias told king Œdipus towards the end of his life the real truth about his – exemplary - behavior. The Hebrews on the other hand were not painters but musicians. They employed the ear: *Sjema Jisrael*, “Hear, O Israel: the Lord is our God” (Deuteronomy 6,4). Music can never abstract from time. The number of vibrations of a cord or air that produce a certain tone is expressed in relation to a certain amount of elapsed time. So in music there is no way of putting time at a distance and reign over it. You will have to cooperate with, be *in* time conscientiously to be able to produce a tone. Therefore, for the Hebrews experienced time is much more important than cosmic time. No need for a language to set time still and distinguish sharply between all the tenses. Human life is a flowing reality in which the whole universe – human, natural and Divine – cooperates to produce and hear tones in order to conquer dissonance by means of harmony. No matter how mysterious that may be ...

However, it was not the Hebrew but the Greek notion of truth that persisted in Christian Faith. And this becomes already visible in St. Augustine’s treatment of time. When God creates everything including time out of nothing, then time has a beginning. In that case what was before this beginning, God himself, becomes a much greater mystery than it has ever been. Instead of letting the mystery exist for itself, as the Hebrews did, St. Augustine divides time in the visible structure of past, present and future, and catches the greatest mystery of them all in the middle of his structure: God the eternally present. Okay the mystery has entered our human reality, but it is made visible in the Greek way – safely caught in rational systems pertaining to the ontic reality of evil and redemption and in the grammatical system of the three verbal tenses - but not audible in a Hebrew way, God’s creative voice thundering and breaking through the eras. Furthermore the God of the Bible became the most ideal form of the gods out of which anything else could be visibly, demonstratively derived by the human mind. Parmenides took some primordial substance for granted. St. Augustine wrapped its mysteries up as an eternal present.

I think it is worth noting here that the theologies of St. Augustine, St. Anselm and St. Thomas Aquinas were built on the unity of being and saying that reigned in the solid house of truth called *logos*. The meaning of their re-

spective theologies will change significantly when related to the isolated subject of the modern era. This solid house constituted by an indubitable logical space of accessible truth in which the individual subject felt safe is beginning to show cracks. And the passage to a new era, the modern era, was – again – set into motion by a renewed interest in nature.

## **The modern era, Renaissance to the twentieth century**

The most characteristic trait of the modern era beginning in the fifteenth and sixteenth century with Renaissance and Reformation is the turn to the subject (Slob, 2002, 77; DR, 43/4). St. Thomas had already drawn positive attention to the sensible world, and this new way of dealing with nature was celebrated in the Renaissance. Not only were the thoughts of the classic Greek philosophers “reborn”, there was also renewed belief in the creative powers of individual humans handling nature in sharp contrast to their subordination to the dark powers of fate that reigned the Middle Ages. The Reformation also shows this turn to the subject in its rejection of the Roman Catholic Church as the unique mediator of salvation. Each individual believer should have direct access to the Word of God and be given the opportunity to develop a direct and personal relation with God. And thus Luther started his Bible translations. Later on in the great philosophical currents of modernism this emphasized status of the subject in its epistemological relation to its object will prevail only until Heidegger turns his attention to being as the underlying condition of knowing. However, although the ontological approach may change the idea of the subject, from *in* control towards *under* control, it is still the subject that draws the attention. Why has the subject become so important that it can determine a whole era of philosophizing? I think because the initial enthusiasm is paralleled with uncertainty and doubt because the solid house of truth is tumbling down, or maybe we should say blown away, and the subject is standing out there in the open all by himself.

## **The Copernican shift from the geo- to the heliocentric worldview**

It takes courage and patience when you want to move counter to ideas that have been taken for granted for almost two thousand years. Patience is nee-

ded because of the endless observations and measurements of all kinds of movements in nature. Courage comes in when audacious hypotheses have to be made about the “actual and measurable” state of affairs of the heavens and the earth that cause nightmares to the authorities in church and public life. What caused the most dramatic shock was that Aristotle’s theory of the fifth element – the quintessence – was shot to pieces. As we have seen this theory stated that everything that exists beyond the circular orbit of the moon around the earth was made of this fifth element that was held to be immutable and changeless. Serious observations on the basis of precise measurements, however, now showed that reality beyond this borderline was as changing and instable as it was at this side of the line.

The first scholar who thought in this direction was Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1541), a Polish Roman Catholic priest and astronomer in his free time. He was sincerely dedicated to the orthodoxy and did not really want to upset the Roman Catholic clergy. He also followed many of the ancient Greek axioms that concerned the movements of the stars and planets. And so he believed - the circle being the most perfect geometric form - the heavenly bodies were moving around in circles. However, he also believed in the value of simplicity – he may have been a serious Christian here stressing the value of modesty. Anyway for Copernicus the complicated structure of moving stars and planets was much easier to understand if you accepted that they do not circle around the earth but around the sun. And as far as the earth was concerned Copernicus accepted a twofold rotation, a daily rotation around its own axis and an annual rotation around the sun. This meant that the earth was no longer center of the universe and thus man could no longer have the cosmic significance that Christian theology had always attributed to him. Copernicus however would never have accepted this consequence of his own hypotheses. Nevertheless, the geocentric worldview had to make room for the heliocentric worldview with the sun instead of the earth as the center of all planetary movements, although it would take many more generations before this hypothesis could be proven with adequate measuring instruments and become more generally accepted.

Johannes Kepler (1571-1630) was the first important astronomer who accepted Copernicus’ heliocentric worldview and he provided this hypothesis with several proofs based on patient observation. Kepler developed three laws concerning the movement of the stars: 1) the planets do not move in circular but in elliptical orbits around the sun - the stars no longer move in “divine” patterns; 2) the nearer a planet is to the sun the faster it moves – in

elliptical orbits this causes instability in speed; 3) and for all planets goes that the distance to the sun ( $r$ ) is related to the rotation speed of the planet around the sun ( $T$ ),  $r^3 : T^2 = \text{constant}$  - this law would become the basis of Newton's law of universal gravity.

Then comes Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) who concentrated his attention on acceleration, meaning change of movement both in direction and in speed. In his first law of movement - the law of inertia - he states that all bodies - in space and on earth - left to itself would move in a linear line with a constant speed. This means that there is no need anymore of Aristotle's first principle, the idea of God as unmoved Mover, because everything moves by itself. However, deviations from this linear pattern - in direction or in speed as shown in the elliptical orbits of stars and planets - can be explained by means of some sort of "force". Now, when you see objects fall in a vacuum, no matter how heavy or light they are, it appears that this "force" is also at work, they all have the same acceleration in speed: 9,6 meter per second. This is Galilei's second law of movement, the law of falling objects. In studying the movements of projectiles Galilei combined these two laws and he discovered that the course of canon ball was parabolic, being the resultant of two forces: the horizontal line forward and the vertical line of a falling object. Of course this is very interesting information for a king who is planning warfare. But one more step further and you can explain the elliptical orbit of a planet around the sun as a constant change of movement of the planet on the orbit line both in direction and in speed. And this acceleration is caused by a certain "force" that is being exercised on this planet in its relation to the sun.

It was Isaac Newton (1642-1727) who combined the work of his three predecessors into one new theory: the law of the universal gravity in which a "force" was at work that caused acceleration being all changes in movement, in both direction and speed. Every planet in an elliptical orbit around the sun showed at any moment an acceleration in direction and in speed that was related to the distance between this planet and the sun. And this acceleration also corresponded with the acceleration in direction and in speed of falling objects on earth - that is when you take the air resistance into the account as well. And this led to Newton's law of universal gravity: each object attracts any another object with a force that is directly related to the product of their mass and inversely related to the distance between them. This force attracts the orbiting planets to the sun, the circling moon to the earth, and the falling apple to the ground. With Newton's formulas every movement in the heav-

ens and on earth could be calculated, even the slightest deviations of planetary orbits foreseen.

Russell regrets with great sorrow how the Roman Catholic bureaucracy – especially the Jesuits - continued to frustrate the progress of science and he is happy with the freedom Protestants had gained from its dogmatic supremacy. However, it was more because of lack of an international power structure that science could make more progress in Protestant countries than out of enthusiasm for the new discoveries that were as threatening for the Protestant as they were for the Roman Catholic clergy (Russell, 1984, 476). Russell's skepticism however must be tempered a little because especially Protestantism began to realize that a new problem of interpretation was emerging and therefore stimulated autonomous scientific research to find proves to serve this new field of investigation. Nevertheless, God being more a hypothesis than a necessity and the ancient Greek idea of ideal immutable forms scattered, science flourished as never before. All kinds of instruments were developed to refine further measurements, lenses for telescopes and microscopes, the vacuum pump for vacuous spaces, in mathematics differential and integral calculus was developed to formulate precise changes etc. But not only the natural sciences flourished. In Protestant Holland, where many Jewish refugees fleeing from the Inquisition in Portugal and Spain had settled, Bible scholars started to learn Hebrew from the rabbis and to read the Old Testament in Hebrew. And of course the New Testament had to be read in Greek, as did Luther and Erasmus. Back to the sources and a direct personal relation with God – without mediation by the Church – were the new ideals. And wasn't it a thrilling idea to be able to discover whole new worlds at great distances by means of human reason and fabricate precise instruments to refine and formulate the discoveries with growing precision. The whole universe seemed to be open for man's reason to understand and discover. And man's faith in his reason was so great that he actually thought that he could reach an overall comprehension of it all. However, doubt was on its way as well.

### **Descartes' doubt: I think therefore I am**

I have not been able to find out whether it was out of loyalty to the Church, deep faith, or severe scientific thinking that the exclusively mechanistic

worldview developing in the natural sciences of his time did not satisfy Renee Descartes (1596-1650). When you read his *Discours de la Méthode* or his *Méditations*<sup>13</sup> you will find all three present. He received his education in a Jesuit college and all his life he paid tribute to his teachers and tried to win them for his ideas - without success. He thought of himself in a humble way as an imperfect and tiny little creature in relation to the infinite and perfect God. And yet he was very severe on himself in his endless pursuit of immutable knowledge of perfect truth. In his writings he is not the pedantic teacher but the modest and deeply involved inquirer who – like Socrates – was more convinced of his own not knowing than of his knowing. Descartes did not trust the senses, nor did he trust Aristotle’s logic to yield certain knowledge. For him, they all relied on opinion and probability. In his quest for certain truth he relied more on Plato, St. Augustine and St. Anselm.

The Cartesian ideal was to get rid of the lumber from the past and start anew from “clear and distinct ideas”. To reach these clear and distinct ideas that would yield immutable knowledge of the truth, Descartes started to doubt everything. He had the idea that what would stand this test would be certain truth. Starting with the senses he asked, how can I know for sure that I am sitting comfortably by the fire and not dreaming this, lying in my bed or that some demon makes me hallucinate warmth while I am in reality very cold. The senses give confused and ever changing information of the material world. More solid ground is given by mathematics and geometry. However, there I may make mistakes as well. What cannot be doubted is the simple and intuitively grasped fact that – correctly or falsely – I think. *Cogito ergo sum*, I think therefore I am. So Descartes found the solid ground for his philosophy in his own individual mind and not in the outside world. This meant two things: subjectivism - starting point is what my mind knows - and a complete separation from mind and matter, body and soul. For Aristotle, the soul was the entity that gave form to the body. For Descartes, the body was completely independent from the soul, like two clocks one of which gives the time and the other rings the bell, two different realms that do not interfere. The mind knows truly by intuitively grasping clear and distinct ideas and developing them in more complex structures. This true insight can only be confused by the disturbing material world that offers itself to the senses.

And so two clearly distinct realms are opened. One is the material world that is regulated only by natural laws. The other is the world of the – subjective – mind. No need for an Aristotelian *entelechy*, an innate goal that directs

matter. Our body is not governed by our mind, neither is our mind governed by our body. I think is what matters, and I would continue do so without a body as well – an idea that comes very near to St. Augustine who stated that existence of the outside world is only of any interest if we can think and communicate about it. Following Descartes it is incorrect to believe everything to be true that comes from outside through impressions resulting in ideas that are not clear and distinct and subject to mistakes. The way outside objects present themselves does not necessarily have to correspond with what we believe they are, just because our will is ruled out in the observation. The same thing happens in our dreams - although they come from the inside – and dreams very often distort reality in dramatic ways. Descartes' decision "to accept thoughts and not external objects as the elementary empirical realities was important and has had far reaching consequences for all subsequent philosophy" (Russell, 1984, 511). However, one question remained unanswered. How can we know that the outside world is real and not an illusion, a mistake that a demon has whispered into my mind? Here Descartes relies on a proof of the existence of God that stems from St. Anselm. The perfect entity of which he has a clear and distinct idea must not only exist in the mind but also in reality. Otherwise it wouldn't be perfect. God being this perfect entity has created me believing in bodies. He would have been a traitor if bodies did not exist, so they exist. And he gave me the capacity to correct mistakes of the mind. This capacity is operative when I hold to be true what is clear and distinct. And thus I can know mathematics, nature and bodies with my mind alone and not through a cooperation of body and mind.

So the outside material world turns following its own mechanistic laws and the mind knows following simple intuition to grasp clear and distinct ideas and developing them in a rationalistic way from simple to complex. For Descartes, God had created two realms: mechanistic automobile nature and superior reasonable mind. They come together in man, but do not interfere. And when they do, it is man's task to live by his reason and be insensible to his bodily needs. This very rational and dualistic worldview that Descartes developed would have great impact in the ages to come. It was faith in reason that dominated the whole philosophical scene and would also be the fundament of Enlightenment's rationalistic treatment of the material world and of the world of the mind. The totality of reality was within reach and could be grasped with certain knowledge by the mind using Reason as its omnipotent tool.

Descartes had great influence on the French Enlightenment in the eighteenth century. Gaarder enumerates seven important characteristics that concern the enlightenment movement (Gaarder, 1996, 313), that in my opinion go straight back to Descartes. Opposition to authority – find your own truth. Rationalism – depend on reason. Enlightenment – liberation of superstition by clear and distinct ideas. Cultural optimism – the human mind is superior to nature and ignorance can be dispelled by educating the masses, which would lead to an “enlightened” humanity. The return to nature – reason was innate, came by human nature rather than by religion or civilization. Natural religion – it was irrational to believe in a world without God, the existence of God and the immortality of the soul were questions to be resolved by reason rather than by faith. Human rights – the principle of inviolability of the individual created the foundation for the ideals of the French Revolution – *liberté, égalité, fraternité* – for the legislation of many modern democracies and also for the human rights movement of the United Nations. Reason reigned in a sovereign way and it was Immanuel Kant who subjected this sovereignty to serious criticism.

### **Kant’s pure and practical reason, and faith**

The French rationalism found its counterpart in the British empiricism of philosophers like Francis Bacon (1561-1626), John Locke (1632-1704) and David Hume (1711-1776). The world of the mind – the noumenal world – was now opposed to the world of the senses – the phenomenal world. The universe edified by the mind – where truth had to be *thought* - versus the universe perceived by the senses – where truth was what could be *observed* by the senses. The first German professor of philosophy in the modern era, Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), really tried to build a system of thought in which the two counterparts were integrated, drawing heavily on Aristotle, and he succeeded in a limited sense. He held that both approaches had their rights of existence but *within* certain limits. Both mind and senses are confined to human existence and this determines their limited reach. And so in his *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Critique of Pure Reason<sup>14</sup>) he distinguished between two kinds of knowledge: reproductive and productive or creative imagination.



“..., though all our knowledge begins with experience, it by no means follows that all arises out of experience” (Kant, 1990, 1). According to Kant, not all our knowledge is dependent on, can be derived from our experience. Our mind is predisposed to distinguish between phenomena by certain forms of cognition that cannot be derived from human experience. These forms, that rehearse the Aristotelian categories of the mind, Kant calls *a priori*: time, space, (the pure forms of sensuous intuition, Ibid. 22/3), necessity, causality and the like (the categories or pure conceptions of the understanding, Ibid. 62), and world, God, soul (the ideas, or integrating principles, Ibid. 97 ff). They are necessarily and universally valid, were always present in and can be distilled from man’s sensory experiences. They were given to man’s mind like a set of glasses to look at reality (Gaarder, 1996, 325/6). In analogy with Aristotle’s distinction between perfect and imperfect syllogisms Kant distinguishes between pure and impure judgments. Pure judgments are the analytical ones, *a priori*, universally valid, only relying on propositions that are contained in themselves, as in mathematics. Impure judgments are judgments of experience, always synthetic, also relying on the changing qualities perceived by the senses, as in the natural sciences. This empirical knowledge that comes through the senses Kant called *a posteriori*, it comes afterwards, after we have had our experiences and after we learned how to distinguish between them and how to reproduce them.

So the human mind operates along given lines when interpreting reality. But, how can we be so sure that what our senses transmit to our mind is reality as it really is in itself outside the human mind? We cannot! Therefore, Kant distinguishes between the *Ding an sich* – the thing in itself – as we can not know it, only “feel” something of its sublime character with faint impressions in art and esthetical judgments and on the other hand the thing as it appears “evident to all”, that is *within* the *a priori* predisposition of our mind and senses. This is a tricky and innovative move that Kant makes here. Not only does he say that the mind based on observations adapts itself to reality, he also holds that reality adapts itself to the mind and its cognitive predisposition and observation of the senses. Therefore, we can never be absolutely sure about the real nature of things in themselves nor in their comprehensive totality.

However, don’t worry, there is a lot be known by human reason within the limits of human freedom set by nature – the ideal or dreams of innocence at one side and existential darkness at the other. And what’s more, with a reasonable degree of certainty and objectivity. So Kant asks, “how are synthetic

judgments *a priori* possible?” (Kant, 1990, 12) He combines *a priori* – pure - and *a posteriori* – sensory - knowledge to reach this goal in his so called “transcendental deduction”. Reproductive imagination reproduces images of objects that are absent to direct contact, but present in experience. Productive or creative imagination creates schemes (concepts and intuition) that relate *a priori* - pure - forms of sensuous intuition, time and space, and pure categories of understanding (necessity, causality etc.) and the integrating principles (world, God, soul) that are given and not deducible from human experience with phenomena that exist in the empirical reality and that we know *a posteriori* by experience. The schemes connect categories with phenomena and thus the categories can be applied to the phenomena in a move of creative imagination, a faculty that according to Kant lodges somewhere in the depths of the human soul. And yet this creative imagination has become through its mediating function between the mind and the senses the corner stone of modern epistemology and objective knowledge.

So human reason has its limits. Beyond these limits you can assert anything but not with the objective certainty that reigns within them. According to Ricœur, creative imagination can go beyond the limits of objective knowledge. However, “Kant had no idea of a language that is not empirical and therefore he had to substitute metaphysics by empty concepts” (Ricœur, 1975, 143)<sup>15</sup>. As we will see later on, Ricœur fills the deepest layers of the symbol with a meaning that stems from this realm beyond objective knowledge. However, says Ricœur, we need Kant’s concepts, if only to be broken open by these deepest meanings. And we need Kant’s limits if only to be free in our human reality to continue – in genuine modesty - our interpretation of this reality (Vaessen, 1997, 18).

Kant not only thought and wrote about objective knowledge and pure reason. He did have an idea of realms in human consciousness that didn’t fit in very well in his schemes of objectivity. Kant not only asks “what can we know”, he also asks “what must we want” and “what may we hope for”. And so he writes another critique, his *Kritik der praktischen Vernunft* (The Critique of Practical Reason, 1786). The existence of God, of the immortal soul and of the free will do not belong to realm of reason. For Kant this has important consequences. St. Thomas had proven the existence of God by Aristotle’s necessary principle of a first Mover of all movement. Descartes had proven God’s existence by his own doubtful, reflecting and consciously reasoning mind relying on St. Anselm and Plato. Kant refuses to “prove” the existence of either God, the immortal soul or the free will. He grounds them

not on reason but in *faith* as practical postulates that cannot be proven but have to be accepted for the sake of *praxis*, that is man's morality. "It is a moral necessity to assume the existence of God", said Kant (Gaarder, 1996, 332). "The moral law demands justice, that is joy directly proportional to virtue. Only Providence can provide for this, but apparently it does not do so in this life. Therefore, there has to be a God, an afterlife and freedom; if not, virtue would be impossible" (Russell, 1984, 638).

However, although the decision between right and wrong is not a matter of pure reason it is nevertheless a matter of reason, be it practical this time. For Kant the moral law is as innate, given in the human mind in the realm of practical reason as the *a priori* categories are in the realm of pure reason. Man has a double status. As a natural material creature he automatically obeys the laws of nature and has no freedom whatsoever. As rationally thinking conscience he enjoys freedom because he has a choice to obey the moral law within him or not. And so the golden rule that says "do unto others what you want to be done to yourself" is a rational guide for responsible action in *this* life that gives hope for a better future. A future that may well stretch out beyond the limits of this life but that is a matter of faith. Absolute certainty cannot be obtained in this realm just like the *Ding an sich* left open room for ever new interpretations.

Kant introduced a critical distance within reason itself, between the knowing subject and the object under investigation. The relation between subject and object that had formed the basis of modern epistemology is now thoroughly criticized, and has become problematic. Not everything a subject wants to know can be known on a pure or even a practical basis. Much in reality has to be assumed in good faith. And even our objective knowledge of a "thing" may differ from "the thing as it is in itself" outside the human mind. So we had better become modest in our thinking, reasoning, knowing, in short in our giving of meaning to the world around us. We have received more meaning from the surrounding world – even adapting itself to our innate, given forms of cognition and action - than we will ever be able to give ourselves. "... there are two sources of human knowledge," says Kant, "(which probably spring from a common but to us unknown root), namely, sense and understanding. By the former objects are *given* to us; by the latter *thought*." (Kant, 1990, 18, italics original.) Nevertheless it is more than worth the trouble to use our reason - pure and practical – and our faith –

within the limits of our human freedom – to give meaning to reality, to build a better world.

### **Hegel's dialectics**

Action is reaction. Kant's focus on the very limited area of the human mind to gain as much "certain" or "objective" knowledge as possible gave many the feeling that something was missing. And so Romanticism came along with a yearning for mystery, personal feeling, undercurrent forces like vitality and the like, in short for the infinite realm of the unknowable side of the *Ding an sich*. Kant had done more for the Romanticists than supply them with a new field to explore. First of all he had underlined the importance of the subject's contribution to knowledge. The ego using the predisposed forms of knowing within the individual mind was now completely free to interpret life in its own way. Furthermore Kant had stressed the point that abandonment to the overwhelming experience of artistic feeling came closer to the sublime character of the "thing" as it is in itself than any other way of human knowledge. And thus Romantic "ego-worship" led to the exaltation of artistic genius (Gaarder, 1996, 346). In his playful consciousness the artist creates his own universe and in his creative imagination he is able to dissolve the boundaries between dream and reality, as Novalis said "the world becomes a dream and the dream becomes reality". And thus reality as a whole becomes the "object" of the romantic mind, not to control it but to experience it in a sort of congeniality. Distant cultures, occult mysteries, spiritual vitality are drawn near. In reaction to Enlightenment's dead and machine like mechanistic worldview the Romantics yearned for nature and its mysteries, that is nature as a whole as a cosmic reality with its divine ego, world soul or world spirit. Nature as one big I, its living spirit was the same that worked in the human mind. So philosophy, poetry, studies of nature and history could form one big synthesis: a living organism (Aristotle), evolutionary, continuous and developing according to one big design (Plato); on a universal level but also on a nationalistic level. And that's how we arrive at Hegel's dialectics.

I do not want to assert that Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel (1770-1831) was a romanticist, yet he did use all the ideas that were developed with this stream of thought. His *Absolute Spirit, Knowledge or Idea* – the culmination of his entire and extremely difficult philosophy - would have been incon-

ceivable if Romanticism hadn't prepared the soil for it to grow on. How did Hegel proceed?

When Hegel uses the term "world spirit" he is not talking of something outside the human mind. Quite to the contrary, it is the sum of human utterances, because only man has a spirit. Did Kant still acknowledge a kind of unattainable truth related to the *Ding an sich*, for Hegel there was no truth above or beyond human reason. All knowledge is developed within the human mind. It is in this sense that Hegel speaks of the "organic" progress of the world spirit in history. Immutable knowledge that Western philosophy had searched for from the beginning is an illusion. Knowledge changes, develops in time just like a river that comes from a babbling brook in the mountains and ends in a big delta before it becomes one with the sea. Every stage in history has its own value and its concrete context determines gained insights that are *added* to all the other insights that had been gained earlier. So the progress of the world spirit is an historical process of growing human knowledge leading toward an ever expanding and increasing self-knowledge, rationality and freedom, thus making the world spirit increasingly conscious of its intrinsic value.

Now, instead of searching for immutable knowledge, Hegel was more interested in *how* the development of knowledge could be understood. So he developed his method of dialectics: thesis – antithesis - synthesis. A thought (thesis) will be contradicted (antithesis), then the tension within this contradiction will be resolved by a third thought in which the best of both opposites are accommodated (synthesis). Then this synthesis becomes the new thesis (for instance Parmenides' single elementary substance) that will be opposed or negated (by Heraclitus' *panta rei*) leading to a new synthesis or - in Hegel's terms - negation of the negation (Empedocles' four elementary substances in ever changing combinations). Another example is Kant's synthesis of rationalism and empiricism in his "transcendental deduction". However, thinking along Hegelian lines Kant's synthesis is not a terminal station but the beginning of new knowledge. All this does not only pertain to history but to the study of nature and logic as well. In dynamic logic the thought of being evokes its opposite, nothing, and the tension between the two is resolved in the concept of becoming.

Confining human knowledge to human reason and the human mind and relating to the "knowable" aspects of the *Ding an sich* was one of the critical ways Hegel dealt with the Romantic ideals. Another topic was the idealiza-

tion of the individual – the path of mystery that leads inwards. Though Hegel does not reject the individual, individualism had to be negated as well by what he called “objective powers”. These were the family, social communities, the state, language; each of them presenting an entity that was more than just the sum of its constituting parts. As the individual needs them all just to be able to exist it is not the individual who finds himself within itself. Something more encompassing than the widest entity is needed here: the culminating synthesis being the world spirit. This world spirit returns to itself in three stages. First, it becomes conscious of itself in the individual, the *subjective* spirit. Second, the *objective* spirit reflects a higher consciousness reached in the family, society and the state, where people interact. The highest form of self-realization of the world spirit is reached in the third stage, being the *absolute* spirit. Its domain: art, religion, philosophy. And of course philosophy is the highest form of knowledge, because in philosophy “the world spirit reflects on its own impact on world history” (Gaarder, 1996, 371) and really returns to itself. It looks like we arrived at a terminal station.

Russell disagrees with Hegel in the strongest terms you can think of when he relates Hegel’s terminal station to Auschwitz. According to Hegel - says Russell, who also writes a history of philosophy – the Spirit and her development through time is the real subject of any history of philosophy. The Spirit being light and free is the opposite of Matter that is heavy and bound. Spirit is the one, immutable, homogenous Infinity, pure identity, who only in a second stage separates herself from herself and makes this second aspect into her anti pole, that is existence in and before the Self. Following Hegel three eras dominated by different cultures can be distinguished in this process of development: the Far East – one is free -, the Greco/Roman world – some are free - and Germany – all are free. Freedom without laws is not possible but for Hegel this does not – as you would perhaps expect - lead to democracy. It is the German monarch who represents the general will, in blunt contradiction to the far less estimated “will of all” represented by a parliament. It is the German monarch who incorporates the Spirit who’s goal it is to realize the absolute truth as the limitless self-determination of freedom; precisely that freedom that has its own absolute form as its content. This very subtle kind of freedom, says Russell “does not guarantee that you will be able to stay outside the concentration camp”. (Russell, 1984, 661/2)

## Husserl's phenomenology, giving of meaning

Phenomenology is in fact a reaction to romanticism and the idealization of time of the nineteenth century. Phenomenology is more interested in the experienced structural identity of the things as they appear than in how they came into being. As we saw for the Romanticists this genesis was related to the dark unknowable side of the *Ding an sich*. Hegel on the other hand related this genesis to the “returning of the world spirit to itself” indicating the human mind – philosophy – as its proper *locus*. There is no truth above or beyond human reason. The culmination through time of the human spirit into the Absolute Spirit reflected by an ideal German monarchy is in fact an ambition just as dark as the Romantic yearning for the lost arc, the holy grail or the stone of wisdom. The hidden world of the Platonic Idea stays at a distance but is nevertheless revealed, experienced, created in, by and through the human mind. However, the knowing subject forms no longer an unproblematic unity with his life world – or *logos* in ancient Greek terminology. Therefore, he projects his own supposed or imagined intrinsic value outside himself on time and in doing so time is “objectified”, idealized into the inflated reality of the Hegelian spirit returned to itself. Phenomenology reacts and proceeds differently by starting at the object side of the relation, the thing in itself. Nothing happens outside the things themselves and with its focus on what happens within the things themselves - where form and matter merge - phenomenology seems to be more in harmony with Aristotelian categorical thinking. Time is not dealt with as an inflated reality produced by hidden megalomaniac desires of the subject. Time – as all other phenomena - is taken seriously as it *appears* to us in itself. However, since Kant turned knowledge into a problem and disrupted the naïve premodern unity for good, the relation of subject and object in phenomenology - being a purely epistemological relation – is problematic as well.

Nothing happens outside the things themselves. Theo de Boer indicated this in an essay on the wide stream of thought that he calls phenomenology and to which he reckons not only Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) but also philosophers like Brentano (Husserl's teacher), Heidegger, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Ricœur and Lévinas. “It is not correct to see causality as a relation between the phenomena and the reality behind them. Causality is a tie between the phenomena themselves: phenomena are not phantoms but appearances; reality is not hidden but reports herself (although she does not show herself). Even the idea itself of a hidden reality behind the phenomena has to be extinguished” (Kwant / IJsseling, 1978, 82/3)<sup>16</sup>. The analogy with Aristotle's

proceedings is striking although the latter is more influenced by the hidden reality of the “Platonic Idea” that is so vehemently attacked by Husserl. To reach this stage Husserl had gone through many others. We will concentrate here on his eidetic and his transcendental reduction, also lucidly explained by Jean-François Lyotard in a book called *Phenomenology*<sup>17</sup>.

If reality reports herself in the phenomena, then experience must be a legitimate criterion to discover truth. However, many objects *are not* what they *appear* to be at first sight. Famous example is the straight stick in a barrel of water that seems to be curved but is not. Reality is not what it appears to be and so it seems wise to postpone judgment about the real state of affairs. Husserl calls this postponement *epochè*, reduction. The meaning of the word reduction is not exclusively negative in the sense of “lessening”. Its literal meaning is “leading back to”. Where to? To the *eidōs*, which is the Greek word for “essence”. For Brentano eidetic reduction still meant abstraction from concrete contingent and even illusionary appearances and concentration on what is behind this concrete changing reality and essential. And now we are straight back in the millennia old problem of the changing world of the senses versus the ideal world and immutable knowledge thereof by the human mind. There is only one “little” difference. Since the seventeenth century modern natural science and Galilei’s mechanistic worldview had replaced the principle of the - hidden - unmoved Mover by the eternal unchanging laws that govern nature. The concrete natural world that the senses observe is actually a dream, an always changing illusionary appearance. A phenomenon then is an appearance that *hides* reality. Brentano had - Plato wise - proposed to concentrate only on the inner observation of that hidden reality, but Husserl – more like Aristotle - said let us concentrate on the phenomena and in doing so postpone our judgment on the real world behind them. Not that the real world that the natural laws behind the phenomena describe is not real but it needs not necessarily be in conflict with the observed phenomena. A house is a house and not a bird. So Husserl concentrates on: the act of observing and its contents.

The act of observing takes place in consciousness. The phenomenon is that which shows itself to our consciousness. Appearance on the other hand involves more: the theoretical reality (physical, psychological) behind the phenomena that reports but does not show itself in the phenomena. A red face can be the result of a certain light or of a high fever. In Husserl’s phenomenology we restrain from this kind of explanation and restrict ourselves to the phenomenon as it *shows* itself, the red face. However, phenomena are not



limited to themselves but have relations with other phenomena. When the person with the red face is standing in a different sort of light and the color of his face has changed, then he will not have a fever. So Husserl says: causality is always a relation *between phenomena* and never between the world of the phenomena and something behind this world (Kwant / IJsseling, 1978, 80). There is an inner structure in the world of the phenomena that relates them to each other and therefore this world is real and not a dream. What seems to be an illusion – the curved stick – is in reality the real form of appearance varying with the medium – water or air - in which it appears. The *eidōs* for Husserl then is not behind but within the phenomena. And Lyotard explains that the “vision of essences” (*Wesensschau*) is reached by means of imaginal variation. “The essence or *eidōs* of an object is constituted by the invariant that remains identical throughout the variations.” The essence is therefore experienced in an actual concrete intuition. The “vision of essences” has nothing of a metaphysical character, nor is the theory of essences itself framed within a Platonic realism where the existence of the essence would be assumed; the essence is only that, in which “the thing itself is revealed to me in an originary givenness”. ... “This [originary JCV] understanding is thus precondition of all empirical science”. (Lyotard, 1991, 39/40). The *eidōs* and eidetic reduction are related to the mundane, real world of the phenomena. By means of the ongoing imaginal variation in human consciousness of what *shows* itself in the appearances we can also trace what *reports* itself in the same appearances to end up with the invariant identity of the essence of the thing itself. The last variation possible is the negation of the thing, which is not possible when it exists. Reality appears – showing, reporting – in the phenomena. The hidden reality has to be extinguished because of the absurd interpretations such a reality would produce. That leaves human consciousness of its concrete life world as the most basic of all essences. And so we enter the realm of pure consciousness, which for Husserl is always *consciousness of...* and undeniable.

What happens then in consciousness? In the natural attitude I discover and accept the real world as existing and I receive it as it gives itself to me, equally as existing. However, perceptions of the real world vary. What I am conscious of, changes all the time, transcendence – the thing coming to me, passing the borderline of my consciousness – is doubtful, but the mere fact that I am conscious cannot be negated. The pure ego, absolute subject arises whose “consciousness is fully aware of itself” (Lyotard, 1991, 51). The positing of the natural world is somehow put out of action, but not annihilated.

The natural world remains alive but permitting pure awareness. Husserl calls this transcendental reduction. Within this last move he turned to the subject again. "As all transcendence is doubtful, knowing takes place in "fulfilled intuition", only immanence is beyond doubt. ... The subject thus elevated into the ranks of the transcendental is not empirical consciousness which is object of psychology" (Ricœur, 1986, 42)<sup>18</sup>. According to Ricœur this has important implications: "The awakening supported by the reflexive work brings its own ethical consequences, because reflection is the act that is immediately responsible to itself" (Ricœur, 1986, 44).

And so in the end Husserl's phenomenology, that started in the things themselves, has become an intentional relation, is giving of meaning (Lyotard, 1991, 56) by the almost omnipotent and fully responsible subject to the many objects he encounters in his life world (Husserl's *Lebenswelt*). Epistemology sure, but somewhere the shoe pinches. Husserl breaks with traditional metaphysics that wanted to penetrate a timeless and immutable state of affairs, Being beyond empirical time and space. And yet is Husserl doing something entirely different with his transcendental reduction leading to pure subjective consciousness and surpassing the concrete empirical *Lebenswelt*? Then again, true reality is not behind us as some sort of lost paradise, it is before us as a correlate of human knowledge, epistemological process without end, some goal for and exclusively related – restricted - to human endeavor, lying *ahead* of us and thus related with time. Heidegger (student of Husserl) will elaborate this theme further in *Being and Time* where he will confront Husserl's epistemological giving of meaning with an ontological reception of meaning.

### **Heidegger's ontology, receiving of meaning**

From Husserl we can take two opposite directions. Either we accept the possibility of human consciousness and relate it as Heidegger did in a - from a metaphysical point of view - non-traditional way to situation and time. Or we reject the possibility of direct human consciousness and see it with Marx, Nietzsche and Freud as constantly being misled and triggered by our will to power and other dark desires residing in the unconsciousness. Let us first concentrate on Heidegger's ontology before we turn to the champions of suspicion.

Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) is looking for “belonging”, but now in the reality that lies beneath knowledge, that is: in the reality of being. He tries to understand the essence of man, who only exists, “is”, by understanding. This understanding is from a different order than the premodern or pre-critical understanding. It went through the distance created by the epistemological critique and searches for a new kind of “nearness” that precedes and underlies knowledge: “being”. Here Heidegger takes up an important Husserlian theme, i.e. being that appears – showing, reporting – in the phenomena. Since there is no unbridgeable gap between the natural laws that govern being and the impressions generated by the senses (eidetic reduction), there is no supposed hidden reality either, no immutable timeless being behind the concrete phenomena we are confronted with in our daily lives (transcendental reduction). However, transcendental deduction does not lead in Heidegger’s case to pure subjective consciousness, but to being. The phenomenon *is* the appearance of being. In traditional metaphysics time had always been excluded as non-being, non-existing, as we saw discussing St Augustine’s notion of time. The present as the only real slipped out of our hands when we try to grasp it, which culminated in the idea of God as the hidden and immutable but “Eternally Present”. Now, behind the traditional philosophy of immutable being hidden behind the illusionary life world of the senses there has always been a repudiation of time. Heidegger, following Husserl, makes up for this failure in Western thinking. “The turning point in the history of metaphysics is that for the first time reality is intrinsically related to time. Reality is no longer a building, but a melody” (Kwant / IJsseling, 1978, 84). In other words, the ear is winning supremacy over the eye. An important consequence of all this is that “being” cannot be approached directly, grasped in one vision, but has to be attained by the detour of understanding, lending your ears to the many different (human) modes of being in time.

Heidegger distinguishes between “being” (Sein) and “modes of being” (Seienden). Man is not an object to observe, but a living creature that exists. To exist means literally “to stand out” and as an existing being man stands out towards his unchangeable past and his unknowable future. This is - per definition - his mode of being. A concept like regret can illustrate this. It looks back to an unchangeable regrettable past and at the same time looks forward to an unknowable future that can be molded by avoiding and making up for the faults committed in the past. Man is a being who designs himself towards the future while accounting for his past, coming to himself from a dimension – the future – that is not there yet from a traditional ontological

point of view. Therefore, man cannot objectively be described as a being that structures – gives meaning to or even possesses – time, building walls with his “now” between his past and his future. Man is determined by that fact that he is thrown into a reality in which he exists, constantly combining past and future in one greater reality. Man does not have but “is” his past and future. So, objective knowledge preceded by being, Heidegger substitutes Husserl’s intentional consciousness (giving of meaning) by man’s existence in time, where receiving of meaning is more important. Our natural attitude is to concentrate on what is here and now, but as we open ourselves as existing beings towards past and future new horizons open where being itself is revealed in which our modes of being have their origin and context.

For Heidegger only the movement from “modes of being” to “being itself” is important. He is not interested in the refinement of epistemological methods of the human sciences as they are only derivatives from their ontological foundations. Understanding - for Heidegger - is expressed in terms like “to be able to be”. This ontological understanding is not concerned with language or with knowledge expressed in language that confronts an object to a knowing subject. Here the feeling of being situated is important, through which we have a relation with, belong to the world and being itself and through which we can also orient ourselves and let ourselves be guided in a certain situation. Language does not create, but only gives expression to what is already there. To understand a text therefore means to open the possibilities of being that the text indicates, projects into new situations of being. Important in this process are not the choices of the reader but the reception of new designs or modes of being. To be embedded in the world and in being does not produce the vicious hermeneutical circle of epistemology in which subject and object imply each other, but gives more positively a genuine ontological pre-understanding, a prejudice of this being, world and situation, by means of which we can anticipate situations and orient ourselves in the world. Understanding always has an anticipatory structure. In grasping its present ability to be from its future mode of being it is guided by being itself (Vaessen, 1997, 13).

According to Ricœur, Heidegger – idealizing *being* as the “last truth” - ends up in a similar sort of position as Husserl did when he idealized *subjective consciousness* as the “last truth”. As Husserl forgot in the end that consciousness is always consciousness of ... , Heidegger forgot that conscious-

ness has to be employed. “In Heidegger’s philosophy only one movement is possible, the one towards the ontological foundations, but the way back, the one that brings us from the fundamental ontology back to the essential epistemological inquiry about the status of the human sciences, is closed. Well, a philosophy that closes the dialogue with the sciences will only speak to itself” (Ricœur, 1986, 94).

### **Marx, Nietzsche and Freud: hermeneutics of suspicion**

Since Descartes we doubt the things and know that they are different than they appear. We never doubted however our direct consciousness; that is as it appears. Since Karl Marx (1818-1883), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) and Sigmund Freud (1856-1939 ) we doubt that sense and consciousness of sense coincide. Ricœur calls them the masters of suspicion. True, they break down and tear apart, but this tearing apart is a true moment of search for new foundations. “All three conquer their doubts related to consciousness by means of an exegesis of sense or meaning. Since their performance our comprehension is hermeneutics: searching for the meaning of something is no longer reading consciousness of that meaning, but deciphering that in which it expresses itself” (Ricœur, 1969, 149). And so direct consciousness is replaced by indirect interpretation of sense. In the hermeneutics of suspicion, the own conscious method of deciphering coincides with the unconscious “operations” that result in the text to be deciphered. And these operations may be social life in the case of Marx or the will to power stressed by Nietzsche or unconscious psychic life investigated by Freud.

When method and object coincide the fundamental category of consciousness is “hide and show”. Restless coincidence with complete identity of the two realms is not possible but the attempt to achieve it remains a constant endeavor for the hermeneutics of suspicion. Hidden reality is interpreted, irreducible to the direct consciousness of meaning but the interpretation nevertheless intends to enlarge the scope of this direct consciousness. Freud’s psychoanalysis and Nietzsche’s scheme of the cunning mind aiming at power are shocking, because they criticize the whole philosophical project as the conscious reflection and portray direct consciousness as a mask and a lie. Russell passionately rejects Nietzsche’s philosophy of power and its creation of superman. Nietzsche’s whole system is built on the fear that characterizes the aristocrat tyrant for the inevitable palace revolution (Russell, 1984, 688) and on the contempt of universal love “which I see as the driving force of all

that I would wish for this world” (Russell, 1984, 693). Ricœur on the other hand takes all three masters of suspicion very seriously - as we will see in the next paragraph – because they open the road to a more radical form of hermeneutics.

### **Ricœur’s hermeneutical phenomenology**

Typical for his way of doing philosophy is that Paul Ricœur (1913 - ) uses Kant’s transcendental deduction, Hegel’s dialectical method, Husserl’s eidetic reduction and Heidegger’s reception of ontological meaning to end up in a highly original form of hermeneutical phenomenology. The deeply felt assignment of such a phenomenology is to increase (self)consciousness.

Fundamental in all of Ricœur’s philosophy is his dialectical way of thinking. He uses Hegel’s method although not uncritically. The Absolute Spirit or Knowing is rejected just like Ricœur always rejects any idealization of whatever method as terminal station of knowledge and truth. But he is fascinated by Hegel’s dialectical method that kindles human desire for new research and knowledge. Therefore, to avoid ending up in some idealist concept of Absolute Knowing or Spirit, Ricœur rejects two of the three “fields” of knowledge that Hegel distinguished. In natural sciences and logics the contradiction of two opposites results in zero and so Ricœur applies Hegel’s dialectical method to what he calls human reality (Ricœur, 1975, 92/4)<sup>19</sup>. Furthermore, Ricœur insists that we should not jump too quickly and easily to a synthesis of thesis and antithesis. The latter should collide heavily and shake each other thoroughly in order to let them release new insights that can form a synthesis. The restriction to human reality is already a move that is characteristic for the Kantian scheme of thinking. Ricœur chooses to stay within the Kantian limits of pure, practical and esthetic/religious reason using Kant’s scheme of transcendental deduction. He puts reproductive empirical knowledge in a dialectical relation with productive objective knowledge to end up in a third term, i.e. the creative imagination. According to Ricœur Kant didn’t have the faintest idea of knowledge that is not empirical and so in metaphysics his concepts - that organize new and unknown fields of knowledge – had to stay empty (Ricœur, 1975, 143)<sup>20</sup>. Ricœur however fills Kant’s concepts with the aid of his own symbol theory and thus is able to surpass the antinomies between nature and freedom, practical and theoretical reason, duty and pleasure that Kant’s philosophy has not been able to

resolve (Ricœur, 1975, 102) ) and explore more of the dark sides of the *Ding an sich* than Kant was ever able to do.

With his strong commitment to phenomenology Ricœur asserts that pre-lingual layers of reality show, report themselves through symbols in the phenomenal world. With Husserl he stresses the importance of consciousness which is intentional in that it begins its search for meaning in the upper layer of the symbol of direct meaning expressed by language – language being the narrow gate to reality. However, Ricœur rejects Husserl’s idealization of the giving of meaning present in his transcendental reduction that makes the conscious subject in its intentional knowledge only responsible to itself in making up the complete meaning of pre-lingual and lingual reality. This terminal station is surpassed by means of Heidegger’s ontological phenomenology. Being is received by human consciousness and thus expressed by means of language. Language creates nothing new, it only gives expression to what is already there in the deep pre-lingual layers of reality and transmitted to human consciousness by the hidden layers of meaning in a wide variety of symbols. Ricœur performs the same dialectical thought act of receiving and giving of meaning within the reality of the symbol in the realm of the metaphor. In the metaphor it is the already existing, received interpretation of two incompatible worlds or ideas or images that are made to collide heavily and thus produce a shock and new meaning. In this, the main movement of symbolic understanding is reception of meaning – the symbol gives rise to thought<sup>21</sup> - while in the metaphor as language creation the giving of meaning is more emphasized.

In my opinion, symbol, metaphor, and their dialectical interaction, are main pillars of Ricœur’s textual hermeneutics, and he uses them to give a different twist to phenomenology, being “the young plant to which the graft from the age old trunk of hermeneutics can be grafted” (Ricœur, 1969, 9). Contra Husserl Ricœur holds that the dualistic epistemological relation of subject and object is preceded by their unity in being and this ontological relation is the fundamental condition of being and knowing. Fundament - the meaning we receive – and last justification – the meaning we give – do not coincide. In hermeneutics the ontological “nearness” of subject and object dialectically related with the epistemological distance between the two precedes the epistemological and psychological category of the subject positing itself. Therefore, the immediate “vision of essences” has to be confronted with the necessary mediation of an interpretation, not only in dialogue but also in texts. As Freud has taught us we cannot trust our direct consciousness

and so we will have to interpret whatever reaches us as meaning. Method and object of this interpretation correspond but can never be exhaustive. There is always more meaning – a surplus of meaning - to be received than we can ever give! Furthermore - according to Ricœur - immanence is as doubtful as transcendence and so the Cartesian *Cogito* – I think - can be subjected to the same radical criticism that phenomenology performs to all phenomena. The priority of the subject is therefore replaced by the theory of the text as pivot of hermeneutics. When the text acquires a certain semantic autonomy, it is not the intentions of the author behind the text that we have to look for but the world that the text discloses before itself. And so subjectivity is not the first but the last category of a theory of comprehension. The subject is assigned a much more modest role, answering to the essence of a text instead of constituting it (Ricœur, 1986, 46-55).

What makes Ricœur's phenomenology hermeneutic is the ongoing dialectical process of receiving and giving meaning. This interpretative movement has a circular form but it is not the vicious hermeneutical circle in which epistemological subject and object imply each other. Its form is the form of a spiral that circles over the same points but each time on a different level so that new meaning may emerge. Ontological prejudice is completed with epistemological criticism to procure new meaning every time this process runs. And so our consciousness of reality mediated by all sorts of texts grows on and on as we proceed on our way through time. This idea already shows up in Ricœur's concept of naivety that plays an important role in the theory of human sciences and the history of the humanities. There, the first naivety is related to the premodern worldview, that we have lost for good, because of the long period of critical thinking that followed in the modern era. However, not all of naivety is lost. When the first naivety is related dialectically with critical questions about human reality of the modern sciences, then new meanings will emerge in a second naivety. (Cf. Ricœur, 1969, 293-296) New texts using old ones will open new worlds for us to step in inviting us to explore and find new ways to go. This fundamental pattern will be used in *Temps et récit*, Ricœur's *magnus opus* in textual hermeneutics<sup>22</sup>. Here the terms prefiguration, configuration and refiguration are used to describe a similar sequence in the understanding of a given text: 1) a naïve pre-understanding based on former texts, 2) a sophisticated comprehension as a process of understanding – analysis - comprehension resulting in a new – though provisional - text and 3) further elaboration into new texts. *Time and*



*narrative*, hermeneutic phenomenology. Meanings are presented to us coming from the past. It is our duty to explore them and the world they open for us conscientiously. And it is our responsibility to choose one of the ways the text may propose to go and to start walking.

### **Evaluation of the modern worldview**

For many authors the most important characteristic of the modern era is the turn to the subject. In modernity the subject became the center of the universe and it was only in postmodernism that the subject was de-centered. As for myself, I think that it was modernity that *de-centered* the subject and that postmodernism left the subject with no center at all and can then at best be described as *non-centered*. And I come to this conclusion because of the great impact that the natural sciences and their worldviews have always had in Western - Greek oriented - philosophy and humanities. In fact they have brought up the big themes like mind versus senses, universals versus particulars, etc. that keep coming back in premodern and modern Western thought.

As we have seen the ancient Greek search for the constant immutable factors in the changing flux of the sensible world by the natural philosophers before Socrates was reflected in the subsequent philosophy up till Aristotle. And the solid house of the *logos* that provided for the logical space in which being and saying were one, accommodated Christian theology for almost two thousand years. All this worked perfectly well as long as it was believed that the earth formed the center of the universe around which all the planets including the sun circled in perfect never ending orbits. Now, when Copernicus discovered that not the earth was at the center of all planetary movement but the sun, the earth and man as well lost their central position, were *de-centered*. No wonder Descartes started to doubt everything, until he discovered that he could not doubt his doubting. And so the individual mind of the subject formed the last ground to stand on, became the measure of everything else. *Cogito ergo sum* I think and thus I am. The subject moved itself into a central position not because it was the center but because it had been *de-centered*. In other words the turn to the subject was a reaction, a compensation of its having become de-centered. I interpret this move as an act out of despair, because something "essential" had been lost forever. Subject and object formed no longer an unproblematic unity, being and saying started to split apart, factual and extensional truth no longer dwelled in the same logical space in the house of *logos*.

Wouter Slob explains this development in a chapter called “A short history of truth” (Slob, 2002, 67-95; DR, 33-67). The title already implies that “truth” has changed in time. And the most dramatic change has been that the unity of being and saying, factual and extensional truth in one logical space of truth that had been normative for the whole premodern era was shattered into pieces in the modern era. This became very clear in the rise of hermeneutics that presupposes a fundamental distinction between the interpreting subject (interpretant), the interpreted object (interpretandum), and the interpretation itself between these two. And this again meant that both subject and object must be thought to be independent entities.

The Aristotelian formal logic lost a great deal of its necessity status and authority. *Scientia* expressed by perfect syllogisms appeared to be less universal as it had always been held to be. It had not been capable for instance to express a universally valid proposition about the Trinity (one in essence, three in persona being a *contradictio in terminis*). And so, “there had to be something else than *scientia* that could provide for a sufficiently strong notion of validity” (Slob, 2002, 75; DR, 42). A higher authority was needed and so *opinio* - the imperfect syllogism - had to carry the burden of all knowledge. But authorities disagree, and therefore appeal to the pope as the highest authority was the only way out. To ensure the normative status of the solid house of *logos*, the pope not only served a clerical function but an epistemological one as well. However, popes contradicted each other and themselves as well, and therefore with no guarantee left, Luther decided to stick to *Sola Scriptura*, the Bible alone as highest authority and last guarantee of the truth. By translating the Bible in the vernacular language, he gave a problematical object to each and every individual believer. *Scientia* and *opinio* being lost as last guarantee of the truth, the believing subject had to decide for itself about the truth of its object that had been produced some fifteen centuries before. Historical distance replaced the intimate nearness of the typological reading. Now, how was this possible? I mean St Augustine had already stressed the fact that by his fall into sin man could never have a complete knowledge of reality. What had not been a problem for a long time now suddenly did become a problem. Why? Because the solid house of *logos* that provided for the logical space of truth had collapsed. The earth and man driven out of the center of the universe, man became aware of the enormous distances in space and its instable conditions.

One could see the whole modern project as an effort to cope with this problem. If the subject was to decide, then you will have an infinite number

of different subjective rationalities to interpret reality. On the other hand, should everything from the past be thrown away? Wasn't there some way to reach maybe not perfect but sufficient knowledge to cope with reality? Even when being and saying were separated and direct access to truth was no longer possible, the two realms – the ontic and the “smaller” human rational logos - could be thought to be maybe not materially but at least structurally identical, thus making indirect access to truth possible. In this, universality is a necessary condition because if there are alternatives a fundamental uncertainty remains: one must be false but which one? However, if a universal ground can be found that is necessary then reality cannot be different. This necessary universal ground of reality as a whole will never be objective in the Kantian sense - truth will remain “at distance”- but it does provide for an indirect epistemological access. And so a necessary universal ground had to be found to arrive at univocal conclusions, an arbiter between conflicting subjective interpretations. Different efforts were made in language and logic to provide for new foundations but they failed. Kant made a last effort to rescue the power of traditional logic but he had to replace the ontological *a priori* of the self-identical *logos* by the ontological *a priori* of subjective self-evidence. “Kant replaced ‘being as such’ as a criterion of truth by ‘thinking as such’ and idealism was the inevitable result” (Slob, 2002, 79; DR, 46). With his turn to the subject – and not to a plurality of persons - Kant aims at universality, consciousness as such and provides for an indirect access to truth when the turn to the subject made a direct appeal impossible. But “evident to all” is a hazardous foundation, an ideal not easy to realize because people differ and what is even more serious, it presupposes what it is looking for: a necessary universal ground. Furthermore: “If self-evidence does not yield the required universality, the very basis of the modern program falls away. ... transcendental rationality is not attainable.”(Ibid.) Kant's ideal had to fail, and he was left with a number of unbridgeable gaps and dichotomies of being and saying.

For Kant, the human subject had no access to the noumenal side of the *Ding an sich*, and therefore man had no access to the “real truth”. Instead of showing how truth worked, he had to *legitimize* claims of truth, show that human knowledge, be it in an indirect way, could attain some sort of necessity. Extensional truth (saying) had indirect access to factual truth (being) if human rationality could yield univocal results. Self-evidence was too weak a foundation to achieve this. Kant's “mono-logic” as Slob calls it was replaced by Frege's syntactical logic, where we have the choice between different

types of logic, that yield different results as well. Frege picked up in the late nineteenth century the idea of the universal language that Leibniz had developed in the seventeenth century. To accommodate different subjective rationalities, Leibniz suggested a universal language in which strictly defined rules were combined with univocal basic elements and would thus lead to necessary conclusions for all. Premodern logic had applied categories, modern logic applies individuals and thus becomes syntactical, no longer relying on the *logos*, but securing its validity by defining its basic elements, its logical operations and a correct calculus yielding correct results. Leibniz' universal language needed a basic vocabulary that is stable and immutable under different circumstances. In mathematics such a language is conceivable. In human, or divine reality it is impossible because we will have to reckon with variables that have not yet been named or even discovered. Two centuries later Frege took up Leibniz' ideal of describing the laws of the universe itself with a logical system that combined basic individual elements. However, he had to secure the foundations of this logical system. He tried to do this with the help of the self-evidence of a set of axioms, but was not able to avoid paradoxes. By using different definitions of the logical operators Frege's successors ended up with different logics and so they called into being a choice of logics.

And further away we waver from the solid house of *logos* with one space of logic. "This wide variety of logics that have been developed terminates all hope of finding the true foundations of logic. The failure of the mono-logical project meant the failure of the modernistic epistemological program: there is no way to ensure a unique indirect access to the real order of being". (Slob, 2002, 80/1; DR, 48) A whole range of theories of truth appeared, from correspondence (of being and saying) to deflationary (complete dichotomy of being and saying in favor of the latter). Truth had to be founded in theory, i.e. vision. Hegel's dialectical approach may have prepared, accommodated the making of choices in this realm. Husserl turned again to the universal subject and its in- or rather extensional consciousness. Heidegger tried to recuperate the factual truth of being. But Ricœur showed with a little help from the masters of suspicion, that all of them failed in one way or the other to bridge the enormous gap between being and saying, factual and extensional truth. No wonder, because their unproblematic unity had been lost for good. The subject is left to itself and s/he has to learn how to live with the fundamental uncertainty of reality and of his/her own subjective self. However, it remains to be seen if Ricœur himself will come to this conclusion.

So the postmodern claim that there is no final truth at all, no big story that gives content and direction to human life has a long preparatory history *in* modernity. Self-evidence was not as evident to all as it was presupposed. And again the natural sciences appeared to be pivotal. Long before the term postmodern was used Einstein discovered that the stable concept of linear time had to be modified. And with help from the Hubble telescope we discovered that instead of one solar system – our own - there were a great many of them in the universe. So who could still maintain that our sun was at the center of the universe? There was no center in the universe. The *de-centered* subject struggling to hold being and saying together was gradually forced to admit that it didn't have a center at all and became *non-centered*. Thrown into an infinite vacuum that can no longer be visualized, will postmodern man be left in a cacophony of fear and disorder at the mercy of nothing ...?

## Chapter 2

# Bible interpretation in the (pre-)modern era

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If the modern era of Western thinking is characterized by the end of the logical space of truth called *logos*, the turn to the subject and the need of interpretation, then it is now time to turn to hermeneutics and concentrate on models of interpretation related to the philosophical undercurrents. Hermeneutics will gradually grow more important in the philosophical systems of the modern era until in the end philosophy will *become* hermeneutics, expressed in terms of hermeneutics like in Ricœur's hermeneutical phenomenology. Also the popularity of a book like *Sophie's World* by Jostein Gaarder is significant here, because it testifies to a massively felt need to interpret reality individually and make one's own choices in the realms of thought and meaning. But this is not the only reason why I want to turn to hermeneutics and concrete models of interpretations in this chapter.

The big ideas developed in philosophy and hermeneutics find their way to the public through art and scholarship and their popularization by the mass media. The church losing its power, theology is always last in the line trying to rescue the important notions of the tradition that are threatened to get lost. So when new philosophical ideas show up in theology and Bible interpretation they are already widely spread in culture and society. Although post-modern deconstruction and radical criticism do show up on a regular basis in theology nowadays they rarely function as an interpretative model of the Bible text in sermons. However, also preachers are part of their culture and of the society they live in and interpretative models with their philosophical undercurrents are operative when they interpret a certain Bible text as source for their sermons. Now, like philosophy, interpretation is a cumulative process. Interpretative models do not replace former models completely, but build on them while integrating them in their own system. And so even pre-

modern models as well as the whole range of modern ones can still be found in contemporary sermons. Usually these interpretative models are implemented unconsciously and very often also confusedly. Which ones of them will be “chosen” depends on a whole range of different factors in the biography of the preacher. This can be the religious background of the family where he or she grew up, the theological atmosphere of the university where he or she studied, actual preferences in cultural, social and religious realms, etc. In this whole range of influences a wide variety of philosophical thought patterns and models of interpretation may be and actually are at work.

In this chapter I will try to show the close relationship between some important interpretative models and their philosophical backgrounds, by situating each model in its own historical and philosophical setting and worldview. These models have formed the analytical body of my research of the past few years, in which I try to obtain some clarity about contemporary Bible interpretation (cf. Vaessen, 97, 33-112)<sup>1</sup>. In the times of accumulating confusion we live in, preachers find it useful to get some clarity in the dark realm of unconscious interpretative processes that play an important role beneath the surface of their own sermons. After the discussion of the interpretative models, I will go into the method of analysis that I developed on the basis of Ricœur’s hermeneutical model that I use to analyze sermons with regard to their inherent Bible interpretation and that I tested on actually preached sermons on the Bible book of Ruth in the Netherlands Reformed Church in the Netherlands (cf. Vaessen, 97, 112-150). Finally, I will give an example of an analysis of one of my own sermons on postmodernism. This sermon – certainly not one of my best – poses the question of the postmodern collapse of truth and normativity and functions therefore as some sort of *trait d’union* to the next chapter where this question will come back in all its force.

## **Models of interpretation**

### **The naïve reading of the Scriptures**

Starting our short survey of modern interpretative models in premodern times seems to be an inner contradiction since in those times *logos* still provided for a solid house of logic and truth and interpretation had not yet be-

come problematic. And yet we encounter typological reading of the Scriptures and other premodern features very often in sermons and also in more general ways of thinking - and this not only in fundamentalist circles. Nostalgia for the warm safety provided by the solid house of truth (the Church?!) is not as uncommon as it may seem. So the naïve reading is still present in interpretation today and therefore merits its place in this survey of models of interpretation that have been developed throughout the whole modern era.

The starting point in the *naïve reading* is that it is possible to know God's will, because it is possible to know His Word, as He wrote it down and meant it to be. The intention of learning God's will is the implementation of His will in our lives here and now. Human interpretation can only violate the Bible text, is superfluous and confuses the congregation. Here we recognize the premodern worldview before Renaissance and Reformation, especially the typological way of reading the Bible. The solid house of truth is still standing firm, providing us with one logical space of truth. The believing subject is not yet doubting its basic truths but still has an unproblematic and immediate relation with the whole of the Biblical canon, God's will and the universe. Understanding the Bible text is not a matter of choice and interpretation but of being loyal and obedient to its deepest intentions. This loyalty will help people to prevent falling in lies, sin and darkness, help us to find and experience God's will, truth and redemption.

In the model of interpretation that I call *the naïve reading*, the whole of the Bible text is considered as a coherent unity without inner contradictions in which everything is typologically related to everything else and even more important than this: directly dictated by God. The human factor is seen as a "passive" or even reluctant tool in the hands of God's Spirit. Every word in the Bible has divine authority. The result is an "interpretative" model with the following features.

The reader's attitude should be receptive and obeying. No critical questions are asked in relation to the text. Much appreciative attention is paid to religious and social obedience of persons in the text, not to their critical creativity. Disobedience is appreciated negatively. Another important element of this model is the fundamental correspondence between the thought patterns, the existential experiences and beliefs of believing and living people in the texts and the believing and living readers of those texts. There is no or hardly any historical distance. Furthermore obedience can be demanded from or one can rely on authoritative persons or institutes outside the text. In sermons on



Ruth for example this can be Paul the apostle, or Jesus, but also rabbis, Catechism or contemporary theologians. Finally the analysis showed that the *naïve reading* takes it for granted that grace has priority over justice. This very tense and exciting relation is not elaborated from the Bible text, but - very often based on the authority of Paul or Catechism - imposed on this text as a magic formula and interpretative scheme.

### **Historical criticism**

The most important characteristic of *historical criticism* is “distance” and there we see the beginnings of the modern period. The immediate relation with the whole of the Biblical canon that made the typological reading possible is gone. There is a gap to be bridged between the reader of the Bible texts and the time when these texts were written. However, the Enlightenment’s “faith” in Reason is still intact. Descartes’ doubts have not yet thrown their shadows and Kant did not yet discover his *Ding an sich*, that made modern man turn so dramatically to the subject. In *historical criticism* it is still generally believed that the gap – although wider than ever experienced before - can be overcome and that through his reason the subject can obtain genuine knowledge of his object under investigation. And so Biblical scholars started to study Hebrew – in the Netherlands with the help of Jewish rabbis who had fled from Portugal and settled in Amsterdam – and Greek, so that the knowledge of the historical and literary contexts in the Bible grew enormously in a relatively short time.

For *historical criticism* it is principally possible to know the historical situation of the Scriptures in which God is active, although the unity of subject and object is no longer starting point. As I said, distance has come between the two, distance of time, space, language, culture etc. The intention is no longer that by means of our knowledge of God’s will, His will is directly implemented in our lives here and now. However, knowledge of this will, as it is expressed in the object of our study, can be very useful. This knowledge is more limited, that is less encompassing the whole than in the typological reading and the different elements of the studied object can be better distinguished from one another.

In sermons, pure *historical criticism* is often used to describe the atmosphere in which the text is situated. In a rational way, keeping historical distance, *historical criticism* tries to reconstruct the text and the meaning of the text objectively within the time of its origins. The meaning of the text within the spirit of the author is tracked down. Therefore, one tries to reproduce all

kinds of data behind the text: the time when it was written, the real author, the social, political and religious circumstances of the author, etc. This can pertain to a wide range of questions, here focused on an historical critical interpretation of the book of Ruth: Historically developed relations between Israel and Moab in the book of Ruth or in a wider perspective between Israel and the nations. Social security, next-of-kin, the institution of the *goël* as the redeemer in case of debt and levirate in case of childless death, both extremely important in the book of Ruth and exemplary for later developments. Religious and political settings, for instance during the reign of the judges and later the kings and other rulers. Editorial history and related topics, e.g. the function of for instance the Ruth story after the exile in Babylon, Aramaic expressions in the Hebrew text. The historical relation of the text with Jesus.

### **Free meditation, Schleiermacher**

For Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768-1834) it is the personal feeling of absolute dependence on the religious realm with its own independent power that is decisive in the interpretation of a Biblical text (the *schlechthinnige Abhängigkeitsgefühl*). Here we feel the influence of what Kant had done for the Romantics, i.e. to set free a realm that cannot be known in itself, but is nevertheless there with a power of its own. For Schleiermacher this was the religious realm that he had experienced in the Herzhutter's pietism. However, the pietistic atmosphere being too narrow for his own religious experience, Schleiermacher broadened his scope with the aid of Kant's epistemology. Although attracted by his severe method of reasoning that went very far, Schleiermacher was disappointed that Kant's metaphysical concepts remained empty. Kant's objective knowledge being too narrow as well, nevertheless brought new perspectives through the noumenal world and the *Ding an sich*. And so the dark sides of reality opened themselves as an independent religious realm of which the believing subject could be absolutely dependent and thus give decisively new meanings to reality - and this included the phenomenal reality as well. Since Schleiermacher hermeneutics is based on psychology. From then on the hermeneutical circle is a fact, which means that the subject is included and implied in its own interpretation processes from the very beginning until the end. Kant's general, even universal notion of self-evidence of the matter in the text to each subject is replaced by the highly individual religious feeling about this matter and the ideal of congeni-

ality with its author, which may be different for each interpreting subject. Not even twenty years after his death Kant's project of saving the unique logical space of truth by means of a mono-logic based on the concepts of self-evidence and universal subject had failed already. The unknown and unknowable are hard to expel from the human mind.

And so it was Schleiermacher – influenced by Kant's critical epistemology and by the religious romanticism of Pietism - who introduced the subject side of interpretation in a fundamental way in Biblical hermeneutics. The subjective experience of a text becomes the corner stone for the whole meaning of the text. Objective rules for explaining a text are no longer universally valid, because the subjective experience of the text can give completely different results than the rules. This turns hermeneutics as a set of rules for explaining the Bible text into a problem in itself. In the choice and in the elaboration of his exegetical rules the interpreter himself is completely part of his own interpretation. What Schleiermacher calls *objective* is the general side or the grammar of a text, that is the linguistic characteristics apart from an author. He calls *psychological* what is *particular* - related to the author - in a text. What matters here is to reach beyond the language (which only has a serving function) the subjectivity of the other who is speaking. This interpretation reaches for the thought-act that has generated the discourse or the text. Ultimately this is what matters in all interpretation. In his latest works Schleiermacher will stress more and more this psychological character of interpretation. The subject, the particular is gaining priority over the general, but Schleiermacher will not be able to relate the two in one great hermeneutical system.

Schleiermacher does not believe in the unbroken power of reason with regard to metaphysics and neither does he believe that the pure religious experience is determined completely by morals. Religion has its own power beside thinking and acting, permeating thinking and acting completely and influencing human consciousness. Religion determines how a human being experiences himself in the deepest sense and it is on this consciousness that theology (as faithful reflection) should build. Human consciousness becomes the determining hermeneutical key and so Schleiermacher gives metaphysics, which can not be known objectively, a new meaning as the religious element in the subjective experience.

All this has serious implications for the interpretation of the Scriptures and of other texts as well. Of course the historical and grammatical aspects of a text have to be studied first, but apart from that it is the feeling of the matter that the text is promoting which is decisive. This feeling - Schleiermacher calls it *unmittelbar erfassen*<sup>2</sup> - makes it possible for a reader to understand the author better than he ever understood himself. What matters is the matter of the text, which moves both reader and author in their own subjective experience of this matter. And if the Divine Word can no longer be known as such, than the subjective experience takes over the role of the objective rules to explain the Holy Scriptures. This subjective experience is very often more or less hidden beneath the surface of the text as I saw in a sermon on the functioning of the Law. The feminist preacher of this sermon painted the boring letter of the law as a general set of rules to be obeyed with male attributes, while she linked the just application of the law according to the spirit positively with the female individual. And so the personal preferences of the preacher played a decisive role in her interpretation.

### **Focused involvement, Dilthey**

Wilhelm Dilthey (1833-1911) had no doubts concerning the epistemological power of the unique logical space of truth that Kant wanted to rescue and restore. In opposition to Schleiermacher, Dilthey – although he too based his hermeneutics on psychology - did not search at the individual subjective side of texts to acquire deep knowledge of reality. He turned his attention more to the universal subject, the objective side of reality and its history reflected by texts and other “objectified life utterances”. Where Schleiermacher more or less sought the dark side of reality and kind of confirmed the being of the *Ding an sich* in a religious realm with a power of its own, Dilthey denied the existence of the dark side of reality and the *Ding an sich* in human reality. Knowledge of psychic life, no matter how alien, is per definition possible because of the already existing *a priori* coherence of the psyche. Dilthey characterizes the distinction between the “explaining” of the physical sciences and the “understanding” of the human sciences by the essential difference between nature and spirit. And he tries to give the understanding in the human sciences a basis that is as solid - that is as objective – as the basis Kant gave to the explaining physical sciences. In this, Dilthey relied more on Kant’s mono-logic and staid more on the light side of reality than Schleiermacher had done before him. The masters of suspicion having not yet uttered

their doubts about direct consciousness, Dilthey was more tempted and in fact did avoid the dark sides of reality than Schleiermacher.

However, psychic life is a dynamic, experiencing and developing whole, while the coherence of objectified life utterances is supposed to be an *a priori*, that is: not deducible from human experience. This inner contradiction – reminding us of but not operative in this way in Kant’s transcendental deduction – leads Dilthey to place his hermeneutics more and more under the sign of “life dynamic” that structures itself – by means of an ongoing interpreting process - in a constant coherence. But this reminds us of the development of Hegel’s Absolute Spirit, that is ultimately only at home in itself. Here, the exclusion of the *Ding an sich* with all its dark sides results in a quite different objectivity than the objectivity that Kant gave to the natural sciences. But then again, one can appreciate Dilthey’s understanding of hermeneutics: finiteness is overcome by history itself and not by a triumphal and absolute knowledge that poses itself above history (Ricœur, 1986, 87). However, whether psychology can still provide for the solid basis here remains doubtful.

Where Schleiermacher was searching energetically for all kinds of hidden subjectivities in a text and tried in his congeniality with the author to understand him better than he had ever understood himself, Dilthey – also deeply influenced by Kant – had a better eye for the meaning and the reference of a text as a whole in itself. Dilthey brought Schleiermacher’s general interpretation (philology) and particular or psychological interpretation (exegesis) together in what he called the historical problem. For Dilthey the most important question in all human sciences is: how is historical knowledge possible? Before the structure of a text there is the structure of history, which he considers as one great human document, as the most fundamental expression of life. In accordance with Schleiermacher and against Hegel, Dilthey – according to Ricœur - holds that “the heart of all human sciences is the individual considered in his social structures but in truth on his own” (Ricœur, 1986, 83)<sup>3</sup>. And so Dilthey takes his starting point in psychology. The physical sciences try to explain nature. The human sciences and Dilthey’s hermeneutics try to understand the spirit psychologically. In a focused involvement Dilthey wants to put himself in the psychic life of another. In doing so he created concepts to serve the understanding of the spirit, which is nothing else than the psychic life of the other.

Dilthey's hermeneutics then poses a double problematic. First he tries to reproduce a coherent historical structure based on a category of signs fixed by scripture or by another procedure of inscription equivalent to scripture – like statues, paintings, buildings. Life objectifies itself by means of all sorts of signs in more or less stable configurations and recognizable traditions. Direct access to the psychic life of the other, like Schleiermacher had, is not possible according to Dilthey. It has to be reconstructed by interpreting the objectified signs following the objective rules of philology. And yet - and here is the second aspect of Dilthey's problematic - this objective knowledge of history has psychology as its last ground. The autonomy of the text is only a phenomenon of a passing and superficial character. In psychology on the contrary man meets man, who – no matter how strange he may be - is never as alien as Kant's *Ding an sich*.

Focused involvement in the Bible text following Dilthey then combines two things in its attention for strange psychic life: the projection of one's own psychic structures and the interpretation of objectified expressions of life. The result is that the actual social, political and religious settings from the context of the reader that are objectified in correspondent institutes have become models to serve the understanding of historical objectifications in the Bible text. These will be approached starting in the actual questions, i.e. questions that play important roles on a larger scale than the individual psychic scale:

- social
- political
- religious

Kant had turned knowledge into a problem. Subject and object formed no longer a unity. Distance had come between them and knowledge had to be partial, restricted, provisional. However, as long as the subject served as universal basis of evidence some indirect but reasonably reliable access to truth was possible. When the subject lost this status of universality Kant's monologic collapsed. From then on two alternatives presented themselves to the human mind. The first is to acknowledge the *Ding an sich* together with the dark sides of reality that are inaccessible for human knowledge and search for another basis for the human mind than objective knowledge. Schleiermacher did this in the independent religious realm. Heidegger did this as well by replacing epistemology by ontology and choosing being as the fun-

dament of all knowledge. The other alternative is to deny the *Ding an sich*, the dark sides of reality and even the hidden world behind the world of the senses and concentrate on direct consciousness. Dilthey did this with his involvement in strange psychic life and so did Husserl with his eidetic and transcendental reduction. So Schleiermacher was more in line with the general development in philosophy of the modern era admitting more than one sort of logic and corresponding truth theory. He may for that reason have had more influence on modern hermeneutics than Dilthey who explicitly lingered in Kant's mono-logic of the subjective self-evidence as the universal and necessary ground of knowledge. But in Dilthey's days this had already become a faint reflection of the solid but by then principally collapsed house of logos. We will now first concentrate on structuralism as interpretative model with its roots in Husserl's phenomenology before we turn to Gadamer who introduces Heidegger's ontology into hermeneutics.

## Structuralism

Structuralism has come forth out of the line of Husserlian phenomenological thought. All the attention goes to the text as it is, not to the many factors behind the text that have caused its creation. As phenomenology was far more interested in the experienced structural identity of the things as they appear than in how they came into being, structuralism concentrates on the text as it lies before us. A deeper reality can show and even report itself in the text but then again it is always the text and a thorough analysis of the text that has to give deeper insights into the reality that the text contains and reveals. Here you will find no romantic search for the lost arc, no deeply felt congeniality with the author in order to understand him better than he has ever understood himself, no search for mummies in a shadowy museum of history that only come to life in never adequate projections, no idealization of history and time either. In structuralism it is only the text that counts as a structure with internal and external relations that reveals its "essence" or meaning as a function of this structure and not through some presupposed hidden and independent reality behind the text. Here structuralism has great affinity with Husserl's eidetic reduction.

Structuralism can go into extremes. In linguistics, De Saussure had already made a distinction between *langue* (synchrony: a-temporal system as object of structural analysis) and *parole* (diachrony: system disturbing event that has to be removed from the object). Someone like Hjelmslev sharpens this

distinction even further. Now, *langue* is no more than a closed system of mutual relations and differences in itself – a system of voids actually - without referring to anything in the real world. By rejecting the connection between language and reality/reference structuralism becomes idealism of the closed system and a purely formal discipline of abstract symbols and differences between constituting elements of the system. This reminds us of Leibniz' attempt to create a universal language with univocal symbols and Frege's system that allows different logics. And therefore structuralism cannot be denied a certain form of idealism, i.e. the idealism of immutable a-temporal knowledge. And here we are approaching Husserl's idealistic transcendental reduction, which leaves the conscious subject as fully autonomous and only responsible of itself, forgetting that consciousness is always consciousness *of* ... In this idealistic structuralism that concentrates on the closed system of voids, the structure of the text leaves a fully autonomous reader, who self-consciously constitutes *the* complete meaning of the text but does not receive *any* meaning from the text. And then knowledge resulting from the epistemological relation between subject and object has surely become problematic. The new Yale theology – Frei, Lindbeck, Holmer, Kelsey – moves into this direction<sup>4</sup>.

However, most structure-analytical methods – certainly not those that are used to interpret Bible texts - do not go as far as to exclude time completely from their research objects, their structures under investigation. It is a logical consequence of phenomenological thinking to experience within the phenomena themselves the fact that time exists. Time therefore does not have to be expelled to some ideal world where it is said to be non-existent. Time is rediscovered and rehabilitated as inherent of true reality, being a correlate of human knowledge, human endeavor. And as such time is not related to some lost paradise we have sadly left behind but to an inspiring goal lying ahead of us. This makes a fruitful relationship possible between Bible text and reader in which the reader receives and constitutes in consciousness “essential” meaning from the text that enables him to design meaningful and responsible structures for the future.

There are many structure-analytical methods of interpretation. One common element is that they all pay more attention to the literary work as it is and to the structure of the given text than to what is behind the text like the author, social, political or religious settings that have generated the text. In principle this development can move in two directions both represented in structuralism. The first direction is inward: a detailed study of all composing



parts of the text (close reading). The second direction is outward: the structure of the literary work of art as a whole and as part of a particular literary genre.

Well known in the Netherlands is the structuralism of the *Amsterdamse School*. Concentration on the given text - that is as it is and not as it is generated - characterizes the work of those who are considered to belong to this school<sup>5</sup>. Their structuralism moves in the two mentioned directions: first the detailed study of all composing elements of a text (close reading) and second the attention for the structure of the literary work of art as a whole and as part of a particular literary genre. From the beginning much attention was paid to the problems of translation and to language and styles within the Hebrew text. What characterizes a Hebrew text has to be tracked down and equivalents have to be created in Dutch. Therefore, reading the Hebrew text aloud and making one's own translation is the indispensable beginning of every sermon preparation. But also on a somewhat wider scale the hermeneutical questions have been important. The starting-point is here that exegetical methods have their own rights, but the biased diachronic methods remain subordinate to and have to be corrected by the synchronic methods. And this is the reason why the latest - post-exilic - edition of the Old Testament canon as transferred by the Synagogue (and in another form by the Christian Church) forms the basis for the studies of the *Amsterdamse School*.

A structural interpretation of a Bible text will usually focus on the following topics. The meaning of personal names in connection with the roles these persons play in the narrative. The meaning of important Hebrew words in the text. The genre of this text itself. The place of this text in literature as a whole. Here are several possibilities: one may start in the canon of TeNaCh (O.T.), or in the canon of the Christian Bible (O.T. and N.T.), or even in the Rabbinical or Christian literature in which the tradition of TeNaCh and New Testament is continued (Talmud, church fathers).

### **Gadamer's *Wirkungsgeschichte* or effective history**

The influence of Heidegger's ontological philosophy on the hermeneutical theory of Hans Georg Gadamer (1900-2002) is extensive. Being, world, situation, tradition are key notions in Gadamer's effective history and meaning received from them determines the position of the interpreter. In his book *Wahrheit und Methode* (Truth and Method)<sup>6</sup> Gadamer - following Heidegger

– says that time and its result finiteness is the most important characteristic of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* or effective history. The frontiers that Dilthey had drawn between present and past, and that Hegel had made into object of knowledge through consciousness in order to transcend them, are transfigured by Gadamer into horizons of effective history. And - as Heidegger has put it - situation, i.e. the connection to the world and to being itself, comes first and lies beneath any form of knowledge. It is given and cannot be manipulated by knowing or controlled by objectification. The awareness of belonging to a situation, of being within a horizon, is the awareness of my own historicity. At any horizon something stops and something new begins: the principle of finiteness. For Gadamer then, many meanings are received through the effective history - that is ontological truth. However, we are not totally passive receivers of meaning offered to us by being. Taking seriously Dilthey's questions related to history, by means of interpretation we can give new meaning as well - and that is epistemological method.

Tradition is so important for Gadamer that critics have argued that there is no room in his mind for what thoroughly disturbs the "belonging" or the victory of "nearness" over "distance". Disturbers can be non-Western traditions but we can also think of the hermeneutics of suspicion that criticize our own traditions. K ung and Tracy want to adjust and complete Gadamer's thinking on these very topics (K ung, Tracy, 1984 77-88)<sup>7</sup>. A similar critique comes from Derrida dealing with the character of the game. Where Gadamer aims at belonging to the structure of the game, for Derrida the playful character of the game is realized by undermining every structure that could limit its playfulness (Th. De Boer e.a., 1988, 81)<sup>8</sup>. Kant's unknowable *Ding an sich* is absent as well in Gadamer's effective history and so is Scheiermacher's religious realm with its own power. Its place is taken by what Gadamer describes as *Welt an sich* – the world in itself - that may however be expressed in religious language. This makes Gadamer's hermeneutics thoroughly phenomenological and non-transcendental (in the religious sense of the word), concentrating on what is shown and reported in the phenomena themselves.

### **Introducing prejudice.**

Old and new in the effective history never stand completely and independently on themselves. When the old dies it passes an inheritance to posterity. The new always inherits something from the old. It is connected to it in an untraceable way, i.e. by means of a historicity that cannot be controlled

by objectification. This is the way the effective history operates within human existence, the old - the traditions - are passed on beyond the different horizons where they are interpreted and grow into new traditions. Understanding is part of this finite quality of existence: bound to transmitted and created traditions within the actual horizon it cannot exist in the knowledge of an independent subject standing in front of an object that has to be interpreted. In some way the interpreter is part of his *interpretandum* as he is part of the effective history going its own way. And that is the reason why a classical work, a Greek tragedy or a Bible text cannot be untied from its long history of varying interpretations. The work is bound to its history of effects that become the new prejudices of the new horizons of understanding to determine the contemporary interpretation. Neither the work itself nor the interpreter can autonomously determine its meaning. The meaning grows in the effective history of its interpretations, in the traditions with its prejudices that flow out of this history.

For Gadamer it is impossible to approach a text or reality without prejudices. Prejudices are untested judgments, leading understanding as anticipations and subject to modification when made concrete. In other words the interpreter may again say "I" and bring his or her own prejudices to a text, if - and only if - there is a possibility that these prejudices can be modified while doing so. In order to realize this, the interpreter has to realize the distance between the horizon of the text and the history of interpretation of the text and his or her own horizon. And furthermore he has to approach his own personal prejudices in a critical way. Therefore, Biblical interpretation following Gadamer's line will never mention prejudices implicitly or without an intention, but always explicitly and with the intention to work on them. In sermons these prejudices can be expressed as personal prejudices coming from the preacher, but also as prejudices that live in the congregation.

### **Creating critical distance**

With the aid of classical texts Gadamer shows the double character of the relation between the reader and the text: the text is both unreachable and present (Gadamer, 1986, 290). The text is unreachable in its historical distance and present as a result of the *Wirkungsgeschichte* or effective history and our awareness of this history. So a text can never become an object because of its historical distance to the interpreting subject, for there is always also presence because of the *Wirkungsgeschichte*. And yet the distance is there

and this turns hermeneutics into a constant struggle between distance and presence, alienation and participation. Objective knowledge of the human sciences and epistemology is alienating because it keeps the distance between subject and object and makes participation impossible. So when Gadamer wants to understand the author better than he ever understood himself, he does not think in philological nor psychological terms of subject - object as Schleiermacher did, but in philosophical terms of participation in the same matter by reader and author as did Kant (Gadamer, 1986, 198). This gives the matter of the text much more independent substance than it had with Schleiermacher. What matters in the human sciences, according to Gadamer, is the participating knowledge of a matter at a distance based on different interpretations in order to give this matter more and more validity and truth.

Sermons will express this *creation of critical distance* especially by stressing the alienating elements in a text. A distance is created in relation to the text by explicating the otherness of the text in relation to our own prejudices by bringing them both into consciousness, so that they can be placed and observed in a new light.

### **The melting of horizons**

The *Wirkungsgeschichte* or effective history itself contains an element of distance. History can only transmit if there is a historical distance that is bridged by the transmission. The nearness of the far away, the effective in the distance and the tension between what is familiar and what is alien is characteristic for the historical consciousness itself. This tension is continued in Gadamer's concept of *Horizontverschmelzung* or melting of horizons.

The element of finiteness - important in the effective history - does not mean that I am locked up in one particular point of view. Wherever there is a situation, there is a horizon subject to widening and narrowing. Communication is possible between different kinds of consciousness in different situations and within different horizons and this communication takes place when the horizons melt. According to Ricoeur Gadamer created here a very fruitful idea and concept, because it means that we neither live within closed horizons nor within one unique horizon. And it also means that total and absolute knowledge is excluded. The concept of the *melting of horizons* implicates, on the contrary, the ongoing tension of what is familiar and what is alien.

Now, the communication that leads to widening horizons melting with other horizons, takes place by means of language. Gadamer follows Heidegger by not putting language in the first position. Language does not create but - in its being bound by situations - only gives expression to what is already present within the own horizon of understanding. *Wahrheit und Methode* discusses language only in the third and last section and this section is preceded by what it expresses: esthetics and history. And yet language is important for Gadamer, because language can bridge the distances that are given with being, language can bring near what is far away, language can widen and narrow horizons of understanding, language can melt horizons with each other and create new horizons. Gadamer goes as far as stating, that “all being that can be understood is language” (Gadamer, 1986, 478). Language should be understood in a very broad sense. Hermeneutics deal with everything that has meaning, that can be expressed and understood in language, that is the language of flowers, body language, the language of art and also human language. Even the unintended as far as it can be understood is important.

Well then, in the dialog that we are - as in the games we play - none of the participants can unilaterally determine the process or the result. On the contrary, it is the matter of the game, the conversation, the text that brings the participants together, that displaces the different horizons of understanding and that changes the participants, so that they will be different in the end compared to what they were in the beginning. This endless hermeneutical game played in the effective history, this ongoing struggle in interpretation between distance and nearness is described by Gadamer in his concept of the *melting of horizons*. In this struggle only one thing is certain for him: nearness will always win from distance, tradition from alienation, being from knowing.

In sermons we can speak of a *melting of horizons* when it occurs in combination with the two preceding elements of Gadamer’s interpretative model, the introduction of prejudices and the creating of a critical distance. The presence of the matter of the text is regained by a critical distance, which modified the prejudices. The *Wirkungsgeschichte* or effective history of a text makes it clear that we belong to a tradition that has generated the text and that we can participate in new ways in what the text brings to language through a deeper affinity with the ways of being in the text.

Ricœur's main objection to Gadamer's hermeneutics – notwithstanding his high esteem – is that truth and method, ontology and epistemology do not come together in a satisfying dialectic of receiving and giving of meaning in relation to texts. He even asks if the title of Gadamer's book *Truth AND Method* should not have been *Truth OR Method*. By shifting our attention from Gadamer's "dialogue that we are", from *Sprachlichkeit* (language) to *Schriftlichkeit* (text), we will turn to the matter of the text that has dissociated itself from both author and reader, but that - when approached in a more dialectical way - can nevertheless bring them a lot closer to each other. Cultural distance then is not a threat to be overcome but becomes a most productive element in the process of understanding (Ricœur, 1986, 96-100). Therefore, Ricœur will design his textual hermeneutics within the realm of hermeneutical phenomenology.

### **Creative imagination, Paul Ricœur**

As we have seen Paul Ricœur (1913 - ) uses Kant's transcendental deduction, Hegel's dialectical method, Husserl's eidetic reduction and Heidegger's reception of ontological meaning to end up in a highly original form of hermeneutical phenomenology. It is within this particular kind of phenomenology that he then develops his textual hermeneutics, concisely summarized in *Interpretation Theory*<sup>9</sup>. Within the Kantian concept of objectivity there is no final truth to be known by man. So knowledge, being, epistemology, nor ontology can incorporate the final truth. That is why Ricœur construed his textual hermeneutics as a dialectic of epistemological and ontological, structural and *wirkungsgeschichtliche* analysis with its starting point in the text and with the reader as active participant. Knowing and being do not have the quality of final truth but are gates to a reality that - although limitless in itself - can only be known and experienced within the limits of human freedom and in an indirect way, that is through the detour of the text. Meaning is received from the text by the reader, through his or her participation in the world that the text projects in front of itself and by giving new meanings to the text in this participation. And when the text is the Bible text then the world of this text is nothing less than the Kingdom of heaven.

## **Language as discourse**

Ricœur starts where Gadamer ends: in language, that is language as discourse, as a structure of signs that refers to something real. This reference may go into the direction of the extra linguistic reality, which is very real to Ricœur but only accessible through the narrow gate of human language. This linguistic reality has to be investigated first before the deeper layers of being can present themselves in human language. The main principle of Ricœur's hermeneutics is the ongoing dialectic of structure and event, of language as a static system of signs (De Saussure's *langue*) and language as a dynamic event with rhetorical power (De Saussure's *parole*). So Ricœur always starts with the static structure as the object to be analyzed, from which the limits are first established and then opened by the dynamic force of the event. This procedure continuously gives new impulses to the process of interpretation in an endless spiral movement. Ricœur therefore starts in the basic entity of discourse: the linguistic sentence in which the dialectic of system and event, of a-temporal noun and time related verb, of remaining object and vanishing subject is performed in the most fundamental sense of the word, and that through this dialectic activity forms the fundament of language.

## **The text**

What was implicit in the general understanding of language as discourse - the dialectic of remaining meaning and vanishing event - becomes explicit when discourse is understood as text. A distance comes in between the text and the reader, their relation becomes increasingly complex and both obtain a certain amount of autonomy.

“Discourse may be actualized as event; it is understood as meaning”. (Ricœur, 1976, 12). When oral discourse is fixed in material signs its event side disappears, because it vanishes in time and cannot be fixed. What is fixed by the new medium is the meaning of discourse, what is said and can be understood. When the medium becomes an external bearer the message will become more independent of its creator. The speaker of the message can no longer be asked for his real intentions or to correct misunderstandings, the text acquires semantic autonomy. What the text means now is more important than what the author meant when writing this text. This does not mean that the author – and the event side of discourse – are totally unimportant. They just cannot be fixed and thus complicate the discourse concept. In written discourse we will have to be satisfied with what the text means in its se-

mantic autonomy. However, the reader has certain autonomy as well. The text may be universal, intended for any reader, its semantic autonomy creates its own public that may or may not read it. Once a text is published it goes its own unpredictable ways. Furthermore, the genre of a text refines and complicates the relation between message and written discourse even further. Some code or genre is used for a certain type of message while others are used for different messages. To write in a certain literary genre increases the independence of the message in relation to speaker, hearer, situation, etc. and thus each genre transmits its own message, provides for the rules of a certain kind of discourse. And this message can refer to situation, the known or knowable world of the senses or logic but also to fiction, i.e. not restricted to actual events in time and space but bound to its own plot, to a world that exists in literary imagination. After all, direct contact between the partners in communication is lost. On the other hand precisely by means of this loss a world is opened by the text in which the reader can participate. "Thanks to writing, man and man alone has a world and not just a situation" (Ricoeur 1976, 36). Both autonomies – of the text and the reader – struggle for their right and this is the origin of the dynamic process of interpretation. "Where dialogue ends, hermeneutics begins" (Ricoeur 1976, 32). And Therefore, the distance between the text and the reader is an enormously stimulating factor in the process of understanding.

For Gadamer this distance is alienating, but Ricoeur considers the distance as a productive moment in the appropriation. Texts with their wide variety of reference claims open our world and broaden our horizon of existence. What we encounter in texts is not another person but a project, the contours of a new way of being in the world. Only texts open perspectives and project a world in front of them selves because they liberate themselves from their author, their first hearers and the narrow dialogue situation. Only in texts this destination of discourse becomes clear and that makes the text an important if not the most important form of discourse. In reading, on the other hand, a new dialectic begins, the dialectic of distance and appropriation. For Ricoeur distance is the counterpart of our need to make our own what is strange in order to overcome cultural alienation. "Reading is the *farmakon*, the remedy that rescues the meaning of the text from alienating distance by placing it in a new nearness, a nearness that both bridges and preserves the cultural distance and that integrates the other in one's intimate own" (Ricoeur, 1976, 43).



Because knowledge of the world of the text is not given a priori it is necessary to use all kinds of analysis and critique that are at our disposal to get to know this world that the text is projecting in front of itself. It is of utmost importance to accept the invitation of the text to enter this world and to go there our own creative ways.

In sermons the Ricœurian way of interpreting Bible texts is shown especially by this dialectic of distance and appropriation. First the world of the text is explored with the help of all the descriptive means we have at our disposal – historical, literary and other sorts of criticism – in order to find and describe new ways of thinking, believing, living. Furthermore the text will be considered as an independent entity, which projects a world in front of itself in which the persons of the story enter. Following the “as-if” principle of literary imagination the preacher himself is invited to enter this world as well and walk the new ways proposed by the text. Finally attention is paid to the critical creativity of persons in the story by means of which new ways of being are explored in both the context of the story and in our own.

### **Metaphors and symbols**

We will now turn to Ricœur’s metaphor and symbol theory with which he will give an enormous amount of extra depth to the dialectic of distance and appropriation mentioned above. Metaphors and symbols explore deep layers of reality and can even reach pre-lingual, transcendental and religious layers of human existence. The starting point for Ricœur however is always language, i.e. the narrow gate that leads to reality as it is, might have been, or may be some day. Epistemological analysis will lead us to the ontological *a priori*’s.

#### **The metaphor**

The metaphor is and is not what it indicates. Very often it contains a paradox that can go all the way to absurdity and thus forces us to consider reality in new ways. For Aristotle the metaphor worked on the level of single words and denomination. It was a style figure serving rhetoric, i.e. the writing of history, public speech and poetry. He defined the metaphor as “the transfer of a name on something that indicates something else as well; transfer of species to individual, of individual to species, or of individual to individual according to the relation of analogy” (Ricœur, 1975, 19)<sup>10</sup>. Ricœur relates the metaphor to the basic entity of discourse, i.e. the linguistic sentence. And

there it does not create a deviation in the literal sense on the level of denomination. The metaphor functions as proclamation on the level of a linguistic sentence and creates a conflict between two different interpretations that are active in that sentence. So through creative imagination the metaphor brings together in one image two different worlds that used to contradict each other and this causes a shock. It is the shock of the discovery, of the new insight that such an unthinkable connection does exist in the realms of thought and imagination. And that is why the living - that is new - metaphor is innovative, revolutionary and transcending frontiers. A new image like this - as an answer to the tension between two conflicting interpretations inside a sentence - signifies an extension of meaning.

In sermons metaphors occur in two ways. As metaphors found in the text – i.e. alive, new at the time when the text was written, dead or well known by now - of which the original creative and innovative force is explained. The preacher may also invent metaphors himself and then we may speak of not only tracing but of actually happening language creation.

### **The symbol**

The symbol has a double reality. First there is a direct literal meaning in which sparkles a hidden meaning rooted in being - good or bad - itself. The symbol is not a human creation of language or of images as is the metaphor. In the symbol the pre-lingual being gives itself in the language of the direct and literal meaning. The symbol does not try to capture or control evil prematurely in a myth in order to safeguard salvation. The symbol draws from the inexhaustible and hidden layers of meaning - good and bad - in being, which can only be named in a partial way by means of language.

Ricœur defines the symbol as follows: “every structure of meaning in which a direct, primary, literal sense indicates another indirect, secondary, figurative sense that can only be apprehended in and through the first” (Ricœur, 1969, 16)<sup>11</sup>. A symbol only becomes *symbol* when it is expressed in language. However, where metaphor is language creation, a giving of meaning to the surrounding world, the symbol reveals the dynamic of receiving meaning from a deep and hidden, even pre-lingual reality. Through the symbol man is related to reality that consists of many layers of sense. The force of the symbol is delivered in language from the deep and hidden layers of sense that root in extra lingual realms as “the holy”, “the lust”, “the cosmos” and Ricœur concludes: *le symbol donne à penser*, the symbol gives rise to

thought (Ricœur, 1960, 323, cf. 1969, 284)<sup>12</sup>. This suggests that all is said already – although maybe in riddles – and that all has to be started again in the dimension of thought. In fact, for Ricœur the symbol and symbolism, with its double structure of meaning, is so important that in *Le conflit des interpretations* he closely linked the whole hermeneutical project with it (cf. Ricœur, 1969, 8-28 esp. 16)<sup>13</sup>.

Before any theology or speculations of a more mythical character we already find symbols related to the direct experience of meaning. In the symbolism of evil we can distinguish between the magical view: evil as stain; the ethical view: evil as deviation; and the more internalized view: evil as burden. These symbols are formed with the aid of bearers of meaning borrowed from the experience of nature (contact, orientation in space, weight). These primary symbols show the double intentional structure of the symbol. Through the literal meaning – material stain, deviation in space and experience of burden – they aim, beyond themselves, at receiving meaning that concerns man embedded in the realm of “the holy”: the polluted creature, the sinner, the guilty one. So the symbol aims at something *as* stain, *as* deviation, *as* burden and that is what constitutes its inexhaustible depth. “The symbol is the movement of a primary (literal, JCV) sense that makes us participate in the latent (hidden, secondary, JCV) sense and thus assimilates us to what is symbolized, without us being able to control the similarity intellectually”. This is how and why the symbol gives; “it gives because it is a primary intentionality that gives a secondary sense”. (Ricœur, 1969, 286)

For Ricœur there are three categories that express the relation between the experience – in the symbolic sense – of evil and grace: the “in spite of”, the “thanks to” and the “how much more”. The “in spite of” is a real category of hope and absolution. Reconciliation is expected *in spite of* evil. It cannot be proven or organized only hoped for. Its home is not a system but a story not a logic but an eschatology. However, this “in spite of” is also a “thanks to”. The Principle of Things does serve grace with and *thanks to* evil. But this is and will remain a mystery since we do not dispose of absolute knowledge of neither realm. But finally there is St. Paul’s “how much more” of Romans 5,20: “where sin multiplied, *how much more* grace became abundant”, encompassing both the “in spite of” and the “thanks to”. Pseudo solutions of hasty rationalizations and mythologies like Gnosticism that pretended to be able to reign over evil by means of “knowledge” are transformed into hopeful comprehension. We no longer have to control evil in its abysmal depths by means of all sorts of rational symbolisms. That is beyond our powers. On

the other hand we don't have to recoil in horror either, because in the midst of evil we find the hopeful comprehension of the "how much more" of grace that will give us our highest rational symbols.

In sermons, symbols appear on a regular basis. This could be expected because symbols affecting man in relation to "the Holy" appear in manifold ways in the Scriptures as well, symbols of evil as well as symbols of grace. And since fear has been replaced by hope, the search for hidden meaning – in a negative or in a positive sense - can go very far and reach some kind of synthesis of evil and grace.

### **The suspicion**

Ever since Descartes, we doubt things as they are because we know things appear differently than they really are. However, Descartes did not make us doubt consciousness, which is how it appears. Since the hermeneutics of suspicion - Marx, Nietzsche and Freud - we have begun to doubt whether meaning and our direct consciousness of meaning are identical. The masters of suspicion have shown us how we misguide ourselves with all sorts of false arguments and how we imagine reality differently than how it really is. By exposing the false arguments they open the way for more authenticity and truth, not only by means of destruction, but also by inventing the "art of interpretation".

In the place of direct consciousness the masters of suspicion put an exegesis of meaning hidden in the expressions of direct consciousness. Through the suspicion of the facades a deep hidden meaning, obscured by the facades, will be liberated. They try to let the method of their investigations coincide with their object, which means that to find a meaning of something has become hermeneutics: we will have to decipher that in which the hidden meaning expresses itself. And here we find an analogy with symbolic knowledge, through the literal, primary sense we can reach a deeper, hidden sense. Always on a provisional basis, sure, and this means that we will never find the whole truth, we will have to be modest about our knowledge. However, our knowledge will nevertheless increase and our consciousness will continue to be enlarged. As we have seen, when method and object coincide, the fundamental category of consciousness is "hide and show". Restless coincidence of the two realms is not possible, but the attempt to achieve it remains a constant endeavor for the hermeneutics of suspicion.

In sermons, suspicion can be expressed in different ways. Explicit attention can be paid to the exposure of all sorts of abuse or general misunderstanding by (persons in) the text. The preacher can be very critical towards Bible translations or towards Jewish and Christian traditions of transmission of the text. Existing traditions here and now can be demythologized. The preacher can also be critical towards his or her own interpretation of the Bible text.

### **The relation of symbol and metaphor**

Symbols have a *surplus of meaning* that Ricœur sees as “a residue of the literary interpretation” (Ricœur, 1976, 55). This surplus concerns a vast and enormous field of meaning. Many different disciplines and arts are doing research into these fields, all using different symbols. Moreover, not all meaning present in the hidden layers of the symbol can be interpreted directly by language because it belongs to pre-lingual and even pre-semantic layers of meaning. And so certain tensions between what can be known by science or used in the arts or “felt” in religion and what cannot, will always remain. Although in the symbol assimilation of the two realms is operative, while in the metaphor creation of new reality by means of language is operative, the tension in the symbol can best be compared with the tension that works in the metaphor.

Metaphors are usually organized in a network consisting of basic and derived metaphors. The basic or prime metaphors (God as the Eternal One) hold the derived ones – borrowed from different fields of human experience, God as Father, King, Husband, Lord, Shepherd – together and keep them in balance and alive. In their capacity to attract derived metaphors basic metaphors can initiate an infinite number of potential interpretations on the conceptual level. And thus a hierarchy develops in the network of metaphors comparable to the hierarchy in the realm of the symbol (primary, mythic and rational symbols) and it appears that, on each level of both hierarchies, the symbol asks for the cooperation of the metaphor. And so metaphors can be seen as elaborations of the “material” supplied by symbols.

Symbolic systems can be represented as a reservoir full of meaning of which the metaphoric potential still has to be expressed. Symbolic experiences ask to be given meaning and this request is answered by the metaphor in a limited and finite way. Therefore, metaphors are more and are less than symbols. They are more, because what remains obscure in the symbol - pre-semantic and pre-linguistic layers of meaning and the infinite correspon-

dence of the elements - is brightened by the tension in the metaphorical expression. On the other hand the metaphor is less, because it is no more than a linguistic procedure in which the symbolic wealth is deposited. "Metaphors are only the linguistic surface of symbols and they owe their power to relate the semantic layer with the pre-semantic layers in the depths of human experience to the two dimensional structure of the symbol" (Ricœur, 1976, 69). So the metaphor can reveal deep and hidden meaning but because of the surplus of meaning in the symbol this metaphoric activity will always remain limited and provisional.

In sermons this dialectical relation between symbol and metaphor appears when the preacher relates grace with the three categories of the symbolism of evil: the "in spite of", the "thanks to" and the "how much more" and clarifies this relation with new living metaphors, so that new confidence is created to enter the struggle of good and bad.

### **Explaining and understanding in the *récit***

The *récit* - in Ricœur's use of the term - is the opposite of the univocal solution. It is a term that is difficult to translate and that lodges both the more objective act of explaining in scientific and historiographic analysis *and* the more artistic understanding in literature<sup>14</sup>. Explaining then pertains to the unfolding and distinction of the constituting parts of a certain structure while understanding is the synthetic act of comprising the distinguished constituting elements as a whole. Dilthey still separated them severely in his famous distinction of *erklären* (explanation of the natural sciences) and *verstehen* (understanding in the humanities). Ricœur however brings them together in a dialectical process, analogous to the dialectic of structure and event, that plays such an important role in the basic entity - the sentence - of any kind of discourse, oral and written, analytic and artistic.

This dialectic of explaining and understanding shows two movements. The first movement goes from guessing, understanding intuitively (based on ontological pre-judice) to explaining in the sense of verifying the primary intuitions. Here Schleiermacher's decisive "feeling" is completed by a more objective analysis of the meaning of the text, because we have no direct access to the author's intentions. We will have to enter the hermeneutical circle in which the whole of the text receives meaning from the constituting parts and vice versa. This is still a form of guessing because there is no necessity or proof of what is important and what is not (cf. Kant's theory on judgments).

However, it is possible to test the validity of the outcome of our guessing on the basis of the logic of probability, which leads us via Ricoeur's metaphor theory back to Aristotle. And thus, although different outcomes are still possible, our interpretation gets a solid scientific basis. The second movement goes from explaining, the sum of clear insights, to a more sophisticated way of understanding based on these insights that Ricoeur calls comprehension. Could the first movement be described as the dialectic of event and meaning, the second movement is more a dialectic of sense and reference. When a text is loosened from its original frame of reference there are two ways to read it. The structural synchronic reading searches for sense in the coherence, the in- and external relations of the text itself apart from whatever frame of reference. However, sense and reference can never be untied completely. They will always be related if only in the *Wirkungsgeschichte*, the effective history of hidden existential reality and conflicts. And thus the analysis of surface semantics will lead to a new comprehension of the semantics of the human existential depths. In the double movement of explaining and understanding explaining is the mediator between understanding and comprehension and becomes totally artificial if it is taken out of this concrete process. So in the dialectical movement of ontological receiving of meaning and the epistemological giving of meaning the hermeneutical circle, which in epistemological terms still was a vicious circle because subject and object implied each other, now becomes a hermeneutical spiral in which each stage leads to new depths and further insights. Starting from an ontological pre- or naïve understanding combined with epistemological critical analysis we end up with a new comprehension of existential depths in an ongoing hermeneutical process. (Cf. Ricoeur, 1986, 92/3 <sup>15</sup>)

A text, analytic or literary, has references in reality and wants to say something, to aim at something by means of the inherent imaginative forces. The text unties itself from its creator and obtains semantic autonomy, independent meaning. Likewise the reader is free to step into the world of the text with his or her own framework of references, to perform a thorough analysis and to discover and go the ways the text is proposing. The distance created by the critical analysis between text and reader is made productive because it has led the initial understanding to a new comprehension of the depths of human existence described by the text. Receiving new meaning from the text in this way – resulting from the dialectic of explaining and understanding - implies a loss of narcissistic ego of the reader that claims to constitute and “own” the whole meaning of a text. Starting point for Ricoeur's textual her-

hermeneutics is not the reader, but the text. Texts can open up worlds and realize new ways of self-understanding. This new self that comes forth out of a deeper comprehension of the text, is the complete opposite of the ego that claims to precede understanding. "It is the text, with its universal power to open the world, which gives a self to the ego." (Ricœur, 76, 95) And this transforms the process of interpretation into an endless process of receiving and giving of meaning. Each text – the biblical text as well - has a provisional character, i.e. never revealing completely its surplus of meaning. And that very fact calls forth new texts and guarantees the continuity of tradition. What direction this continuity will take is to remain open. In this way the hope for a better future is not captured in closed systems of thought but remains a creative and living reality.

So the imaginative game played in the encounter of text and reader will be dialectics of structure and event, hermeneutics and rhetoric, analysis and literature, receiving and giving of meaning, of self and ego. Sermons that follow the interpretative model of Ricœur will draw heavily on these dialectics. The preacher may stress the premature character of the understanding of the Bible text presented in the sermon and thus stimulate the study of the same text again so that new meaning still may emerge. The preacher may also stimulate new thought processes in himself and in the congregation that will lead to further exploration of the world of the given Bible texts.

### **Evaluation, where do we go from here?**

What appears to me as striking in the development of hermeneutics in the modern era is that models of interpretation that initially drew from and were built on philosophical systems gradually become complete philosophical systems themselves. *Historical criticism* for example is application of pre-Kantian Enlightenment rationality. *Schleiermacher* and *Dilthey* follow Kantian lines although they go into different directions, the former – sometimes called the father of hermeneutics - in a more original way than the latter<sup>16</sup>. *Structuralism* as a hermeneutical current already begins to look like a philosophical system but as such remains highly dependent on Husserl. The idea of *effective history* in "Truth and Method" on the other hand may still draw heavily on Heidegger's ontology, but with it *Gadamer* has designed a philosophical system of his own with its own worth and value. In the end interpretation is philosophy, *Ricœur's textual hermeneutics* is hermeneutical phenomenology. Sure, Ricœur uses many philosophical systems that pre-



ceded him, but with them he creates an entirely new philosophical system on an entirely new basis, the interpretation of texts. Hermeneutics has become philosophy itself and this only confirms the idea that the modern era is the era of hermeneutics.

Philosophical systems and hermeneutical models never are independent or self-supporting entities. In the history of philosophy of the premodern and modern eras, one could discern the following development: 1) coming from a naïve belonging in a natural attitude that feels at home in the unique logical space of truth where the possibility of knowledge is beyond any doubt, 2) criticism comes in and de-centers the subject, consequently objective knowledge is focused on the subject and becomes a problem, 3) until a new basis prior to all knowledge is found in being. Using Ricœur's terminology one could call this development: "first naivety - critical analysis - second naivety"<sup>17</sup>. As we have seen interpretative models are closely related to thought patterns developed in philosophy. In our scheme of interpretative models, the *naïve reading* and *historical criticism* would then belong to the first naivety. *Schleiermacher* and *Dilthey* would belong to the critical analysis along Kantian lines, and *structuralism* to critical analysis along Husserlian lines. Finally, *Gadamer's effective history* can be reckoned to belong to the second naivety in which knowing and being are related in new ways. And so does *Ricœur's textual hermeneutics* that also establishes the relation between knowing and being but in a more dialectical way with the text as starting point instead of personal prejudices.

The main principle in this development is that what preceded in interpretation is considered in a new way and integrated in a new interpretative model. And so interpretative models that were focused on receiving objective meaning from the text (naïve reading, historical criticism and structuralism) gradually integrated more subjective giving of meaning by the reader until in the extreme forms of structuralism the subject posited itself as fully self-conscious only responsible to itself. However, eliminating itself (as subject) as "a system disturbing event" and its object as a "system of voids". In the models that focused more on the subjective giving of meaning by the reader (Schleiermacher, Dilthey, Gadamer) the horizons gradually widened so that more meaning was received from an expanding world. Finally in Ricœur's hermeneutics, where preceding interpretative models from both sides are integrated, the world of the text reaches beyond our own conscious knowledge while the ego of the reader is expanded, completed by a new self coming from the text.

Preachers - and not only preachers - usually do not create but follow philosophical and hermeneutical models. In my own research it appeared, that the described interpretative models are found in sermons in different combinations. So preachers too are seriously influenced by the “spirit of their age”, but the mix of models that is operative in their sermons will differ with each preacher. Education, denomination, theology, psychological, social and other backgrounds are important factors that have a strong influence on the development of a personal mix of interpretative models and this mix is also closely related to very personal circumstances, creating meaning as expressed in the sermon. Theological analyses by preachers featuring in their sermons appeared to be much closer to their own personal hermeneutical mix than they had ever imagined themselves. Not only did it become more than clear that theology too is finite interpretation of infinite reality, the personal hermeneutical mix turned out to be a dark area as well. Preachers are usually not aware of the great impact of philosophical and hermeneutical models that reign in their age and in their own thinking. Well then, not only does insight in their own hermeneutical processes offer preachers some lucidity in a dark area, but it also increases their freedom. The unconsciously felt coercion from a certain interpretative model will vanish, because of the possibility of choice for one or another interpretative model. And ultimately this hermeneutical lucidity will be reflected by rhetorical lucidity and will increase the rhetorical power of a sermon as well.

One important line of thought followed by Ricœur is that through critical analysis we have lost forever our first naivety. However, this does not mean that naivety or faith or a sense of belonging is completely lost. Critical analysis can lead us to another form of naivety and in the second naivety something has been preserved of the first although it is completely different. I see a strong analogy here with the sequence we saw above: understanding – explanation – comprehension. Ricœur’s condition is that we have to stay within the Kantian limits and concepts of objectivity. Only then every individual interpretative model has its own - limited - value. In the postmodern concept of objectivity these values are lost, as is Kant’s mono-logic. The concepts of time and space are no longer *a priori* categories in the Kantian sense but derived from individual or holistic, that is human experience and thus in a very fundamental way fluent and uncertain. Structure will then give way to event. When however we take the loss of modern logical uniformity seriously, or just take the hermeneutics of suspicion as seriously as Ricœur does,

we will have to leave room for the possibility that reality is totally different from what we have ever imagined, even that postmodernism is right in its fluctuating and nihilistic assumptions. And then the question, to what new interpretation will Ricœur's textual hermeneutics lead us, where do we go from here? becomes a core question and an arduous one. Especially when we realize that for Ricœur there is no way back to former naiveties, because his hermeneutics always call for new interpretations in a principally progressive way.

I will now give an example of an analysis of interpretative models operative in one of my own sermons on postmodernism. My aim here is twofold: to illustrate the work of interpretative models in a sermon and to begin our reflection on the question: where do we go from here, when modernism is over and out?

## **A sermon analysis**

### **The method**

The analytical model that I designed in my dissertation to analyze hermeneutical depths and operations in sermons is based on Ricœur's textual hermeneutics. This means that the basic movement of the analysis goes from a preliminary understanding through a thorough analysis to a new comprehension of what has happened in this sermon. A first impression of the interpretation is acquired from the rhetorical side, i.e. the surface of the sermon text. I always divide the sermon in a sequence of (numbered) segments that have inner coherence called moves by David Buttrick<sup>18</sup>. Then I look for keywords in each segment that can serve as the basis for a summary of that segment. This will result in a first impression of the interpretation of the Bible text in this sermon. The hermeneutical analysis starts with confronting each keyword with the analytical questions that have been developed for each interpretative model and as a result of this confrontation each keyword will be related to one or more models and their codes. Starting from Ricœur's dialectic of text and reader I have rearranged the models in a slightly different way as I did above: 1) the text has a) the naïve reading, b) historical criticism and c) structuralism, 2) the reader has a) Schleiermacher, b) Dilthey and c) Gadamer, 3) dialectic of text and reader is completely dedicated to Ricœur.

The codes attributed to the keywords in the charts correspond with the codes in the list below. This list is the actual analytical instrument for a sermon analysis. The last step of the analysis is the counting of the number of scores of the various interpretative models. The interpretation of this numeral picture will lead to an enlarged comprehension of the Bible interpretation in this sermon.

So this sermon analysis is in fact interpretation of interpretation. Based on Ricœur's textual hermeneutics – taking seriously the hermeneutics of suspicion – its method coincides with its object. This means that each attribution of an interpretative model to a keyword is a matter of judgment inside the hermeneutical circle based on the logic of probability. The individual decisions are influenced by the hermeneutics of the whole sermon and the total view is developed out of the individual attributions of interpretative models. Thus different models can be attributed to one keyword and this occurs frequently, especially when the sermon lacks hermeneutical clarity. However, the attribution is not done arbitrarily, but is based on the hermeneutical theory that resulted in the interpretative models as described above. That the hermeneutical circle is not a vicious circle that yields no new meaning but takes on the form of a spiral circling over the same points but every time at a different altitude thus producing new meaning, is shown in the second part of the analysis. The structure of the numeral picture is just an enumeration but will lead to an evaluation of the hermeneutical and existential depths of the sermon and its preacher. The sermon we are about to analyze is a sermon I preached on postmodernism and certainly not one of my best. For an analysis however this is perfect, because the analysis will be extra challenged to bring to light deep, existential and even unconscious layers into the consciousness of the preacher.

## **The analytical instrument**

The following list is the actual analytical instrument for a sermon analysis. It contains the analytical questions that have been developed for each interpretative model to be confronted with keywords from the sermon text.

### **1. The text**

- Is the reading from the Scriptures part of a lectionary or reading schedule?
- Is the text important apart from one's own experience of the text?

### **1a Naïve reading**

1. Is absolute obedience to the text demanded without any opportunity to raise questions related to this text?
2. Is there much positive attention for the religious and/or social obedience of the persons in this text (and negative attention for their disobedience) instead of attention for their critical creativity?
3. Is the identity suggested of faith and experiences of the people in the text and people here and now? (Due to historical criticism and Gadamer mostly existential layers will be involved here.)
4. Is any obedience demanded towards authorities outside of the text?
5. Is the axiom “grace before justice” taken for granted without human beings being able to make any difference in this realm and “deserve” grace?

### **1b. Historical criticism (here applied to the story of Ruth)**

1. Does the preacher explain relations between nations and their historical development (like Moab and Israel)?
2. Does the preacher explain institutions of social security (Boaz: next-of-kin, redeemer)?
3. Are the religious and political settings during the time of the Judges elaborated in the sermon?
4. Is there any attention for the function of the Ruth story in post-exilic times (Aramaic expressions in the Hebrew text)?
5. Is a historical relation established between Ruth and Jesus?

### **1c. Structuralism.**

1. Have meanings of names been related to the roles that their bearers play in the text?
2. Are important Hebrew and Greek words mentioned and explained?
3. Does the preacher say anything about the genre of the text?
4. Has the text been situated in the canon of Old and/or New Testament, rabbinic literature or Jewish or Christian tradition?

### **2. The reader**

- Does the preacher say “I”?
- Does the reading of the Scriptures serve a certain theme?

### **2a Free meditation, Schleiermacher**

Does the preacher make guesses for personally relevant meanings of the text apart from the objective exegetic results and does the preacher relate them to free thought associations regarding his or her own personal faith?

**2b Focused involvement, Dilthey.**

Does the preacher give meaning to the text starting from

1. the social actuality,
2. the political actuality or
3. the cultural-religious actuality?

**2c Gadamer's *Wirkungsgeschichte* or effective history.**

1. Introducing prejudice

Have personal prejudices of the preacher or of the congregation with regard to this text, the persons in the text or the implicit image of God of the text been made explicit in the sermon?

2. Creating critical distance

Did the preacher take a critical distance towards these prejudices in order to experience the different or even culturally alien character of this text?

3. Melting of horizons

Has the created distance been overcome by focusing on common existential layers, so that the culturally alien text is nevertheless introduced in our own modern western experience?

**3. Dialectics of text and reader through creative imagination, Ricoeur**

Is there freedom of movement inside and outside the given text?

**3a. Language as discourse**

Is the preacher consciousness of the fact that language - as a closed system - is fixing things, has references and is tied to reality and that at the same time language - as an event - opens up closed systems, has ideal intentions and creates new reality? Does the sermon show the ongoing dialectics of both elements of language so that the surplus of meaning in language can manifest itself in the sermon?

**3b. The text**

1. Is the world of the text explored with as many means as we have - like historical, literary and other sorts of criticism - in order to discover new ways of living, thinking, believing?
2. Does the preacher handle the text as an independent entity that projects a world in front of itself in which persons within the text enter and in which the preacher is invited to enter as well to go the new ways proposed by the text?
3. Is there any positive attention for critical creativity of persons in text?

### **3c Metaphors and symbols**

#### *1. Metaphor*

1. Have living metaphors (i.e. alive when the text was written) been traced in the text and is their innovating power explained?
2. Do dead (already existing) or living (newly invented) metaphors occur in the sermon?

#### *2. Symbolism of evil and grace*

1. Have symbols been traced in the text and does the preacher indicate their bottomless depths related to the hidden layers of meaning that root in evil (3c2.e) and grace (3c2.g) as well as the dialectics of the different layers of meaning within the symbols themselves. Has the mystery of evil - in all its dark and incomprehensible layers of meaning - not been eliminated in advance by introducing it into a rational myth?
2. Does the sermon create room for a dialectics of evil and grace? Does the preacher have so much trust in grace, that the struggle between evil and grace may take place in his or her own person and in the sermon so that grace may emerge from the struggle itself (in the sermon or in the silent prayers after the sermon)?

#### *3. Suspicion*

1. Has attention been paid to de-mythologizing activities of persons in the given text?
2. Does the preacher have a critical attitude towards Bible translations and Christian and Jewish traditions that have regulated the transmission of this text (in the story of Ruth this may be the role of women, the destruction of mixed marriages etc.)?
3. Are actually existing traditions de-mythologized?

4. Is the preacher critical towards his or her own interpretations of the given text?

*4. Relation of metaphor and symbol*

1. Does the surplus of grace symbolism liberate the preacher to use living metaphors in the sermon in a free and creative way?
2. Does the sermon create room to tangle the struggle of evil and grace with new trust?

**3d Explaining and understanding in the *récit* of the sermon**

1. Will the preacher accept the preliminary character of his or her own understanding of the world of the Bible text and thus of the sermon that depends on this understanding?
2. Does this sermon stimulate the preacher to study the same text again and search for new explanations so that new meanings and a new understanding may emerge?
3. Is the preacher trying to start new thought processes in his or her own mind and in the congregation that stimulate a further exploring of the world of the given Bible text?

**Analysis of the sermon on Luke 13:1-9 (the barren fig tree)**

By J.C. Vaessen on March 15, 1998 (Lent) in Gasselte, Holland.

*1 Liturgy*

Lectures: Exodus 6:1-7 and Luke 13:1-9 in a Dutch Reformed liturgical setting. The Wednesday before this Sunday was the traditional orthodox holiday of prayer for good crops in the coming season. In more liberal congregations the holiday itself has been abandoned but may still have its effects on the following Sunday worship service.

**Sermon**

*2 prayer for crops*

Dear brothers and sisters in our living Lord Jesus Christ,  
Last Wednesday it was annual prayer day for good crops in the coming season. Now, you may think: aha do we still pray for good crops? That should not be necessary anymore, because with our latest methods of agricultural production we can control precisely what we do and what don't want to



grow and foresee exactly how much it will bring us. Nowadays we can calculate how much a lettuce will cost, because we control the whole productive process and can safeguard it from unforeseen external factors. The value of all the work that has to be done to get this lettuce in the supermarket can be calculated in a very precise way as well, because the value of labor is a controllable economic factor expressed in money. We also know rather accurately how much revenue this lettuce will bring us. Prices may vary a bit, but with a sophisticated marketing policy we can protect ourselves against the heavy fluctuations and make reasonable decisions. Agriculture is reduced to human biogenetic and economic control and the question whether the work you do does make sense or not - just like the power of vitality in that single lettuce - is beyond human control and thus out of order. I am the one who decides and I won't make my decisions dependent on a higher power than myself. Okay I do not control world economy and the fluctuations on the stock markets but I can follow them in a scrupulous way and make my moves accordingly - that is if I have money. RTL 5 television program "Business Update" is the new worship service, speculations on the stock market the new praxis of faith to which this liturgy calls us. Who's talking about praying for crops?

### *3 ethical dilemmas*

Biogenetics and also medical technology are far reaching disciplines and they confront us with enormous ethical questions that we cannot ignore any longer. The question that puzzles me most is especially the question of my personal relation with God. I mean if life is a matter of handicraft and pottery, what will remain of my own life and personality? Life that God made in such diversity and uniqueness, life He gave me personally doesn't seem to be so unique anymore when it can be copied freely with all sorts of cloning techniques or partially replaced by means of organ donation. And yet medical technology is a blessing. Medical technology improved many people's lives and even saved many from an early death. So why say no to the latest developments while all of us have profited so much from them and for such a long time? I have the feeling that we are reaching a point beyond which I start to say no. And I will say no when my personal relationship with the God of heaven and earth and with other people has become impossible. We are heading in that direction when we make everything dependent on the individual decision making of every human being, when we put God outside our range of vision and deprive each individual of its own value and dignity. In that case what would be the sense of searching one another in community,

why should we confess each other our failures and sins and why should we ask God to forgive our trespassing and help us when life is difficult?

#### *4 god/postmodernism*

Developments in our society and our culture are heading in this direction. I am reading a lot of so called “postmodern” literature lately and the message is clear. There is nothing we can be sure of anymore. World economy, existence in general, God, our individual personality, they have all become volatile, ethereal, wavering fundamentals and this is not surprising if you realize that man has to control everything without being able to do so. There are so many things in life that man does not create himself but has to receive - if only life itself. The higher powers cannot be pushed aside so easily. If you do, other things will take their place immediately. Just think of the RTL 5 liturgy of “Business Update”. People don’t only give meaning to life they also receive meaning, more than they ever could create by themselves. And if this mere fact is denied I say no, no, no. Because it would mean that I am totally left to my own self, my life will become very poor and short-sighted. We need each other to pray, to sing, to experience that our community is more than the simple sum of all the individuals gathered here. And this “more” this surplus is present in the Holy Spirit who joins us and makes us experience that He carries us when life is difficult, that He makes our lives valuable, that we receive His warmth in order to share it with others. This community has value. Old fashioned? Okay, so be it. But she’s worth to hold on to, to fight for, and to remind each other that the Holy Spirit is and remains with us all. Take only the fruits of what you have invested, than you will limit yourself to your own unsure shrinking little self. Live from the love of God, than you will be lifted above yourself and you will never be alone anymore. And what love builds will sustain one way or another. The mere fact that we still gather here as a congregation of Christ finds its cause in the love of people who have been building this congregation for centuries and centuries and never stopped. Society and our culture may choose another direction, the congregation of Christ still exists, is very much alive and will be protected in the love of the Lord.

#### *5 liberation*

Considering all this I think to myself, I have heard this before. It all sounds so familiar. And that is how we get to our lectionary texts. The people of Israel have always been different from the surrounding world. Threatened, almost destroyed from time to time and yet they cling to their Lord, Creator of

heaven and earth, the one who always carried them through difficult times and never abandoned them. In Egypt too they were a threatened minority, slaves of the mighty pharaoh. They were trapped, but the Lord did not accept Egypt's repression of his people. He had promised them a holy land to live in and that was their destination. That is why He would liberate them from their slavery and nothing could stop Him. Mind you, the most important point here is not the wickedness of Egypt and the bad conditions there but the fact that the holy people reaches its destination. It's clear that the conditions in Egypt were bad otherwise God would not have been compelled to come to action through Moses. But what is important is that God comes to action. He does not let His people down. He gets his children out of a difficult position and leads them to their destination. We should not pay all our attention to Egypt but to the liberating work of the Lord of Israel in favor of his people. That is precisely what Jesus says to the people who come to him with the question about the disasters that hit people. Don't point your finger to others who did so many things wrong and are now hit with so many plagues and disasters. We must not focus our attention on that. No, we should pay all our attention to how God leads you and me to our own destination.

#### *6 self-criticism - light*

If we point our finger, that finger should before anything else be pointed in our own direction. Maybe I am that barren fig tree that should be cut down. But there is a gardener who cares and who will pay extra attention to his tree in order to bring it to its destination that is to bear fruit. Maybe we let ourselves - as the community of Christ - be dragged away by the alarming developments of our time. But that is not where all our attention should go. We would let ourselves guide too much by the dangers and put too little trust in the Lord who will carry us through all the dangers. It is okay to be critical and value the signs of our era, but in all that we have to keep in mind that our God is Lord of time and space and that He will never abandon his children to their own fate. He will lead us through the darkness to our destination. Not the darkness deserves our attention. The light that He shines in the darkness is much more important. And so we will - just like the people of Israel - survive. We will survive because we remain critical towards the surrounding world and do not follow in everything. We stick to our Lord Who sticks to us, to Him who makes our life worthwhile and our death fruitful, because He relates to us with his Holy Spirit until eternity.

### *7 wages>money*

Praying day for the crops? Maybe it is not such a bad idea after all. Just like the day of thanksgiving for the crops in the fall. These liturgical holidays have disappeared a bit into the backgrounds of our faith. Understandably so in our cultural setting but maybe we should get them out of that darkness again. Because our God is and will always remain the Lord of Creation, who enables us to create our “handicraft”. Our work has remaining value if it is related to His love. Every worker deserves his salary, but these earnings cannot be expressed in only ciphers and money. If God’s Spirit is active in our work, than this work will relate us also to Him and to our fellow men. And what are the good fruits: love, joy, peace, patience, to mention only some of them. Do you miss these fruits? Well open up your heart to the Lord and ask Him to care for you and you will bear fruits that only He can give, as a community but also in your personal life. That is a perspective that Jesus promised us with his parable of the barren fig tree. Amen.

## **Analysis of interpretative models in the sermon**

### **First impression**

The first impression of the interpretation in this sermon is, that the Bible text is read from the interpretative model of Dilthey. The actual situation in society, the cultural connections and the position taken in all this by the congregation of Christ form the lenses through which Luke 13:1-9 are interpreted.

### **Analysis**

Summaries based on keywords and attributed codes

| <i>keywords</i> | <i>codes</i> |
|-----------------|--------------|
| 1 liturgy       | 1a4          |
| promised land   | 1c4          |
| infertility     | 3c2.1e       |

#### *summary*

The lectionary gave as parallel reading to Luke 13:1-9 (on the barren fig tree) the reading from Exodus 6:1-7 in which God promises his people through Moses liberation from the Egyptian slavery and the holy land as their final destination.

| <i>keywords</i> | <i>codes</i> |
|-----------------|--------------|
|-----------------|--------------|

|                              |                    |
|------------------------------|--------------------|
| 2 prayer for crops           | 2b3; 3c2.1e        |
| value of labor               | 2b1                |
| control economy/biogenetics  | 2b1                |
| decide for oneself           | 2b3                |
| depreciation values/vitality | 2b3; 3c2.1e        |
| business update              | 2b3; 3c1.2; 3c2.1e |

*summary*

Do we still have to pray for good crops in our days now that the value of labor has become a controllable economic factor expressed in money and the vitality of the crops a controllable biogenetic factor expressed in feasible marketing targets? The individual right (or duty) to decide for one self deprives us of our vision on the values and vitality that were already present before we started recreating them. For that purpose we use RTL 5 television program “Business Update” without realizing how fake it is.

| <i>keywords</i>         | <i>codes</i> |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| 3 ethical dilemmas      | 2b3; 3c3.3   |
| ethical questions       | 2b3          |
| life unique?            | 2b3; 3c3.3   |
| bio-/medical technology | 2b3; 3c3.3   |
| border                  | 2b3; 3c3.3   |
| nihilism                | 3c2.1e;      |

*summary*

Genetic and medical technologies confront us with their techniques of duplication and substitution with enormous ethical questions. They corrode the uniqueness of every separate form of life, but they also “give” life and we cannot live without them. For the preacher the border has been reached with postmodern nihilism: individuality without God and without any sense.

| <i>keywords</i>         | <i>codes</i>     |
|-------------------------|------------------|
| 4 god/postmodernism     | 2b3; 3c3.3; 1a4  |
| postmodern literature   | 2b1; 2b3         |
| no more certainty       | 2b3; 3c2.1e      |
| “the higher power”      | 3c1.2            |
| give/receive meaning    | 3c3.3; 1a4       |
| value of community      | 3c2.1g; 1a4; 2b3 |
| old fashioned           | 2b1              |
| the shrinking self      | 2b3; 3c2.1e      |
| live in the love of god | 3c3.3; 3b2       |

*summary*

In a great deal of postmodern literature nothing is certain anymore, everything fluctuates: world economy, God, individuality. That's why "a higher power" has to come in again: the liturgy of "Business Update". This is a logical development because we always receive more meaning from life than we could ever give to life ourselves, but the preacher refuses with great force to come along if this simple fact is denied. That is why he attributes great value to the community of faith. It may be old fashioned, but God is still active there with his love and Spirit, which will be received by believers gathered in this community. To live in the love of God lifts people above their own shrinking little self, directed on investment returns and transforms them in a community with eternal value.

*keywords*

5 liberation  
familiar  
no focus on slavery  
destination of god's people  
god in action

*codes*

1c4; 1a1  
2b3; 1c4  
1a1; 1c4  
1a1; 1a5  
1a5

*summary*

The exceptional position - in the midst of an otherwise oriented society - in which the congregation of Christ is ending up at the moment is very familiar and can be compared to the position of the Jewish people in Egypt. The attention of the congregation must not be focused on the darkness of slavery, but on the destination where she is heading to and God's liberating actions to reach this destination.

*keywords*

6 self-criticism - light  
am I the barren fig tree?  
congregation too concerned  
critical and confident  
lord of time and space  
light  
congregation/jewish people  
sense of life/death

*codes*

3c3.3; 1a1  
3c3.3; 1a1  
3c3.3; 1a1  
3b2; 1a1  
1a5  
1a5  
1c4; 1a5  
1a5

*summary*

Self-criticism is more fruitful than pointing an accusing finger towards others. In personal as well as communal affairs it is good to be critical and to

take notice of the signs of the era and of our own reactions. We might discover that we are too much concerned with what worries and troubles us and that what we need is a little confidence in our God, who is Lord over time and space. He will never lead his people or his congregation astray to perish in the abyss. He will make our life worthwhile and our death fruitful through his eternally active Holy Spirit.

|                          |              |
|--------------------------|--------------|
| <i>keywords</i>          | <i>codes</i> |
| 7 wages>money            | 1a5          |
| remaining value of labor | 3c3.3; 2b3   |
| love of god              | 3c2.1g       |
| fruits                   | 1a5          |
| fruit bearing            | 1a5; 3b2     |

*summary*

Our labor has a remaining value that cannot be expressed in money if it is related to the love of God, because it is this love that binds our activity to Him and to each other. If you miss the fruits of the Spirit than simply ask Him for them and He will surround you with divine care and have you bear fruit just as Jesus promised in the parable of the barren fig tree.

**Numeral picture and evaluation**

The first impression regarding the interpretation in this sermon was that the Bible text is read from the interpretative model of Dilthey. The actual situation in society, the cultural connections and the position in all this of the congregation of Christ form the lenses through which Luke 13:1-9 are interpreted. The analysis as it finds its expression in the numeral picture and the evaluation of that picture will further elaborate this first impression.

**1. The text 24**

|   |           |
|---|-----------|
| <i>1a Naïve reading</i>                   | <i>19</i> |
| 1a1 obedience now to the text             | 7         |
| 1a2 obedience of persons in the text      |           |
| 1a3 exact correspondence then/now         |           |
| 1a4 obedience to persons outside the text | 4         |
| 1a5 grace above justice                   | 8         |

*1b Historical criticism*

|           |   |           |
|-----------|---|-----------|
| 1b1       | political settings                      |           |
| 1b2       | social customs and laws                 |           |
| 1b3       | religious and cultural backgrounds      |           |
| 1b4       | linguistic features                     |           |
| 1b5       | historical connection with Jesus        |           |
| <i>1c</i> | <i>Structuralism</i>                    | 5         |
| 1c1       | Hebrew names                            |           |
| 1c2       | Hebrew words                            |           |
| 1c3       | genre                                   |           |
| 1c4       | place in canon/tradition                | 5         |
| <b>2.</b> | <b>The reader</b>                       | <b>20</b> |
| 2a        | Schleiermacher, free meditation         |           |
| 2b        | <i>Dilthey, focused involvement</i>     | 20        |
| 2b1       | social                                  | 4         |
| 2b2       | political                               |           |
| 2b3       | religious                               | 16        |
| 2c        | <i>Gadamer's Wirkungsgeschichte</i>     |           |
| 2c1       | prejudices                              |           |
| 2c2       | distancing                              |           |
| 2c3       | melting of horizons                     |           |
| <b>3.</b> | <b>Ricœur, dialectics text – reader</b> | <b>25</b> |
| 3a        | <i>Discourse contrasts and surplus</i>  |           |
| 3b        | <i>The text</i>                         | 3         |
| 3b1       | the world of the text                   |           |
| 3b2       | new roads                               | 3         |
| 3b3       | individual creativity                   |           |
| 3c        | <i>Symbols and metaphors</i>            | 22        |
| 3c1.1     | metaphors in the text                   |           |
| 3c1.2     | in the sermon                           | 2         |
| 3c2.1g    | symbols hidden meaning grace            | 2         |
| e         | evil                                    | 7         |
| 3c2.2     | dialectics of good and evil             |           |
| 3c3.1     | suspicion by persons in the text        |           |
| 3c3.2     | of traditions                           |           |
| 3c3.3     | of actual situations                    | 11        |
| 3c3.4     | self-criticism preacher                 |           |



- 3c4.1 dialectics metaphors/symbols surplus grace
- 3c4.2 new confidence
- 3d *Explaining and understanding*
- 3d1 provisional character
- 3d2 new interpretations
- 3d3 new processes of reflection

This sermon lacks the clarity that the preacher is searching to solve his problem: how to be church of Jesus Christ in a postmodern society. This fact corresponds to the almost proportional score in the three categories 1. The text: 24, 2. The reader: 20 and 3. Dialectics text – reader: 25. Especially in category 2 the scores are consistent, they all go to Dilthey. The scores in category 1 are divided among the naïve reading (1a: 19) with emphasis on grace above justice (1a5: 8) and obedience (1a1: 7) and structuralism (1c4: 5). The same applies to category 3, where suspicion gets much emphasis (3c3: 11) and also the symbolism of evil (3c2.1e: 7).

The preacher tries to find new ways (3b2: 3) for the congregation of Christ in the labyrinth of his own time, but he does not really succeed. He does use some new metaphors (3c1.2: 2, Business Update as “higher power”) but they serve more his critique of his own era than his search for new ways to go. In the whole sermon the critique of the actual situation (2b1/3 + 3c3.3, together 31) is much more important than the search for new ways to go as the texts could propose (3b1: 0). The critique has become goal in itself and the proposed solution is naïve: many times obedience to the text is prescribed and finally the liturgy and the preacher himself also become important authorities outside the text (1a4: 4).

What we have here is not a consistently implemented interpretative model regarding the studied Bible text, but a more or less contingent mixture of sometimes even colliding models of Bible interpretation. This lack of hermeneutic clarity underneath the text surface of the sermon is damaging its rhetorical power from within. Loyal church visitors may feel attracted to the tenacity of the preacher regarding the institute of the Church of Christ, but the real ground for this tenacity is not - as it appears from the analysis of the interpretative models operative in this sermon – based on looking ahead in time in a trustful, critical and creative way, but much more on falling back upon old traditional values in an almost fundamentalist way. But the very question that this sermon raises is related to these old and traditional values.

At the surface of the text it is the paradox of tradition and progression. Are the old values solid and strong enough to serve as a basis for the future of the community of Christ in the midst of postmodern negation of God, meaning and individual self? However, beneath the surface of the text another question can be traced. How is it possible for Christians - who too have always been children of their own time - to avoid the negative attitude of postmodern philosophy and interpretation in their own being in a non-fundamentalist but faithful and loving way?

This sermon does not create a real playground to look at the future in a trusting and faithful way in order to re-engage in the battle between good and evil in new ways (3c4.2: 0). Anyhow, this faithful trust should be based on more than only the person of the preacher or on his interpretation of the Bible text, that is if the preacher does not want to contradict the Biblical message. The problem that has been raised in this sermon is gigantic and cannot be solved so easily. However, hermeneutic clarity can help to formulate the problem more effectively. And concentration on one or two interpretative models - of which Ricœur's model can be a great help if implemented with more consistency - will also ameliorate the rhetoric power of the sermon to get us moving again in new directions and towards new solutions.

I preached this sermon some three months after I got my PhD. Full of Ricœur's thought that I had explored in my dissertation I thought that it was now my task to look for new answers that the living church of Jesus Christ could give to the postmodern question along the lines of his textual hermeneutics. And so my sermons too would be a fine example of Ricœurian dialectic of text and reader. But somehow I didn't feel comfortable about this particular sermon and I decided to analyze it not long after I had preached it. It turned out that my sermon was not that fine example of the exciting adventure that Ricœur proposes for the interpretation of a Bible text. Instead of finding new ways in a postmodern future, I had fallen back heavily on premodern models of interpretation. Instead of creativity, I proposed obedience. And I was appalled when I realized that this deep layer of signification hidden in my unconsciousness was actually very active in my own sermon. True, the problem may be gigantic. The proposed solution, however, was very unsatisfying.

The problem of this sermon – how to respond to postmodern nihilism in a relaxed and creative way – has haunted me ever since and became the main

theme of this book. When Bible interpretation is so closely related to the philosophical thought patterns of one's own time spirit we will have to find that answer. I still think that Ricoeur's interpretative model is useful and stimulating, but I started to doubt if it can give the answer to the problem I am dealing with, because Ricoeur – by staying within the (modern Western) Kantian limits - refuses to step into postmodernism. And doesn't this last refusal signify a change of attitude, from progressive to reactionary? So let us turn to postmodernism now and see if we can find an answer.

## Chapter 3

### The postmodern collapse of truth and normativity and some reactions

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The time has come to concentrate on postmodernism itself. We have touched on postmodernism in various instances above. My experience is that it is easier to describe what postmodernism *is not* than to describe what it *is*. Therefore, I would like to begin this chapter with a short summary of the most important features pertaining to truth and normativity we have studied in the previous chapters in so far as they can be related to postmodern philosophy. We will then turn to postmodern philosophy itself that we find in Jacques Derrida's *Margins of philosophy* and Jean François Lyotard's *Heidegger et les 'juifs'*. Then we will turn to some reactions to postmodernism in theology and the churches: the return to premodern positions and the use of postmodernism for one's own purposes but always in a less radical way than postmodern philosophy itself. Another reaction is the idea of "rhetorical normativity" coming from Wouter Slob, who takes postmodernism seriously in its most radical form. Finally I will describe my own reactions to postmodernism, in which Ricœur keeps playing an important role. Is the postmodern preacher a minister of grace or a victim of chaos? I will go into this matter in an article that I wrote for colleagues and that concentrates on the postmodern film *The Matrix*. And while the philosophical trends always have their impact on hermeneutics and Bible interpretation, I will also analyze another sermon that I preached on postmodernism.

## Truth and normativity

### Premodernism

As we have seen in Chapter 1, the prevalent experience of truth and normativity in the premodern era was the one reflected by correspondence theory. The solid house of truth representing one unified logical space was still in tact. What was *said* to be true and what *was* true in reality formed a unity and this unity, again formed the basis of normativity. You were giving false information when you said something was, which was not. So saying and being were one, and had to be one - this was the only thinkable and thus normative relation between the two- and so truth and normativity also formed an undeniable unity. When saying - or knowing - and being are one, and epistemology and ontology are not distinguished principally, the question of priority between the two can be solved in *logos* to everybody's satisfaction. In the prevailing geocentric world view of the premodern era man knew his place in the surrounding world in which typologically everything was related to everything else in a reassuring way. The question "what is the truth?" is frequently heard here, but the question "what is truth?" is unthinkable.

### Modernism

All this changed when the earth and the subject were cosmologically de-centered in the modern era, driven to the margins of a solar system with the sun as the new center. The de-centered subject started to measure and feel the distances between his knowledge and his object in its own state of being. He begins to ask "where am I, who am I, what am I" until Descartes discovered that he cannot doubt his doubting and thus founded human knowledge on human consciousness. The first cautious distinction between saying and being is made, in which saying - human knowledge based on subjective consciousness - takes priority. This turn will then put the subject epistemologically in the center.

The gap between knowing subject and his object as it is in itself is widening when Kant distinguishes between the phenomenal and the noumenal world. The things as they are in themselves in the noumenal world - Kant's *Ding an sich* - cannot be known, direct access to being is impossible. Indirect access through human knowledge, and consciousness of their appear-

ance in the phenomenal world, is all we have. And so knowledge becomes a problem. To rescue certain knowledge of things as they are in reality Kant was forced to build a logic on the universal knowing subject because being itself was not accessible in a direct way. So he relied on the concept of “self-evidence” - the appearance of things as they were “evident to all” - to gain access to being, indirect but with the necessity of the “pure forms of sensuous intuition” (time and space). However, the universal subject appeared to be inexistent. Even the most universal forms, categories and ideas of the human mind like time, space, causality, necessity, God, soul, etc., were experienced differently in different cultures, religions and historical settings. Therefore, it became impossible to establish which one represented the real universal or transcendental subject and this resulted in an “irreducible difference”, which makes the universal transcendental subject principally unattainable.

In fact, the modern project to build certain knowledge based on a supposedly universal subject failed here. Is it possible to maintain Kant’s monologic based on the universal subject that tries to save the necessary, although indirect, correspondence of saying and being after it has turned out to be a failure? If not, the way to postmodernism is open. Epistemology had become inadequate and is forced to leave room for being as it is. Phenomenology shows the struggle for priority of epistemology (saying) and ontology (being) in the subsequent philosophies of Husserl, Heidegger and Ricœur without really regaining a necessary correspondence between saying and being. And so continuous efforts were made to reach this correspondence: in linguistics, building on Leibniz’ artificial language, consisting of purely univocal symbols; and in logic, building on the design of different logics by Frege’s successors, all yielding different results in various “agreed upon” rationalities that Slob - following C.O. Schrag - calls “transversal rationalities” (Slob, 2002, 87; DR, 55). But these efforts stayed within the linguistic realm without really touching the order of being. In short all the efforts after Kant’s failure to establish a mono-logic ended up in a plurality of subjective experiences instead of a necessary correspondence of “articulated” knowledge and true “being”. Therefore, in modernism the question “what is the truth” is supplemented by the question “what is truth?” Just like morality - “what is good?” - finds a supplement in the ethical question on a deeper level - “what are the conditions to make responsible choices possible?” And it seems a logical step to loosen the severe demand of exact correspondence in the relation of saying and being.

## Postmodernism

At the opposite side of the correspondence theory in the spectrum of theories on truth stands the deflationary theory in which saying and being are no longer connected to each other in a normative way. Truth is what we say is true, independent of the “real” state of affairs in being, of which we have no knowledge at all and of which we therefore can never be sure. This attitude “corresponds” to the discovery in the natural sciences of the infinite number of solar systems, which leaves the subject not only de-centered but now also non-centered, i.e. without a center at all. And when time and space appear in Einstein’s theory of relativity as fluctuating instead of fixed entities another solid basis of the human mind is gone. Along with these developments in the natural science goes the development of different logics yielding different results in the theory of logic, culminating in a theory of chaos. The subject is left to itself without an encompassing truth to rely on. In fact there is no truth, no big story that encompasses and guarantees meaning in human life. Everything is fluctuating in itself without a common center. Saying and being are cut loose from each other. Their normative relation regarding truth is gone: “anything goes.”

Slob explains: “Both truth and normativity have throughout history been understood as sameness: if saying is the same as being we have truth and what is true should be accepted. Sameness was a matter of course in pre-modern epistemology in its employment of the notion of logos. It became untenable after traditional Aristotelian epistemology had to make room for modern epistemology. But still sameness was essential: establishing sameness of thinking and being was the task of modernism. It hoped to fulfill its task by showing necessary sameness on the level of thinking. If that succeeded, being could not be different. In post-foundational epistemology sameness is also a *desideratum*. Having lost confidence in universal claims it bets on local sameness: agreement on the transversal logos. But this derives its rationale from the *ideal* sameness between transversal rationality and the real world of being itself. Seen from this perspective, post-foundationalism tries to save the modernistic program in a very modest way.”

However, desire and reality do not match. “Deconstructivist postmodernism strikes at the very heart of truth and normativity: it maintains that there can be no sameness at all. If this is true, the devastating power is enormous. For it then makes no sense to speak about a classical unity of thought and being in logos, neither does it make sense to base truth in self-evident truths,

nor to understand rationality as something that is shared by human beings. If the sophisticated notion of transversal rationality is supposed to “gather” different rational persons together because they, after all, have something in common, the postmodern criticism is devastating as well. If deconstructivism effectively destroys sameness and makes an end to all understandings of the *ontological a priori*, it seems that truth can no longer be understandable in any sense. And indeed this is what many adherents of deconstructivism, but particularly all of its adversaries seem to think; calling the resultant “free play” or “anything goes.” (Slob, 2002, 92; DR, 61) So, the result of the disappearance of sameness is a constant flux lucidly demonstrated by Derrida’s “concept” of *différance* that we will study below. Of course then the main question will be, whether a concept is still a concept, when it has lost its last bit of stability rooted in sameness. And so the term concept in the sense Derrida gives it, can better be put between quotation marks.

“The constant flux also, or perhaps in particular, regards the notion of the subject. Neither synchronically, nor diachronically, can we discern any stable notion of identity. As subjects our identities are molded by all the influences that work upon us, have worked upon us and will work upon us, over against all those that have not influenced us, are not influencing us and will not influence us. ... This implies that any claims of reason for the unification of human experience, either from the side of the subject or the side of the object, and any hopes for communicative solidarity, appear to be undermined. A fundamental instability is all that is left.” (Slob, 2002, 95; DR, 64)

As a radical critique on the modern project to define and prescribe the way of relating to truth by the “subject” – there is no such thing as a subject or core self says also Richard Rorty (Rorty, 1989, 23 ff.)<sup>1</sup> – postmodernism is a logical consequence of the developments in the modern era. And as a critique it has certain value, if only that it urges us to raise new questions and to find new answers. So let us turn to Derrida and Lyotard, two pivotal philosophers of postmodernism, and concentrate on their critique of modernism.



## Postmodern negation

### Jacques Derrida: *différance*

The complete destruction of sameness has been effectuated in Derrida's "concept" of *différance*. With this "concept" the Jewish postmodern philosopher Jacques Derrida – born in 1930 in Algeria and raised in France - builds on De Saussure's linguistic structuralism, the understanding of language as a synchronic system relating differences (*langue*) (cf. Derrida, 1986, 5, 10 ff)<sup>2</sup> and takes it to its logical diachronic conclusion of radical differing (submerged in the disappearing reality of *parole*). Derrida accepts Hjelmslev's radical conclusion from De Saussure's linguistic structuralism that signs - like texts, i.e. notes in the margins of other texts - only refer to themselves and not to reality outside the linguistic system. After all, in the deflationary view of truth, saying and being no longer formed a unity, leaving language as a closed system only referring and speaking to itself by means of differences (cf. Chapter 2, structuralism). The bearer of meaning is composed of the relations between the different elements within the linguistic system. The individual signifying elements have to be different from each other in order to be able to have a relation with each other. The system as a whole will be different again when fixed at another point in time, and these changes can again be caught in another - a-temporal - system. Linguistic structuralism is able to do so by excluding *parole* with its diachronic - time-related - event character from *langue*, the a-temporal system. Now, here Derrida - in the line of Ricœur - does not agree that it is possible to exclude *parole* from *langue*, time from the system, but he draws another conclusion than Ricœur does. Instead of trying to set up a dialectic of structure and event, of *langue* and *parole*, Derrida chooses *parole* as the omnipotent element of language and portrays the system as an event, a constant flux characterized by radical differing (cf. Ibid., 12).

This radical differing is what Derrida calls *différance*. In its neologistic use of an *a* instead of an *e* it is even different from *différence*. The notion of *différance* then indicates that there is no sameness at all: "a sign is at most a sign "of" other signs, a trace of the differing which constitutes it" (Allen, 1995, 102)<sup>3</sup>. This has far reaching consequences: "Reality itself is not stable and is in constant flux. No *thing* is identical to itself: there is only repetition with *différence* and never a repetition of *the same*". (Slob, 2002, 94; DR,

64)) And Therefore, every system that tries to set or stabilize anything has to be deconstructed. We cannot do this “without the passage through a written text, nor to avoid the order of the disorder produced within it – and this [the disorder JCV], first of all, is what counts for me” (Derrida, 1986, 4).

*Différance*, says Derrida, is neither a word nor a concept. The difference between the *a* and the *e* is only graphic, can only be seen not heard. The play of differences therefore is a silent play offered by a tacit monument, a pyramid “announcing the death of the tyrant” (Ibid, 4). However, the pyramidal silence of the graphic difference between the *a* and the *e* can only function within a system of phonetic writing. But according to Derrida there is no purely and rigorously phonetic writing because such a system will always need non-phonetic signs like punctuation, spacing etc, to be able to function. And so also in writing the play of differences is inaudible and will therefore vanish in the night. “But, from this point of view that the difference marked in the differ( )nce between the *a* and the *e* eludes both vision and hearing perhaps happily suggests that here we must be permitted to refer to an order which no longer belongs to sensibility. But neither can it belong to intelligibility. ... Here, therefore, we must let ourselves refer to an order that resists the opposition, one of the founding oppositions of philosophy, between the sensible and the intelligible” (Ibid., 5). *Différance* cannot be exposed, offered to the present, or to anyone. It exceeds the order of truth and even the realm of the occult, mysterious non-knowledge and negative theology, “always hastening to recall that God is refused the predicate of existence, only in order to acknowledge his superior, inconceivable, and ineffable mode of being.” (Ibid., 6) *Différance* is irreducible to any ontological or theological – ontotheological – reappropriation. *Différance* includes ontotheology, inscribes it and exceeds it without return.

In a *system* of language there are only differences. What is written as *différance* will be the playing movement that “produces” these differences, these effects of difference. This does not mean that the *différance* that produces differences is somehow before them, in a simple and unmodified – indifferent – present. “*Différance* is the non-full, non-simple, structured and differentiating origin of differences. Thus, the name “origin” no longer suits it.” (Ibid., 11) Likewise the word *différance* itself will have to disappear as well because for what it describes “there is no name for it at all not even the name of essence or of Being, not even that of “*différance*”, which is not a name, which is not a pure nominal unity, and unceasingly dislocates itself in a chain of differing and deferring substitutions” (Ibid., 26)

Toward the end of his speech addressed to the French Society of Philosophy on *différance* Derrida touches upon something that Lyotard will use to criticize Heidegger and Western philosophy in general but that Derrida uses to confirm his own “pattern of thought”. *Différance* shakes, makes the domination of beings tremble, and interrogates the determination of Being as presence. As we saw above *différance* is not a present being. No matter how excellent, unique, principal or transcendent it may be, “it governs nothing, reigns over nothing and nowhere exercises authority” (Ibid., 21/2). Further, what is the present? In *The Anaximander Fragment* Heidegger recalled that the forgetting of Being forgets the difference between Being and beings: to be the Being of beings is the matter of Being (*die Sache des Seins*). The “Being of beings” hints at a mysterious emergence of what is present out of “a presence”. Yet the essence of this emergence remains concealed along with the essence of these two words, “Being” and “beings”. Not even that but the very relation between presence and what is present (*Anwesen und Anwesendem*) remains unthought. The essence of presence (*Das Wesen des Anwesens*), and with it the distinction between presence and what is present, remains forgotten. And so Heidegger himself reminds us that “The oblivion of Being is oblivion of the distinction between Being and beings” (Ibid., 23). But for Derrida this implies that “Oblivion of Being belongs to the self-veiling essence of Being” (Ibid., 24), and that is in short: *différance*. It is precisely this oblivion, the forgetting of Being that Jean-François Lyotard will pick up and criticize as non-arbitrary and therefore questionable strategy of Western thinking.

To sum up: – irreducible to and exceeding without return whatever form of ontotheology – “there is no essence of *différance*; it (is) that which not only could never be appropriated in the *as such* of its name or its appearing, but also that which threatens the authority of the *as such* in general, of the presence of the thing in itself in its essence” (Ibid., 25). Therefore, *différance* serves the radical suspicion in the line of the radical criticism of Freud (consciousness) and Nietzsche (power), to whom Derrida adds Lévinas with his theory of the vanishing trace. After that there is laughter, dance and hope, because in the simulated affirmation of *différance*, “... the daring question of the alliance of speech and Being in the unique word, the finally “proper name” is inscribed. This daring question bears (on) each member of Heidegger’s maxim: Being / speaks / always and everywhere / throughout / language” (Cf. Ibid., 27). Elsewhere<sup>4</sup> Derrida remarks: “Such a *différance* would at once, again, give us to think a writing without presence and without

absence, without history, without cause, without *archia*, without *telos*, a writing that absolutely upsets all dialectics, all theology, all teleology, all ontology. A writing exceeding everything that the history of metaphysics has comprehended in the form of the Aristotelian *grammè*, in its point, in its line, in its circle, in its time, and in its space” (Ibid., 67).

### **Jean - François Lyotard: *terreur de l'irreprésentable***

Jean François Lyotard (1924-1998) is the postmodern thinker who announces the end of the great stories as foundation of meaning and of man's spiritual comfort and material well-being. He does so because beneath all representation he sees the forgotten realm of what cannot be represented, the secret interpreted by Lyotard in an extremely negative way: *terreur de l'irreprésentable*, terror of the “non-representable”. To explore this realm Lyotard starts in Heidegger's oblivion of Being, which is the oblivion of the distinction between “presence” and what has emerged out of it as present (*Sein* and *Dasein*) and relates it to the experience of the Jewish people who have no means or strategies to avoid the perpetual forgetting of the Forgotten (*l'oubli de l'Oublié*). In *Heidegger et les 'juifs'*<sup>5</sup> (Heidegger and the “The Jews”) Lyotard raises the question of how Heidegger's consciousness of the oblivion of Being can be thought together with his almost total silence of the extermination of the Jews at Auschwitz. In both cases there is a forgetting of a dark realm in reality and Lyotard uses Freud's psychoanalytical concept of repression and Kant's esthetical concept of the sublime to explore this very realm.

It is interesting to see the difference between Lyotard's proceedings in his exploration of the dark realm in comparison to Ricœur's study of the unconsciousness. Ricœur enters the unconsciousness through Freud's psychoanalysis and he uses Kant's transcendental deduction developed in his first critique, the *Critique of Pure Reason*. Freud said what can be analyzed are not the unconscious impulses themselves but their representations in dreams, neuroses, lapses, etc. (cf. Ricœur, 1969, 105/6)<sup>6</sup>. Therefore, Ricœur concentrates on the representations and in doing so he stays within the Kantian limits of “dreams of innocence” and “existential darkness”. He concludes: “What matters, is to stay between the empirical realism on the one hand and the transcendental idealism on the other”. And this in order to: “promote the first against any pretense of the immediate consciousness that it knows itself truthfully and preserve the second against whatever fantastic metaphysics

that would give self-consciousness to the unconscious, which in reality is “constituted” by the deciphering activity of hermeneutics” (Ricœur, 1969, 109). So the unconscious can be known partially (empirical realism), according to Ricœur, but it exceeds our possible knowledge and we will have to continue to interpret and “constitute” its contents (transcendental idealism). Thus, the dark area becomes a little less dark.

Now, Lyotard also makes use of Freud and Kant but he does so in an entirely different way. He does not concentrate on what can be known and represented. His primary concern is precisely that what cannot be represented: the forgotten impulses of the impulses that were brought to some light by their representations. Here Lyotard uses Freud’s theory on secondary and primary repression and relates it to Kant’s theory on beauty and the sublime in the esthetical judgments of his third critique the *Critique of the faculty of Judgment*. This primary repression that no psychoanalysis can reach and the sublime that no art, no literature can express are the dark “forces” that have always determined the relation of the Jewish people and the West. However, they go beyond this because they lie beneath human relations, reality, or the universe as a whole. Therefore, Lyotard speaks of the “Jews” in his book *Heidegger et les ‘juifs’*. In plural form and no capital, to indicate that “with this name I don’t refer to a political figure or subject (zionism), nor a religious (judaism), or a philosophical one (hebrew thinking). Quotation marks to avoid the confusion of these “Jews” with real Jews. What is the most real in the real Jews is that Europe, at least, doesn’t know what to do with them: christians demand their conversion, the monarchy expels them, republicans integrate them, the nazi’s exterminate them. The “Jews” are the object of a non-location that has struck the Jews [without quotation marks, JCV] in particular in the realest sense of the word.” (Lyotard, 1988, 13) This non-location (*non-lieu*) that stays in the dark precisely because it cannot be represented by language and yet performs its influence on language stands model for Lyotard’s interpretation of reality.

### **Freud, the unconscious affect**

What is the impact of this non-representation? Pure terror. Lyotard describes this terror that has struck the Jewish people from the beginning, following Freud’s description of Moses in *L’homme Moïse et la religion monothéiste*<sup>7</sup>. “Forgetting souls (*âmes oubliées*) they are - the Jews - just like the rest of us, but souls to whom the Forgotten (*l’Oublié*) does not stop to come back

and remind them of their dues. Not to remind them that he has been, or still is, for he has not been and is nothing, but to bring himself back to their conscience as that what is constantly being forgotten. ... it is to what man is bound, obliged by the Law, guilty. It is the affection of this "fact" that the non-location persecutes". (Lyotard, 1988, 14) In this, the politics of oblivion work by raising memorials, so that you can comfortably forget what has really been. For – according to Freud - it is the pain of shame and doubt that generates the worthy, the certain, the noble and the just (cf. *ibid.*, 20). And Therefore, in "the Law" a certain form of sublimation is represented of dark and negative forces rooted in an even deeper and darker realm that the historical sciences can never retrieve, nor a philosophy of consciousness, be it phenomenological, epistemological or political.

These forgotten impulses of the impulses that were brought to some light by their representations only make sense in a hypothesis of a deep unconsciousness. However, "the hypothesis of an unconsciousness without "representative formations" that Freud makes when he tries to think the "unconscious affect" (*l'affect inconscient* or *Urverdrängung*) demands a complete separation of the philosophy of consciousness, even if the term *inconscient* still refers to it." (*Ibid.*, 28) It can only function in what Freud calls metapsychology, i.e. the topology and economy of the unconscious forces interpreted by Lyotard as another metaphysics that tries to reach what cannot be grasped by vision. Here a shock can be inflicted without being noticed, without the normal functioning of the psychic system of repression, sublimation and oblivion. This is the realm of the primary repression, realm of silence, the realm of non-location that is nevertheless there and when represented not recognized as being present (cf. *ibid.*, 30). Here the soul is exceeded: depossessed, surpassed and excised by something. The infirmity that constitutes the soul, its childhood, its misery (cf. *ibid.*, 38). This "something" Freud calls the sexual difference, but related to its negative side: castration of the mother, murder of the father, father as name, prohibition of incest, guilt, law, seduction, exogamy, in short: the bringing together what cannot be brought together in the difference of man and woman and even more of adult and child. And Lyotard continues: "... an excess, ... the name of a wrath, mixture of pleasure and pain, an inclusive disjunction and an exclusive conjunction, the mentioned exogamy of what the psychic apparatus does not have the faintest idea, which it cannot establish or synthesize, where its life and death are enacted, outside although inside. ... It is this terrible, furious silence that persists in it like a cloud of vain and forbidden matter, this

head of Medusa. Freud characterizes this “unconscious affect” most of the time as anguish (*Hemmung*.)” (Ibid., 41). It cannot be described adequately because description means forgetting its excision, what makes up the unconscious affect. This always “present” immemorial – although never here and now – is always divided in the chronic time of consciousness between too early and too late; too early because the psychic apparatus does not feel it, too late because it cannot bear it.

Well then, this idea of primary or original repression supports Lyotard’s hypothesis “that something like the sexual difference - in its darkest sense - plays this role of immanent terror in the thinking - and psychic apparatus - of the (European) West, not identifiable as such, not re-presentable, an unconscious affect, a misery untreatable by whatever medication” (Ibid., 43). Precisely that what Freud has tried to trace in *L’homme Moïse*. The point is, that according to Lyotard the Jews have never resisted the original repression as vehemently as the West has always done - with all sorts of (re-)presentations - and therefore they had to become the black sheep of the Occident. Lyotard: “a promise made to a people that did not want nor need it, an alliance that had not been negotiated, that goes against its public interest, of which it knows itself unworthy. And thus ... this very ordinary people was taken hostage by a voice that has nothing to say except that it is and that any representation and nomination of that voice is prohibited and that this people only had to listen to its sound and had to obey a timbre”. (Ibid. 43/4) Due to this “revelation”, this obscure and uncertain unveiling of such a non-nameable Thing this people is called to disintegrate as a normal “gentile” people and has to avoid the representation of the original difference as it is done by any religion, Christianity included, by the bias of the sacrifice, i.e. the first representative economy. Freud calls this “the refusal of the confession of the murder of the father” that he considers as the foundation of every community. Normally the totemic meal of the sons “internalizes” the Thing, represents it, purges itself of it and forgets it. But “this people” will not celebrate the communion. Forced to non-reconciliation by this denial they are chased off from the inside, pursued, - dispossessed of their installation – in an earthly domain, in a scene. Chased forward in the interpretation of the voice, of the original difference, of an exorbitant law that demands to listen to the inaudible. Taken hostage by the voice of the Other, this people is different from all other peoples, does not have its god like the others do, is compelled to listen to an indeterminate affect that will constantly command and divert its representations, also those of the voice itself. (Cf. *ibid.*, 44/5)

In the spirit of the West – constantly occupied to found itself – it's the "Jews" that resist that very spirit by their "otherness", consequently and unceasingly related to the unconscious affect. Lyotard: "The occidental anti-Semitism is not its xenophobia, it is one of the tools for the apparatus of its culture to relate and represent as much as it can – to resist – the original terror and to forget it actively. It is the defensive face of its attacking mechanisms such as Greek science, Roman law and politics, Christian spirituality, Enlightenment. ... The Jews are converted in the Middle Ages, they resist by mental restriction. They are expelled in the classical era, but they come back. They are integrated in the modern age and persist in their difference. They are exterminated in the twentieth century. But this murder must have no memory, no trace and thus the murder itself once again confirms what has been killed: the unthinkable, the lost time always there, the revelation that never reveals itself but stays there, a misery. ... soul lost in the spirit." (Ibid., 47 /8).

### **Kant, the sublime**

Kant touches in his *Critique of the faculty of Judgment* on something that is equally inaccessible as Freud's unconscious affect. This "something" challenges - as in the Freudian psychic apparatus – what Kant called the constitutive power of the spirit, i.e. the synthesis of diversity, its most elementary memory. "The imagination that demands the sensible presentation of something that represents the Absolute not only does not succeed but loses it self in the abyss". (Ibid., 59) The sublime cracks the normal order of the imagination of time. This order marks the relational minimum that is necessary for the representation of the "material", for the giving of the data. However, if something absolute has to be represented, given, the power to represent, i.e. to connect or relate, will be insufficient and will stop – in the sublime sentiment - to constitute time as a flux. "But the sublime sentiment will not take place in this flux, it has no *momentum*. How then could the spirit remember it? When the sublime is there (where?) the spirit is not. When the spirit is there the sublime is not. Sentiment incompatible with time, like death." (Ibid., 60/61)

And yet there is something like a sublime sentiment qualified by Kant as the combination of pleasure and pain, attractive and repulsive at the same time, a spasm. This feeling shows that something too "much" has touched the spirit, too much to be able to do something with it. That is why the sub-



lime has no consideration whatsoever for form, is non-form. For the form is what gives the data, even in the imagination. In the original repression the psychic apparatus is incapable to connect, invest, fix and represent the terror and that is why the terror stays “within” the apparatus as its outside, infuse and diffuse as unconscious affect. In the sublime sentiment the imagination is not capable either to collect the absolute (in grandeur, in force) in order to represent it and that means that the absolute cannot be located in time. However, at least something stays there, ignored by the imagination, spread in the spirit as simultaneous pleasure and pain, the terror of a “there is nothing” that threatens without introducing itself or realizing itself. (Cf. *ibid.*, 60/1)

Well then, what the arts – especially the so-called contemporary *avant-garde* arts - are doing is to try to touch the untouchable, to represent this “something” that cannot be represented and thus they have to fail. Literature searches its way toward this realm as well. “Like every representation she betrays the secret, but does so by making an effort to seduce the language, to divert the tradition by which she is, has always been and will always be seduced without giving a shrink. She tries to escape the traditional repetition of its defense, *to divert the language on unknown ways towards the cloud of terror that hides in the limpid blue of the language*”. (*Ibid.*, 64, italics JCV) And Therefore, every representative art or literature and even preaching is fallacious, inadequate, *kitsch* when it comes to presenting “what really is”. “Jesus is not true because he is beautiful. He is not even sensible, his incarnation is not his presence in the world, but our tears shed of joy; sublime, insensible affection, a presence only sensible to the heart. How can it be present in the flesh when the preacher only talks about it? It is not his task to make people cry. One cries by mere grace”. (*Ibid.*, 66) “... there is no *technè*, no technique, for preaching. Grace will have to descend into the mouth of the preacher.” (*Ibid.*, 69) From the Jews we have even less to expect when it comes to experience of the sublime. They are a people unprepared for the revelation of the alliance and always too young for it. And by that too old as well, too much occupied by preoccupations, idolatries and even studies to gain access to the holiness that is required by the promise. Locked up between prophecy and history there is no such thing as Hebrew predication or esthetics. “Nothing can lead ... to the hidden sentiment, the pain and the joy of the sublime that are the inimitable deposits of the unfelt shock of the alliance, and that cannot be equalized by whatever *artefact*, not even the pious word” (*Ibid.*, 69).

And thus literature being unable to describe the indescribable, Lyotard encounters Adorno. The devil of *Dokter Faustus* tries to live in hell. First experience of hell: thinking gets lost in the abyss before the disaster of Auschwitz trying to get close to what cannot be thought. It knows what has been tried to annihilate in the gas chambers, its own resource, the anguish left behind in the “spirit” by this event that equals nothing and that continuously is sought to be retrieved, because thinking is caught in the consequence of this event which is the ordinary time. Fighting against the time within the time. Second characteristic of hell: metaphysics – even the metaphysics that tries to clarify the failure of the representation of what cannot be represented – fails to find the reason of the disaster. Philosophy as architecture is ruined but a description of ruins can do the job. This description preserves the forgotten that one has tried to make forget by killing it, it proceeds towards the immemorial by passing through the destruction of its representations and its witnesses, “the Jews”. Third evidence of the devil: this perpetual murder of the Other that thinking and writing fail to recuperate, this annihilation is not confined to Auschwitz but is performed by many other means, by any other means and is still performed here and now in the technical, administrative, scientific, capitalistic world or whatever other name we want to give to the world we live in, survive in. (Cf. *ibid.*, 75-77)

Can we speak of esthetics “after Auschwitz”? According to Lyotard we cannot. The incapacity of the imaginative spirit to produce forms to present the absolute means the end of art, not so much as art but as beautiful form. What is left is *pathos*, suffering. “The sublime is not made, not projected, it lights up. Art cannot be sublime, it can “produce” the sublime and this is not better than beautiful, only more ridiculous” (*Ibid.*, 79).

### **Heidegger’s silence on Auschwitz**

In the second part of his book Lyotard concentrates on Heidegger. And he makes it very clear right from the beginning that Heidegger is not only one of the most important philosophers of the twentieth century but that he has also been a respected and loyal member of the NSDAP, he paid his contribution from 1933 until 1945. In fact this is the whole point that Lyotard wants to make in this second part of the book as a sort of confirmation of what he has found in the first part. One of the most predominant philosophers of the West had - not just occasional but – deliberate and profound sympathies with the nazi regime. He only mentions the *Endlösung*, the final solution (techni-

cally perfected at Auschwitz) once – In 1949 - and relates it with technology developed in agriculture (cf. *ibid.*, 137). With this “gesture” Heidegger himself practices what he had discovered as the “oblivion of Being”. “... he did not lend his hand nor even his thought to the extermination but preserved his silence and non-thought. He “forgot” the extermination.”(*Ibid.*, 132). This silence makes Heidegger – and mankind – guilty. He refuses to realize the cloud of terror that is hiding in the limpid blue of language of which the Law is sublimation and prefers to remain comfortably numb in the oblivion of being (in the sense of Being, *Sein*). And Lyotard’s judgment is severe: “Freedom is not due to the Law but to being. And by this contempt Heidegger’s thinking reveals itself – in spite of itself - as hostage of the Law. That is his real fault”. (*Ibid.*, 146)

Both Kant and Freud had touched upon something that Lyotard calls “a cloud of terror that hides in the limpid blue of language”. For Freud the unconscious affect and for Kant the sublime hinted at what can never be represented, is forgotten, and had better be forgotten. Although both recognized the negative aspects of this forgotten non-expressible realm, they had sufficient trust in the psychic apparatus and the esthetic judgment that they estimated man to be able to live with it. Heidegger’s oblivion however makes it perfectly clear why this forgotten realm must stay in the dark and remain forgotten for ever, for there it shows its true terrorist character: the horror of Auschwitz. Auschwitz has become a memorial - never again! – but its perfect technology survived and will keep watch over the forgotten monster so that it will stay in the dark, not perish and continue its influence on man’s existence. No God, no dead God – God can not be dead because he is not an (esthetic) life (*Ibid.*, 129) – no Forgotten One - who does nothing but keep people hostage and then chases them astray into the interpretation of a non-existing voice - nor even being – that forgotten horror - can rescue man from despair. All he has left is his inadequacy to express the inexpressible - philosophy of the ruins - or to experience – don’t even try to think of control - the real terror of what has been repressed in the infinite time-space realm of primary repression. In short Lyotard only leaves one way open. Connected to terror in its purest form, non-centered, disorientated, man – or better: mankind as the quotation marks around “the Jews” indicate - is “delivered” to the formless monster.

Where Derrida is rather neutral in his normative judgments Lyotard is extremely negative. Maybe you could say that Derrida’s concept of *différance*

marks the end of sameness and thereby of truth and that Lyotard's *cloud of terror that hides in the limpid blue of language* marks the end or at least the impossibility of normativity. As we have seen in the previous chapters these concepts – in their quality of final conclusions of Western thinking of the modern era – did not come unexpectedly. And as a profound critique they have value. Nevertheless, we are now facing a serious problem. If truth is a fiction, and if - with Derrida - we have to develop “a writing without presence and without absence, without history, without cause, without *archia*, without *telos*, a writing that absolutely upsets all dialectics, all theology, all teleology, all ontology, a writing exceeding everything that the history of metaphysics has comprehended in the form of the Aristotelian *grammè*, in its point, in its line, in its circle, in its time, and in its space”, what then will we write? And if Lyotard is right, that, connected to terror in its purest form, non-centered, disorientated, man or mankind is “delivered” to the formless monster, then Heidegger remaining silent - and not only he but any perfection of genocide technology - can find an excuse. That is if we can still think in terms of excuse. Why even criticize, why teach homiletics, why preach? Can we find a way that leaves the critical value of postmodernism intact without the constraint to accept its total nihilism? And the problem is an urgent one, because postmodern philosophy – like any other philosophy - is finding its way through the sophisticated mass media also into theology, Biblical hermeneutics, preaching and the church community. And this is happening in an ever increasing and astonishing quick pace.

## **Some reactions to postmodernism in the churches**

We see a great variety of reactions to postmodernism showing up lately in theology and in churches. Most of them are of regressive character, falling back upon former “safe” positions. Therefore, we will now have a closer look into the widespread and increasingly popular movement towards pre-modern positions in orthodoxy and evangelicalism – where I have my own roots. The next reaction we will consider is the consolidation of modern positions as an answer to postmodern nihilism and we will end this section with the postmodern answer of Wouter Slob's “rhetorical normativity”.

### **Orthodox and Evangelical return to premodernism**

Born and raised in a rather severe orthodox family and environment I am well acquainted with their handling of truth and normativity. In our family there was only one truth - the Bible - and one norm – don't think you can ever do good, for man is unable to do good. This resulted in a gloomy atmosphere where many facts of life were unspoken, concealed, “forgotten” and the suffering of and struggle with evil unavoidable and to a certain extent even venerated. However, in our village many protestant denominations had developed a congregation more or less in reaction to the mainstream church. Some were even more severe, others more liberal. I liked to attend the Evangelical worship services, because of the joy those people shared in their faith. All the different congregations in that village claimed to own the real truth when it came to God's intentions with humanity and the universe. And this resulted in a blooming struggle for the truth with very little Biblical love that tore the village community apart. Power had metaphysical traits and justification. I have always been very skeptical toward these developments with their intolerant and even fundamentalist character. There had to be more than what all these different people claimed to be true. And now, as a reaction to postmodern nihilism, we see precisely these denominations – orthodox and evangelical – bloom and gain influence. Why? Is relying on old and “safe” positions and theologies that go all the way back to the Reformation, St. Anselm and St. Augustine the way out of postmodern nihilism to salvation? Or is self-preservation in chaos a more dominant drive here?

### **Evil reduced to personal sin and guilt in the orthodox experience**

In my youth I have experienced what it means to be in a “cloud of terror hidden in the limpid blue of language”. My mother had died in her early forties of a brain tumor when I had reached the age of eleven. The house had been darkened because all the curtains were closed. The only light came in through a window that looked down on the stairway. And so I have been sitting on that stairway for about four days until the coffin with her corpse left the house and the curtains opened again. No one said a word to me and I didn't speak either. From where I was sitting I could see people coming in through the front door, sharing their sympathy and condolences with my father. Words that I didn't understand and that couldn't express what we were going through. Only once I had the urge to scream out loud. When my grandma – whom I loved dearly - came in, I wanted to tell her: “don't go in

there, you'll come out crying", but no words came out of my mouth. And she came out terrified, crying. At the day of the funeral our house was full of people, and it was lovely. I enjoyed the company and the light in the house where I had regained my freedom to move around. People were chatting with each other, and when we went for a walk in the bright winter sun I felt life was good. However, the atmosphere in the group changed suddenly and dramatically into pure terror as we entered a building where the coffin stood demanding all our attention once again. My father said: "you don't have to look if you don't want to". These are the only words I remember. Many more words were spoken in the funeral service but they meant nothing. They only suppressed, concealed the real terror of what was happening. They healed nothing. The real terror had to be experienced: to catch a glimpse of your mother disappearing in a deep black hole in a graveyard covered with snow from behind thick rows of oh so deeply concerned neighbors. They all crowded around the open grave, wondering. "This could happen to *me*. Will *I* then go to heaven or will *I* be damned for eternity? Have *I* sinned against the Holy Spirit for which sin there is no reconciliation?" But they had no words to formulate - let alone decide on - these questions, it would all be in the hands of the Almighty on Judgment Day. And they forgot about the terror of an eleven year old boy standing in their midst watching his mother disappear into nothing.

Later I tried to listen and understand the words. What struck me in the orthodox faith, in which I was raised, was the great emphasis laid on personal salvation of which one could never be sure. Christian faith remained a life long struggle with sin. Using deep psychological insight it was always possible to find some kind of self-justification that would keep you away from salvation. Salvation was only available through faith in Christ who was crucified to pay for our sins. But sin was always stronger than man and there was no way to get rid of it completely. Although promised in the Old Testament the Law first had to be fulfilled by Christ on Calvary and now we have to wait until His Second Coming for God's Kingdom of love and peace to be established on earth permanently. So you were advised to wait for the grace of God but all you received while you were waiting was the terror his children repressed into oblivion. And it would be a waste of time and the surest way to hell to go and search for redemption elsewhere. For nothing could prevent you from your destiny as predestined by the Almighty and his Divine Providence for each and every one of us. My mother had been a church organist and she had loved those pietistic songs about the New Jerusalem

with its gates of white pearls and streets of pure gold where she would go eventually. These were the songs we sang at home, never in church. Why hadn't I heard anything about it at her funeral service?

Lyotard is right. Somewhere a cloud of terror hides in the limpid blue of language. And you can feel it especially when grace has gone beyond our reach, which I think was the fruit of Western thinking of the modern era. Of course the orthodoxy is loyal to the Reformation's axiom *Sola Scriptura* and beyond it to St. Anselm's satisfaction theory and St. Augustine's predestination theology but they forget that the modern turn to the subject modified these old traditions in a very significant way. By lack of adequate authority "The Scriptures" alone had to be obeyed, okay but in the modern era these very scriptures had to be interpreted and were interpreted in multiple ways. Which interpretation should have authority? Furthermore it makes a big difference if a theology about evil and justification of evil by satisfaction of the Divine Will is developed and organizes life within the logos, the unified logical space of truth, where man is at the center of God's redemptive activities or that it has to function in a worldview where man and his planet have been de-centered, led into the margins, where man has become uncertain and consequently concentrates on his own subject. The same goes for the Augustinian predestination theology. In St. Augustine's time it functioned perfectly well as a refutation of Pelagius' free will and deepened the insights in the mystery of evil. However, in the logos realm there always was the greater mystery of grace to match this mystery of evil by which God preserved salvation for mankind. And precisely this redemption becomes extremely more complex and even doubtful in the modern era, where everything is seen from great distance except man's own subjective being. Where would God's grace, redemption from immanent evil have to come from? And this question only becomes more urgent in postmodern times, where man is non-centered, lost in an infinite senseless universe.

As we have seen above, Ricœur distinguishes between three forms of evil: personal evil in the form of sin and guilt, social evil in the form of deviation, and non-personal evil in the form of stain or chaos. Of course not all orthodoxy resembles the gloomy picture I have given here from my own experience. Many conservatives have found – by means of fine and thorough exegesis of the Bible texts, serious and honest theology, subtle and gracious psychology - a more healthy equilibrium between evil and grace. My thesis however remains that orthodoxy in modern and even more in postmodern times is in serious danger not to overestimate but to underestimate evil. It

does not take evil seriously because it does not take evil seriously enough. In only concentrating on the personal, subjective forms of evil in the form of sin and guilt and *personal* salvation it follows the modern turn to the subject and is therefore different from the orthodoxy developed in the premodern era where the social and non-personal forms of evil were a natural part of the whole picture. In (post-)modern orthodoxy these last two realms of evil are solved all too easily (dissidents condemned to non-existence, natural disasters ascribed to the wrong faith) or they become alibis for man's sinful nature or - which is worse - they are forgotten just like it is forgotten that we now live in a completely different world with a totally different worldview. And then the social and impersonal forms of evil become object of repression and even sometimes form a cloud of terror in the limpid blue of language, creating living hell in life here and now, kindling fear that realizes itself. And in doing so not only evil is grossly underestimated, so is grace...

Falling back on premodern orthodoxy in (post-)modern times and in a (post-)modern way is not an option.

### **Postmodern premodernism in the evangelical experience**

For me it meant a great relief that after the death of my mother there was an evangelical congregation in our village where I found some consolation. Instead of the long and dragging equal notes their singing was rhythmic and joyful. And their preaching went straight into the heart. I was told that God loved me, that I was valuable in his eyes because he had made me. I was told that God's love was enough to make me love my neighbor. When I believed in Jesus Crucified and in his reconciling blood all evil that would come into my life would be conquered and dispelled. And what was even more important at that stage of my life: they practiced all this in a warm and active communal life. They had a youth group that met every Saturday evening, where everyone *was* important and was taken seriously in discussions. They organized exciting excursions, one of which went to Germany where we taught ourselves a little bit of skiing. They were interested in my stories and slides when I had come back from half a year of work (after finishing high school) on an ocean liner that made cruises from New York to the Caribbean. For these people the world outside our village seemed to matter, something that was completely missing in the orthodox congregation where I had grown up. The Evangelicals have given me new confidence in God, in life,



in myself in a very important period of my life and I am still and will always be deeply grateful for it.

Striking in the evangelical faith I found the great emphasis laid on personal experience, which was not unfamiliar, but here this was not expressed in terms of sin and guilt but in terms of redemption and spiritual well being. Their pietistic colored hymns were sung in the official worship services and they were the only ones. What struck me furthermore was their strong suspicion - even fear – of anything that came from academic theology. If you wanted to lose your faith you only had to study academic theology. Evangelical Bible School was okay; the Academia was not. And likewise you were fully entitled to criticize the mainstream orthodox congregation in the village, but to direct your criticism to the Evangelical congregation was not done and not wanted. We should be thankful for our own spiritual well being that the Lord has granted us so abundantly and it would be a sin to let our faith be shocked by no matter who. And yet something was missing there. It took me many years of theological study to realize what it was I was missing.

In fact there is no such thing as an encompassing evangelical theology. All comes down to two or three undoubted kernel truths that form the basis of the whole evangelical faith.<sup>8</sup> Rooted in the Reformation where Luther had rediscovered the good tidings of grace for the individual – “How do I find a merciful God?” - evangelicalism has always been connected to inner renewal, rebirth and personal sanctification as a reaction to rigid and inflexible systems that control people’s faith. We find it in the British Puritanism that wanted to renew the Church of England in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, in German Pietism that engages the Holy Spirit in personal piety and in British Methodism trying to promote personal sanctification on a more methodical basis, both in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries we see several revival and charismatic movements come up both in Europe and the US. They lay great emphasis on the free movement of the Holy Spirit who cannot be caught in all sorts of theological systems and ecclesial structures of an official institute that claims to own – exclusively - the Truth. They all had their influence on the Evangelical Movement as we can see it function nowadays on the basis of these three foundations:

- Unconditional acceptance of the Holy Scriptures as the infallible and authoritative Word of God.
- Personal relation with Jesus Christ through the work of the Holy Spirit.

- Necessity to bear witness.

The Bible is of utmost importance here because it radiates divine inspiration and divine authority. And Therefore, it is vital to devote much time to Bible study. However, because academic theology is suspect, uncontrolled and fragmentary *subjective* interpretation that takes passages literally is blooming and increases the authority and power of the many evangelical “Bible experts” on their own members. The relation with Jesus is very subjective as well as enforced by the work of Holy Spirit (the Spirit spoke to me and thus: ... discussion closed). This Jesus piety can even replace completely the faith in the God of Israel just like the new covenant (NT) replaces the old one (OT). Finally the necessity to bear witness is not only connected to what is said but also to what is done: personal sanctification in obedience to “the will of the Lord”: no smoking, no drinking, no dancing, no premarital sex, etc. Those who live up to these demands participate in the congregation, are “in”, those who fail are easily given up. One is a member of the group as long as one participates and this makes the social structure of the group rather casual and - because official traditions are suspect - even cursory. It seems like the foregoing ages have had no meaning whatsoever. All is concentrated on the spiritual experience of the individual believer here and now.

Theological accents – Trinity, divine providence, God’s sovereignty over his creation, Jesus unstained life, virginal birth, vicarious and reconciling death on the cross, second coming of Christ, redemption of the sinner by the blood of Christ, physical resurrection, eternal life for the faithful, eternal hell for the faithless to name a few – stem from the premodern era and the oldest traditions transmitted by the church. However, no distance whatsoever is experienced in this realm. They are not subject to faith - let alone theological - discussions but form central and normative truths for our spiritual life here and now. These normative truths may serve – to some extent - the recognition between the many different evangelical groups. Faith, however, is not a rational affair. It seems to be purely emotional by means of an existential confirmation of the everlasting joy of life. “Count your blessings count them one by one ...”

“God loves you and so do I. Wow!” says Dr. Robert Schuller in the worldwide broadcasted television worship show *Hour of Power*. The latest technical developments are used in this show to reach the masses with the good tidings of the Gospel. Not only Schuller, but many evangelicals go in this direction. Bands using laser light shows, computerized rhythms, and

other “up to date” presentation techniques sing out loud the love of Jesus, with texts however that very often get lost in the decibels produced by their instruments. Evangelicals like to present themselves as modern and post-modern to be able to connect to contemporary culture. And – it must be admitted - they are very successful in reaching the masses with their easily understandable message about the love of Jesus. And this unique positive message is presented as the only adequate answer to the challenge of postmodern nihilism. However, the evangelical message itself - although wrapped in postmodern gift paper – is terribly naïve and premodern. It cannot be an adequate answer to the challenges of (post-)modern theology and nihilism because evangelicals refuse to plunge into the very questions they present. On the contrary evangelicals prove themselves - much more than the orthodox - terribly liable to Lyotard’s postmodern critique. Not only do they forget evil in its mysterious inexhaustible depths, they also forget *that* they forgot. And so the cloud of terror hidden in the limpid blue of language can do its work in the masses without notice, while the postmodern quest for truth is completely ignored ...

(Post-)modern evangelical fundamentalism - how joyful it may be - is not an option either.

It may be clear by now that from the two regressive movements described here I prefer the orthodox to the evangelical return to premodernism. With their subtle psychology, deeply experienced theology and thorough Biblical exegesis in which evil plays a main role the orthodox engage more in responsible theological discourse than the evangelicals - forgetting evil - have ever done. However, both are very modern in their emphasis on the subjective experience of faith and – consequently – in their unconscious disloyalty to premodernism. And this led in both cases to the forgetting of evil. In the orthodox case social and impersonal forms of evil were repressed, but because these forms can still be retrieved in the analysis by means of their representations we could speak here of secondary repression, having nevertheless disastrous consequences on many occasions. In the evangelical case evil is not interesting in itself, not discussed in detail and therefore forgotten.

Their silence on the topic - concentrating completely on the individual spiritual well being, as if Auschwitz had never existed - can be interpreted as forgetting their forgetting evil and thus hints at the primary or original repression. Not even trying to make the slightest allusion to the terror of the

“non-representable” they elude the whole problem and let the monster sleep. And this in turn will lead - in both cases - to the propagation of certainties in faith and life that are not certain at all and thoroughly fake when seen from a more (post-)modern perspective. They may meet a deeply felt need in the masses living in postmodern culture - the need of structure and reassurance in chaos - but instead of solving they intensify the cloud of terror, evangelicals even more so than the orthodox. Is there a more satisfying answer to Lyotard’s cloud of terror? Let us turn to the other side of the spectrum, where postmodernism is not fought but rather embraced.

### **Modern pragmatism in serving postmodern congregations, Allen, Blaisdell and Johnston**

Postmodernism has its value as radical critique. When, however, you want to build a system of thought on this critique you end up – all consciousness being deconstructed - with nothing. This became very clear in theology where consistent thinkers - who not necessarily present themselves as postmodern - started to deconstruct key notions of Christianity. The satisfaction theory deconstructed (Den Heyer)<sup>9</sup>, Jesus could no longer pay for our sins and God lost his omnipotence but “cared” when it came to suffering. The resurrection theology deconstructed (Kuitert)<sup>10</sup>, victory over evil manifest in all three layers of consciousness could no longer be hoped for. Even a dead God is an illusion because God cannot die, as he is not (esthetically) alive, according to Lyotard. No wonder strong reactions to this line of thinking developed within the churches because the very ground of existence of the Church was at stake.

Many - more liberal - churches however got into serious trouble as they started to develop strategies for their congregations to survive in postmodern culture. The orthodox and evangelical “solutions” being no option and not ready to accept postmodern nihilism with all its consequences, but realizing that they had to convey the Biblical message to modern people living in postmodern culture, they tried to make postmodern thought fertile for their churches. The number of church members in these circles diminishing rapidly precisely because of postmodern experience the question was not only how to survive financially but even more how to win the hearts of postmodern people with an old but existentially important message. On the principle “if you can’t beat them join them” they ended up in what I would call (*post-*) *modern pragmatism*. The answer must lie on a pragmatic position some-

where between radical conservative orthodoxy and radical progressive fragmentation and deconstruction. One of the many examples of this “in between” approach I found in *Theology for Preaching, Authority, Truth and Knowledge of God in a Postmodern Ethos*, by Allen, Blaisdell and Johnston<sup>11</sup>.

### **Revisionism as a basis for Christian witness to the postmodern condition**

Allen, Blaisdell and Johnston start their book with a description of the postmodern condition in which church members are living. “The heart of the postmodern mind-set is awareness of the relativity of all human thought and action” (Allen *c.s.*, 9) In this the preacher has to tell the congregation how “the Gospel can help create the emerging world and how postmodernism might inspire the church to reflect on its witness” (Ibid., 10). The term “constructive postmodernism” is introduced indicating diverse currents of theological thought. *Postliberals* or postfoundationals – going their own Christian way without bothering to justify the believability of Christian faith in postmodern culture – and *revisionists* – seeking to revise major premises of modernity - can be portrayed as “constructive postmodernists”. The question can be raised if this term is not an inner contradiction, it does reveal at least a critical attitude towards postmodernism. And in revisionism it is crystal clear that it is not postmodernism that will be revised but modernism. The latter of the two currents, revisionism, has won the sympathy of the authors.

Allen says: “My approach to theology and preaching moves in this stream” (Ibid., 20). Quoting Griffin’s *God and Religion in the Postmodern World*, revisionism “does not simply carry the premises of modernity through to their logical conclusion, but criticizes and revises those premises. Through its return to organicism and its acceptance of nonsensory perception, it opens itself to the recovery of truths and values from various forms of premodern thought and practice that had been dogmatically rejected by modernity”. Revisionists wish to “salvage a positive meaning not only for the notions of the human self, historical meaning, and truth as correspondence, which were central to modernity, but also for premodern notions of a divine reality, cosmic meaning, and an enchanted nature”.<sup>12</sup> And so revisionary theology and preachers try to correlate ancient and contemporary realities in a critical way. “They *criticize* the Bible and Christian tradition from the standpoint of contemporary perceptions. And, they *criticize* contemporary Christian theol-

ogy and practice from the standpoint of tradition.” (Allen *c.s.*, 21) However, they cannot avoid the danger of arbitrariness, using changing postmodern notions in their critique that “erode the congregation’s confidence and can even call the possibility of belief into question” which means that they eventually can “easily recreate God in their own images” (Ibid.). This arbitrariness however is part of the postmodern condition and experienced at a large scale by church members longing for authentic spirituality. Therefore, it is important for the authors to note that: “The preacher is not first a deconstructionist or a constructive postmodernist. The preacher first seeks to make a *Christian* witness.” (Ibid., 23)

This is the background of the discussion on authority, truth and knowledge of God in a postmodern ethos. Modernity is revised but not transcended. With regard to authority - “the umbrella under which to focus on truth and knowledge” (ibid., 35) - a very modern standpoint is chosen as well. There Gadamer’s view of conversation, asking about the real state of the matter (*Sache*) under discussion instead of enforcing one’s will on the conversation partner, plays an important role. Responsible conversation lays an ethical claim on the participants to “think for themselves and attend to the claims of the gospel to transcend the self”. Blaisdell: “The reality is that we cannot think or define or fulfill ourselves by ourselves. We do our individualized ethical thinking dialogically, in conversation with or in struggle against competing definitions of the self. ... Taking responsibility for what one believes, therefore, need not and ought not collapse into a self-absorbed ethic. Taking responsibility for what one believes is an ethic that requires that one converse with the most penetrating of partners. ... One of the implications here is that scripture and tradition, as well as the experience of others and self, will be partners. ... respected and listened to. In this regard the conversational nature of authority [based on Gadamer’s insights, JCV] is not primarily a matter of rhetorical strategy on the part of the preacher, it is an ethical demand.” (Ibid., 47/8) What is at stake is to enforce the matter (*die Sache*) of the text and not whatever authority.

### **An enlarged correspondence theory of truth**

When it comes to the theory of truth the correspondence theory is followed, However, in a slightly modified way by Allen. The correspondence theory, important for the empirical method, was complemented with the coherence theory – logical consistency within the system. Likewise this theory

can also be completed with an enlarged understanding of experience and with the theological method of mutual critical correlation to determine correspondence between claims. In this way the total deconstruction of truth can be avoided and yet the postmodern doubts and uncertainties taken seriously. Perceptual experience contains a surplus that often evades conceptualization. "Perception of the More (with its vast and powerful depths) is often nonsensory, but it is crucial to the self-understanding of individuals and communities. Conscious interpretative categories cannot exhaust all that we know. Indeed these categories are only the tip of powerful undercurrents of feeling and force that affect self and community." (Ibid., 63) This very modern, Ricœurian, thought – named postmodern (!, *ibid.*, 65) - is further confirmed by the idea that "interpretation and reinterpretation are constant in the process of relating truth and experience." (Ibid., 64) The preacher who wants to tell the truth in a postmodern community will always feel the tension between his or her "real" experience and the fact that this experience is interpreted reality: "the tension between the universal claims for truth and the fact that contextual experience is always particular and contextual" (*ibid.*, 65). And therefore both sides of that tense relation have to be confronted to each other continuously in a mutual critical correlation. In so doing the postmodern self and community are taken seriously in their deepest experiences and doubts and can be enriched from an interpreted and always provisionally known universal truth.

"This "Telling the Truth from the Pulpit" is marked by honest discussion of the issues, humility in the face of our finite perceptions and openness to other notions of truth" (*ibid.*, 69). In short, modified partially knowable correspondence and as such a foundational theory of truth. Johnston: "The question: "What is truth?" can also be phrased, "What is at the center? What is the foundational core that organizes our lives?" (*Ibid.*, 72) The answer for Johnston is Jesus Christ but this center is a mysterious one, a trace that – with Karl Barth and Jacques Derrida – calls all other centers and structures into question and transforms our experience of all that is. (Cf. *Ibid.*, 75/6/8) And yet this mystery can be touched by language – stenic (precise) and tensive (imaginative) language - and thus by preaching. "At its most potent, language has the power to effect what it speaks. In the broad sense, language creates world." (*Ibid.*, 166)

### **Revisionist's inadequate understanding of postmodernism**

I have great sympathy for this approach - I guess because it reminds me of so much that I have learned from Ricœur - and yet here too I have the feeling that something is missing. Postmodernism incorporates a non-foundational, deflationary theory of truth, which means non-correspondence of saying and being. Now, the description of postmodernism from a foundational standpoint *within* the correspondence theory of truth (be it a modified version) must be inadequate, incorrect, i.e. portraying postmodernism as less devastating than it is in reality. A nice illustration of this can be found in the way Foucault's moral judgment is criticized by Allen. Foucault holds that all knowledge is a function of power, and for Foucault this means a function of saying and not a function of correspondence of saying and being. "Then in a strange contradiction he says that all oppression is wrong." (Ibid., 61) Now, in the foundational theories of truth the correspondence of saying and being is the normative relation and only on the basis of this relation you can make moral judgments. Therefore, Foucault has no right to make a moral judgment. However, Foucault - postmodern and non-foundational - is not bound to this normative relation in truth and therefore he can make any judgment he may want, verifiable according to foundational standards or not. Maybe choosing the "right" foundation principally is a matter of power activating all sorts of oppression automatically. However, if that is the case then there is much more at stake in Foucault's moral judgment than just a strange contradiction. For in that case no form whatsoever of power can be morally approvable, and then any form of knowledge is automatically corrupt.

Allen, Blaisdell and Johnston stay – as Ricœur does – within the Kantian limits of human reality and therefore present a modern reaction to postmodernism. However, Kant failed to rescue the unity of saying and being with his mono-logic even in the limited sense of self-evidence pertaining to the subject. What if Foucault is right that knowledge is only a function of power, an assertion that seems not so implausible to me after all? What if Derrida is right that any kind of sameness is an illusion? What if Lyotard is right that all language only aims at hiding the terror that cannot be represented by any language? We would have to find an answer, not by eluding but by searching within the very postmodern perspective on truth and normativity. If only to avoid all sorts of diffused syntheses of theories on truth that lead to theoretical discourses that no one can follow anymore but that appear in all sorts of disciplines especially theology<sup>13</sup>. My colleague Rev. Dr. Wouter Slob makes an interesting effort to find an original answer to the problems postmodern-



ism poses from within a clear postmodern perspective with his idea of “rhetorical normativity”.

### **Postmodern “rhetorical normativity”, W. Slob**

If it is true – as we saw in Chapter 2 - that philosophical models turn into interpretative models that determine our understanding of the Bible texts, than also postmodernism will come into Christian sermons and church discourse. We see this happen for example in Altena’s dissertation *Wolken gaan voorbij* (Clouds pass by)<sup>14</sup>. For Altena the prevailing talents, as far as the preacher is concerned, are reduced to those of *stage director* and *language artist*, and he legitimizes his choice on the basis of the postmodern philosophies of Derrida and Lyotard. Biblical exegesis has to be postponed as long as possible and the attention for the Biblical languages Hebrew and Greek in the curriculum of homiletics diminished in favor of disciplines like literary sciences, hermeneutics and rhetoric. In short, the author wants to start in the postmodern condition and tries to accommodate the Biblical message to the needs of postmodern church members. However, Altena proceeds in a rather naïve way - from a postmodern point of view - by supposing that the clouds (of terror ...), portrayed as such on the cover of the book, pass by, contrasting themselves against, in stead of hiding within, the limpid blue of language. And he forgets Lyotard’s axiom that any art – also direction and linguistic performance - reinforces the forgetting of what has to remain forgotten. Therefore, his homiletical proposals are not postmodern at all, but thoroughly modern and as such based upon a naïve reading of postmodern philosophy. None of this naivety is to be found in Wouter Slob’s idea of rhetorical normativity “that is independent from the notion of sameness and that thus resists, and even dwells comfortably in, the notion of *différance*” (Slob, 2002, 95; DR, 64).

### **Postmodern notions of truth imploding under their own weight**

Both truth and normativity are under serious attack in postmodernism. “*Différance* attacks at the heart of logos, rendering impossible reliance on the classical assurance of the self-identity of thought and being, on the self-evidence of the modern turn to the subject, but also on the transversal rooting in a shared rationality”. (Ibid., 95) However, Slob is not guided by fear of paralogy and radical dissensus that may result from this. He maintains: “I

do not think we have to *defend* the notion of truth. I rather think that we should radicalize the deconstructivist claim and let it collapse under its own weight” (ibid.) .

The postmodern predominance of the multiple and the absence of sameness have an awkward quasi-metaphysical basis, granting a privileged ontological status to the multiple that can hardly be maintained. For to have any force at all, the deconstruction of truth must itself be true, but that would mean that deconstructivism would either “annihilate itself or would have to re-struct the notion it only seemed to de-struct.” (Ibid. 95) Furthermore Slob has doubts about the feasibility of deconstructivism itself. “The identity of A, surely, is not only determined by its *différences* with B and C; A’ and A”, but also by all the other *différences* that are feasible: B’ and D’, or C’’’ and F’’’, etc. *as well as all the possible combinations*. What we get when we would draw such a picture, with all the diacritical relations as mutual arrows, is not an insightful web of interrelated, flowing, mutual-determining “identities”, but simply a big black mess. An infinite black mess, to be precise, because there are no limits to *différance*”. (Ibid., 96) And what may be of even more importance “the deconstructivist claim only makes sense from an external point of view. ... Not only does deconstructivism deny such a position, the infinite black mess swallows it up. Deconstructivism requires the withdrawal from our chronotopical place [i.e. our specific place in time and space JCV] so that we can discern our interrelationship with some far away Z’’’’’. The very upshot of the message, however, is that this is not possible. We are just (k)nots in the web of *différance*, without the possibility to oversee all relevant and determining relationships.” (Ibid.) And so the scope of postmodern deconstructivism is so infinitely vast that it implodes under the weight of its own logically unsolvable problems.

Being part of this infinite network that no one can oversee, man’s vision will always be limited (chronotopically determined) but changeable (without the recourse to sameness). However, when no recourse to sameness is possible the chronotopically determination is less determined as the term suggests, it becomes a flux. This inspires Slob to make an interesting move towards the concept of - changing - identity, not by rejecting but by using deconstructivism. “Although *différance* makes any appeal to sameness impossible the chronotopical determination certainly does not rule out the idea of identity. No longer stable as identical-with-itself, it remains possible to see identity as an ever-changing process. There certainly *is* something that is changing. Only when one demands something more stable, the notion of *dif-*

*féranche* leads to nothingness”. (Ibid.) Therefore: “The incoherence of the deconstructivist message does not lead back to a notion of truth understood as *logos*. Rather, it challenges to rethink identity as a flowing, shifting notion that uses *différanche* instead of being threatened by it.” (Ibid.) This concept of changing identity will play an important role in Slob’s idea of normativity that results from responsible dialogue. Therefore he exchanges the truth as dependent on notions of sameness for a deflationary understanding of truth that can be thought in the logical space of *différanche*.

### **Dialogical rhetoric as the locus of normativity**

It is the task of normativity to decide in a compelling way whether an argument is good or false. Now, in classical logic the goodness of an argument depended on two things, the truth of the premises and the validity of the inference, the premises being a matter of the various disciplines and the inference a matter of logic. When both conditions are met you will have a sound argument. When you have only one univocal logical space, there is no need to defend your mono-logic as was the case in the premodern setting. Truth provides for the unique logical space of normativity that reflects its structure, because thought and being correspond, and cannot be thought not to correspond. Logic only defines the domain and the operations and thus when the premises of an argument are true the conclusion must be true when the logical operations are valid, hence the great power of deductive reasoning. However, as Kant failed to rescue this solid house of *logos* we lost its univocal clarity.

Changes come when Frege with his syntactical approach allowed for different logics depending on what syntactical decisions are made. “The very fact that there are alternatives fundamentally changes the logical space in which normative issues are to be settled. Truth no longer speaks for itself, but has become dependent on the logical system that is operative”. (Ibid., 97) The Aristotelian categorical syllogism becomes a logical technique but can no longer be considered as a general logical theory or unique logical system. The appearance of logical alternatives pertains not only to truth but to normativity as well because no logical system has unique normative force to decide on the goodness of arguments.

In modern times many efforts were made to solve this problem with dialectical means. Dialectics as such always starts in the conflict of thesis and antithesis and tries to settle this conflict in a new synthesis, although in dialectic

tical logic not in a Hegelian way ending up in some all-encompassing Absolute Spirit. Always more than one perspective being involved, dialectical logic is dialogical and by its focus on solving conflicts also pragmatic. However, how do you decide which synthesis is the best and should be normative? Two sources are available to draw on: objective validity (problem solving, rationality) and conventional validity (social acceptance, chronotopical condition of man) and they are kept strictly apart in dialectical logic. A real synthesis is not reached here and cannot be reached in dialectical logic according to Slob for several reasons. First of all the strict distinction between objective and conventional validity cannot be sustained. “Problems” are never an objective matter in its purest form, nor is their identity and solution, even the “better than” criterion involves choice. And when it comes to normativity, conventionalism runs into trouble because conventions are always local. Who decides what is “universally” good, what we *should* and not merely *would* do and think? Who decides about the rules, and the “win or lose” standards of a discussion? You would need a meta- instance to set the rules. “Rules cannot determine their own applicability” (Ibid., 113). However, this is precisely what dialectical logic tries to do. And yet ideally in dialectical logic *a priori* rules are not set on a meta-level but emerge *a posteriori* within the dialectical process.

Slob now develops a dialogical rhetoric because classical logic failed and dialectical logic resulted in unsolvable problems. He does so with creative use of Aristotle’s theory of argumentation. Aristotle distinguished between three sorts of argumentation: 1) analytical argumentation, demanding true premises, 2) dialectical argumentation, demanding generally accepted premises and 3) rhetorical argumentation, demanding premises accepted by some specific audience. In choosing a logical system for normativity the analytical argumentation cannot be used because “Aristotle knew just one logic: syllogistic logic that was normative for all sorts of argumentation,” (ibid. 114) and we know that this monological system couldn’t be sustained. Dialectical argumentation cannot be used either, because in dialectical logic the choice of the logical system is a premise, an element of the discussion itself. “If the logical system is a premise and if it is granted that any specific rule can be questioned during the discussion, then we lose the notion of rule guidance” (ibid.), which is the proper function of a logical system. That leaves the rhetoric argumentation as the only possible way of arguing with normative force because here it is not establishing a logical system that is at stake but making argumentative moves, finding the right arguments. “The *a priori* au-

thorization of conventional dialectics linked to the idea that logic is a system of rules requiring validation before application, makes a suitable account for normativity impossible. If, however, we can establish a normative force for argumentative *moves* we may not need conventional validation and many of our problems may disappear. Rhetoric is the place to look for such normativity.” (Ibid.)

This applies even when rhetoric has often developed a bad moral reputation as one-way communication and manipulation of an audience. Slob tries to overcome this weakness of rhetoric by introducing the concept of dialogical rhetoric, which is two-way communication. “The audience is not merely the addressee, but is an active participant in the exchange; and hence also responsible for its success” (Ibid., 122). In opposition to dialectical logic, where only the proponent faced the burden of proof, in dialogical rhetoric both participants face the burden of proof of any logical standard or premise they may hold. The basic idea of a dialogico-rhetorical normativity is “that we need not establish any form of sameness of standards. ... Any move must be accepted by the interlocutor and only the evaluative standards of the interlocutor are of interest. But the argumentative behavior of each participant is under the control of the other ... Both standards – of proponent and opponent – “pitch” a normative field which is local but very strong. ... both participants become committed to all moves that are established within the discussion. Either by advancing moves themselves or by accepting the moves from the interlocutor, moves pro and contra are established that together form a normative “vector” leading up to the conclusion.” (Ibid. 124/5) The conclusion reached is a compelling one because both participants have taken responsibility for, defended the standards of every move – pro and contra, positive and negative, adherence and resistance – that led up to it. Power, that had no place in premodern mono-logic because the truth could not be manipulated nor in the dialectical logic because everybody should have a free choice, does have a place in that dialogical rhetoric, can be accounted for and thus resisted. Identity in all this is not a fixed and stable entity, which does not mean as the postmoderns maintain that identity is non-existent, it is only in constant development as a result of the mutually responsible dialogue.

Slob sums up, “Dialogical rhetoric ... is not focused on “sameness”. It conceives of normativity as the instrument by which arguments can be enforced upon a participant who is not inclined to agree. Indeed, this is the very task of normativity. Its compelling character is always directed at the

other because the proponent is already convinced of the conclusion. Dialectic demands fundamental agreement, dialogical rhetoric can handle fundamental disagreement [to be settled *in* the discussion, JCV]. Dialogical rhetoric proposes a formal logical space<sup>15</sup> that is constantly substantiated by the actual discussants”. In this formal logical space the problems that dialectics could not solve in a satisfying way form no fundamental problem. “... the participants need not agree on the basic presumptions, neither on the identity of the problem nor on the reach of the logical system.” Furthermore, “... one’s argumentative reputation becomes of decisive importance.” And finally, “... a rhetorical dialogue is a continuing flux in which the exchange of commitments changes a situation on the way to a desired goal.” Therefore, “... the locus of normativity is to be sought in the logical space that exists between the respective standards of the participants *in* a discussion”. (Ibid., 125.)

### **Theological implications of rhetorical normativity**

For Wouter Slob the rhetorical normativity located in the logical space of the dialogue is reflected in the Biblical “amen”. In Hebrew, אָמֵן *amen* expresses personal and responsive commitment, the Greek ἀμήν *amen* is asseveratory, adds extra weight. (Cf. Ibid., 188)

However, instead of *amen*-celebration, “the Word of God muted away in theological quibbling” (Ibid., 191) after the pope had lost authority to represent the one and only truth as a result of the modern turn to the subject. In Protestantism the Creed became more important than the “potentially alarming consequences of the Gospel”. “The glide is ironic: initiated to break down the power of the Church, Protestantism ended up in celebrating the self-righteousness of ecclesiastical confessions. ... Rather than a religious motivation modernist epistemology is behind all this. ... Modernist epistemology turned on fundamental agreement, and Protestantism translated this in requiring acceptance of its ecclesiastical creeds.” (Ibid.) And that means that there are as many creeds as there are denominations. Postmodernism as the logical consequence of the modernist emphasis on agreement is left with the conclusion that commensurability is not attainable and therefore every individual has a perspective of his own. But this leads to fundamental *hubris* of “owning” knowledge of God, which is sin. “The *hubris* of the modernist turn to the subject ends up in philosophical solipsism and moral indifference ... and these are ... actual realities.” (Ibid., 192) As we have seen above,

Slob does not agree that the hermeneutical character of all knowledge and the chronotopical situatedness of man necessarily leads up to the postmodern conclusion that the individual has no identity at all. “Indeed, the proclaimed fluidity is taken to imply the rejection of the concept of identity. Postmodernism is wrong. ... Even if contingent and even if dependent upon all kinds of influences around me, “I” am still distinguishable from the rest of the world around me. The fundamental relational ontology that is involved here distinguishes it from modern solipsism” (Ibid., 193)

In dialogical rhetoric the very idea of a perspective between the world as-it-is-in-itself and the subject is dropped. “There is no other world than we are perceiving, experiencing, relating to. There is no need to postulate anything more than this. In particular there is no need to postulate that the world as-it-is-in-itself is somehow responsible for the way we perceive it. This is the main difference between the correspondence theory of truth and a deflationary account of truth.” (Ibid., 193) In the latter we cannot postpone responsibility for our own conclusions, and must stand for our convictions. This involves a radical change of the basic conception of logical standards because agreement and commensurability are no longer sacrosanct. Rather than concluding that normativity is lost when this is accepted, dialogical rhetoric investigates the consequences of the inability to safeguard commensurability. Living with differences and fundamental disagreement is less shocking than most people think. Normativity is not jeopardized but replaced and becomes accountability within the discussion in which both partners have responsibility to defend the arguments and the logical system they use. When both partners have the burden of proof the opponent may have the stronger case and the binding outcome of the discussion can go in his direction. This means that there is no *a priori* stance or standard to be met and thus the strict distinction between deductive and inductive reasoning becomes less important as well. In dialogical rhetoric the normative conclusion for both partners in the discussion is reached by means of their discussion.

All this will also result in a much more modest relation with God. Instead of proving his existence – “a pitiful conditionalization of faith” (Ibid., 199) – we can trust Him to deal with the problem of his ontic existence; we are called to praise the Lord and live our lives in the sight of the Lord according to his commandments. In this, religious normativity is a matter of dialogue too. “Being convinced of the trustfulness of God, religious integrity involves taking responsibility for its requirements. ... The guiding notion for us here is the notion of Christian love. Rather than a substantial norm for action,

love compels us to be fundamentally “audience oriented”. Rather than telling us exactly what we should do, it teaches us to do what is good for others. ... In such a situation “identities” are not so much given up, but made the responsibility of the other party. ... identity is the result of interrelationships. Mutual love provides precisely for this: by relating to others we confirm their identities and by relating to us they confirm ours. ... Whereas deconstructivism draws a negative conclusion from its celebrated *différance*, we should rather draw a positive one, and understand identity as a floating and fluid notion. ... My unique biography is my identity.”(Ibid., 201/2)

As disagreement is a condition for any discussion, and dialogical rhetoric can cope with it, the inter-religious discussion must not be excluded. The ideal of mutual responsibility is of course a risky matter because the condition of mutuality is not always met. But the God of love “shall affirm our existence, even when all other relationships are lost. We are invited to accept this love by responding “amen.” (Ibid., 202) And this “amen” is meant in a responsive (O.T.) and asseveratory (N.T.) sense. “We should take responsibility for our commitments and act accordingly, and preaching the love of God is central for that. We shall not arrive at any final conclusion; we shall not regain paradise by ourselves. But the fact that our efforts are only errant piecework still calls for “yeah”-saying rather than “not”-celebration.” (Ibid.)

Slob’s idea of “rhetorical normativity” is the first serious attempt I have seen that takes postmodernism seriously and that tries to *think* an alternative from a postmodern standpoint – Slob speaks about a *differant* point of view (Ibid., 95) – without accepting the radical postmodern nihilistic ideology. His dialogical rhetoric based on a deflationary notion of truth that he relates to Aristotle’s rhetoric argumentation is indeed neologicistic and as such *differant*. It is so because Aristotle’s mono-logical space of truth that ruled every discussion or the dialectical logic that tried to do the same are no longer the guiding rule but object of discussion and thus subject to choice and change within the discussion. Taking the radical postmodern critique seriously means that falling back upon former more steady traditional positions is no option. “Reinforcement of Papal authority does not answer the problems that led to modernism and that eventually laid the basis for our present loss of normativity” (Ibid., 201). And therefore something radically new has to be thought out: dialogical rhetoric leading to rhetorical normativity located in the logical space of dialogue governed by mutual responsibility and defla-



tionary notion of truth, placing normativity at the heart of and not before the discussion.

With Slob I wholeheartedly agree that there is no way back and something new has to be thought out. The question however is if this is possible in a radical sense, relying – as we always do - in our thinking on former models of thought. So did Ricœur build his modern (for him that meant within Kantian limits) metaphor theory on Aristotle's premodern *Rhetoric*. In Western thinking it is thoroughly legitimate to use an old concept, place it in a new context and thus modify the concept in a significant way. And so did Slob by reinserting Aristotle's rhetoric argumentation in a postmodern context with multiple logical systems and a deflationary notion of truth with no normative correspondence between factual and extensional truth. The disappearance of the world as it is in itself out of our thinking in favor of the world as it is perceived and named reminds me of St. Augustine's emphasis on the consciousness of the present and his concept of the Eternally Present. Furthermore the reference to the logical *space* of dialogue and the *perspective* of mutual responsibility of proponent and opponent relies on knowledge as vision. And so by concentrating on the problems of logic and truth or non-truth as well as on Derrida's concept of *différance* Slob stays in Western currents of thought with his dialogical rhetoric. But it nevertheless gives enough exciting stimuli to proceed on new ways.

However, I have a more fundamental problem with the concept of rhetorical normativity. When the normativity of the correspondence of being and saying in mono-logic is gone and dialectics - due to its inherent methodology - cannot establish any normative logic, then rhetorical normativity - based on responsible communication of ever changing and developing identities of the participating subjects - becomes as fluid as the subjective identities themselves. Power being admitted in the logical space of dialogue morality will be a hard-won commodity. Fierce battles lie ahead of us but will the joy of "yeah saying" be victorious over the fear for "not-celebration"? We will need trust and love, but how can they be accounted for *in* and not outside the infinite number of battles that each individual or group identity has to fight? However, and notwithstanding this fundamental problem that I have with postmodernism in general, Wouter Slob does give with his postmodern approach of rhetorical normativity a real alternative to the postmodern denial of *all* truth and normativity.

## **Postmodern nihilism, threat or impulse?**

Being a Christian preacher myself, a child of and fully aware of the dangers and challenges of my own (post-)modern time in which I grew up and live in, *and* not satisfied with the answers given to postmodern nihilism, I continued my search for a meaningful ground for non-centered human beings. In articles, in sermons ...

## **The postmodern preacher: minister of grace or victim of chaos?**

Well then, can the Christian preacher nowadays be a minister of grace or is s/he by definition a victim of chaos? It is the question I discussed in an article for *Op Goed Gerucht*<sup>16</sup> (Good Rumors), the name of a group of preachers in the Netherlands who are tired of the reactionary forces in the church and want to define a clear position of the church in postmodern culture based on the good rumors coming from the Gospel. Have we preachers become lonely fighters against a value-killing culture in our society and church? The postmodern situation may be serious and necessitates reflection (which is never wrong), nevertheless I do hear some exciting new melodies.

## **The Matrix**

*There are two worlds. One is a dream. The other is the Matrix ... The 22nd century. Neo is a computer hacker who is asked by Trinity to assist a group of liberty fighters, led by the illustrious Morpheus. This group is resisting the autonomously thinking computers that control human civilization. The computers control human beings by plugging them in into a virtual reality environment that looks like the 20th century, as we know it. Morpheus believes that Neo is the chosen one who will defeat the computers, and so he liberates Neo from the Matrix. The group prepares itself for the decisive battle with the protectors of the Matrix in which fiction and reality merge completely.*

This is the plot of the extremely violent action of the postmodern film, *The Matrix*. The whole western society as we know it and in which we grew up is represented here as a matrix, a computer simulation, one of the many models without real intrinsic signification or traceable time or space. It is a prison out of which only the extremely gifted will be liberated. Experiences

of the people plugged in into the virtual reality are in fact electro magnetic impulses coming from the computer while in reality they are connected to an enormous network of machines that transform their bio-energy into electric energy to feed the computerized network that holds them captured. Even the recycling of dead bodies is organized efficiently: the decomposition forces are transformed and re-injected into the newborns as energy in liquid form. The liberation army consists therefore of a number of computer experts with very western and Christian names like Trinity (the triune God), Cipher (cipher or computer), and Morpheus (a Greek name that signifies form and is also the Greek God of sleep and dreams). Morpheus is the real leader in the dream of the liberation army stationed in a fully computerized kind of “space ship” called the *Nebukadnezar* that is wandering through the nightmare of post-apocalyptic reality and is somehow connected to the last remainder of authentic human life in a distant resort called Zion. This army fights the guards in the prison, the protectors of the computer system, and agents who call themselves Smith. But the army does not succeed in eliminating them. And that is why salvation is expected from a digital Messiah who is called Neo. He is liberated from the prison, dies, resurrects and becomes invincible. In the end he is successful in defeating the prison guards, ascends to heaven and is gone, of no further use for anyone, so it seems. Neo doesn't seem to need the telephone circuits anymore that enable the “liberators” to travel between their world and the computer simulation. The special codes shown at the beginning and at the end of the film for two seconds go from “access anomaly” to “system failure”. And the rest of the world is left to its own, waiting for salvation ...

What is the message of this film? Life in a society led by computers is a prison out of which no one can liberate us, not the Christian triune God, nor the most sophisticated computer sciences, or Greek mythology. The basic entities of our western culture have become powerless. And then the notion of Messiah is emptied completely. Neo dies, resurrects, defeats the enemy and ascends to ... wherever. But no one takes the benefit. What benefit? This is the picture that western civilization presents of it self. Our culture is rumbling and shaking. We still have some idea of how the triune God had meant His creation to be, but the realization of the fact that we never have matched or will ever be able to match this ideal strongly prevails.

And yet this very dark movie still gives one perspective for hope, for without hope man cannot live. This perspective is hidden in what they call the Code of Zion. The prison guards, the agents of the matrix have power, so

much power that one day they get hold of Morpheus. With all the means they possess they try to get the Code of Zion from Morpheus. If they could get hold of this code then no one could ever take their power from them. They do not succeed because Morpheus does not give the code, and it remains unclear if this is because he does not have the code at his free disposal or because he is so strong that he is able to resist the agents. In other words, it seems that somewhere is an instance - related to Zion - that holds the ultimate power and determines the world's final destiny with all its systems and creatures. The prison guards want the code, but the liberators don't seem to have it. That is, in the end we will all be forced - liberator, prisoner, or guard - to leave our destiny in the hands of this instance, wait for a digital Messiah coming from Zion to liberate us.

This instance is not the Western triune God - described by Western theology to the smallest details, which has now become a computer program in the Matrix dream world. Reminiscence of his Name may indicate that He belongs to the real world of the powerless liberation army that could not dispose freely of Zion's code. I think what is implied here is the Hebrew God of Zion. That is, the God of the Hebrew Bible who is beyond human control, the God who has been described by humans by trial and error with many different images in the Scriptures, the God who's name is not pronounced by the Jews because they know that this God is far beyond human imagination. The God "above God" (Tillich) who asks for modesty, surrender and love from His children, the God whom rulers and commanders kick out of their world, the One who remains present in the background. There may be rumbling and shaking all over our world. The skies may be black, spreading thunder and lightning. Aggression may seem to take over. But the Code of Zion remains unbroken in the hands of this instance that no one can control but with whom *the faithful* cherish a relationship.

This film has taught me three things. 1) It is worth the trouble to ponder on the patterns of thought in our own culture and time spirit, and in our own theology and sermons, instead of following whatever our culture may radiate. 2) Western religious authorities appear to be powerless and incapable to judge or condemn Western postmodern culture because they have accepted and live in the very concepts that the culture has deconstructed. 3) However, in the meantime, postmodern thinking itself sends us "back" (or forward) to Zion.

## Models of thought

Karl Barth's ideal of the preacher as a hollow tube through which the Word of God can flow in its purest sense, is never realized. Every sermon also radiates personal - conscious and unconscious - choices of the preacher. The interpretative models that are active in the sermon usually belong to the unconscious choices. They are directly related to the models of thought of the spirit of one's own age, if the preacher wants "to be up to date", or to those of the spirit of the time in which the preacher's theology was born. These thought patterns are developed in the field of philosophy, then they penetrate into the arts, then they appear in the media that bring them to the masses. At the end of the line stands theology, reluctant because it tries to hold on to the old time religion and is now forced to put it in new terms. Wouter Slob thinks that hermeneutics enter this process in the protestant tradition. In the *Catholica* the reading of the pope had absolute authority. In the *Reformata* the Scriptures had authority but had to be interpreted. Distance came in between interpreting subject and the object to be interpreted; distance that we already see emerge with Copernicus and that becomes more and more important in the Enlightenment.

When Kant had turned the relation between the knowing subject and the object under investigation into a problem, Schleiermacher developed with a little pietism, his *schlechthinniges Abhängigkeitsgefühl* (the feeling of absolute dependence on the religious realm), in which the individual feelings determine the final meaning of the Bible text. When Husserl had brought phenomenology to its great height structuralism was developed. After Heidegger had diverted our attention from knowing to being and Gadamer had applied this to text interpretation, our own tradition and prejudices were to be taken into account again. In other words protestant theologians and preachers who followed these theologians through the ages have not been the leaders in this process. In their Bible interpretations, and their judgments of the culture based upon these interpretations, they were unconsciously led by the important models of thought that were operative in the spirit of their time. This hermeneutical proceeding could work because Western Christian thinking was taken for granted, could provide the models to interpret the Bible texts, and was not yet thoroughly criticized. With postmodernism this will change.

I think postmodernism forces us to be conscious and critical when it comes to patterns of thought and their interpretative models offered by the culture in which we live. If not, we will - in terms of *The Matrix* - consider the

Western culture and its religions as a computer simulations that keep people in an iron grip, a prison out of which no escape is possible. Liberation will not come through our interpretations of the Gospel of the triune God, because He is part of the simulation - or when it comes above this view - of a powerless liberation army. The critical distance between the Biblical message and faith reality will disappear. The Christian faith reality will go under with the postmodern negative patterns of thought that have crept into our conscious and unconscious reality. That's why I would like to plead that preachers become active ministers of just that what has appeared to be of crucial importance for the Reformation: the hermeneutic relation with the Scriptures. And this means not to follow or implement like a slave whatever the culture prescribes, but to have a critical look at the models of thought that are operative within that culture and make responsible choices that can be accounted for and that will also affect preaching.

I have the feeling that an important impulse for renewal lies outside of Western thinking and is expressed in what is called in *The Matrix* the Code of Zion, the code that refers *principally*<sup>17</sup> to an instance that no one can or ever will be able to control. Why is this code related to Zion and not to Krsjna, Mohammed, Buddha, the Indian Mother Earth or any other religious instance? One could answer the choice of Zion is clear because Christianity has developed out of the Jewish faith. But when you read Jewish thinkers as Rosenzweig or Lévinas you could find other and deeper answers. They were the thinkers who have strongly resisted the totalitarian character of Western thinking that *starting by itself* wants to describe everything, explain everything, govern everything. It is not only very arrogant but also naïve and even dangerous to refuse to keep in mind that there is something or someone who is and remains for a great deal outside of our comprehension. You will end up in a closed system that will only stand on the basis of repression and violence and even that won't do because this instance outside of our comprehension will manifest itself in the end. It cannot be denied and keeps calling.

It makes a difference for the experience of reality whether you describe this reality with a language that uses three tenses in its verbal forms that wants to determine with great precision the exact frontiers of passed, present and future or with a language - Hebrew - that only uses two tenses, in which the passed merges with the present and where the future begins in that same present. In such a language the openness to an unknown passed and an unknown future is much stronger. This makes the description of the God of heaven and earth per definition a provisional and imperfect description. The

relation with this God is characterized by modesty, trust, and love, that will bless us and with which we will bless others. In other words, a non-Western approach to God and the world in which human systems remain open towards the hidden love of God that cannot be manipulated or controlled but can be experienced by human beings. This reality stands in great contrast with the image that *The Matrix* creates but to which the film nevertheless does refer.

### **The preacher as minister of grace**

I do see a very important role for the preacher in his or her role as minister of grace. Of course s/he is a member of the congregation but as a qualified professional, s/he has to raise above the passive status of victim of chaos to the active status of minister of God's grace. In my view it is helpful in this realm that we become aware of thought patterns and interpretative models that play a role in our culture and make responsible choices here when we prepare a sermon on a certain Bible text, think about God, and experience and share our own spirituality. Of course there are many possibilities and each one has its own advantages and disadvantages. A professionally trained preacher may be expected to be able to weigh them and to implement the hermeneutic consciousness acquired during the training into the praxis of preaching.

For me following passively the postmodern thought patterns just to be up to date is not an option. I have found a satisfying alternative in the textual hermeneutics of Paul Ricœur. Text and reader meet in a dialectical way and both have their own rights. The reader is invited to enter the world of the text, to be enriched by the text because this text differs so much from one's own presuppositions and to make his/her own choices in the reality that the text proposes. In the case of the Bible text, this means also room for the Hebrew sense of time and reality with an open *pro-* and *eschaton*, a modest and provisional description of God who will maintain his Code of Zion through all cultural misery and decay. By becoming aware of the range of possible interpretative choices in relation to the Bible text and of the freedom of making responsible and loving choices in this realm, the preacher may avoid fundamentalist war and postmodern chaos and get a new view from the Scriptures on life after cultural and religious death. And this seems to me a very Christian thought, by which the preacher can be an active minister of God's loving and indestructible grace.

### **The Matrix reloaded**

Because of its great success *The Matrix* was followed by a second film, *The Matrix Reloaded*, and a third, *Revolutions*. Now we are given some insight into the mythological world of Zion, a huge cave somewhere deep inside the earth where people live totally dependent on machines for air, light, food etc. They dance primitive dances, long for love and struggle for power. The only difference with the matrix is that here man has a choice ... to turn off the machines or die. However, Zion is now under attack by the war machines sent from the matrix, digging their way towards its habitat. The whole army of numerous computerized "space ships" is needed for the defense of Zion. Only Morpheus decides against the will of the general, but with the consignment of the Counsel to return to the matrix. Neo is part of Morpheus' crew on the *Nebukadnezar* and he has become some sort of superman or batman and loving husband for Trinity. The oracle that had led Morpheus in important decisions, is exposed by Neo as a part of the matrix. And now it all comes down to the personal decision of superman if Zion will be rescued from total destruction. However, for the dénouement we had to wait for the third film in this series, *Revolutions*. And of course Trinity and Neo gave their lives to rescue Zion. Trinity did not survive an attack on their shuttle and Neo gave his life as a ransom in a final power struggle with the machine, a redemptive act that stopped the attack on Zion.

What is interesting in this development is that cash success has prevented the makers from accepting the conclusions of the really postmodern deconstructionist plot of the first movie. If they had, *The Matrix* would never have had a follow up. What we see in the second film is a return to modernism with the glorification of the subjective individual hero, to premodernism with its unified logical space and even to mythological times and primitive dances in an almost platonic cave from where no escape is possible. And the third film is almost the Gospel of Jesus Christ revisited. This regressive move is a negative one. But can a progressive move into postmodernism be anything else? On the other hand, is my refusal to accept postmodernism not equally negative and is my appeal on preachers to make responsible choices in their Bible interpretations not thoroughly modern, justified by my fear for a life without meaning? However, I strongly believe that fear comes not from God and is the worst possible adviser one can consult. I also have the impression that the more we fight postmodernism the more it creeps into our unconsciousness to perform great influence on real life, just like Zion became infiltrated by the matrix. I therefore suggest that we have a look at how



my own preaching on postmodernism developed and see what is happening there.

## **A second sermon analysis**

Some years after I had preached my first sermon on postmodernism - the one we analyzed in the previous chapter - I preached again on the same topic. The gathered congregation had not changed but the occasion was different and so was the sermon. I have analyzed this sermon as well, and I would like to share the results. This time, however, we will not go through the whole analysis again. The attribution to the keywords of the codes that correspond with the interpretative models will be given in a note<sup>18</sup>. Here we will refrain ourselves to the numeral picture in an abbreviated form (only the models with scores will be mentioned) and to the evaluation of this picture.

### **Sermon on Matthew 24 (Jesus and the apocalypse)**

By J.C. Vaessen on December 2, 2001 (1st advent) in Gasselte

#### *1 liturgy*

Readings from the Scriptures:

Isaiah 2:1-5 and Psalm 122

Romans 13:8-14 and Matthew 24:32-44

#### *2 the preacher's worries*

Dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Not so long ago someone from our Church here in Gasselte asked me, "How are you doing at the moment, I mean spiritually? When you lead a worship service you're not completely with us. Technically speaking it's okay, but something is missing. It's just like you're moving on the autopilot. You are there and then again you are not there. Where is your compassion? Where are your emotions? Where is your contact with the community? Do you still believe what you proclaim from the Bible Sunday after Sunday?"

Well, in this sermon, I would like to talk about myself. Let me tell you before everything else that I was glad with the question, despite the critique it contained. It feels really good to notice that you're a part of the community with all your deepest feelings and doubts and that people start to miss you when you're slipping away. I do have my doubts lately. Maybe you could call it a crisis although, thank God, I haven't lost my faith in the Lord. I have

told you before that preaching has become more difficult after September 11<sup>th</sup>, and many of my colleagues agree with me in this respect. You cannot act as if nothing has happened, but if you really try to realize what happened you get dizzy. But my doubts go much further than all this and sharing it with you means that I'll need to do something that can never be done in a sermon. I will have to explain unexpected and difficult phenomena that would normally take a book or more to explain. And yet I think you have the right to know what bothers your preacher, and so I'll give it a try and just hope for the best.

### *3 culture and Bible interpretation*

As long as I have been studying theology I have been interested in the way preachers interpret the Bible texts in their sermons. I discovered that these interpretative models are directly related to the culture, the spirit of the age and thought patterns of the society in which we live. God never speaks directly in sermons but always through human beings, and these human beings are children of their time. In our time we preach in a different way than people preached in the Middle Ages or in the 17th or 19th century, because in these past eras people had completely different ideas of the world, of man and of God. This can easily be demonstrated by hard facts. The culture in which we live reproduces itself in the way we speak about God and in our feelings about the love people receive from God. Until now this has never caused us serious problems. I mean, Jesus as a Jew did think rather differently than we do in our western culture with its Greek and Roman backgrounds. And yet "Jesus" has had for more than twenty centuries a very important meaning for a huge number of people. However, in our time, a serious problem is coming up which is related to postmodernism. And sometimes I have the feeling that I am the only one who sees it or who is willing to face it. However, I too get frightened when I realize the full size of this problem.

### *4 postmodern uncertainty*

You may say - and many people do - that we live in a chaotic and very uncertain period of time. Values and morals are fading, people only care about themselves and God is disappearing from our experience in a secular society. Liberal theologians empty the Christian faith by taking away all meaning from basic Christian notions like reconciliation, resurrection, Jesus the Son of God. Religion is suspect because believers love to kill each other with their holy texts. We saw that on September 11th. An understandable reaction

is the wish to develop one religion because in its strictest sense “we all believe in the same God”. Our planet has become so small that collisions of different faiths have become inevitable. So let’s start paying attention to what relates us instead of what distinguishes us. But this movement - practiced by New Age among others - of embracing everything ends up in vague generalities with no more meaning at all. Others go the opposite way and try to hold on to what they’ve got and defend their traditions in a fundamentalist way. They become hostile and conservative in a way they have never been before. Both these opposite developments and their extremes cannot only be seen in the secular society but they occur in the churches as well.

Not so long ago I heard a practical theologian say in a lecture that it is no longer possible to practice pastoral care as we have done in the past. Our society has become an open society in which everything is possible and this is how our church must be: an open community in which everything must be possible. And so we have to develop a point of view on everything: gay marriage in the church, images of God, asylum seekers, modern theology, etc. Don’t get me wrong, it is okay to discuss these matters - which we do - but now it has become a holy must, enforced upon us not by faith, not by the Bible, but by the culture. And the hidden engine here is not the fact that we love human beings - then it would be fine - but the fact that we must allow everything on our table and that everything must be possible - and this compulsion is not fine. On the other hand - oh irony - you see in the national church the same staff members and officials that propagate the liberal and open community fight for their jobs and positions. And they appear to be as conservative as can be when it comes to jobs, power and influence. As for me, I think that all this has nothing to do anymore with God or Jesus or a loving life. On the contrary, everything in Christian faith is thus reduced to one question, How do I relate to power in a way that I may gain the utmost.

#### *5 losing solid ground and god*

Now, we can take note of these developments, regret them and stay faithful by saying - which I have always done - that the Lord will keep us and protect us against the devastating results of postmodern insecurity and nihilism. However, I’m beginning to realize that this attitude is thoroughly naïve. The problem lies on a deeper level, and that’s where my doubts are growing. For many years I have been studying the basic philosophical thought patterns that determine cultures and also postmodernism. Now, in the postmodern culture in which we all live, something happens that has never happened before as long as human beings have lived on this planet. In every culture peo-

ple have been thinking about the basic entities in which we live. The most basic of these entities are time and space. These are data, which means that they are given to us, they've existed from the beginning, independent of human experience. Long before human beings lived upon our planet there was space, there was time. Man was created on the last day. Everything else that had been created in time and space before man was there, was given to man to live in, to love, to grow in. And so also time and space were given to man by the Creator to live in.

Well, in postmodernism precisely this is changing. Time and space are losing their character of solid ground given to man and existing independently of any human experience. Objectivity in postmodern thought is no longer evidence for everyone on the basis of a priori, given data like time and space in combination with human experience or logic. Objectivity is now related to a rather vague concept like "what comes from the other side". For the subject this can be anything and so objectivity embraces the All, which - by the complete lack of critical distinctions - equals nothing. On the other hand what comes from the other side is by definition different in the experience of each and every individual, who is undeniably entitled to his or her own interpretation. The changes we see in society and in the church are related to these developments in postmodern thinking. The objective, given value of time and space, is disappearing. What's left is the subjectively experienced time and space, and what man makes of them. This is very clear on the Internet where we create our own virtual reality with virtual time and space.

#### *6 the impotent almighty individual*

However, as soon as time and space as a whole are made dependent on human experience, they are no longer the solid data that we can rely on but become as fragmentized and shallow as man himself. And this explains the strong feeling of uncertainty that reigns everywhere and the increasing difficulties man experiences with God and with religions. If this is going to be the trend in a culture then no religion is possible any longer, because God as the giving instance of the solid ground on which we all exist has disappeared from our conscience. Well, this trend is growing stronger and - as always happens with thought patterns that determine a culture - it is implemented unconsciously everywhere, also in churches, also in sermons. And so you'll get into a serious conflict with yourself nowadays if you want to be a preacher in the spirit of your own time. If you follow the spirit of our post-modern time without any critique you will ultimately see the Lord disappear out of your faith. On the other hand, fanatically holding on to the old tradi-

tions and positions or furiously defending them doesn't mean a solution either, because also in that attitude you will lose your inner peace and your faith in the protection by the Lord. So the effect of both extremes is the same and the question is: Is there a way out? How can one keep one's faith without falling into a Godless postmodernism or into the intolerant hostility practiced by the fundamentalists? Are the developments we become aware of inevitable or is there still hope?

#### *7 some ways out*

I have read four passages from the Bible today, because they show me a way out. I am beginning to think that postmodern thought patterns invite us to relate Jesus' ideas on the apocalypse to our selves. For how could we live if we have cut ourselves off from the love and mercy of the Almighty. How can we give love, if we are unable to receive it. In that case, everyone will stand up against the other, and the battle for our daily bread and power positions will be fought in a fierce and relentless way. The gospel of Jesus Christ who sacrificed himself for the well being of others will no longer be understood. And all this does not happen because we would like it to happen, but because it is injected in us by our culture without notice. To be a community of Christ will be more difficult and we will be pointed at and designated as naïve human beings who still believe in truths that are no longer valid. However, if anything is of vital importance in our time, it is that we really are a community of our Lord. And that means that we hold onto one another, love each other as Paul tells the Romans, radiate the inner peace that our faith gives us, share our joy and our doubts with each other, and continue to have faith in the Lord of heaven and earth who assists us in everything and helps us to overcome evil with love. And if that is no longer believed and experienced in postmodern society, we will just have to show it.

I found another way out in Isaiah's prophecy and in the pilgrim's song about Jerusalem in Psalm 122. Of course, Jerusalem is also a mess at the moment: war and violence. But in Isaiah's time this wasn't very different. And yet Isaiah speaks of justice and the love of God that will radiate from Zion, Jerusalem. Even if we think God out of our postmodern world and universe, the Hebrew God of the Bible will still be there. And He will manifest himself for human beings in completely new ways. All nations, all religions will turn to Jerusalem to seek and find the glory of the Lord says Isaiah. Maybe we will reach a global turning point in which we will unanimously refuse to accept the postmodern rejection of God. Maybe we will search together for brand new ways to praise the God of heaven and earth so that this

may result in love and peace, humility and compassion. That is what I hope for and what I trust in, because God has promised it in his Word. Receiving new perspectives when hope has vanished, wasn't that the true meaning of the Gospel?

So let's be alert, critical and loving, help each other when life is difficult and enjoy all the good things that the Lord gives us every day. And I am glad to be part of the living community of Christ here in Gasselte with whom I can share my doubts, my struggles and my faith and who encourages me to go on, no matter what happens. Oh yes our God keeps his promises. That's for sure. Amen.

### Analysis of interpretative models in the sermon

| Interpretative models                          | Scores |            |
|--|--------|------------|
| <b>2. The reader</b>                           |        | <b>14</b>  |
| 2b <i>Dilthey, focused involvement</i>         |        | <i>14</i>  |
| 2b3 cultural / religious                       | 14     |            |
| <b>3. Ricoeur: dialectic text – reader</b>     |        | <b>105</b> |
| 3a <i>Discourse, contrasts and surplus</i>     |        | <i>5</i>   |
| 3b <i>The text</i>                             |        | <i>15</i>  |
| 3b1 the world of the text                      | 3      |            |
| 3b2 new ways                                   | 12     |            |
| 3c <i>Metaphors and Symbols</i>                |        | <i>75</i>  |
| 3c1.1 metaphors in the text                    | 2      |            |
| 3c2.1g symbol hidden meaning: grace            | 11     |            |
| e evil   | 33     |            |
| 3c2.2 dialectics of grace and evil             | 6      |            |
| 3c3.2 of traditions                            | 1      |            |
| 3c3.3 of actual situations                     | 18     |            |
| 3c3.4 self-criticism preacher                  | 1      |            |
| 3c4.1 dialectics metaphor/symbol surplus grace | 2      |            |
| 3c4.2 new confidence                           | 1      |            |
| 3d <i>Explaining and understanding</i>         |        | <i>10</i>  |
| 3d.1 provisional character                     | 4      |            |
| 3d.2 new interpretations                       | 1      |            |
| 3d.3 new processes of reflection               | 5      |            |

Dilthey and especially Ricœur are predominantly present in the interpretation in this sermon (2b: 14 and 3: 105). The postmodern cultural and religious actuality (2b3: 14) is analyzed in its existential depths with help of Ricœur's symbolism of evil (3c2.1e: 33) and criticized with help of Ricœur's hermeneutics of suspicion (3c3.3: 18). The problem in this sermon - when it comes to *Bible* interpretation - however, is that what is interpreted here is not so much the Bible text but the postmodern conditions of its interpretation. Furthermore the direct occasion for this sermon had not been the Bible text but the critical question from the community if the preacher still believed what he was preaching them every Sunday. Anyway, the wide range of symbols that Ricœur has pointed out can be found in the Bible text and in actual reality. They reveal a deep layer of meaning that underlies both realms and are used frequently in this sermon for the same reason.

The preacher tries to explain to his congregation that the way preachers normally interpret the Bible texts they treat in their sermons is directly dependent on the philosophical thought patterns of the culture and the spirit of the times they live in. These thought patterns - as in Dilthey's objectified signs of life - influence the models of interpretation with which the Bible texts are read. However, this rather narrow psychological procedure of projecting one's own basic psychic structures on strange psychic life - already enlarged by structuralism, Gadamer and Ricœur to a phenomenology of meaning in a broader sense in which the receiving of meaning becomes relevant as well - is criticized in postmodernism and reduced to non-sense. The preacher is somewhat ambivalent in his appreciation of this postmodern criticism. Taken in itself - segment 3 - this criticism is positive and in the line of Ricœur's interpretative model because it takes the reader beyond his own scope of consciousness in order to become receptive for something totally new from the text (3c3.3: 2). In all the other segments however the preacher uses Ricœur's hermeneutics of suspicion to criticize the postmodern developments and subsequent reactions (3c3.3: 16). When the solid ground of the *a priori* given basic entities (time and space) disappears, God and man's ability to receive meaning from any external instance will disappear as well. Man will be left alone to his own horrifying abyss of self-preservation (3c2.1e: 33).

In a way this is already the existential experience of the preacher of this sermon. Better than anyone else he realizes that the postmodern thought patterns of his time will enter Bible interpretation. However, contrary to what he sees already happening all around him, he refuses to "serve" his congre-

gation with sermons without God or basic Christian notions. And he also refuses the rather popular alternative to “postmodern preaching”: falling back on ancient positions and fiercely defending the “safe” traditions that lead to fundamentalist hostility towards outsiders. In either way faith, inner peace and other fruits of God’s Spirit will be lost. This is the core of the preaching crisis in which the preacher finds himself and that he wants to express and share with his congregation. Yet, based on the Gospel that he has been preaching for many years, he believes that there must be a viable alternative to this dilemma (3c2.2: 6). And so he starts to search for new ways to experience the Kingdom of God in the Scriptures (3b1: 3 and 3b2: 12).

The search in the Scriptures is performed retrospectively. From our post-modern perspective we can understand Jesus’ lessons about the apocalypse quite directly. From Matthew we go back to Paul and his ideas about Christian communal life that was based on the metaphor of Jerusalem as the city of peace (3c1.1: 2) attracting pilgrims from all over the world because it radiates the love of the eternal Hebrew God. Here in Zion, somehow the treasure of the preacher’s quest must be present. While this treasure is expressed in language, and language has surplus of meaning because – as event - it can open its own fixed structures and closed systems and create new reality, this language - code of Zion – must be appreciated on its own, non-Western, i.e. Hebrew, grounds (3a: 5). That is why our understanding is provisional, needs new interpretation all the time and a whole lot of fresh reflection (3d1: 4; 3d2: 1; 3d3: 5). But the experience of real Christian communal life in his own congregation gives the preacher hope that his search will not be in vain and gives him the strength and courage to continue (3c4.1/2: 3).

Compared to the first sermon I preached on postmodernism this one is much more consistent from a hermeneutical point of view and it has more rhetorical power. Ricœur has had quite an effect on the Bible interpretation in my preaching. In this sermon Ricœur’s hermeneutics was used more to interpret postmodern culture than the Bible text, but that cannot be a real problem for in Ricœur’s textual hermeneutics both realms come together. The question how to live a Christian life in postmodern culture that is based on “authentic” Bible interpretation has gained weight and cannot be avoided any longer by means of pseudo answers. But what is authentic?

I have received a wide range of diverse reactions to this sermon. My congregation was happy that I had taken the unarticulated questions and feelings



seriously and that, with this sermon, I was back in the community. As I had sent the sermon also to some people outside the congregation I received more reactions regarding the contents as well. They all agreed in their critique that there are too many “loose ends” in this sermon, single remarks that need further elaboration to make sense. This is not surprising because the problems posed by postmodernism are huge and a sermon is not the most adequate medium for an analysis of this problematic field. However, in their “solutions” for the problem, the reactions diverge widely.

Someone who left the church years ago wrote: “Does the apocalypse that you mention in your sermon involve a change of the whole world order, will it mean a change in our faith, culture, science? Have not all these paradigm shifts in the passed been accompanied by struggle, death and destruction? Why should it be different this time, is it the end or a completely new beginning? Maybe the solution for the contemporary faith crisis lies within the churches themselves. The church should choose to be a faith community based on love; the church should give up reason as its immutable basis and concentrate on experience; the church should not exclude a redefinition of concepts like time and space and accept a completely different - other than the literal - meaning of the Hebrew texts; and the church should show that the experience of God is a binding dimension for everyone – non-believers as well as believers, the Buddhist as well as the Islamite, the Jew and the Christian will meet in the New Jerusalem as equals.”

An American professor of homiletics wrote: “I want to explore with you how objectivity has broken down again and again in history. I am not sure that our era is as novel in this respect as you say it is. However, what you are dealing with is so close to our greatest fear: namely, that life is without meaning. But then, you keep returning to being in community and living the truth of God’s love, and my heart leaps up. I think you are onto a way of preaching from the boundary between despair and hope. Keep in touch with those you love so that you do not get stuck in the despair but rather find it a source that energizes your realism. It is as though the Spirit is using the depth of your analysis, and existential identification with that analysis, to bring forth the word of God in a new and dynamic way.”

A German professor of homiletics wrote: “You preached about preaching – which is very necessary but rarely done - and involved in doing so yourself and your congregation. But you do even more. You say that preaching as it has been done up to now can no longer be done. However, what do you do

then yourself? You preach as is expected, the same preceding as every Sunday. I know you are following Ricoeur in your preaching even if you do not mention him explicitly. But he is a representative of the hermeneutical phenomenology. Now, postmodernism criticizes modernism, a point you do not mention in your sermon. I find that amazing because phenomenology has, in its own way, paved the way to postmodern criticism.”

A Tibetan Buddhist monk wrote: “Time and again you stop, when you bring in God to the scene as something fundamentally different. Why don’t you draw those two realities a little more together? God is you and you are God. Now it is dual and one always stays behind, frustrated: you or humanity, or the culture or postmodernism, etc. How can we experience and use altruistic love if we have to receive it first from an Other? Has not every human being this divine spark in himself since the beginning of times? If so, then we can train to use this potential responsibly. Why not add something to the old structures that is potentially present in everyone, like loving friendship that binds Christians and other believers. And this love should be filled with the deeply felt wish that THE OTHER may be happy and must not suffer. In this way, you introduce a concept – love – that all world religions know as a binding principle. And this kind of love goes beyond all concepts, attitudes, logics, and is a quality of the heart adorned with positive adjectives like respect, tenderness, engagement and clarity, the opposites of hatred, revenge, aggression, jealousy and self-interest. Give it a try! You can do it! I am with you.”

Interesting questions come up out of these reactions for the remainder of this book (and beyond). The inter-religious dialogue, the fear for a life without meaning, hermeneutical phenomenology paving the way for postmodernism, love beyond concepts and logics, to name just a few. They all hint at the contemporary loss of solid ground to live on. This sounds familiar and is what could have been expected. For me, too, the most important question remains: Can truth based on a purely Western idea of logic serve as a meaningful ground for postmodern non-centered human beings?

### **Interpretation as dialectic of historical and systematic approach**

My approach thus far in this study has been historical. In chapter one we studied some highlights of Western thought in the premodern and modern

eras. In chapter two we saw how these philosophical thought patterns influenced (Bible) interpretation, also in a historical order. And in chapter three we concentrated on postmodern nihilism as a logical and historical consequence of modernism. On the other hand, as became clear in the analyses of my two sermons, interpretation accumulates or rather absorbs different models from the past to form a more or less coherent whole with which Bible texts are interpreted. The analysis of this coherence - of Bible interpretation in sermons - asks for a more systematic or a-temporal approach and so does the quest for a meaningful ground for postmodern non-centered human beings that will occupy us in the next chapters. This raises serious questions about the relation of systematic and historical inquiry and the character of the dialectics that we use in this relation, but also about our ethical involvement in making interpretative choices. So I will try to create some clarity in these two realms before we proceed.

### **The logical ambiguity of dialectics**

First of all, I do not believe in a strict distinction or antithesis of historical and systematic research because I do not think it is possible to abstract from time in whatever system. This would only be possible in a system of voids which is exactly where I do not want to end up. Language refers to reality in some way which rules out the deflationary theory of truth as well. Nevertheless some synthesis must be found between system and event, *langue* and *parole* and so we are in dialectics. The problem however with dialectics is that there are so many different variants that all seem to contradict each other and that makes it difficult to make a responsible choice.

Already in Aristotle's argumentation theory the term dialectic shows up in the sense of generally accepted premises - within a fixed and univocal logical space of truth. In Hegel's dialectical system nature, logic and human reality are related to each other only to end up in some all encompassing Absolute Spirit or Knowledge and as such a remainder or idealization of the old solid house of truth although it had already collapsed. In dialectical logic, objective, i.e. problem solving validity and conventional, i.e. traditional and local validity, are kept strictly apart without reaching any synthesis. It ran into trouble because as a logical system it conceives of normativity as a rule guided matter and this implies that the rules are set before the discussion. Slob calls this "a troublesome reminiscence of a monistic approach" (Slob 2002, 125; DR, 98 ). However, in a dialectical procedure the rules are prin-

cipally the result of the discussion. Something similar turns up in the dialectical theology of Karl Barth and his successors. There the reality of God and the reality of man are strictly kept apart without reaching a real synthesis. And the resulting theological system has been normative and compelling. Ricœur refuses the idealization of totalitarian knowledge. In his dialectics he concentrates on human reality, skipping nature and logic, for there thesis and antithesis counterbalance each other without creating new insights. In human reality, however, new syntheses can be found *ad infinitum*. They may be instigated by nature or logic, or even prelingual existence but remain within and are realized by human reality, which thereby continues to be open to a partially knowable and infinite reality. With this dialectical approach Ricœur brings us at the threshold of postmodernist *différance* but he does not pass it.

So within dialectics itself a development can be discerned through different logical systems of the subsequent eras in Western thinking. Now, logic wants to be normative in that it gives compelling rules to decide what is a good argument and what is not. In premodern mono-logic this was not a problem, it became problematic when different logical systems and truth theories emerged in the modern era. It became impossible when in postmodernism the concept of sameness was rejected. This brings Slob to decide for the deflationary theory of truth and to situate normativity *in* the discussion of responsible flowing identities. But that turns normativity, ethics and morale into a flowing reality as well. The question then becomes how normative is logic actually. Do we who live in postmodern conditions have a moral obligation to choose a logical system, a theory of truth, as a basis to decide between right or wrong? Or is there another, more direct way to find a meaningful ground for postmodern non-centered man to live on?

### **The ethics of interpretation**

Inherent in the development of logical, philosophical and hermeneutical systems is a certain truth claim, which I accept. What has become especially clear to me is that reality as a whole is more than what the human mind can contain or control. This implies that the postmodern claim that “truth is not, is true” is a perfect illustration of the fact that postmodernism “implodes under its own weight” as Slob says. My preference goes to Ricœur’s dialectical approach of hermeneutic phenomenology and textual hermeneutics within certain although diffuse limits. It enabled me to develop an analytical model to do research in the interpretative reality of actual sermons. This research

was systematic in the sense that a wide range of different interpretative models may form the interpretative mix pertaining to a particular sermon. All models seemed to have equal value, and only the conscious coherence of the different used models gave rhetorical power to the sermon. However, every single model of interpretation refers to a certain point in time and history and its use is not value free or innocent. It does make a difference if a preacher uses the naïve reading or Dilthey, or Gadamer, or ...

Normally preachers – and not only preachers – are not very conscious of the models with which they interpret reality or Bible texts. However, when preachers or ministers want to be responsible for the spiritual well-being of their congregation and parishioners their first responsibility will be to become conscious of their own hermeneutical processes and of the moral implications of the different logical and hermeneutical systems they are using. No interpretative model is good or bad in itself, and initial value will be preserved somehow in the course of time. In Ricœur's hermeneutical model the lost premodern naivety is not totally substituted by critical analysis. Some of it returns through the dialects of first naivety and critical analysis in the new synthesis of the second naivety. So are structural and historical analysis put in a dialectical relation to form the new synthesis of textual hermeneutics. However, once conscious, the choice for a model cannot be neutral from a moral point of view. To be responsible for the spiritual well-being of postmodern man, a minister will have to understand the postmodern condition and its moral implications. Sameness is non-existent which makes truth completely unreliable, and morale is a sublimation of a cloud of terror that hides in the limpid blue of language. To fall back on "safe" but lost positions from the past out of fear for postmodern nihilism is morally improper because you need to repress later insights and this can only be done with some degree of violence. And what is even more serious, it makes one close the eyes for the vast and unlimited reality of truth, that no logical system or truth theory will ever be able to cover exhaustively. Fear promotes violence and shortsightedness. In other words, if logic and truth are too limited as categories of a meaningful ground for postmodern man, would not that mere fact make a more direct appeal to morale, that is, independent of logical systems and theories of truth, possible and even desirable? And could such a morale become a new guide for our interpretative activities after the postmodern collapse of truth and normativity?

### **Normative rhetoric**

And so I keep searching for a normative rhetoric instead of rhetorical normativity, for an independent moral of love and peace that will influence man's rhetoric positively instead of a normativity that is dependent on man's argumentative force in dialogue and rhetoric. In the next chapter we will ask what the conditions of such a normative rhetoric are. We will have to surpass the limited realm of logic, truth and rationality, and we will have to find an answer to Lyotard's challenging remark that all morality aims at the forgetting of the real terror that hides in the limpid blue of language. In the final chapter, we will go into the question whether Torah morality that I see as the core of Hebrew thought expressed in the Codes of Zion can meet these conditions.

So in the next chapters we will shift our attention from interpretation to ethics and morality. This does not mean that interpretation will be of no importance any longer. We cannot turn back the clock, and, in our present era that can be characterized as the hermeneutical era par excellence, we will continue to interpret reality and (Bible) texts when logic and truth no longer form the ultimate foundation of our thinking but morality. In my interpretation I will continue to move within the dialectical way of thinking that Ricœur uses in his hermeneutical phenomenology and in his textual hermeneutics. The new "foundation" of morality will give less certainty than the correspondence theory of truth but I hope to find more positive meaning there than postmodernism and its deflationary theory of truth will ever be able to give. An inevitable consequence of my choice for the dialectical approach is that we will remain right in the middle of the unsolved problems of dialectical logic, the battle between problem solving and traditional validity. However, that is precisely the battle that is being fought on a worldwide scale at this very moment. And my ultimate hope is that on a new *moral* foundation we might get the courage to search for, try out and risk new syntheses on a larger scale than personal - be it responsible – dialogue.

## Chapter 4

### Normative Rhetoric

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Postmodernism confronts us with a serious problem: we find ourselves in the awkward position in which it has become impossible to make a definitive choice for a particular logical system or theory of truth. I mean how can we be sure that there is complete and doubtless correspondence between what is and what we say about it, after mono-logic had been proved to be a failure? And although I am all for deflating inflated egos, the complete absence of any correspondence between being and saying is too thin a basis for my thinking as well. As for the dialectical logic, real synthesis of problem solving and conventional validity could not be reached, and thus there is a real danger that the most powerful group will set the standards before the discussion that should actually result from the discussion. Agreement depends on a limited but powerful “in-group” that closes itself for the yet unthinkable and powerless but probably realistic claims of truth coming from “outside”. It therefore does not present an ultimately satisfying option either. Moreover, normativity has always been a function of truth and became an increasingly abstract concept, as the number of truth theories increased and correspondence of being and saying gradually vanished. *Morality* or *morale*<sup>1</sup> as the concrete justified or the only justifiable way of doing things vanished with it. And, people talking to each other from different, maybe even mutually excluding, theories of truth are like two windscreen wipers on a car. They may reach out for each other but will never embrace. Therefore, I started looking for alternatives for this awkward position and I became curious about what happens if we turn things upside down. What happens if we no longer see normativity as a function of truth but truth as a function of moral, that is moral in a more universal sense than we are used to?

Inspired by the efforts of Wouter Slob, I will concentrate in this chapter especially on Lyotard’s notion of “the cloud of terror that hides in the limpid blue of language”. Whereas Derrida’s notion of *différance* meant the end of

truth, Lyotard's notion of *terreur de l'irreprésentable* means the end of morality. And therefore I want to search for an alternative to the postmodern moral "black mess", as Slob calls it, although "black hole" may be more adequate, because it swallows up everything. And I want to find a satisfying answer to Lyotard's problem of the omnipresent and omnipotent but not representable terror beneath all language and consciousness. In this I am not so much interested in a normativity based on a certain conception of truth but rather in a different way of experiencing truth based on a certain conception of morality, like the universal command of love that we perceive in all cultures. Hence I will not speak of rhetorical normativity but of normative rhetoric. My real goal then instead of throwing away the totality of Western thinking - premodern, modern, postmodern - or looking for certainty - be it the certainty of uncertainty - is the quest for a new ground of a meaningful life. A life in the midst of and able to cope with uncertainty, where prayer has more force than power, and where love is more important than total control. Hermeneutics are important here but in service of real life. The detour through texts must lead to action<sup>2</sup>. Ethics and morale are not confined to only rationality and authority, *scientia* and *opinio*, but pertain much more to the human being as a whole with a variety of senses, using different intelligences and belonging to a wide range of different cultures. Because reality has an infinite surplus of meaning that is easily blocked by the borderlines of our limited structures of knowledge and truth, the moral basis of our rhetoric must have a more universal character. As we have seen in the first chapter of this book, Western thinking has always been thoroughly influenced by the Greek way of "knowing" reality with vision as its most important guiding sense. Therefore, we must widen our scope and include more senses than just vision, and other human intelligences than only the rational and logical ones, in our search for an adequate moral ground of a meaningful life in the midst of (post-)modern chaos.

Different cultures favor different senses and function according to different frames of mind. One of the blessings of late modernity and postmodernity has been the growing awareness in Western culture of this plurality that resulted in more attention for other frames of mind and thought than the ones we are used to and prefer. In the "global village" that the world has become nowadays we meet many different cultures and we will have to find some way to cope with it harmoniously. In rhetorical normativity the very existence of ethics and morale is based on a certain theory of truth, i.e. the logical system of deflation. Since the correspondence of being and saying is no



longer guaranteed and agreement by means of a dialectical process is suspect from the outset, morality is an ethical question to be settled time and again in each and every dialogical situation. The last foundation of the mere possibility of morale then is the subjective identity, which Slob - disagreeing with postmodernity - assumes to be existent, although not as a fixed but as a flowing reality. (Cf. Slob, 2002, 95, 193; DR, 64)<sup>3</sup>. In normative rhetoric the exact correspondence of being and saying is given up as well. However, ethics and morale are not based on a certain theory of truth or logical system, but must be based on a more universal formulation, as we see appear in all cultures. This will *result* in a certain conception of truth but that is not its main concern. I think that the dialectical theory of truth in the way that Ricœur uses it comes nearest to what I have in mind, but there again we have to refrain from total and final judgments. Truth is something to participate in not something to be owned, an itinerary of love and not a possession, says Ricœur. And this is so because of reality's infinite surplus of meaning.

In this chapter we will first concentrate on Ricœur's hermeneutical phenomenology and see whether it leads necessarily to postmodern nihilism - absence of sameness, *différance*, and inevitable terror - or that it leaves room for other alternatives. After this we will try to transcend vision as a too limited perspective on reality with help from Thomas Troeger's understanding of culture as a certain constellation of the senses and with Howard Gardner's different frames of mind and use of the senses in different cultures. A reflection of these ideas will be found in Anodea Judith's treatment of chakrap psychology, an ancient view on the flow of energies coming from the Far East. We will try to reach some sort of universal dialectical agreement - *engaging* these different resources instead of eliminating some of them by brutal use of power. On that basis we will reconsider rather than accept Lyotard's "cloud of terror hiding in the limpid blue of language". Maybe the terror can be compensated or even "resolved" by means of the central chakra of the heart that organizes the energies of love. Finally I will develop a normative rhetoric in the realms of homiletics, liturgy, ecclesiology and inspiring leadership.

## Morality rather than truth as a basis for meaning

### Paul Ricœur's hermeneutical phenomenology, gateway to postmodernism?

For Ricœur consciousness that moves backward to an *archè*, a beginning or even hoary antiquity, is as legitimate as consciousness that moves forward to a *telos*, a goal that can go as far as eschatology. He rather often does the second reading of a book backwards as can be seen in his discussion of Franz Rosenzweig's *The Star of Redemption* in a book called *Figuring the Sacred*<sup>4</sup>. Archeology and teleology are related and also compensate each other in some way. Therefore, Ricœur uses the whole range of Western philosophy from Plato, Aristotle, St. Augustine, Kant and Hegel up to Husserl, Heidegger and Jewish thinkers as Rosenzweig and Lévinas. But he always does so in order to create something new for the future out of these old philosophies. To go backwards only, falling back upon old and "safe" positions would mean totalitarianism and fundamentalism. To go only forward without taking into account of the achievements of the past would be stupid. This has important consequences for our relation with truth. Humankind does not own the truth, but may participate in the truth. "We have to reject the lethal alternative in which the truth is considered as one and unalterable, and the interpretations as manifold and variable. ... We will have to create a "theological" consciousness that the truth of faith is a way to follow – the way of loving acts – and therefore a communal itinerary. The truth is the truth of our awakening, of our becoming familiar with the plan. In that sense truth itself is also coming towards us." (Ricœur, 1971, 294)<sup>5</sup>

The crucial question that comes up now is of course, does Ricœur's itinerary necessarily lead into postmodern nihilism or can it bring us somewhere else?

### With Hegel back to Kant

Hegel's bad reputation in Western philosophy can be viewed from different angles. The most frequent objection we hear is that his philosophical system, in which the Absolute Spirit or Knowledge – the philosopher - encompasses "the all", is totalitarian and utterly naïve at the same time. Megalomania revived in and reduced to "nothing", says Rosenzweig. As Wouter Slob would

say: Power is not accounted for but vividly present in this system. And the system fails because neither the conventions that belong to the traditions nor the practical effectiveness in problem solving govern the direction of the syntheses by means of discussion, but the power inherent in the system sets the rules for the discussion and the direction of the resulting syntheses in advance. Therefore, Slob chooses a deflationary conception of truth in which the rules are set *within* the discussion. Dialectics - because of its inner contradictions - will never lead toward any form of total agreement. Ricœur, on the other hand, agrees with Rosenzweig that if a philosopher only speaks to himself, ends in his own philosophy and makes it absolute, this will mean the end of philosophy as well. Hegel's totalitarianism is countered by Ricœur, by reducing the totality of being to which dialectics is applied to the human reality, and he cuts nature and logic where opposite forces counterbalance each other and produce nothing new. Ricœur continues to believe in the good will and possibility of loving acts in humankind and its desire to reach some kind of agreement through discussion. Hegel's total system can not help here, but his intellectual tool, dialectics of thesis – antithesis – synthesis, will. And so Ricœur goes back with this tool to Kant who is also very respectful when it comes to limits.

For Kant the realm in which philosophy moves is set by the limits of existential darkness and dreams of innocence. Beyond these imaginary border lines no knowledge is possible, and yet the *a priori* forms, and categories and ideas do come from there. Reproductive knowledge of phenomena in reality is no problem, the senses can account for them. Producing new knowledge on the other hand is a problem because imagination is needed, a faculty that “resides somewhere in the dark depths of the human soul”. And so the *a priori* forms and categories are combined with the knowledge of the senses to produce objective knowledge in the spirit of man beyond the world as it appeared to the senses. However, Ricœur says that Kant had no idea of non-empirical reality and so his objective concepts being “pure form” remained empty. The result was that Kant ended up with a whole series of antinomies, abysmal gaps that he could not overcome, but that according to Ricœur could be bridged by means of the dialectical method.

So Ricœur sets limits to Hegel's totality, but within these limits he wants to go further than Kant and he does so by investigating the dialectics that work between the surface and hidden layers of meaning in the symbol. We do encounter nature and logic here but only as far as they are meaningful to the human existence within human reality. So, in a way, Ricœur stays within

and at the same time surpasses Kant's mono-logic which is of course a very dialectical move. Correspondence of saying and being is not a given reality anymore. It is a way, an itinerary through colliding positions towards agreement.

### **With Husserl on to Heidegger**

When Husserl ends up in pure consciousness that is only responsible to itself, Ricœur has the same objections he had with Hegel. The philosopher has to be conscious of the fact that his or her consciousness is always *consciousness of something*. If not, philosophy will end with the end of the philosopher. Macro or micro totality, totality remains totality aiming to preserve itself instead of finding or creating something new. On the other hand Husserl's *Wesensschau* – the view of the essence of phenomena as they appear, reached by means of eidetic reduction and imaginative variation - goes further than the world of the senses without losing itself in a boundless reality that can not be known. Phenomenology with Husserl, however, remains an epistemological affair, intentional, the giving of meaning by a subject to an object in which the subject can never be sure if the meaning s/he gave is not a projection of his or her own presuppositions instead of "true" meaning radiated by the object itself. In epistemology, as Kant showed already, the gap between subject and object remains intact. The two do not really meet. So a more fundamental relation between the two is needed in which meaning is received from the object under investigation.

This relation is established by Heidegger's ontology. No one gives meaning autonomously. Most of the meanings given have been received or at least influenced by meaning that was received before through family and other traditions. Being alone is autonomous, says Heidegger, and leaves it at that, another totality to be resisted. Ricœur agrees with Lévinas in this wholeheartedly. Therefore he does not only go with Heidegger the way from beings (*Seienden*) to being (*Sein*) but also the way back that Heidegger "forgot" completely. He tries to bridge the gap between epistemology and ontology dialectically. And instead of taking his starting point in "being" Ricœur starts his phenomenology in the text, which has ontological priority but needs epistemological elaboration. The reader is disciple of the text, i.e. will be able to receive new ontological meanings from the text through his/her epistemological giving of meaning to the text if and only if that text is sufficiently far away from the reader's own traditions and ontologically founded

prejudices. In that case new meaning can arise, new compartments of the truth can be opened in which the reader can participate. Again, being and saying do not necessarily correspond. When they do, it is always on a provisional basis, longing for more, on their way to a fuller agreement.

### **The role of *a priori* categories in Ricœur's hermeneutical phenomenology**

Through the *a priori* forms, categories and ideas, the lenses through which we see reality, the *Ding an sich* adapts itself to the human mind and the human mind adapts itself to the *Ding an sich*. The *Ding an sich* is located beyond the border line that separates knowledge and ignorance, but the forms and categories must be very near that (imaginary) line, as they are given to the human mind. And, creative imagination that combines the forms and categories with sensuous observations to create objective, although empty, concepts, is a faculty hidden in the dark depths of the human soul. With all these ideas, Kant is flirting with the unknowable but stays at this - i.e. knowable - side of the boundary line. Even in his transcendental deduction, the way to organize the investigation of still unknown fields of knowledge, he stays within the realm of the human mind.

Now, Ricœur says that Kant's concepts remained empty because he had no idea of non-empirical reality. But what is meant here by non-empirical reality? I think it has to do with reality beyond the borderline, mentioned above, that gives itself in the symbol and therefore fills the empty concepts. Evil presents itself *as* a stain, although it is much more than and very different from a stain and the conventions that were built around it. And when dealing with the unconscious Ricœur says that the pulses themselves cannot be analysed by means of transcendental deduction, only their representations as they appear in dreams, neuroses, etc. So through the symbol we cross the borderline and touch the *Ding an sich*, or better, it touches us. But the transcendental deduction pulls it back over the borderline into knowable, human reality. Moreover the symbol needs the metaphor to be of any meaning for mankind. And therefore, I would say that Ricœur knows of the dark realm of the *Ding an sich* beyond the line, where there is no correspondence whatsoever between being and saying and where truth is deflated to non-existence, because we simply have no means to know, but he refuses to stay there. The *a priori* categories help him to proceed on the way of loving acts *within* the

human reality towards a deeper understanding and agreement of mankind in a dialectical way.

### **The concept of naivety: no way back**

Naivety is a term that Ricœur relates especially to the spiritual history of Western thinking, as he explains in *La symbolique du mal* (1960) and, in a summarized form, in *Le conflit des interprétations* (1969)<sup>6</sup>. Kant already spoke of dreams of innocence as if he felt that we were losing our first innocence. His failure to rescue mono-logic testifies to the fact that this was indeed exactly what was happening. For Ricœur the turning point lies earlier, i.e. with Copernicus. The Copernican Revolution divides the natural attitude of pre-modern thought in which the unity of subject and object is presupposed in a first naivety and not yet made problematic at one side, and the modern attitude of “objective” analysis and the failure to account for the distance between subject and object epistemologically at the other. So by means of our analysis we have lost for good our first naïve belief in the universal coherence of reality and there is no way back. However, this does not mean that we lose all of our innocence, for the analysis can complete the lost first naivety, leading to a second naivety in which a new coherence is realized, although always on a provisional basis.

Philosophy, says Ricœur quoting Lachelier, “has to understand everything, even religion; philosophy cannot stop in the middle of the journey it began with making the sermon of coherence; it will have to keep its promise until the very end.” (Ricœur, 1960, 323) And here is where the symbol plays a crucial role. The symbol gives rise to thought and pre-lingual layers of meaning give themselves in the language of the symbol. This pre-lingual reality is not accessible in a direct way, we have lost that direct access of which still testified the first naivety, alive in pre-modernity. The philosophical search for the hidden meaning in the symbol is always bound to language, which reflects the philosophical presuppositions of the searcher. “And we, moderns, are the inheritors of philology, of exegesis, of phenomenology of religion, of psychoanalysis of language; it is the era that reserves for itself the possibility to empty the language by formalizing it completely and to refill it again, memorizing those significations that are the fullest, the heaviest and the most intimately related to the presence of the sacred for man. Therefore it is not the regret of sunken Atlantis that animates us, but the hope of a restoration of language; through the desert of criticism we want

to be called again.” (Ibid., 325). So the symbol has immediate meaning, but this meaning has to be mediated to us moderns by means of critical language. “Does this mean that we could return to the first naivety? Certainly not! Either way something is lost, irreparably lost: the immediacy of faith. However, if we can no longer live according to the original faith, the great symbolisms of the sacred, we can, we moderns, in and through criticism, tend to a second naivety. In short, it is by means of interpretation that we can *hear* again; it is therefore in hermeneutics that the giving of meaning by the symbol and the intelligible initiative of deciphering are tied to each other.” (Ibid., 326).

Pre-modern, immediate faith and modern criticism, and mediation by means of deciphering, are dialectically forged into a new synthesis in the second naivety of hermeneutics. And therefore the hermeneutical circle takes the form of a spiral: first naivety – critical analysis – second naivety. St. Anselm’s axiom *credo ut intelligam*, “I believe in order to be able to understand”, is completed in the second naivety with, “I understand in order to be able to believe”. And every time this cycle is completed, new insight emerges. Again it is an itinerary, a way to travel. On this road humanity can only go forward, not backward, but this does not mean that the past has become meaningless. Faith and naivety are preserved as human existential conditions, but they change contents through the different eras. Kant’s *a priori* categories, that Aristotle used already in his time, no longer describe the necessary universal and total correspondence of being and saying. They nevertheless help to find some provisionally “objective” correspondence in the renewed and critical understanding of the dialectical way. For Ricœur the hermeneutical turn is so important that he even calls it a second Copernican revolution (cf. *ibid.*, 331), because the Cartesian Cogito is turned upside down: I *am*, not because I think, but I think because I am. The receiving of meaning has ontological priority, but cannot do without the epistemological giving of meaning. And this gives hope that new relations between being and saying can be revealed.

### **Textual hermeneutics, leading where?**

It may be clear by now, that the postmodern alternative in which all correspondence or even relation between being and saying is suspended is no option for Ricœur at all. True, total correspondence of being and saying is suspended, Kant’s mono-logic surpassed, and a dialectical variety of logical

systems admitted. But this means, in my view, that the field of human investigation has been extended enormously, and not that every basis of truth is gone and every possible correspondence of being and saying deflated. Tradition and problem solving are not the last imaginable truths, they can be transcended by being itself, and being can again be transcended by infinity. They are all realities from which we receive meaning, but not exhaustively. There may be very well meaning that is not intelligible for humans. But what really matters is that we not only receive meaning but also elaborate further and give new meaning to the meanings we receive from an extended reality in order to understand more and build a better world. And here Ricoeur is thoroughly modern at one side, turning to critical hermeneutics, and almost postmodern, making the text pivotal to hermeneutics. At the other side he does not follow the moderns in their radical turn to the subject and the subjective giving of meaning, and he refuses to step into postmodernism holding onto naivety and the receiving of meaning in the broad sense. Meaning comes from all layers of reality also those that are still unexplored and is condensed in the text that always contains a surplus of meaning. However, the question still remains: If not to postmodernism, where to will Ricoeur's renewed understanding of his hermeneutical phenomenology lead us? I think the direction is determined by the text that is being interpreted, if we want to be "disciples" of the text in Ricoeur's line of thinking. And there a wide variety of possibilities lie before us.

### **The limited perspective of vision transcended**

When I was a child we often sang at home those pietistic hymns about the coming Kingdom of the Lord with images from the Book of Revelation. I did not like its pictures of the New Jerusalem as capital of the Kingdom of God. Streets of gold, gates of pearl, foundations of diamonds. Where was I to play my wild games without running the risk of damaging anything? Furthermore, where was the water? Whenever a sea was mentioned, it was made of glass. Born and raised in a rural environment, I loved to wander around in the vast meadows with my pole to jump over the streams I encountered - surrounded by cows, birds, horses and the other creatures living there - discovering life in its full wealth. For me, that was the real adventure. All of that would be over in the New Jerusalem. Much later I discovered that this early youth experience reflected my preference for the Hebrew image of Messianic life – sitting peacefully under the olive tree, enjoying the rhythms of life



– instead of the Greek one that paints a boundless sea of beauty where you can hardly live. Vision alone did not suit my way of experiencing life and thinking about God, there should be more to it.

### **Culture as a constellation of the senses, Thomas Troeger**

An author who has written about the general interest that cultures take in the use of particular senses is Tom Troeger, in a book called *Preaching and Worship*<sup>7</sup>. Troeger does not take Gardner's detour through different intelligences - that we will discuss hereafter - but investigates more directly the relation between cultures and their use of the senses. He distinguishes between the eye, the ear, the body and language. A culture then is defined by its *sensorium*. Troeger – quoting Eugene A. Nida – holds that “culture is all learned behavior which is socially acquired; that is, the material and nonmaterial traits which are passed on from one generation to another. They are both transmittable and accumulative, and they are cultural in the sense that they are transmitted by the society, not by the genes.” (Troeger, 2003, 4) The answers to questions like “how do we use our eyes, ears, body, language and what is the meaning of this use?” vary so tremendously in different cultures that – quoting Walter J. Ong - “it is useful to think of cultures in terms of organization of the sensorium. ... Man's [*sic*] sensory perceptions are abundant and overwhelming. He cannot attend to them all at once. In great part, a given culture teaches him one or another way of productive specialization. It brings him to organize his sensorium by attending to some types of perception more than others, by making an issue of certain ones.” (Ibid., 5, addition of [*sic*] by Troeger)

Troeger gives some nice examples of the different experience of sophisticated cultural achievements by persons who come from other cultures. First he pictures a Nigerian at a Beethoven concert in Germany. The eye of the Nigerian expects to see a lot of things happen; his ear is used to a sonic idiom that employs preeminently complex percussive rhythmic patterns; furthermore, he expects the body to be used in energetic, highly visible ways, including the bodies of the audience. None of this occurs in the Beethoven concert, and the Nigerian has the feeling that nothing is happening and gets bored. The German present at the same concert on the other hand has a quite different experience. His eye expects to see only what is necessary for the production of sound; his ear is used to a sonic idiom that employs preeminently harmonization, inner voices, and melodic development and variation,

and rhythm is important but not preeminent; he expects the body of the performers only to be used to produce sounds – i.e., bowing of string instruments, gestures of the conductor, and the audience is to remain completely still and silent except for the applause at the conclusion. The German then has a sense that a great deal of significance is happening at this concert and this results in apt attention. (Cf. *ibid.*, 122)

A second story comes from a French woman who attended an African worship service. She was utterly shocked by the experience, which is quite understandable when you consider that her expectations related to the use of the senses were completely different from the actual African use made of the senses during that particular mass. For the Africans, the mass was truly prayer because it embodied what it celebrated. For the French woman, this mass meant a shock because it was done in ways she had never associated with prayer before. Prayer had to be done in a quiet contemplative atmosphere by means of some well formulated intentions, not by means of wild exuberant dancing and shouting (Cf. *ibid.*, 123)

Applied to the realm of worship and preaching, we can – with Tom Troeger - ask the following question: “What are the unique resources of homiletics and liturgy that can help us relate faithfully to the culture so that we can affirm what is true, good and beautiful, while we offer a discerning judgment about what is false, wrong and ugly? Like Paul, we need theological acumen and practical, pastoral wisdom in order to be faithful to the movement of the Spirit in our own time and cultures.” (*Ibid.*, 14) Troeger will answer his question at the end of his book somewhat hesitatingly. “I have now abandoned my hope that there is some principle or method that would make it possible to bring a full and satisfying integration of all our highly variegated sensoria.” Instead he searches for mutual understanding in two complementary directions.

“The first direction is what I have proposed throughout this book: self-conscious attention to the cultural sensorium that has shaped us and others so that we, at the very least, have an appreciation for why there are such great differences between us.

The second direction is theological. Analyzing the deep, material roots of our cultural differences leads us to realize that the only one capable of understanding all sensoria simultaneously is God. When God’s spirit is present among us, then we are gifted with a glimpse of the divine vision, a moment of Pentecost that recapitulates the first Pentecost (Acts 2:5-12). People of

multiple languages do not suddenly speak one language, but a universal understanding is granted to them while they speak in their distinct tongue. The result is amazement and astonishment.” (Ibid., 125)

Troeger believes that in the spirit of Luke’s account of Pentecost we have to expand the meaning of “language” to include the visual, oral, and somatic idioms of the different groups. “Pentecost happens when the Spirit of God intersects our varied sensoria and opens our hearts to acknowledge that the grace and wonder of God are manifest through multiple idioms. ... Our unity is found in the living Spirit who created us all and who can use our varied idioms to express divine grace, love and justice.” (Ibid.)

Although it cannot be denied that the use of the senses is highly influenced by the different cultures I do not agree that the transmittance of this use is only a matter of conventions and socialization and not a matter of genes. Troeger chooses too easily for the cultural side of the matter, at the cost of the biological side, and that makes his Pentecostal solution – although I think with him in the same direction – a little too easy as well. Later on, in the Postlude, I will make two additions to his admirable effort to reconcile the cultures in spiritual worship – “all of us for all of God” (cf. *ibid.*, 20-22). One is about the Hebrew roots of Pentecost and the other about the realm of the symbol. And there I will try to fit this into my own conception of normative rhetoric.

### **Frames of mind, Howard Gardner**

Different cultures function according to different frames of mind in which different intelligences that use different senses are favored. Howard Gardner has explained this very well in his book *Frames of Mind, The Theory of Multiple Intelligences*.<sup>8</sup> His point is that Western culture, at least since the rise of the Greek city-state, has always stressed “the existence and importance of mental powers: *rationality, intelligence*, or the deployment of *mind*. The unending search for an essence of humanity has led, with seeming ineluctability, to a focus upon our species quest for knowledge; and those capacities that figure in knowing have been especially valued.” (Gardner, 1984, 5) Now, one can reason holistically and see the mind as a unity or more fragmentarily and consider the mind as a constellation of several components. Gardner opposes the traditional Greek way of the holists in which only ra-

tional knowledge is favored, for they “not only believe in a singular, inviolable capacity which is the special property of human beings: often, as a corollary, they impose the conditions that each individual is born with a certain amount of [rational, mathematical, logical JCV] intelligence, and that we individuals can in fact be rank-ordered in terms of our God-given intellect or IQ.” (Ibid., 7) Based on neurobiological analysis and developmental psychology research in a wide variety of individuals in different personal, social and cultural settings Gardner concludes that the human mind, in general, accommodates more intelligences than just the one referred to in terms like “bright”, “smart”, or “clever”. This becomes particularly clear when we look at other, non-Western, cultures where other intelligences are employed to survive in the struggles of life.

What then does Gardner consider intelligence? “... a human intellectual competence must entail a set of skills of problem solving – enabling the individual *to resolve genuine problems or difficulties* that he or she encounters and, when appropriate, to create an effective product – and must also entail the potential for *finding or creating problems* – thereby laying the groundwork for the acquisition of new knowledge” (ibid., 60/1). Various mixes of different intelligences can accomplish this work, of which Gardner distinguishes and discusses six: the linguistic, the musical, the spatial, the logical-mathematical, the bodily-kinesthetic, and the personal intelligences. “What I am calling for here are sets of intelligences which meet certain biological and psychological specifications. ... Thus a prerequisite for a theory of multiple intelligences, as a whole, is that it captures a reasonably complete gamut of the kinds of abilities valued by human cultures. We must account for the skills of a shaman and psychoanalyst as well as of a yogi and saint.” (Ibid., 62)

The auditory and oral elements then are operative in both language and music. “What they share is an existence that is not closely tied to the world of physical objects (in contrast to spatial and logical-mathematical forms of intelligence) and an essence that is equally remote from the world of other persons (as manifest in various forms of personal intelligence).” Yet both forms, linguistic and musical intelligence, have their own autonomy. “... the fact that deaf individuals can acquire natural language – and can also devise or master gestural systems – serves as decisive proof that linguistic intelligence is not simply a form of auditory intelligence.” Language is not a func-

tion of sight either because “the linguistic decoding capacity proves robust despite massive injury to the visual-spatial centers of the brain”, while “reading is invariably disturbed by injury to the language system”. Therefore linguistic intelligence has its own autonomy. So does the musical intelligence, described by Gardner as – “the abilities of individuals to discern *meaning* and *importance* in sets of pitches rhythmically arranged and also to produce such metrically arranged pitch sequences as a means of communicating with other individuals. These capacities also rely heavily on auditory-oral abilities – indeed, they prove even less susceptible to visual translation than does language; and yet, counter to intuition, musical abilities are mediated by separate parts of the nervous system and consist of separate sets of competence.” (Ibid., 98)

The logical-mathematical and spatial intelligences are more orientated towards vision, although they can also develop in individuals without direct access to the visual world. Blind people can have spatial intelligence just like deaf people can have linguistic intelligence. Both intelligences connected to vision are mutually linked in areas as chess, engineering and architecture. “Central to spatial intelligence are the capacities to perceive the visual world accurately, to perform transformations and modifications upon one’s initial perceptions, and to be able to recreate aspects of one’s visual experience, even in the absence of relevant physical stimuli” (ibid., 173) - this limit situation of spatial intelligence is present at the drawing table of the architect. Logical mathematical intelligence on the other hand is about reasoning in long – numerical - chains and geometrical forms. “Beginning in the material world, the individual moves toward increasingly abstract formal systems, whose interconnections become matters of logic rather than empirical observation” (ibid., 135). When applied to music (which was already done by Pythagoras) the mathematician is concerned with form, music is just another pattern and not - as for the musician - patterned elements appearing in sound, put together in certain ways in order to have expressive power and effects. (Ibid., 127) Logical-mathematical intelligence has its own autonomy, as the other intelligences do, with its own ordering mechanisms. Where logical-mathematical intelligence “concludes its developmental trajectory with increasing abstraction, spatial intelligence remains tied fundamentally to the concrete world of objects and their location in the world” (ibid., 204).

Finally, we have the bodily-kinesthetic and the personal intelligences where all the senses cooperate to find and create meaning. “Bodily intelligence, which, focusing inward, is limited to the exercise of one’s own body,

and facing outward, entails physical actions on the objects in the world” (ibid., 235). It is, like the logical-mathematical and spatial intelligences, object related. The dancer and the athlete use their bodies as objects, and inventors and other workers use parts of the body – particularly hands – in order to manipulate, arrange and transform objects in the world. But the body is more than a simple object. “It is also the vessel of the individual’s sense of self, his most personal feelings and aspirations, as well as that entity to which others respond in a special way because of their uniquely human qualities. ... While still poorly understood, the realm of the personal intelligences is clearly of utmost importance to humans, the site of our most awesome accomplishments, as well as of our most terrifying tendencies.”(Ibid., 235/6) And what applied to the other intelligences applies even more to the personal intelligences. “There will be universal features of any sense of person or self, but also considerably cultural nuances, reflecting a host of historical and individuating factors” (ibid., 276).

Well then, the individual intelligences may rely heavily on certain senses – the first pair on the ear, the second pair on the eye, the last pair on all the senses – they do not coincide with them completely. Every individual intelligence has and keeps its own autonomy and value. From a neurobiological perspective, there is no intelligence that is more important, more basic, and that therefore reigns over the other intelligences. In our society the logical-mathematical intelligence has always been given this privileged status in a conceptual and in a practical sense. It has *therefore* strongly influenced the development of Western culture. (Cf. ibid., 167) However, since the breakdown of the unified house of *logos*, logic in itself has become fragmented and no longer rules it “all”. Now there is room for other logical systems and, in the same line of reasoning, for other intelligences. And so we should realize that culture, conventions and tradition determine what intelligence is chosen as the predominant one, the one that helps best to solve the problems of life and discover new reality.

The Greeks may have chosen space and vision as their primordial mode of thought and with it they developed their culture to great heights that thoroughly influenced Western civilization in subsequent eras. But this does not mean that Western civilization has a privilege on spatial intelligence. Gardner gives a beautiful example of the highly sophisticated navigation skills of the Paluwat people of the Caroline Islands in the South Seas that fill Western

navigators with awe (cf. *ibid.*, 202/3). Furthermore, time and hearing are not only important to the Hebrews. Among the Tshidi in Botswana the effective power of a chief is determined by his performances in public debates, carefully analyzed by members of the group afterwards. And here, in oral discourse, not only linguistic features are important but also the accompanying body language; and they are developed into highly sophisticated skills as well (cf. *ibid.*, 94/5). In short the human brain accommodates all these different autonomous intelligences without any preference and it is the culture that decides which one of them will be used preferably. In the end it is a matter of *power* which culture will grow above and dominate the others and will thus determine which intelligence is favored and used most. However, this preference is culturally determined and is *not* principally anchored in neurobiology, although a privileged set of intelligences will be deposited in and passed on by the genes.

In other words, when one intelligence has led to radical criticism and nihilism, a culture can try out another intelligence and see if this will lead to more positive results. When logical-mathematical intelligence leads to post-modern nihilism, Western culture can try linguistic and musical intelligence in order to *hear* new songs coming from beyond the imaginary borderlines of its own systems of thought.

### **Chakra-psychology, Anodea Judith**

“You are at the beginning of a journey through the many dimensions of your own self, in which you will weave your past, presence and future into a complicated web of insight. This journey will bring you to a transformation of consciousness - over the rainbow bridge - that will connect spirit and matter, heaven and earth, body and soul. And while you are transforming yourself, you transform the world”. (Judith, 2003, 12)<sup>9</sup> This is how Anodea Judith begins her book on the seven chakras - centers of energy - that inhabit every human being. Chakras are ethereal centers of energy that develop with the normal, non-frustrated development of the life of a human being and are located from the bottom of the spine up to the top of the head. This ethereal system represents a very sophisticated system coming from ancient Eastern philosophy that reached the West through the tradition and practice of *yoga*. Its origins lie in India some four thousand years ago. Chakras show up in the ancient *Veda* literature and the *Upanishads* – important sources for Hinduism – in the *Yogasutras* by Pantanjali and in *Sat-Chakra-Nirupana*, as the

most detailed description by an Indian yogi from the sixteenth century CE called Tantrik Purnananda-Swami.<sup>10</sup>

Our transformation journey through the seven chakras is a colorful one. The seven colors of the rainbow symbolize the seven vibration modalities of human existence that become manifest in the chakras. The evolutionary vital force – symbolized by the snake goddess Kundalini – wakes up in the earth in order to dance its way through the seven chakras towards divine consciousness. By doing so she makes the rainbow into a metaphysical bridge between matter and consciousness in order to become the axis of the world that runs through the vertical core of each and every one of us. As a universal sign of hope the rainbow can even bridge the gaps that exist between cultures (cf. *ibid.*, 12/3). The chakras that line up on this vertical core are not material entities that can be touched physically but nevertheless they have a strong influence on the human body being “the expression of the embodiment of spiritual energy on material level” (*ibid.*, 15). They are related and touch both body and spirit, as becomes clear in the intimate interaction of emotions at one side and breathing, heart pulse and even metabolism at the other. “By applying yoga, breathing and bio-energetic techniques, bodily practice, meditation and visualization, we can influence our chakras, our health and our lives. This is one of the essential values of this system – that it can be charted in relation to both body and spirit and that it is accessible through each one of them”. (*Ibid.*)

Based on their location on the vertical core of the body the different chakras have been associated with different archetypical elements and stages of consciousness. The lower chakras are located nearer to the earth than the higher ones and can be related to the practical aspects of life like survival, motion, etc. They are governed by material and social laws. The higher chakras on the other hand have a more mental character and operate through words, images, concepts and symbols. The chakras develop one after the other when a child grows from its mother’s womb into maturity and they all have a rather fixed moment of origin on the lifeline of a growing human being although there may be individual differences. The general principle here is that the preceding chakras have to reach full growth before a new one can really begin to develop towards healthy maturity. When the development of a certain chakra is frustrated by conflicting circumstances the chakra that follows will not grow into full maturity as well. Of course, for no human being the circumstances of growing up are totally perfect, and so the growth of the chakras will be frustrated one way or the other. And then an individual has



two possible reactions at his or her disposal. Either the particular chakra will show deficiencies, which can be compensated for by excesses in other chakras, or the individual will overreact and “load” the particular chakra with excessive energy, which also will have its repercussions on the other chakras. Either way the chakra-system as a whole will aim at a healthy equilibrium between its seven levels, which are inextricably bound up with each other.

The seven chakras symbolize important areas of psychological health - survival, sexuality, power, love, communication, intuition and cognition - and corresponding archetypal elements - earth, water, fire, air, sound, light and thought<sup>11</sup> that in their turn symbolize the universal principles - gravity, polarity, combustion, equilibrium, vibration, luminescence, and consciousness. To get a better understanding of the system as a whole we will now take a closer look at each individual chakra and follow the same order as given above. To keep it easy I will skip the Sanskrit names and I will designate the chakras with their numbers and the psychological areas with which they are connected (with their corresponding elements and principles).<sup>12</sup> In fact the development of the successive chakras happens in two rounds, an unconscious, more or less instinctive process that follows the growth of a human being from its mother’s womb into maturity, and a conscious recurrence of the same process a person may perform once s/he has reached adulthood.

Chakra 1, survival (earth, gravity). *Color*: red. *Development phase*: three months before birth to one year. *Aim*: foundation. *Realms*: roots, grounding, nourishment, trust, family, stable limits. *Identity*: physical. *Direction*: self-preservation. *Tasks*: physical growth, locomotive skills, and object permanence. *Basic rights*: to be and to have. *Stable characteristics*: good health, vitality, well grounded, basic trust, to feel at ease in one’s own body, ability to relax, *Location*: spine bottom, tail bone. *Demon*: fear. (Cf. *ibid.*, 60/1)

In this phase all of baby’s energy and consciousness go to learn how to relate to its own body – to suck, eat, digest, grasp, sit, crawl, stand, walk, handle objects – and more “in general how to relate to the material world and the challenging force of gravity” (*ibid.*, 46). Consciousness is inner directed towards survival and physical well being with little or no awareness of the outside world. There is symbiosis with the mother and absence of independence. To discover and use the locomotive functions is the first step to such independence. When all these physical needs are satisfied the soul will be

firmly rooted in the material body and the child will feel welcome in this world. It will experience basic trust, hope, its physical identity will become the foundation for security and grounding that will enable self-preservation.

Chakra 2, sexuality (water, polarity) *Color*: orange. *Development phase*: six months to two years. *Aim*: movement and connection. *Realms*: movement, experience, emotions, sexuality, desire, needs, lust. *Identity*: physical. *Direction*: self-satisfaction. *Tasks*: sensorial exploration of the world, motion. *Basic rights*: to feel and have fun. *Stable characteristics*: gracious movements, emotional intelligence, ability to experience lust, cherish one self and others, ability to change, healthy limits. *Location*: abdomen, sacred bone. *Demon*: feeling of guilt. (Cf. 112/3)

The second chakra can be characterized by duality, experience, feeling and mobility and begins to develop at the age of six months. Visual sharpness enables the child to direct the eyes on objects outside itself and thus obtain a wider visual perspective. And when the child learns how to crawl and walk, it can move itself in that direction out of mother's direct reach and experience short periods of independence. This movement is exciting but at the same time frightening, insecure and full of ambivalence. Erikson characterizes the phase that pertain to the first two chakras as *trust versus suspicion*, but according to Judith a new development appears in the second chakra characterized by duality, binary choices and the conflict between "loosen up and be attached" (ibid., 50). The first distinctions between good and bad, pain and lust, nearness and distance, I and thou, are experienced, felt rather than understood. Basic needs must be satisfied, experience becomes desire and both motivate movement. While linguistic capabilities have not developed yet, the predominant means of communication is emotion that calls for caring and adequate response. Therefore, it is the emotional identity that is developed in the second chakra directed to self-satisfaction.

Chakra 3, power (fire, combustion). *Color*: yellow. *Development phase*: a year and a half to four years. *Aim*: transformation. *Realms*: energy, activities, autonomy, individuation, will, self-respect, pro-activity, power. *Identity*: ego-identity. *Direction*: self-determination. *Tasks*: realization of distinction, establishment of autonomy. *Basic rights*: to act and be an individual person. *Stable characteristics*: responsible, reliable, well balanced and active will, awareness of self respect and ego-force, warm personality, self-assurance, spontaneous, playful, and humoristic, self disciplined, awareness of one's

own power, ability to meet challenges. *Location*: plexus solaris, stomach. *Demon*: shame. (Cf. *ibid.*, 176/7)

In this phase of development the child feels secure enough in its individuality to start experiments of the will. The powerless desire from the second chakra becomes a deed of the will now with hope for success. Linguistic abilities enable the child to understand time in terms of cause and effect, impulses can be controlled and satisfaction of needs postponed. Instinctive developments of the preceding phases become under conscious control: “the awakening of the ego” (*ibid.*, 51). The possibilities of self creation and self determination are explored by means of the training of one’s own will in the dynamics of power that is in harmonious equilibrium with the will of others. Breaking a child’s will as well as granting it limitless power are both extremely damaging for its further development. So here the personal ego-identity is formed.

Chakra 4, love (air, equilibrium) *Color*: green. *Development phase*: four to seven years. *Aim*: love and balance. *Realms*: love, balance, self-love, relations, intimacy, devotion, animus/anima (fem./masc.) to reach out and absorb. *Identity*: social. *Direction*: self acceptance and acceptance of others. *Tasks*: creation of relations with peers and family, development of the persona. *Basic rights*: to love and be loved. *Stable characteristics*: compassionate, loving, empathic, self-loving, altruistic, peaceful, well balanced, adequate defense system. *Location*: chest, heart. *Demon*: grief. (Cf. *ibid.*, 234/5)

The stubborn egocentrism from the third chakra is now making way for an interest for relations outside the small family circle dominated by mother and father. The peer group with other children in the same age becomes important and love becomes more conscious, that is behavior is adapted in order to obtain or to express love. The child’s autonomy as developed in the relational structure of its own family form the basis for its social life. This structure is tried out in the peer group and acceptance thereof is very important for the child’s self esteem. The ability of conceptual thinking enables the child to see the world “as a complex collection of relations” (*ibid.*, 51) and it now has to learn the ins and outs of this new extended reality. In the fourth chakra the social identity is formed which is based on self-acceptance, which again is necessary to be able to accept others. Determination and goal-orientedness grow here; they are necessary for the development of the next chakra.

Chakra 5, communication (sound, vibration). *Color*: blue. *Development phase*: seven to twelve years. *Aim*: communication, creativity. *Realms*: communication, creativity, listening, resonance, finding one's own voice. *Identity*: creative. *Direction*: self-expression. *Tasks*: creative expression, communicative abilities, symbolic thought. *Basic rights*: to speak and hear the truth. *Stable characteristics*: expressive voice, good listener, good feeling for timing and rhythm, clear communication, and creative life. *Location*: cervix, throat *Demon*: lies.

Well-anchored in its social reality and with a firm self-esteem due to a healthy development in the preceding phases the child is now ready to give something back to others and offer the world something of its creative self. Thinking becomes more symbolic, which stimulates creativity and abstract thought. "This is a period of expansion, experiments and creativity" (ibid., 52) which should be supported and stimulated by means of good examples. And so in the fifth chakra the creative identity is formed with self-expression as its predominant characteristic.

Chakra 6, intuition (light, luminescence). *Color*: indigo. *Development phase*: adolescence. *Aim*: recognition of patterns. *Realms*: imagination, intuition, visualization, insight, dreams, visions. *Identity*: archetypical. *Direction*: self-reflection. *Tasks*: establishment of personal identity, ability to observe patterns. *Basic rights*: the right to see. *Stable characteristics*: intuitive, perceptive, imaginative, good memory, good access to dreams, ability to think symbolically, ability to visualize. *Location*: forehead, brow, third eye. *Demon*: illusion.

For the awakening of this chakra the development of the ability to recognize patterns and apply them to important decisions is a must. By means of its imagination the child will form a symbolic image of the world. This means that the adolescent will reconsider its social identity, which instead of a given datum of the fourth chakra due to family structures and dynamics, now becomes a matter of conscious choice. The awakening interest can go in different directions: spirituality, mythology, symbolism in music, song texts, movie stars the latest fashion at school, etc. "When this interest gets the chance to ripen it will lead to the formation of an archetypical identity, which is directed to self reflection" (ibid., 52).

Chakra 7, cognition (thought, consciousness). *Color*: violet. *Development phase*: young adulthood and afterwards. *Aim*: comprehension. *Realms*: transcendence, immanence, convictions, divinity, unity, vision. *Identity*: univer-

sal. *Direction*: self-knowledge. *Tasks*: assimilation of knowledge, development of wisdom. *Basic rights*: the right to know and to learn. *Stable characteristics*: ability to observe, analyze and assimilate information, intelligent, alert, conscious, unprejudiced, capable to doubt, a feeling of spiritual connection, wisdom, vast understanding. *Location*: cerebral cortex, top of the head. *Demon*: attachment.

The seventh chakra is predominated by the search for meaning, “questions about the sense of life, the universe and the inner Self” (ibid., 53). Here sensitivity for spiritual and religious realms is developed in relation with one’s own life and convictions. This will enable the development of a life attitude as an ever-changing structure that will lay the basis for future behavior. So in the seventh chakra the universal identity is formed which can be found by means of self-knowledge within the core of the awakened Self.

These are the seven chakras, centers of energy as they develop ideally in due time on a more or less unconscious level in each human being, when situated in a positive atmosphere in which the growing individual is surrounded by love and care. This developmental process can be repeated on a conscious level when the person has reached adulthood and wishes to do so. Usually such a desire comes up when the (young) adult becomes conscious of certain blockades of the flow of energy in one or more chakras, which will always have repercussions on other chakras as well. The whole system has a beautiful coherence in the sense that the first chakra corresponds to the seventh, the second to the sixth, the third to the fifth while all the chakras are centered around the fourth, love. This means that deficiencies in, for example, the first chakra – lack of material security - will be easily compensated with an excess in the seventh - expecting basic trust exclusively from the religious realm. In fact any combination of deficiencies and excesses can occur in the life of a human being and then the fourth chakra will reveal the unhealthy condition of the system as a whole. This in turn will stimulate the adult individual to reconsider the flow of energy in each one of his or her seven chakras and in the system as a whole, and do yoga and other exercises to stimulate deficiencies and calm down excessive flows of energy in order to get a healthier equilibrium in the system. But for such a rehearsal of the development process and reprogramming of the system you need the willingness to achieve self-knowledge - with help from the energy of the seventh chakra - which is difficult, especially when this knowledge is negative and

not flattering at all. Therefore, the conscious development of the chakras in adult life is unpredictable and different for each and every person. However, when a person wants to work on his or her own chakra system, then the general principle is that also the negative aspects – the demons – should not be repressed to an unconscious realm but embraced as a shadow and filled with positive energy.

The flow of energy through the chakra system is – in analogy to electricity - dependent on two poles of human existence. We have the pole that is oriented towards the earth with which we make contact through our body (first chakra) and the pole of consciousness that we experience with our spirit (seventh chakra). The main stream of energy is therefore a vertical one - the more subtle streams being horizontal – and flows through the chakras from earth to heaven *and* back. “When energetic contact is being made through the body it is called *grounding*. We are grounded when we make firm contact with the earth, especially through our feet and legs. This roots in experience, feeling, action and the density of the material world. This connection makes us feel safe, lively, self-concentrated and rooted in our environment. Consciousness on the other hand originates from the elusive entity we call spirit. It is our inner insight, our memory, our dreams and our convictions. It also organizes the information that we have observed with our senses. When consciousness is loosened from the body, it is extended and vague, dreamy and empty, but capable of long journeys.” (Ibid., 23)

Now, for the energy to be able to flow both poles have to be activated. When consciousness “is connected to our body we experience a dynamic flow of energy through our whole system” (ibid.). And so we have movement of energy throughout our system in two directions. The first goes upward from the first chakra to the seventh and is called transcendence or liberation. The life world of the growing individual expands gradually until limits have completely disappeared in the spiritual realm. However, this development would be of no use for anyone if the end result is that you can fly away in an impersonal, unlimited freedom. Therefore, the movement upward has to be supplemented by the movement downward from the seventh chakra to the first, called immanence or manifestation. New insights and spiritual ideas are given hands and feet in order to make a real difference in the concrete world we live in. “When we unite both streams of energy we realize the coupling of the two cosmic polarities that is known as the *hieros gamos*, the holy marriage. This union of opposites creates infinite possibilities. It is the

metaphorical source of *conception* – a word that implies both the birth of an idea and the beginning of new life”. (Ibid., 24)

It is at least remarkable that the chakra system that started to develop some three millennia ago is still present and very much alive to a degree that it can stand up to and even surpass the latest developments in developmental psychology. Freud, Maslow, Erikson, Piaget are all represented one way or the other (cf. *ibid.*, 48/9). Of course modern psychology is limited by - legitimate - methodological restrictions. Freud concentrated especially on the area covered by the second chakra. Maslow introduced the pyramid structure that reflects the hierarchy of needs that motivate the individual movement from survival through the five different motivation levels up to self-actualization - that is, when the preceding need levels are fully satisfied. More chakra levels come in, but learning and development remains an individual and subjective affair. With Erikson and Piaget “the other” will become important as well in the structure that represents an extended number of levels of development, and that resembles even more the seven level chakra system. Also, very near to the chakra system, comes Clare W. Graves with his theory on the levels of human existence.<sup>13</sup> His system is interesting because he combines existential psychological problem solving with neurological chemistry that results in a hierarchy of eight levels of human existence. Only his system is rather rigid in the sense that transitions between the levels are like paradigm shifts with all the accompanying phenomena – crisis and new insights that enclose former levels of insight, insecurity, regression, etc. Although he concentrated his research on (young) adults - mostly his own students – and conceives of their progress through the different levels as a process related to the healthy personality, he also uses his system to describe the development of humanity as a whole (cf. Graves, 2003, 106). The ancient Greeks score low in the system, postmodern cognition is open ended. No one knows what comes next.

What fascinates me in the chakra system is its inherent strife for harmonious equilibrium that can continue endlessly because of its spiral form. Once the seventh chakra is reached this will stimulate self-knowledge, which in turn will encourage one to go through the whole system again and again and again. Liberation calls for manifestation, which is the vital principle of the whole system that preserves it from getting lost in an impersonal freedom of formless bliss but keeps energy flowing within the system. Chakra psychology surpasses modern developmental psychology in that it includes the me-

taphysical realms – the rainbow bridge as sign of hope mediating between the heavens above and the earth below – in normal human development. Its spiral form may remind us of Hindu belief in reincarnation and the Buddhist ideal of enlightenment, but then again the chakra “ideology” stays remarkably sober and down to earth. The earth and the heavens participate as external entities that nevertheless enable energy flows *within* each human being following the chakra sequence. Receiving and giving of meaning are dialectically related in which relation the former has ontological priority that stimulates the creativity of the latter. That makes the individual “other directed” from the very start. All of the senses cooperate as well as all of the intelligences that inhabit human existence, and that should enable mankind to find a new harmony in new sorts of equilibrium.

The chakra system does not exclusively pertain to the individual: it also pertains to social systems, traditions, cultures and even the evolution of mankind as a whole. Therefore, the rainbow bridge means hope on a micro scale as well as on macro scales, in the individual psychological realm as well as in social and cultural development. In *Waking the Global Heart*<sup>14</sup> Anodea Judith applies the chakra system to the history of humanity as a whole. Chakra 1 (survival) stands for pre-historical times in which matter, plants, animals and the first human beings take form and substance. Chakra 2 (sexuality) refers to the era in which mankind procreates and migrates, starts to fill the earth. This is the era of sexuality, the receiving, giving and nurturing of new life, in which especially women are active. The religious scene is here dominated by goddesses and fertility rites. Chakra 3 (power) then refers to the era of rational power and the great civilizations (starting in the millennium BC). Hunters and collectors begin to settle on fertile soil and by means of agricultural over-production the great civilizations emerge on the basis of the development of all sorts of activities that are not agricultural. These civilizations start to impose their will on neighbors and defend their own territories and power with huge armies. The female mythical worldview, in which receiving of new life is so important, has to surrender to the more rational male worldview of control, power, warfare and destruction. The goddesses of fertility lose their position to war gods. In our time the rational worldview is collapsing. In postmodernity truth and normativity have become illusions. Our technology has produced weapons of mass destruction and exhausted the earth. Our rational control has not brought peace to the world. A new era is dawning, the era of love - chakra 4 – will start very soon. And it will have to start soon if we want our planet to survive.



### **Lyotard's *terreur de l'irreprésentable* reconsidered**

And yet those pietistic hymns we sang at home when I was a kid did something graceful to our family. It brought us together around the organ, taught me the connecting value of music reflected in harmonious human relationships and eventually inspired me to learn to play Bach on a church organ.

### **Cultural preference of intelligences and senses**

As we have learned from Howard Gardner the senses are important but their value should not be exaggerated. They serve the more autonomous different intelligences that all human beings share and develop according to cultural preferences transmitted by the genes. The auditory–oral sense serves the linguistic intelligence: but, when it is damaged, language is made by means of gestures. The same sense serves the musical intelligence as well, but Beethoven wrote his ninth symphony when he had gone deaf. And a colleague of mine who had to preach in a neighboring village had great difficulties to explain to the mentally handicapped organist what hymns would be sung during the service. But the singing of the hymns was nevertheless impressive due to the musical virtuosity of the organist. The visual sense serves the spatial intelligence as well as the logical-mathematical intelligence, but blind people do not lose their spatial intelligence. They may even improve in abstract thinking, no longer hindered by concrete objects. An example can be found in the *Oedipus* myth, where the blind seer, Tiresias, was able to see far beyond the concrete and actual circumstances of life into the depths of the human soul. And when you ride a horse – especially when you try to perform a show on music with other riders - you will need all the senses you have to achieve some level of harmony. The bodily and the personal intelligences that are necessary to perform such a show need all your senses and a harmonious cooperation with the other intelligences as well.

So the senses serve the more or less autonomous intelligences that different cultures choose to develop particularly – together with the use of the particular sense that belongs to the preferred intelligence - according to their basic needs in life. And so it came to be that the Greeks developed the visual sense serving the spatial and logical-mathematical intelligences, while the Hebrews developed much more the auditory–oral sense serving the linguistic and musical intelligences. Nature has provided human beings with intelligences and senses alike, cultures make their choices and thus determine the way people experience reality, orient themselves in life and listen to infinity.

And this way is transmitted to the next generation by both genes *and* traditions.

### **The culturally determined quality of negation**

Both, vision and hearing, serve a more or less concrete intelligence, i.e. the spatial and linguistic, and a more abstract intelligence, i.e. the logical-mathematical and musical. Now, when it comes to vision and space, abstraction is easier than it is in the case of hearing, language and music, so closely related to time. Space can easily be measured and divided in parcels of space by means of imaginary borderlines. Logical and mathematical systems and forms can easily abstract from concrete space and still be a dimension of space, measurable, divisible, ideal, cut loose from reality as it is, like in geometry. What is outside the system can be negated as being not part of the system and even considered as being non-existent. This negation of what is outside the system has always been rather easy, or at least bearable, in the premodern logical system of the *logos* when man and his mind were still in the center of a nicely ordered and surveyable universe. What is negated in the abstraction is the concrete world that gives solid ground and a grip on life to the human mind, but also the unthinkable, i.e., that what is beyond the grasp of the human mind. This could be done because the house of *logos* as a projection of the human mind was still standing firm and provided man with sufficient grip and security. It became a lot more difficult in the modern logical systems where man and his mind were de-centered, driven to the margins of a much bigger and less surveyable universe. This in turn then easily led to the postmodern affirmation of the illogical status of the whole mental system that describes the universe, leaving room for the unthinkable and total negation of human knowledge and certainty. Which again would lead to the quite understandable reaction of negation of external chaos and fundamentalist affirmation of internal order that will have to be defended with some or any kind of violence. Distinction and negation are – so to speak – part of the system of the spatial and logical-mathematical intelligences. Ideas can be easily separated from concrete living human beings, but when the house of *logos* no longer provides for a solid ground, man loses grip and the result is chaos. When being forms the whole abstract system, “the all”, then what is outside being will be negated as “nothing”, which has been exposed by Rosenzweig as *hubris* of the Western mind. And “To be or not to be” is *not* the question for someone like Lévinas. It pictures being as an abstract totalitarian system of the controlling mind at the basis of Auschwitz.

Is there another way? When it comes to hearing, language and music, abstraction becomes much more difficult because of the unity and mystery of time in which the life rhythms actualize themselves into infinity. Language and music are as closely related as spatial and logical-mathematical intelligence but they have another basis, in experienced time and not in space. And therefore negation has another quality and plays another role. When the prophets confront the people of Israel that they do not live according to the Lord's will and do not hear his commandments anymore, this will immediately remind them of the times in which they did live according to the will of the Lord and heard his thundering voice. And it will encourage them either to harden their hearts and act accordingly or to change their lives. The unity of time and communal rhythms have more weight than any dividing line, just like the unity and the rhythm of a melody are more important than the separate bars and notes of which it consists. Silence not only is a productive element in music, negation heard as a dissonance, a deviation of the good and beautiful which – screaming for a resolution in a new consonance – can also have a positive function and be resolved in a new harmony remembering past eras of harmony. Negation of sight for the Hebrew mind means only what cannot be seen anymore, what is beyond the horizon of our direct or mental experience. But this does not mean it is not there. We might see it if we move in its direction. And then again we might never reach it. It is not a matter of direct or utmost concern. There is no idealization of whatever totality to be controlled by the human mind by means of negation of what is outside the system. What is more important is that when we live within a new horizon we live in harmony, resolving dissonances in new harmonies. And this pertains not only to concrete visible horizons but to infinity as well. Somehow infinity too is related to our concrete world. It keeps the mystery of creation alive, the miracle of revelation poignant and the hope for redemption active. Hear its song and live well.

### **Terror?**

Can the terror that Lyotard refers to be “resolved” in this way, being a dissonance in need of a new harmony? In some way I have the feeling it can. Postmodern negation, as a result of spatial and logical-mathematical intelligences, is, in my view, more a matter of space than of time. Affirmation of the illogical status of the whole mental system that describes the universe – leaving room for the unthinkable - and total negation of reliable human knowledge and certainty can lead to radical criticism and total nihilism, but

not necessarily. When Hubble discovered that there is no center in the universe around which everything else is neatly organized and Einstein discovered that in this immensely vast, infinite universe there is in fact no real difference between time and space and therefore speaks of curves in the “time-space”, then the universe is no longer a surveyable reality for the eye, nor for the mind, and space loses its status of primordial mode of thought.

And now one can reason along two lines. Either you say – with the “holists”, as Gardner called them - that space, as the reigning category of the human mind, determines the space and vision related intelligences of which the other intelligences served by different senses are derived. As a result, and through abstraction of concrete reality, the logical-mathematical intelligence is made absolute and held representative of the whole reality. Then the negation of space, or at least of space as a well ordered entity, means non-space or chaos; and, by virtue of the absence of the space related and derived intelligences, this sums up to *non*-sense. Even the fight for space becomes a useless fiction, leading systematically to (epistemological and moral) chaos, like in the film, *The Matrix*. And you will conclude that this horrible *non*-sense is the hidden basis of “all” reality that terrorizes humanity, encouraging oblivion of the hidden *non*-sense in its fights for self-preservation. In that case the presumption of “all” encompassing terror is inevitable. The unity dissolves in violent fragmentation. Lyotard clearly chooses this option in concentrating on Heidegger’s majestic logical system of ontology with its inherent oblivion of the relation of Being and beings, and the hidden terror this involves.

However, you can also reason along another line and say that the fight for space as the primordial mode of thought with all the logical systems that resulted from this fight is culturally determined. It means denying the more time related intelligences served by other senses than only vision, and that is already a form of terror. But this reduces terror to a cultural affair - Western, Greek - and is therefore not a universal reality hidden at the basis of “the all”. And this in turn leaves hope for humanity as a whole. For the negation of space reminds us that other realms of reality, other times, other cultures, the Hebrew culture as it flowed into the New Testament, encourages us to use other intelligences and senses and prepares us for positive change. Especially as Western predominance of spatial and logical-mathematical intelligences is diminishing as a result of the radical criticism of its own logical systems. By means of this line of reasoning, postmodern radical criticism

can even revivify the hope that there is more than just terror beneath and above the surface.

The solution seems to be easy. Take “time” as your primordial mode of thought and the problems of humanity will be solved. I do think that abstraction from concrete as well as infinite reality is much more difficult for the time related intelligences than for the space related intelligences. Therefore, cultures that prefer time related intelligences will stay much nearer to their own *experienced* reality, and their negation is less general and fierce because they have fewer opportunities to expand their power and jurisdiction. However, I also think with Rosenzweig and Lévinas that it is a form of *hubris* to reduce the totality of reality to a category of the human mind, or to one or two human intelligences served by certain senses. Elites do develop within the boundaries of each intelligence. And, therefore, I would plead with Tom Troeger for an attitude like “all of us for all of God” in a personal and communal sense, leaving lots of room for the mystery. We might have a starting point here for a solution to Lyotard’s problem of the terror of what cannot be represented and is hidden in the limpid blue of language. The ear cannot reach it but is reminded of harmony as it tries to do so. The eye cannot see it but imagines the terror nevertheless, if only in transcendental deduction (Kant), transcendental reduction (Husserl), in the topography and economy<sup>15</sup> of the human consciousness (Freud), the creative imagination of the symbolism of evil (Ricoeur), or in describing the ruins (Lyotard). Together however they may inspire to a song or dance of lamentation that restores some kind of harmony.

It therefore is a matter of choice if we want, with Lyotard, to conceive of infinity and God in terms of original repression, as “a voice that has nothing to say except that it is and that any representation and nomination of that voice is prohibited and that this people only had to listen to its sound and had to obey a timbre.” Thus, being non-representable, this “God”, or whatever the unconscious affect might try to hide, produces anguish and exercises terror by means of “a promise made to a people that did not want nor need it, an alliance that had not been negotiated, that goes against its public interest, of which it knows itself unworthy.” (Lyotard, 1988, 43 cf. above p. ) However, we can also, with Rosenzweig, surpass the Western, and also the post-modern one-sided preference of space, spatial and logical-mathematical intelligences and vision, and conceive of infinity and God as something more substantial and less devastating, encompassing all the intelligences and senses and more than that - creation, revelation and redemption. Although He is

not exhaustively knowable we can nevertheless precipitate the coming of his Kingdom by means of the right prayer. “For verily the Name is not, as unbelief keeps asserting in proud and stubborn emptiness, sound and smoke, but word and fire. The Name must be named and confessed: I believe him.” (Rosenzweig, 1996, 209 cf. below p. ). And so terror is not the final word. There is at least a choice humankind can make between terror and redemption.

### **Universal love as basis for morality and rhetoric**

Singing those pietistic songs with my mother playing the *harmonium* - the little house organ with pedals you have to tread to generate the necessary wind – “at the bosom of the family” as we say in Dutch, gave me basic trust for life.

### **Dialectics of structure and event**

In discourse, as dialectic of structure and event, Ricœur considers language as both space and time related. As a structure it is space-related, using more or less abstract systems of the logical-mathematical intelligence. As an event language is time-related, using the concrete linguistic and even musical - in the sense of poetic<sup>16</sup> – intelligences. Furthermore, Ricœur surpasses the purely psychological approach in interpretation. Language is only the narrow gate to reality and is therefore surpassed by reality. Therefore the most important referent in the Bible text, “God”, is described as the point where all meaning is gathered and where it escapes at the same time, to which Jesus further adds the symbol of sacrificial love stronger than death. Language as the narrow gate to reality can touch but never control reality as a whole, and this is a very Hebrew way of experiencing truth. Especially in Ricœur’s biblical hermeneutics there is room for the unthinkable and a relaxed, almost surrendering attitude towards its force when and where it may manifest itself. That is at least how I experience it.

As a logical system, dialectics may be logically inadequate. The normative status of a certain set of rules is not a flowing affair but is determined by its capacity of problem solving and its validation by tradition. This is more or less how Howard Gardner saw the development of the different intelligences in the different cultures and the preference within a certain culture for one or two of them. That makes the preference for a particular intelligence or set of rules a matter of power that is not accounted for by the dialectical process it-

self. However, I am not searching for an ideal logical system but for a sensible ground that gives basic trust and is trustworthy for a meaningful life. Now, if the preference for the spatial and logical-mathematical intelligences leads to postmodern nihilism, I think it is time to review our preferences and look for other intelligences as well. And we will have to accept the imperfections of the logical system we use. After all, what could be a criterion for the perfection of such a system? There is no perfect logical system that can cover the “all”. But this means that, if we use dialectical logic, we will have to accept its imperfections and cope with power, which forms the greatest obstacle in the interaction of the cultures in our actual global village.

Now, this is exactly what I see happen continuously in the Bible texts, TeNaCh and New Testament alike. Powerful closed structures of meaning that regulate social and religious life are constantly criticized and opened so that new and deeper levels of meaning may enter as well. In the book of *Job*, the mourning Job confronts his visiting friends with the limits of their own religious systems that are incompatible with the God they confess to believe. And so evil is given a much deeper and more mysterious meaning, not solved by God but compensated by his warm redemptive presence. And as evil is taken more seriously, so is God’s redemptive force expanded to the whole of creation. In the book of *Ruth* the outsider coming from Moab, a country that has always been Israel’s arch-enemy, is made subject of Israel’s law and grandmother of its greatest king. Just imagine the impact of this story in post-exilic times when *Ezra* and *Nehemiah* tried to purify the Jewish race by splitting up mixed marriages. Yet the book of *Ruth* was maintained in the canon of the Holy Scriptures. And did not Jesus act in the same spirit when, instead of aborting the law, He fulfilled the law and thus made the law into a universal document, to be brought - by Paul - to all nations. At every single instance that power in the hands of rulers was exercised it was criticized as serving self-maintenance, and yet the sacrificial love proved to be stronger than death and transformed structures for good. And truth or at least the experience of truth changed accordingly.

### **Terror or cultural agreement**

When I watch the news broadcastings I see terror on a worldwide scale. Nations, religions, traditions, cultures that are struggling to survive and that, in their struggles to prevail, suppress, kill and exterminate others on a systematic basis. The problem that the dialectical logic leaves unsolved and that no

logical system can solve, only aggravate, has become precisely the problem of humanity on a worldwide scale. Wars are raging all over the planet and not just the actual war the West is fighting against terrorism. Everywhere you see small traditional groups emerge, fighting for their own rights in big, impersonal systems. The systems no longer provide for the security as they always did because they are in our global village constantly confronted with completely other and even contradictory systems that pretend to do the same. The result is increasing terror between human beings fighting for their own security, preferring the certainty of death above the uncertainty of freedom in peace.

Where Derrida left room for a completely different reality of truth, Lyotard leaves us with pure terror without any hope for new possibilities at all. Lyotard is therefore the most Western thinker of the two, thinking predominantly within spatial traditions, making the negation of space and its intelligences - with the connotation of non-space, *non-sense*, or at least chaos in the relation of Being and beings - and terror absolute. I think this absolute status of terror is culturally determined by means of the one sided preference of spatial and especially logical-mathematical intelligences and can therefore be surpassed. Lyotard may be right that the Jews - at least before they had their own powerful State - never made such a big problem of original repression nor promoted memorial activities aiming at oblivion in order to forget the real evil, as was done in the West. As the black sheep of Western civilization - "Christ killers" - they have always been severe victims of that evil throughout Western history. In the Scriptures nor in Jewish life afterwards has evil ever been euphemized or cut off from its mysterious character rooted in its depths of terror. Whenever it was, this was mercilessly exposed by the prophets and the rabbis. Furthermore, the snake that seduced Eve to eat the forbidden fruit in the Garden of Eden can be considered as a symbol of the evil that man started but that was nevertheless already there and can therefore never be controlled completely by humankind<sup>17</sup>. However, and here I disagree the most with Lyotard, evil in its bottomless depths of terror may be real but can be compensated for by the even greater mystery of the grace of God (Romans 5,20). And this gives me basic trust, a trustworthy basis for a meaningful life in the midst of and able to cope with uncertainty. Prayer instead of power, love instead of total control.

The choice therefore is easy; its actualization on a global scale still has to begin. Either we choose for ourselves and for the certainty that our own culture, with the intelligences and senses it prefers, has always provided for.



Then we deliver ourselves to the inescapable terror that is hidden beneath the surface that these intelligences are able to explore. Or we choose to sacrifice our own absolute status, let ourselves be guided by the accusative glance in the eye of the victim entering the gas chamber, let ourselves be enriched by other intelligences and senses than the ones we are used to, and experience the human reality as a unity that can be transcended and transformed into a new being related to the Kingdom of God. This will produce a great amount of uncertainty that will be only bearable in the light, the harmony and the spirit of that Kingdom. The actual condition of our global village demands this kind of solution if we do not want to fall into total terror. The question is how much more terror we will have to endure before we even start to think of trusting God's universal grace and go in that direction.

### **Rhetorical normativity or normative rhetoric?**

Wouter Slob's rhetorical normativity was based on the conception of *identity* as a flowing but personal, individual reality. Pertaining to the deflationary theory of truth, rhetorical normativity is not derived from the general correspondence of being and saying but is constituted in each and every discussion. It can account for power and exercise power as well to enforce the outcome of the discussion upon the partner who has lost the debate. In a following discussion the roles can be switched if the former loser now wins the debate. As both partners have the burden of proof, they carry mutual responsibility for the discussion and for each other. Apart from the very unstable constellations of communication this produces, and the psychological sort of focus on the debating partners, rhetorical normativity has another problem. It cannot very well account for love that cannot be forced to be given or even shared. "Rather than a substantial norm for action, love compels us to be fundamentally "audience oriented". Rather than telling us exactly what we should do, it teaches us to do what is good for others. ... In such a situation "identities" are not so much given up, but made the responsibility of the other party." As disagreement is a condition for any discussion and dialogical rhetoric can cope with it, the inter-religious discussion must not be excluded. The ideal of mutual responsibility is of course a risky matter because the condition of mutuality is not always met. But the God of love "shall affirm our existence, even when all other relationships are lost. We are invited to accept this love by responding 'amen'."(Slob, 2002, 201/2)

How to account for this love within the fierce battles that rhetorical normativity is inviting us to enter? In my opinion rhetorical power must not be exercised or enforced but *given up* – or at least be related to more chakras than just the third (power) and the fifth (communication) - to make love flourish. And then we build our rhetoric on love instead of founding love and normativity on our rhetorical performances. Success is not guaranteed. Uncertainty and even suffering will follow in many instances. But sacrificial love will prove to be stronger than death. The ideal to become “audience oriented” I share with Slob. Our ways to reach it are different. I do not end with the God of love affirming my existence. It is my starting point, my itinerary and my destination, all along and even when all relationships are lost. And for me this love is not a matter of compelling logic but of inviting faith that will transform our rhetorical praxis and our concrete actions as well.

## **Normative rhetoric**

Searching for a new unity of saying and doing, rhetoric and praxis implies that in a theoretical construction like normative rhetoric – if it wants to take itself seriously – rhetoric must be intimately related to real life, using all the senses and human action, depending on more than just one intelligence. Furthermore, when rhetoric wants to serve universal love, the continuing search for harmonious equilibrium between the senses and intelligences of chakra psychology will have to be taken into account as well. In doing so I will stay close to my own praxis of preaching, teaching and coaching. Therefore, we will now concentrate on homiletics, liturgy, ecclesiology and leadership in general.

## **Homiletics**

The Greek word *homiliè* not only means the speech act of addressing a certain audience on a certain subject where a certain consensus has to be presupposed. It can also mean intimate encounter or intercourse, and therefore I like to conceive of the sermon that a preacher delivers in a worship service as a playground where people with different backgrounds and opinions may meet and playfully interact on subjects that pertain to many different aspects of life. One of my guiding rules in homiletics is the following: In order to be able to reach or even touch the mind and heart of the hearer in the pew with

your sermon, you will have to be touched yourself first by the Bible text you preach about. How can you even expect as a preacher that the Word of God will be effective through your sermon if it has not been effective in your own mind and heart? In my view a worship service has been effective when the congregation leaves in a different, more positive state of mind than the one they came in with. And, as a preacher, you serve this movement if and only if you let the Bible text do something to yourself. That means that you will finish your sermon preparation in a different state of mind, heart and faith than the one you had when you first set your eyes on this particular text. There is not only the world of the Bible text that has to be explored, the preacher will have to make his or her own decisions as well about how to move around, relate to and live in this world. It is therefore of utmost importance that a preacher takes all the time there is – usually a week – to go through this whole process every time s/he has to preach a sermon.

When I teach a course of homiletics, I like to start with watching a post-modern film like *The Matrix*. This is the culture you and your congregation live in. So what is your attitude – as a human being, as a student of theology, as a future minister - towards our own contemporary spirit of the times and culture? Just to think that postmodernism exaggerates will not free us from the responsibility to choose because there is a whole range of other interpretative models – premodern and modern - available to direct our readings of the Scriptures. Even if hermeneutical choices are made on an unconscious level, they nevertheless have a strong impact on everything that may - or may not – happen in the process of sermon preparation, as well as in the writing and the delivery of the sermon itself. So students should have some awareness of the hermeneutical problems and possibilities and thus begin to appreciate adequately the challenge of personal choice in this realm. It can be helpful to improve insight in one's own chakra system, because usually deficiency in the higher chakras will be compensated in the lower ones. And then the question can be raised if love is served by compensating postmodern insecurity by means of premodern "security". Probably it is more effective to compensate the feelings of being lost in contemporary postmodern nihilism by means of exercises that stimulate the lower chakras, which will result in new basic trust so that contemporary culture can be faced in a different way.

The next step is exegesis. Every student makes his or her own exegesis of the pericopes – from Old and New Testament - given by the lectionary. Afterwards, I write a summary of their findings on the blackboard. By this pro-

cedure, the surplus of meaning of this particular text becomes crystal clear in one glance. It jumps off the blackboard, so to speak. What is also clear is the necessity of choice, because you cannot treat all the meanings that are present on the blackboard. A third advantage is that students become aware of the fact that they do not have to do all the work all by themselves. They can let themselves be enriched by and use the findings of others as well. Then sermon preparation is not a matter of ego- tripping but of sharing, which will open the chakra system for new energies to flow. This sharing already starts in the exegetical work and continues until and after the sermon is delivered.

So we have the explored world of the Bible texts and the necessity to make our own choices there. But how do we make those choices? Apart from the hermeneutical preferences, homiletical theories are very helpful here as well. I like to use Rolf Zerfasz' *Grundkurs Predigt*<sup>18</sup> and David Buttrick's *Homiletic*<sup>19</sup>. Zerfasz described the process of sermon preparation in eight steps. After a first acquaintance with the texts and a more thorough study of commentaries, you need to let go and do something else in order to give the creative process the time it needs. I recommend to do the research work on Monday and let associations with your findings come along in the week that follows - during a pastoral visit, a walk with your dog, a conversation with your partner, a ride on a horse, reading a newspaper article, a drink in the pub or whatever. Then Zerfasz advises the preacher to be still: collect yourself and realize that you too are loved by the Lord and that you may serve Him with all the capacities He has given you and with all the imperfections you struggle with. Your own personal choices are important, make them with love and the Lord will bless them. So sit down and summarize the meanings that emerge from the world that the Bible texts unfold and *that you choose* to treat in your sermon. Write in four lines what will be your message (M), the resistance you expect (R), your advise for the short run (A) and your goal for the long (G). With Buttrick I agree that a preacher elaborates and speaks to consciousness. And the road to deep layers of consciousness always passes through the more rational layers at the surface of the mind. So never overload a congregation with unstructured masses of knowledge and information. Set up a simple and transparent structure for your sermon - not more than five or six moves and not more than one illustration per move – and let this structure reflect the decisions you made concerning MRAG. Here, too, a lot of choices will have to be made, because not all the associations are useful for this sermon. I always urge students to be very critical and careful in their use of images because the effect of images is very strong and they may well

undermine and even contradict the whole line of reasoning in the structure of the sermon. I recommend to do this on Friday morning before the preacher sits down to write out the sermon text. Then s/he can sleep over the product, go through it on Saturday one more time, become eager to share with the community what the Word of God has done this week, and relax by giving the effect of this sermon on the congregation into the hands of the Holy Spirit.

So we have the world that the Bible texts unfold with a variety of traditions and theologies, the world of the hearer in the pew made up of a variety of other traditions - from pre- to postmodern and everything in between - and we have the world of the preacher with yet another set of more or less well articulated traditions. The sermon should mediate between all these different worlds and traditions. Is this possible? I think we get better results with a more or less universalistic approach to truth and unity of consciousness than with a distinctive way of thinking that tends to make one's own mode of thought or model of interpretation absolute and neglect or even disdain others. As we can learn from Ricoeur, the first naivety survives and will, although deepened and changed by the critical analysis, show up in a modified form in a second naivety. The influence of Ricoeur's textual hermeneutics is clear in my teaching of homiletics as well as in my own preaching, and it would be an inner contradiction to give it the status of final truth. My criterion is not "what is the most true" that I then *impose* on an audience. My criterion is "what makes the love of God most effective" that I can *share* with the congregation. Preachers are free to make their own choices and decisions based on their biography and the equilibrium reached in their chakra system. When they do so in a flexible way, without rigidity, with love and self-esteem, they will be authentic and inspiring in their preaching, inviting the hearers in the pew to follow their example to form their own opinions on the Bible texts and participate in the grace of God in spite of all the imperfections. They will be employed by the love of God and thus creating room for the Holy Spirit to be effective in the congregation.

## **Liturgy**

In liturgy, even more than in homiletics the influence of the different eras of Western thought is felt in a direct way. Joseph-André Jungmann's book, *Missarum Sollemnia*, about the history of the genesis of the Holy Mass, makes it very clear that most of Christian liturgy has developed within the

Roman Catholic Church in the premodern era.<sup>20</sup> Apart from the Anglican Church, most of the Reformation Churches have thrown a great deal of the ritual and symbolic wealth of the old liturgy overboard without really creating new forms to replace the old ones. Congregations like Glide Memorial United Methodist Church in San Francisco, that develop liturgical forms out of jazz, folk music and popular culture with little connection to the age old traditions, can be considered as exceptions in Western Christianity. In non-Western Christianity there is much more freedom to combine local culture with liturgical forms than in the West. However, according to Jungmann, this is precisely what also happened in the medieval Christianization of Europe when many local traditions, especially the Gaulish ones, were introduced into the Holy Mass and used to bring the Gospel into the hearts of pagans. But once Europe was Christianized the liturgical forms became more settled and less subject to change. Of course, there are many different currents in contemporary Roman Catholicism, from conservative to progressive, but the great liturgical structures have shown a remarkable vitality and have stayed intact. Only the replacement of Latin, as the official worldwide mass language, with many different vernacular languages used in mass celebration, has been effectuated on a large scale. This was a logical result from developments instigated by the Reformation and Enlightenment, and it brought back to official Roman Catholicism a much closer contact with the local traditions. In Protestantism we see a reverse development lately, and not only in the more liberal churches searching for liturgical “renewal”. Many of the old Roman Catholic rituals return, although they are usually accompanied by new theologies. So in the liturgy we feel the ages vibrate, and we can be grateful for the rich inheritance that our “fathers” have left us.

Now, you can say the liturgical structures of the Christian churches in the West are premodern just as the pope continues to be the infallible authority – that is, when he speaks *ex cathedra* - who still pretends to guarantee the truth, when we in our era have been convinced that there is no such thing as “the truth”. The church is upholding mono-logic while this has been gone for ages. Hopelessly outdated, not hermeneutic, useless for faith communities living in a (post) modern time where we ask “what is truth?” instead of “what is *the* truth?” Liturgy is interesting for historians and church musicians, nice for museum visitors, but homiletics is up to date. There we treat and ask the real questions. The *Societas Liturgica* and the *Societas Homiletica* have nothing in common; they are and should remain two completely different and separated entities. It is the age old dialectical dilemma of tradi-

tional authority versus problem solving, and usually this dilemma is not solved in the dialectical process but by means of power. And the hearer in the pew, at the cost of whom this power battle is fought, must suffer in one way or the other. How can s/he experience the unity in Christ when the worship service where this should happen is characterized by dichotomy? It may not be expressed explicitly but it will be felt on a deeper level and there it will do much harm to the effectiveness of God's love.

In Groningen, the teacher of liturgy and myself - as teacher of homiletics - have set up an experiment for a course in ministry in order to come to some sort of cooperation between our two separate disciplines. We agreed upon the idea that each worship service has its own dynamic - following the tradition it belongs to, a movement from the world outside to an encounter with God at the heart of the service of prayers, in the silent prayer that precedes the communal recital of the Lord's Prayer. Both liturgy and sermon have to serve this dynamic. In order to be able to do so, the preacher has to be familiar with the liturgical as well as the homiletical dynamics and therefore we taught our courses separately. But we organized the evaluation sessions of the worship services led by the students in such a way that we could both be present simultaneously and make our comments. And we discovered that many hermeneutical decisions that were made in the exegesis and expressed in the sermon had great impact as well on decisions made in relation with the liturgy. That hermeneutical decisions could influence the design and articulation of prayers, the choice of hymns, etc., meant that liturgy could not be a fixed and inflexible given entity from the past. It is still a living dynamic structure in which people can feel at home and in which all sort of things can happen.

For the students all this felt quite natural. For us it was a successful experiment, quite unnatural in our respective fields. The most important lesson we took from the experiment was that, although working from different angles, cooperation in serving something greater than your own discipline improves the graceful dynamics within the service. And so we thought that church musicians and organists had to be involved in the whole process in a very early stage. Therefore, we ended the course with a day for the students and church musicians, amateurs and professionals, where it appeared that both parties desired to be consulted by the other beforehand and that this could be of great advantage for the quality of worship. When an organist knows what the preacher will preach about and what the message will be approximately, then s/he can adjust tempi, registration and musical atmos-

phere, even teach a congregation a new way to sing a particular hymn. Then the hearers in the pew will experience unity, and the blessing of this cooperation will include them as well, if only resulting in a more spiritual and enthusiastic way of singing the hymns. They will experience the whole service – liturgy, the articulation of prayers, the sermon, the choice of hymns, the musical and spiritual atmosphere - as a gentle flow of energy within a wonderfully created structure and will leave in a different state of mind than the one they came in with.

Again I would say that a universalistic way of thinking, experiencing and believing within a unity of consciousness helps better to promote a smooth flow of energy through the chakras and of the development from one chakra system to the other within the worship service than does the Western veneration of distinction.

## **Ecclesiology**

Personally I like to see the Christian community as a collection of the widest possible variety of consciousness flowing as loving energy in different people who therefore flourish from confidence and creativity. For me consciousness pertains to the seven layers of the chakra system: the first three chakras that belong to the mostly unconscious existential realm, survival, sexuality and power (from spine bottom to stomach), the central chakra of love (heart) and the three conscious rational chakras communication, intuition and cognition (from throat to top of the head).

The first three chakra-layers of consciousness are the deepest and most repressed. Apart from the individual will and the personal emotions like fear of sexuality and of the responsibility to make your own choices, it lodges everything that the individual has received – through genes and education – and that has consciously but even more unconsciously helped to form that will. This is the realm of connection with the outside world and the development of the self in terms of self-psychology. The development of this self starts very early in life. For a healthy development, the “good enough mother” (or father when the traditional roles are inverted) is of predominant importance. The “good enough mother” is an important concept in developmental psychology (cf. Ivan Boszormenyi Nagy, *Invisible loyalties*<sup>21</sup>) and is related to the ideal middle way between two extremes. The child *has* to be separated from its mother - become a self - but without losing its confidence. In order



to help the child reach this stage the “good enough mother” is not always physically present but she knows when she is needed and then she shows up. Therefore, trust in the imperfect outside world grows gradually together with the trust in a not completely independent inner self. There is no complete and irreconcilable distinction of good and bad in the self, leading to extreme and confusing states of mind – negative or positive - but a healthy suspicion in positive situations and hope for better times in negative situations.

Long before the development of ego power and emotional identity related to sexuality and its Oedipal power struggles, the self receives confidence and balance. By means of this confidence, the self factually separates itself from the outside world and everything it enhances through the “good enough mother” who takes care of a healthy equilibrium between deficiency and excess in the first chakra. Now, when the development of the self proceeds in a harmonious way, this receiving of confidence, balance and meaning through the “good enough mother” will remain important throughout the child’s life, more important than the giving of meaning based on ego power struggles. It will provide him or her with a healthy modesty – more is received than can ever be given by any individual – and prepares for interaction and communion with others on the basis of equivalence. This modesty even makes it bearable that I am not the center of my world and that man is not the center of the universe. Here the existential layers of consciousness surpass mere psychology. There is room for the hidden mystery that surpasses me and is yet “existent”. And that makes even the hidden and incomprehensible God trustworthy.

At the other side, and more at the surface of consciousness, we have the more rational or conscious chakras. Where in the existential layers more emphasis is laid on the receiving of meaning in the rational layers of consciousness, the giving of meaning by means of communication, intuition and cognition is more important. Although not all giving of meaning is a result from power struggles and ego preservation, in rational consciousness, especially since the modern turn to the subject, the individual giving of meaning is more important than the reception thereof. Subjects “distinguish” themselves from others by means of an original way of giving meaning to the outside world, be it in science with sophisticated theories, in literature with new images, in art with new forms, in the pulpit with new interpretations of age old texts. And the further away one gets from generally accepted traditions, the more original their personalities, the lonelier these innovators become, the heavier their egos come under attack and scream for self defense. Since at-

tack is seen as the best defense, power struggles emerge where you wouldn't expect them to, eliminating the fruits of the original ways to give new meaning to the outside world. This, of course, is a great pity because valuable contributions of the ego are neutralized and made ineffective in this way. And yet much of our cultural growth in the last centuries has persevered in and through this sort of struggle for power in which the ego takes predominance over the self and where chakras three and five shine brightly at the cost of the others.

Somewhere in between is the chakra of the heart and love, where there is equilibrium between receiving and giving of meaning. This is the realm of peaceful and fertile relationships between people based on confidence, mutual trust and common efforts in the struggle for life and characterized by creativity, originality and innovation. When this is realized, positive emotions will result. If not, the emotions will be negative, expecting something quite different from the interaction of the different realms of consciousness. Maybe you could say that the heart-chakra is the clinical thermometer indicating a more or less healthy consciousness of a well-balanced chakra system. There is harmony between the seven chakra-levels, which is obvious because they all shine with equal force, together forming a rainbow as a sign of hope, a gentle flow of energy within and throughout a wonderful system. The result is inner peace and a sound relationship between the receiving and giving of meaning.

Now, when the Christian community gathers, the building is populated with a wide variety of different people. What they have in common is consciousness consisting of several layers. But within each and every single person the layers are filled differently and have different meaning, balance and weight. For some, the given structure of the liturgy developed in the ancient church, rich with rituals and symbols, may be the only comfort for a wounded self and a source of a rich life of faith and even creativity that would not have been there without it. For others the given structures are a threat, and these worshippers want to be addressed rationally by an ego-challenging sermon that liberates them from all bondage in order to be able to create new forms. However, the new forms they create might very well reflect the ancient structures. What is new for them is that they are now no longer taken for granted. Still others come to feel security and joy in the community and experience togetherness in the spiritual singing of the well-known hymns. How can this wide variety of different people ever become a unified body of Christ, a real community in which no one has to deny his or her own authen-

tic self? Again the idea of universal love and unity of consciousness comes to help.

When we realize that every one of us has received a self - through a “good enough mother” - out of given structures in the outside world then we are somehow connected to these structures. However far away or ancient they may be (premodern, eastern, Hebrew), they remain meaningful for our very selves. Through our self we remain connected to the world and therefore our self is more open to the world than our ego that is usually caught within itself. In the meanwhile, a healthy self knows its own limits and becomes modest by means of its grateful confidence in the given structures it relies upon. A healthy self will accept its own roots but is at the same time open for other structures that support other selves in life. And therefore a healthy self feels good and will support creative acts of its own ego to help others. And so in the community of Christ, we address each other as whole, healed, that is, as a unified consciousness in which all layers are of equal value. And while the deeper existential layers are less easy to reach directly we start with the more rational ones and then pass through the love chakra where we are encouraged to try and touch the deepest layers as well. This is the itinerary of the ancient liturgy - and we should respect it in our sermon outlines as well - leading to a solemn moment of silent prayer, where we loose control and entrust our fate and destiny into the hands of the Lord, where manifestation and liberation become one. Of course much may go wrong in life, but when God’s Spirit is working in the human heart - through pastoral care, worship or communal involvement - all the levels of consciousness are reunited and God’s love can begin to flow freely between and through all of them. It liberates the ego from its lonely prison, gives a self to that ego, and gives a person refilled with confident creativity as a blessing to the community who in turn will sing its songs of praise.

From my own experience I can say that highly educated intellectuals in our congregation may be interested in a rational part of my sermon that explains some backgrounds or coherences of the Bible texts. But they start to listen intensely when I appeal to the existential layers of their consciousness, and it is especially on this level that they start to feel one with the community. On the other hand, the less educated are eager to hear some explanation of unheard of connections and coherences in the Word of God because they are taken seriously in their existential needs and beliefs. And so a unity grows between people you would never expect to even socialize. I experience this as a miracle and enjoy it with all my heart every time it occurs. So many dif-

ferent people with so many different talents, sharing, growing in faith and communion, singing, painting, opening other people's consciousnesses for new experiences, a community flourishing with confidence and creativity, respectful towards the inheritance of the past and creative in filling old forms with new images, "for the honor of God and the edification of the congregation" as J.S. Bach has put it so well.

### **Authentic and inspiring leadership**

Power exists as long as it is granted, and this makes power into something that not only has to be established but *received* as well. Fierce battles for power of the ego always lead - in the long or short run - to a loss of power. While power based on inner strength of the self and self control, resilience, and flexibility, is not easy to destroy. This is quite natural because the self, in its openness to the world, is more encompassing, has more resources to draw on, and is stronger than the inner directed, narrow minded and breakable ego. Now, the Western veneration of distinction has put thick walls between the self and the ego and between the different layers of consciousness they belong to. The modern turn to the subject even reinforced this development. The ego is venerated at the cost of the self and becomes hard and fragile until it annihilates itself completely in (post-)modernism. Freud only reinforced this tide, for he too venerated the ego in its Oedipal power struggles reducing the whole person to sexuality. *Wo es war soll ich werden* - "where *id* was my *ego* should grow", and ... take over.

I consider Ricœur's hermeneutical phenomenology as a significant expression of a development that goes in the opposite direction, in which the unity of consciousness is more respected and even promoted. When he ends his *Interpretation Theory* with, "It is the text, with its universal power to open the world, which gives a self to the ego" (Ricœur, 1976, 95) then some kind of unity of self and ego is restored. Distinctions are not blurred but made productive in a dialectical process leading to new and deeper understanding. It does not mean that we should fall back on premodern or even primitive naivety. However, the receiving character of the self is preserved in order to enrich and deepen the giving of meaning by the ego, which will eventually lead to a new and deeper understanding. The first naivety passes through critical analysis in a second naivety. The self is not annihilated by the ego; the self *enriches* the ego with new and maybe even - until then - unthinkable meaning. In my view this means that the self receives meaning and confi-

dence from an enormously expanded reality and encourages the ego to relate modestly and creatively to that reality. Fights and collisions are not excluded but in them the opposite elements penetrate each other and create new reality. Then life, consciousness in all its aspects, becomes the hopeful grace of a bright shining rainbow, a gentle flow of energy within a wonderfully created structure, a highly effective well-balanced chakra system, on an individual and personal scale as well as on a corporate scale where small and multinational organizations operate.

This may sound like a highly unrealistic ideal and yet postmodern society is searching for it in many ways. Normative rhetoric and its spirituality are not a privilege of churches and other religious organizations. What I see at this very moment in corporations, profit and non-profit organizations, and all sorts of management training, is that postmodern negation is not accepted but considered as a challenge to look at other times, cultures and intelligences as sources to draw on. Economical power is fragile, fragmented and changing rapidly. So business companies start to look for more stable constellations as their principle of organization. And they do so by drawing increasingly on sources coming from the self-psychological disciplines and also from non-Western cultures. In organization theory, there is an abundant flow of books nowadays that refer to transcendental, psychological and other general human values to be integrated into business corporations. Some try to reintegrate the whole person to the benefit of the organization. "Management drives" (motivations) are derived from the latest developments in developmental psychology<sup>22</sup>. The head is encouraged to encounter and employ the heart when it deals with people who work within the organization<sup>23</sup>. Quality in leadership is searched for and found in authenticity, inspiration, creativity, personal development and ... love<sup>24</sup>. Others look further for even more basic human drives. I have read a book in which the author recommended the traditional African type of tribal leadership for modern, Western managers<sup>25</sup>. Modern, Western companies create room for their employees to meditate, perform their regular daily prayers, and do holistic physical forms of training, like *Tai Tsji*, that employ both body and soul. Courses are developed that use Reiki – a healing technique coming from a Buddhist monk in Kyoto, Japan – to encourage and develop psychological forces to support personal and intuitive development. I even found a management training that draws on very basic insights from the millennia old *Veda*-literature and *Upanishads*<sup>26</sup>, the foundation of Hinduism, going further back in history

than the Hebrew Bible, and of comparable value for Hinduism and Buddhism as the Hebrew Bible has been for Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

How will this work out practically in secular use of language and models of management? I start a course in management training by doing something physical. I prefer to put the participants on a horse and I ask them “How does it feel to be carried by what you are supposed to lead?” When it is a scary or even traumatic experience, I tell them that the horse is a fearful being and the rider has to give it confidence by means of body language. Relax, stretch your legs out and straighten your back, loosen your grip, don’t pull the reins, be lenient and resilient in mind and body, try to feel the rhythms and follow the movements of your horse as if you were sitting on a swing or a rocking chair and enjoy. And thus it becomes gradually clear that it is by means of relaxed confidence transmitted to your horse that effective communication and cooperation becomes possible, and what’s even more, enjoyable. It also becomes clear that not everything that is happening in this cooperation of man and animal can be expressed by means of language, seen by the eye or heard by the hear, but has to be felt, experienced by using all the senses. Therefore, to lead what carries you is an art that will have to be learned and further perfected in a lifelong process of training. How can we get an attitude of basic confidence that is necessary in this process? Reliance on more than just ego qualities is a first prerequisite. To realize that fear is generated and spread throughout organizations and contemporary (postmodern) culture as a whole as a result of overestimation of one sort of intelligence, of ego qualities and ego struggles, is a second. To stimulate in leaders, and by that way also in their organizations, a healthy development of the self receiving meaning from the outside world – secular and religious – is a third stage to pass to basic confidence and a healthy balance of self and ego. A better balance in the lower chakras will automatically lead to more harmony in the higher chakras and in the whole system. By means of a healthier balance in their chakra system and improved self-consciousness, leaders learn to appreciate more the meanings they have received in life from many different realms and can implement them more effectively. They learn to rely more on inner strength and peace of mind than on outward status symbols and will see the effects on their subordinates of such an attitude. Moreover they will also accept that others have received different meanings and differently balanced chakra systems and learn to deal with it more effectively.

I think it is profitable when company activities show some kind of unity in their dynamics, leading to and incorporated in some sort of higher entity from which meaning is received and to which meaning is given. Here then should be created some room for the elaboration of self and ego psychology. I confront the *Oedipus* myth on which Freud based his depth psychology with the *Aeneas* myth on which Nagy based his contextual psychology.<sup>27</sup> *Oedipus* is the great rival of his father by coveting his mother. *Aeneas* is the caring supporter of his crippled and blind father whom he carries out of burning Troy so that he can die in peace elsewhere. Freud promotes ego liberation and development; Nagy develops the self-supporting structure of family care to improve basic trust in the individual with which he or she in turn will be able to take care of others. Now, when context becomes important in company activities, there will be more room for the receiving self and the caring ego, and this will improve their inner coherence because the basis is much broader than an ego struggle for power. Company activities will be more based on confidence related to a unity of consciousness and can therefore be performed in a more relaxed way. And this will in turn improve product quality, internal and external relations, and communications. Company activities may even begin to resemble the image of the gentle flow of energy within the well-created structures of the chakra system. Every separate level in the hierarchy will have its own balance of chakras and flowing energies. For a leader it is important to realize the specific character of this balance within the group that he or she is leading.

After these lessons in the conscious and relaxed use of the whole chakra system, and not only the logical-mathematical intelligence based on vision, I pay some attention to the development of Western thought in the premodern, modern and postmodern eras. They all have their own corresponding models of interpretation, and there is a widespread variety in the use of the latter throughout the Western society. They all have their specific flows of energy in a characteristic chakra system. Since every company tries to adjust to and communicate with its clients by means of market segmentation and product differentiation, it is important to have some idea about the prevailing way in which reality is interpreted within the different segments and what the character of the chakra balance is in each segment. However, not only in external communications is such a hermeneutical awareness effective, but it also helps to understand ways of thinking and reacting within the organization. To be up to date, “modern” or following every fad can be profitable in the short run but it can also be very contra-effective for an organization in the

long run because the veneration of the subject, ego powers, and ego struggles is accepted in a thoroughly naïve way. All this is reflected in the language that is being used, and therefore I will concentrate subsequently on the manager's use of language. Speeches will be analyzed and discussed in view of underlying interpretative patterns and flows of energy. To establish message, expected resistance, advise and goals can improve the conscious use of language and thus also the energetic contact of the speaker with the audience addressed. By thus relating rhetoric, hermeneutics and chakra energy on a cultural level, new energies may start to flow and form rainbows everywhere.

## **Truth as a function of universal love and morale**

Universal love - as referred to in Torah and Decalogue but also in the chakra system, the heart chakra of love that connects all the other chakras - is basic for a normative rhetoric as I see it. By means of its inherent unity of consciousness rhetoric becomes much more than just decorative speech or discursive - in both meanings of the word - language. Neither concise nor extensive language can grasp reality exhaustively. There is always a surplus to be found and enjoyed somewhere. Enriched by the surplus of meaning in reality, and the loads of energy that are available there, we can build and cross over rainbow bridges and develop increasing harmony in our world, in our chakra systems.

The chakra system has become one of the cornerstones for my idea of normative rhetoric. For me the chakra system is psychology, (religious) philosophy and open ideology at the same time. What makes it especially attractive is that it opens human consciousness towards reality's surplus of meaning even in the metaphysical sense of the word. As such, it is more or less compatible with Ricœur's hermeneutical phenomenology although the generation of meaning is not restricted to texts alone. Nature and logic - i.e., dialectics in the Ricœurian sense - participate as long as they pertain to human reality at many different levels - personal, traditional, cultural.

I consider postmodern nihilism as the final stage of the liberation movement through the chakras of Western thinking that was not, or at least not sufficiently, counterbalanced by the opposite movement of manifestation. Through its concentration on truth and the logical-mathematical intelligence based on vision it overloaded the sixth and especially the seventh chakra,



and this excess collapsed under its own weight (says Wouter Slob) into the total deficiency of nihilism with regard to truth and morality. That in turn caused the overestimation of the first two chakras. Out of fear of not surviving, the Western traditions and culture are venerated and defended by arms, which caused a worldwide spiral of violence. Economic survival in the West exhausts the natural resources received from mother earth, and sexuality is overstressed but empty, that is not connected to the other chakras. The balance in the individual chakras and thus in the whole system is lost. What we need is a new movement of manifestation, a healthy *grounding* of the enormous achievements of Western civilization, a new equilibrium in the chakra system called humanity of which all will benefit. New truths will emerge because we will take the chakra of the heart seriously and act accordingly.

The chakra system puts humanity under the hopeful sign of the rainbow. In the Jewish tradition this would correspond to the Alliance of Noah that assures humanity as a whole of the universal love of God. How can the codes of Zion, Hebrew thought more in particular, help us further in this direction? We will turn to that question now.

## Chapter 5

### Codes of Zion

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Is there an answer to the present global problems of nihilism, mutual disrespect, wars and terrorism? In a first approach to this question, in the preceding chapter, I have searched for a different way of experiencing truth, based on a certain conception of morality, universal love as it has been expressed in the world religions and also in the Hebrew Torah. Hence, I did not speak of rhetorical normativity but of normative rhetoric. The question that will occupy us in this chapter is: How universal is Hebrew thinking, and in what way does it surpass Western thinking to become universal, and will it then have practical value for intercultural relations? Biblical Hebrew is thoroughly non-Western and thus we might expect something new coming out of it, if only the replacement of the perspective of vision by the experience of hearing, music, as basis of human knowledge<sup>1</sup>. But can Hebrew thought meet the conditions of universal love, connecting the different senses and intelligences in order to drive a vital flow of energy through the complex system of chakras or will we end up in a new sort of short-sighted Biblical fundamentalism?

My real goal here is not to throw away the totality of Western thinking – premodern, modern or postmodern – but to put it in another key so that it may begin to sound differently. I have always felt great sympathy for Ricœur's dialectical way of reasoning, especially because his symbol theory creates room for the radically new and unthinkable, that is, the pre-lingual layers of reality that enter meaning through their representations. The question is if in doing so it is possible to stay within Kant's mono-logic, and his limits of existential darkness and dreams of innocence, and to limit Hegel's dialectics to human reality excluding nature and logic. Does not the transcendence of these very limits present a movement towards postmodernism, *différance* and deflation of truth? Or would Ricœur's textual hermeneutics and especially his Biblical hermeneutics rather deprive the truth question of

its privileged status and in doing so become able to present a viable alternative for postmodern negation in the moral realm? Furthermore Ricœur's hermeneutical theory is interesting because of his notion of first and second naivety with critical analysis as mediator. Something of pre-modern naïve thought is preserved in the critical analysis of modernity, leading to a new comprehension of the second naivety. Old notions are not completely thrown overboard but re-used in new settings with new logical systems and thus receive new meanings. The same could apply to biblical notions that might preserve some of the thoroughly non-Greek, i.e. non-Western roots they stem from and create new meaning in the Western mind. Especially because Ricœur sends us to the Bible texts as disciples who receive new meaning instead of "owners of the truth" who only give meaning based on their own limited insights.

Whatever the direction of solutions proposed, the postmodern *cloud of terror* will have to be taken as seriously as Slob took the postmodern concept of *différance* and solved "on the spot". With my approach to the postmodern challenge – concentrating on normative rhetoric based on universal love – I hope to come near to the ideal of the Tibetan Buddhist monk (at the end of chapter 3), to divine love within, making us responsible for the well-being of others; that is, not beyond but by means of the detour of language and concepts offered to us by the codes of Zion.

We will begin with Paul Ricœur's philosophical interpretation of the Biblical language, with its theological implications and inherent power to open our imagination for a new kind of being that the Bible calls the Kingdom of God. We will then concentrate on Thorleif Boman's study of Hebrew thought compared to Greek. In this predominantly linguistic study, we will find some first peculiarities concerning the very code of Zion, the language of the Bible and the worldview this language entails. Finally we will take a look at the philosophies of the two Jewish thinkers with deep roots in Western as well as Biblical thinking, Franz Rosenzweig and Emmanuel Lévinas. Did their worldview change considerably under influence of the Western thought patterns in which they grew up in comparison to the Hebrew worldview of the Bible, or did "something" that inalienably belongs to the codes of Zion remain that is sufficiently universal to support our normative rhetoric?

## **Ricœur and Bible interpretation**

### **Textual hermeneutics, gateway to Hebrew thought in the Bible.**

Ricœur has extensively written about biblical hermeneutics on many occasions. He did not always gain the approval of theologians because he would supposedly take philosophical concepts of general hermeneutics as the basis of biblical truth. Especially the New Yale Theology blames him for this. Although their reproach is understandable in Ricœur's case, we will see if it makes any sense, or if it is resolved in the surplus of meaning of the Bible text.

### **Barth, Ricœur and the New Yale Theology**

The New Yale theology, Karl Barth and Paul Ricœur have one thing in common: their focus on the Bible text with its own integrity, as Mark I. Wallace has explained very well in his book, *The second naiveté: Barth, Ricœur and the New Yale Theology*<sup>2</sup>. What Wallace finds compellingly common in Barth and Ricœur is "their willingness to risk strong readings of the Bible by taking its claim to confront the reader with the Word of God". And here is a strong contrast with purely historical-critical readings, that look behind the texts, and with postmodern readings that separate the internal literary environment of the Bible from the extra-lingual world of meaning outside the text. "In both of the cases the Bible's power to unfold a world that the reader could risk inhabiting – a world beyond the Bible's background, on the one hand, and literary conventions, on the other – is unfortunately lost." (Wallace, 1995, 51). New Yale theology has the same concern, but in its attempt to reach that Biblical world it prefers Barthian theology to Ricœurian philosophy.

The New Yale Theology (Frei, Lindbeck, Holmer, Kelsey) calls itself "post-liberal" and even "post-foundational". For them this means "emphasis on the narrated world of the biblical texts as the primary medium for the theological reflection. Scripture is not a reference point alongside "common human experience or the "constructive imagination" for doing theology, but the definitive source for all theological work." (Ibid., 89) Theology is the grammar of the Christian faith and describes the intra-biblical rules con-

tained in the master concepts like God, Christ and Church - located in the Biblical stories – that guide the church’s appropriation of its rich spiritual and doctrinal heritage. Theology “does not substitute new concepts for those in the [biblical] story, for that again is not an improvement but is invariably a radically different replacement. One might say that a new concept usually changes the entire grammar.” This intra-textual attitude is post-foundational because it results in the vivid rejection of “theological liberalism’s (alleged) commitment to the foundational enterprise of validating traditional theological claims by appeals to philosophical criteria of truth and rationality”. (Ibid., 94) There is no extra biblical or ontological foundation that can “prove” the truth or falsity of the Christian witness. Apologetics are permitted, but on an *ad hoc* and not on a systematic basis.

The question then for the Yale school is: Can there be any basis for truth outside the Bible? And the answer is No. Wallace holds that the Yale school is so preoccupied with these truth claims of foundationalism – in a strong and in a weak sense – that “its complaint against liberal theology is like a slippery cable that runs throughout the whole argument. As such it is impossible to grasp with confidence”. (Ibid., 97) Furthermore in its *ad hoc* apologetics, it “uses a variety of concepts and ideas from the other discipline in order to clarify – if not actually to ground – its own post-liberal proposals” (ibid., 88). On the whole Wallace finds it “difficult to reconcile the Yale school’s intra-biblical hermeneutics with its relativist notion of truth.” This can be related to the fact that Karl Barth is considered as virtually the only theologian that can support Yale’s post-liberal narrative theology, because “sometimes Barth is used in a way that is absolutist (“the religion instantiated in Scripture defines truth”) and sometimes relativist (“notions of truth are incommensurable”).” (Ibid., 108) Yale’s focus on the Bible text with its own integrity<sup>3</sup>, lays such a heavy emphasis on the “right” notions of truth that this can easily lead into (postmodern) epistemological confusion in which much attention is paid to truth claims while normativity is endangered to disappear more or less out of sight.

Yale theologians consider Ricœur “a strong foundationalist who supports his theological hermeneutic by a prior philosophical hermeneutic that makes a general theory about common religious experience – the experience of the “central self” – the true referent of the biblical stories.” (Ibid. 97) His “experiential-expressivist understanding of religion” based on “the all determining experience of the sovereign ‘central self’ ” (ibid.) would be prior to and governing the understanding of the text. I think this critique pertains more to

Gadamer's hermeneutics than to Ricoeur's treatment of the text and the world it unfolds. As we have seen above, Ricoeur's use of dialectics leaves plenty of room for new and unexpected insights and even new "foundations" coming from the text that is interpreted. In an article called "Myth as the Bearer of Possible Worlds", Ricoeur says, "It was in fact Karl Barth who first taught me that the subject is not a centralizing master but rather a disciple or auditor of a language larger than itself."<sup>4</sup> Now, Barth's theology being thoroughly Christocentric, his central theme is Christ as the Word of God revealed in the language of the Biblical texts and, therefore, the basic entity of Barth's theology is the Word. For Ricoeur, on the other hand, the basic entity of general or philosophical hermeneutics as well as particular, "regional" or applied hermeneutics, and also Biblical hermeneutics, is not the word but the sentence. Well then, will the dialectics of meaning and event, that are operative in this basic entity of language, force the Bible texts in a direction that was predetermined by the reader or is it exactly the other way around in Ricoeur's textual hermeneutics, and what does that mean for the interpretation of the Bible?

### **Ricoeur's Bible interpretation**

In *Du texte à l'action* Ricoeur deals with the relation of general and Biblical hermeneutics.<sup>5</sup> Biblical hermeneutics is a particular case of general hermeneutics and as such in some way is subordinate to general hermeneutics. On the other hand, however, this subordination is reversed. Because of the "matter" that this text presents, Biblical hermeneutics is completely unique and may even employ general hermeneutics for its own purposes, as its own *organon*.

### **General hermeneutics applied to Bible interpretation**

First of all, general hermeneutics give clear insight in the structures as well as in the genesis and tradition of the text by means of which the matter of this text – the Bible - unfolds itself.

The credo that is expressed in various documents is closely connected to the different forms and structures of discourse. Pentateuch and Gospel have a narrative structure, prophecy has a predicting prophetic structure, and finally parable and hymn have a poetic structure. This leads to contrasts and tensions within the creed. The narrative structure is related with the theology that announces JHWH as acting in a history of liberation, first in small

units, and then centered around the core event of the Exodus and reception of the Torah as one big story. In the prophetic structure the God of the Exodus becomes God of the exile. Tensions are made fertile. God calls for trust and employs lethal threat by means of punishing evil. Prophecy makes salvation available again for a small remnant at the other side of a dark abyss. The God of the past becomes God of the future with new trauma's and new liberations. Many more forms and structures of discourse are present in Scripture in which God appears in different ways. In legislation and proverbs He is the Hero of wrath, of compassion and of the covenant. In wisdom literature He is encountered in a cosmic order that precedes man as a person and has no knowledge of "me". In the psalms He is addressed in an I-Thou relation wherein glorification, lament and thanksgiving find an address. God's revelation in Scriptures is performed in all these different forms in different ways, and this revelation cannot be understood or organized exhaustively. Structural analysis helps to trace this multiplicity of structures of revelation and thus puts itself in service of and subordinates itself to this matter of the text. Ricœur: "Perhaps an exhaustive inquiry, if possible, would reveal that all forms of discourse form together a circular system and that the theological contents of each of them receives its meaning from this complete composition of forms. Religious language would then appear as a many-voiced language supported by the circularity of the forms. But probably this hypothesis cannot be verified and would only give the completion of the canon some sort of necessity that cannot be harmonized with what should stay a coincidence of the text's history. Anyway, this hypothesis is coherent with the central theme of our current analysis, i.e., that the finite work we call 'Bible' is a limited space for interpretation in which the theological meanings correlate with the forms of discourse. And then it is not possible to interpret these meanings without taking the long detour of the structural explanation of the forms." (Ricœur, 1986, 123)

So general hermeneutics has shown us the importance of structural analysis in Bible interpretation, but warns us as well that we should always be aware of the fact that the word has become scripture. The Word is always intimately related to scripture. Jesus interprets the Torah, Paul interprets the Christ events in the light of Old Testament regulations. The word has to be preceded by a written text. "In this sense Christianity is from its very beginning exegesis". But this is not all. The new proclamation becomes scripture as well until it is closed by the Church in a new canon. Christian proclamation is based on interpreted witnesses from Old and New Testament by the

first congregations. Here is distance – proper to scripture – and a moment of hermeneutical freedom as it is expressed by the four Gospels. Word (in the sense of word event) and scripture (in the sense of fixed discourse) are related in the proclamation. The word can mediate between two scriptures as Jesus mediated between Old and New Testament, and scripture can mediate between two words as the Gospel mediates between the preaching of the first congregation and contemporary preaching. This chain makes tradition possible. Scripture gives the distance that unties the message from its original speech situation. “Thanks to scripture the word reaches us as well by means of its own ‘sense’ and by means of the ‘matter’ that is unfolded in this text and no longer by means of the voice of its proclaimer.” (Ibid., 124) This is how it works with all texts and tradition, also the Biblical one. What is specific to the Biblical word and scripture is not to be found in the way of its transmission but in the very matter that is “working” in this text.

### **General hermeneutics in service of Bible interpretation**

So it is the general hermeneutical category of “the matter of the text” that Gadamer already wanted to make as strong as possible, in order to be able to bridge the hermeneutical gap between alienation and appropriation, that also for Ricœur is of utmost importance. Not only in general but also in biblical hermeneutics. The matter of the text is the world that this text is unfolding in front of itself. But unlike Gadamer the distance between text and reader does not have to be overcome as quickly as possible, but is made fertile by Ricœur. The world of the text takes distance – in poetry, in literature – from the daily reality of normal discourse. And instead of bridging the gap by means of our own interpretation to avoid alienation, the matter of the text is given full weight and takes over the leading position, no matter how alienating this matter may be. This is the point where biblical hermeneutics employs general hermeneutics as her own *organon* or intellectual instrument and where we will be liberated from several very dominant illusions.

First of all, we need not give in to “the seduction to introduce in advance all sorts of existential categories of understanding to counterbalance possible excesses of the structural analysis.” The only assignment of structural analysis is to unfold the world of being that is the matter of the text, not to call for any decision on the part of the reader. Therefore, the Kingdom of God, the new covenant, and rebirth are located above and before all personal feelings, faith or unbelief. It is the objectivity of the new being that the text offers us. Second illusion to overcome: the priority of the matter of the text above any-



thing else also “means the end of posing the problem of the inspiration of the Scriptures in terms of psychology, as if the sense would be whispered into the ears of the author, who would then project himself again into the text and its representations. If ever the Bible may be called revelation, this only pertains to the ‘matter’ that it presents: the new being that is unfolded.” This new being is revelation related to the whole of reality in which my existence and history has a place as well. It is mediated by means of the structures of the texts, not by means of all sorts of psychological intentions. Therefore, the third consequence of a theological application of general hermeneutics is that there is in the world of the Bible texts “no priority of personal aspects of the I-Thou form in the relation of God and man.” Apart from these personal aspects there are many other aspects that call for attention: cosmic aspects, the biblical world being a creation; communal aspects, a people; historic-cultural aspects, the Kingdom of God in which Israel takes part. A fourth and final implication of a theological application of the general hermeneutical category of the world of the text is this: “the world of ‘literary’ text is a projected world, that takes a distance from daily routine in a poetic way. Is not this particularly true for the new being that is projected and proposed by the Bible? This new being breaks through in the world of normal experience, its power is an opening poetical force inherent in the matter of the text.” (Ibid., 126/7) The force of Scripture opens in the world of daily reality the reality of the possible, appealing to our most inner capacities rooted in the deepest sense of the Kingdom that comes not from us but from God.

### **The specific matter of the Bible text**

Well then, by applying general hermeneutics without any reserve to biblical hermeneutics, a general hermeneutical category like “the world of the text” or “the matter of the text” becomes *organon*, instrument of biblical hermeneutics. Thus the specific character of the biblical “matter” comes to light, is the text we call Scripture Word of God in its renewing and opening poetic force. The most central “referents” in this specific text are of course God and Jesus.

The referent “God” is described by Ricœur as “the coordinator of the many different forms of the biblical discourse and at the same time the point where something escapes, the index of incompleteness of all these partial pieces of discourse. In this sense the word ‘God’ does not function as a philosophical concept, as the concept of being – in medieval or Heideggerian sense – nor as a religious name of the being. The word God says more. ...

To understand the word God it is necessary to follow the arrow of the sense of this word in its double power: that of collecting all meanings that have resulted from the different forms of biblical discourse and that of opening an horizon that escapes the enclosure of this discourse". (Ibid., 129) The same pertains to the word "Christ" that furthermore adds another fundamental symbol: "the symbol of sacrificial love, of a love that is stronger than death. The function of the proclamation of Cross and Resurrection is to give to the word God a condensation that is not inherent in the word 'being'. That meaning contains the notion of His relation with us, being merciful, and our relation with Him, being ultimately engaged and fully grateful." (Ibid., 129)

God and Christ belong to the world of the text that is unfolded by biblical hermeneutics, a particular case of general hermeneutics to be sure, but also completely unique. Particular because "the new being of which the text speaks is nowhere else to be found than in the world of this text". Unique because "all different forms of discourse have their reference in a Name that is the point of intersection as well as index of the incompleteness of all our discourse on God and that has become solidary with the meaningful event that is proclaimed as Resurrection." (Ibid., 129) Biblical hermeneutics then has something unique to say, because the world of its text and its matter are unique.

And so a lot is offered to me by and through the world of the Bible text. However, it would all remain inoperative if I did not appropriate it by means of "constantly renewed interpretation of the core events" of Exodus and Resurrection. "These liberating events open and disclose for me the very possibility of my own freedom and thus they become for me word of God." (Ibid., 131) And this hermeneutical character of faith that consists of the appropriation of the matter of the text takes me beyond myself and my idealism. To understand oneself before the text implies distance to oneself, self-criticism, losing and finding oneself. It also means criticism of religion, hermeneutics of suspicion, deconstruction of prejudices that prevent me from entering the world of the text. And it finally means new room for creative imagination, for the game, for metamorphosis: "... the text first speaks to my imagination and thus presents to me the different images of my liberation" (ibid., 133). The matter of the text surpasses and precedes my self-understanding and decisions in relation to the text, and it is through my poetic imagination first of all and not through my will that the new being will break through in me.

## Surplus of meaning

Gadamer and Ricœur may be very close in their respective approach of ancient texts – especially the threefold structure of understanding looks similar – and yet there is one important difference between their hermeneutical theories. Gadamer took his starting point with Heidegger in being and, as tradition is rooted in being, tradition provides for the glasses to look at the texts. Of course traditions may change, but then again it is still tradition – i.e. the reader - that serves as a basis for interpretation. For Ricœur this basis is the text itself. The text has ontological priority on the reader, and its meaning reaches the reader through the matter of this text. When the text is the Bible and its matter the Kingdom of God, then the reader with his traditions and idealisms, is surpassed; and even being, as a philosophical concept or religious name, is surpassed by the new being coming from God, by God him/her self, who is considered as point of collection *and* escape of all meaning. This text has its own meaning that may be very different from everything that man has ever read in it. This text - like any text - has a surplus of meaning, but the surplus of this particular text is one that can enrich humankind, because it is related to new being coming from God.

Now, in his reliance on the general hermeneutical categories, as the world and the matter of the text, Ricœur surpasses modernity in its turn to the subject. He had already turned the Cartesian *Cogito* upside down and called it a second Copernican revolution. “I am, not because I think; I think because I am”. Thinking is rooted in being, and being is not rooted in thinking. Ricœur remains modern however in his phenomenological search for the deepest layers of meaning in the matter of the text, not in a Kantian way - although he respects its limits - but in a dialectical way. In his reliance on the Bible text, he even surpasses the latest modernity, because some aspects of this matter have to remain alien and will be revealed to humankind in God’s time. This is not postmodern, because hope for the coming of the Kingdom is not denied, and truth may be considered relative but not irrelevant because it lacks a reliable basis. The basis is given as new being by the matter of the text. And here Ricœur resembles an acrobat balancing on a tight rope. He often speaks of his hermeneutical phenomenology in terms of wager and risk<sup>6</sup>. Understandably so, because it is quite easy to fall off on both sides. Is Ricœur post-liberal? I would say yes, because it is not the free will that chooses a theory of truth or logical system and is therefore decisive in hermeneutics, but it is the matter of the text that appeals to our imagination. Here Ricœur is very near to the New Yale Theology. Is Ricœur post-

foundational? Here I would say no, not due to an intellectually designed foundation in the “central self”, but because some new foundation is provided for by the matter of the text, the Kingdom of God. And although we cannot have exhaustive knowledge of this new basis, that does not mean that the new being unfolded by the Bible text is no basis at all for truth and our partial knowledge thereof.

There is one theme to which Ricoeur draws attention that I find rather unique for the Hebrew Bible, something I do not find in the main sources of other world religions. That is that God is encountered in a cosmic order that precedes man as a person and that has no knowledge of “me”. We are liberated from the illusion that in the Bible everything concentrates on subjective existential choice. There is no priority of personal aspects of the I-Thou form in the relation of God and man. There are many other aspects that call for attention apart from the personal ones. The new being of the text, the Kingdom of God, is offered by the text in a poetic way by which it precedes, surpasses and therefore does not depend on psychological intention, individual faith or existential decision. One way or another this fact is connected to the, what I would call, deepest imaginable layer of meaning in the matter of the Bible text: the self sacrificial love that is stronger than death. Here is a surplus of meaning that is hard to follow and even harder to bring into practice. But I think it is exactly at this point where a viable alternative for postmodern nihilism is beginning to take shape.

## **Hebrew thought compared with Greek, Boman**

In his study, *Hebrew thought compared with Greek*<sup>7</sup>, Thorleif Boman refers to passages from the whole historical range of the Hebrew Bible texts while he concentrates especially on Plato as the best representative of Greek thinking and as the author who is the nearest to Hebrew patterns of thought. Boman proceeds in his study by means of five predominant distinctions in order to characterize both ways of thinking. We will first concentrate on three of them: dynamic and static thinking; impression and appearance; and finally time and space.

## Dynamic and static thinking

The first and most obvious difference between Hebrew and Greek thinking is that Hebrew thinking is dynamic and Greek thinking more static in character. Or, as Boman says, the former is more based on movement and the latter on rest. Even the Hebrew verbs of inaction have a dynamic character. "Motion and standing are not opposites as they are for us, but they are so closely related to one another that together they can form a unity. Movement is carried through to a standstill, or seen from the other side, standing is viewed as a result of a rising or a placing." (Boman, 1970, 29) Boman illustrates this unity of meaning with verbs like *amadh* - to stand - and *jashab* - to sit.

The same pattern pertains to verbs that indicate a condition or a quality – the stative verbs - that in our view express a state of being. In Hebrew "these verbs designate first of all the 'becoming' of the conditions or qualities in question"(ibid., 31), although the "being" of the latter is not excluded. Both "becoming" and "being" together produce a third, more dynamic, reality of "effecting". The Hebrew verb *or* not only means to become and to be bright, but also to make light effective, to illuminate. "The distinction between becoming and being, which is so meaningful for us and even more so for the Greeks, appears to have been irrelevant to the Hebrews or to have been experienced by them as a unity."(Ibid., 33) Relevant to the Hebrew mind is the degree and the activity contained in a verb, also in stative verbs of which Hebrew language, in contrast to Greek and derived languages, have a great many. "We have to presuppose, therefore, that the verbal idea in Hebrew stative verbs is always living and palpable even when we are not able because of poverty of expression either to repeat it or to feel it with them." (Ibid., 34).

In contrast to this dynamic and finite movement in almost everything, the Hebrew language also gives expression to "that what is", even to being related to infinity. It does so by means of the so-called *noun clause*, in which the verb "to be" is absent and yet "being" is described as a unity. "Every sentence, the subject as well as the predicate of which is a noun or noun equivalent is called a noun clause, while in a verbal clause the predicate is a finite verb. ... The noun clause, the predicate of which is a substantive, offers something fixed, [enduring] not active, in short a 'being'; the verbal clause on the other hand asserts something moving and in flux, an event, an action." (Ibid., 35) In a noun clause the identity of the subject and the predicate is expressed. A thing or a person is not predetermined by some general

and abstract platonic “idea”, on the contrary, a thing *is* its material, measure, or predicate. Form and material (or measure, predicate) *are* a unity. *Hamitz-beah ‘ets* – the altar [was] wood. This altar is not a specific variant of altars, that is a wooden one. It is there completely for itself: this wooden altar. A copper altar would be a wholly new affair. *JHWH Elohenu*, JHWH [is] our God and his relation with other peoples needs a new description, *JHWH echad*, JHWH [is] one, that He can be different is inconceivable.

So the “formal logical state of being” (a rather Greek expression that Boman uses here) is expressed by means of the noun clause, by means of the *omission* of the verb “to be”. With this omission is indicated that “being” surpasses any kind of being that can be expressed by means of language and at the same time that this being is steady, enduring, even infinite. However, being or existence is also expressed by means of the verb *haya* which brings it into the human realm. *Haya* “in distinction to our verb ‘to be’ ... is a true verb with full verbal force” (ibid., 38). It has the three meanings we saw occur before in internally active (stative) verbs : becoming, being and effecting and “it is best understood in ‘the being’ of an active person, since the intrinsic value of this being is determined by the subject. The most important subject for Israel is God and so the question concentrates on the *haya* of God. Now, ‘analytical’ judgments about God, as well as other objects, that is: judgments where for the Israelite the predicate inheres in the subject are not expressed by *haya* but by noun clauses. ... The *haya* of God is to act as God, to deal as God, and to carry in effect as God. Since He did this to a particular degree in leading the nation out of Egypt, JHWH’s being is tied up with this manifestation of grace and power” (Ibid., 46/7). Wherever and whenever this grace and power is manifested, God’s *haya* is revealed. Likewise the *haya* of the nation is not created with the Exodus but it shows itself in the obedience to God’s commands. And so the word, the hand and Spirit of God are effective in their existence as well as in the people’s response. Not at rest, but thoroughly dynamic.

The world that is of interest for the Hebrew mind, *this* world in which God acts – rooted as it may be in infinite being – is a dynamic world, full of power and grace, effective existence and most of all: being *in movement*. And this is very different from the Greek ideal searching for immutable knowledge of the real state of affairs, the high platonic ideal, i.e. the unchanging “idea” which is, in sharp contrast to the lower world of the senses, *at rest*. And although Plato’s concept of the “Idea”, comprising many lower forms of existence, may seem to reflect the Hebrew preference of thinking in terms

of unity and collectivity being more than its constituting parts, the way Hebrews and Greeks move within these collectivities differs significantly. This can be shown by the difference of meaning between *dabar* and *logos*, the former being the Hebrew and the latter the Greek word for “word”. The Hebrew *dabar* is located in the following sequence: to drive forward – to speak – Word – Deed. The Greek *logos* is located in another sequence: to gather, arrange (*lego* - to collect); to speak (*legomai*), reckon, think – Word – Reason. “... *logos* expresses the mental function that is highest according to Greek understanding. ... *dabar* performs the same service for the Israelites; Therefore, these two words teach us what the two peoples considered primary and essential in mental life: on the one [Hebrew] side the dynamic, masterful, energetic; on the other [Greek] side the ordered, moderate, thought out, calculated, meaningful, rational”. (Ibid., 68)

### **Impression and appearance**

As can be expected from the previous paragraph, the vivid impression a thing or a person leaves in life experience is more important for the Hebrew mind than its outward “photographic” appearance. When, for instance, buildings are described, the description focuses on the inner parts of the building, the plan of its compartments, the material the different elements are made of, and the way it was constructed. This pertains to the bigger constructions like Noah’s Ark, the tabernacle, or Salomon’s temple, but also to the smaller ones as an altar, or the Ark of the Covenant. “The edifice is thus not a restful harmonious unity in the beauty of whose lines the eye finds joy, but it is something dynamic and living, a human accomplishment; to be affected by it and to admire it, this is his joy and desire.”(Ibid., 76) The same can be said when the attention is focused on human beings. “When considering man, the Israelite first seeks his qualities.” Outward appearance is related to inner qualities, as Boman shows extensively with the descriptions of the human body in the Song of Salomon. When the neck, the nose, and even the breasts of the bride are compared to a tower, this is done to praise her chastity, purity and incessant vigilance; while her appearance as an aromatic lily among brambles points at her loving charm “better than wine”. “Beauty is not form but [effective] charm” (ibid., 83) and this goes for the bridegroom as well. When his eyes are compared to “doves beside of springs of water”, his purity and faithfulness is praised, while his appearance “like the cedars of Lebanon” hints at his power through impressive size.

“Beauty is spirituality revealed in material objects” (ibid., 85). This definition that pertains to both human and divine beauty can be used for both Hebrews and Greeks. It is only the kind of sensuous motive working in this beauty that is very different for the Hebrew and for the Greek mind. “For the Greeks, beauty lies in the plastic and consequently in the tranquil, moderate and harmonious expression of the intellectual motive.”(Ibid., 85) Music and rhythm are given to man to bring harmony to disharmony in the soul, says Plato in *Timeaus*. And sculpture is partly successful in imitating the highest beauty of form in the platonic “idea” in which beauty, through the stage of clear geometrical form, is raised into the religious realm. “Spirituality is a necessary condition of perfect rest, for movement and alternation belong to the sensuous; when the sensuous is more and more put off, a kind of spiritual or ethereal corporeity remains as a substratum for the eternal, the immutable, and immobile. This beauty is in itself at the same time the true and the real.” (Ibid., 86) For the Israelites, on the other hand, beauty, that which is *tobh* – good – *begins* in the sensuous. “That is beautiful first of all, which accomplishes its definition and fulfils its purpose. ... Accordingly ‘beautiful’ and ‘good’ are synonyms. ... The Israelite finds the beautiful in that which lives and plays in excitement and rhythm, in charm and grace, but also in particular in power and authority. It is not form and configuration which mediate the experience of beauty, as for the Greeks, but the sensations of light, color, voice, sound, tone, smell and taste ... man’s beauty is found in his pre-eminent qualities which are expressed by means of the body in a dynamic way” (Ibid. 87). And so the Israelite can even find beauty in the formless dreadful fire and the wrath of God, as well as in the life giving light and tender Divine grace (cf. ibid., 89).

Characteristic in this Hebrew “impressionistic” way of experiencing reality, life and God is that human existence and experience stand model for the being of these entities and are at the same time surpassed by them. When the Scriptures speak of God’s wrath and anger, they refer to his nostrils as the location where this anger becomes manifest, is effective. But this does not mean that God is anthropomorphic in his appearance. What matters is the impression this appearance makes on the believer. The images of God in the Bible are not really visual. They are much more “motor, dynamic, auditive” (ibid.,108), in short: *movement*. The Greeks on the other hand consider reality “as an objective, given quantity with which our senses, particularly our sight, bring us into contact” (ibid., 113). They do not tell stories nor describe in a direct manner what their impressions are. We have to conclude what



impressed them by what they describe: that what they saw (*theoria* = sight) in outward appearances of harmonious order and of the ineffable, in short, that what is in *rest*.

## **Time and space**

When it comes to the conception and the experience of time and space, these *a priori* pure forms of intuition that Kant called the lenses through which man sees reality, Hebrews and Greeks differ significantly again. Grossly speaking, one could say that Hebrews live in space as they live in time, while the Greeks conceive of time in terms of space. We will begin with time, the primordial mode of thought for Hebrew mind, and then we will spend some time on space which has been more fundamental for the modeling of the Greek mind. The Hebrew preference for time over space and the Greek preference for space over time will again, considering what we have seen in the previous paragraphs, not come as a surprise.

## **Time as the Hebrew primordial mode of thought**

The Hebrews did not speak of circular lines or orbits of sun moon and stars around the earth by which they measured time, they spoke of the “heavenly luminaries”. True, Hebrews also knew what time it was with a little help from the sun, but they did so in an entirely different way than the Greeks. The Greeks spoke of sun, moon and stars as heavenly bodies, outward appearances in space, and by means of determination of their exact position in space they could “measure” the time, tell what time it was. The Hebrews could tell you the time by experiencing the intensity of light coming from the *me'oroth* - lamps and the *orim* – the lights above, that illuminate and give warmth. However, time is not measured by these external entities. “Time is determined by its content, and since light is authoritative and decisive, the light was called ‘day’ and the darkness ‘night’ even before the creation of the heavenly luminaries (Gen. 1,5).” (Ibid., 131) As God saw that the light was good and separated light from darkness, light is also synonym with goodness, good fortune, and God’s grace; and darkness with evil, disaster and God’s wrath. And so the heavenly luminaries are symbols of God’s kindness, power and glory. They give together with other qualities in nature an indication of the sacred seasons, the date of secular times, and let man experience the time of the day.

Now, these heavenly luminaries “thus excite various sensations in which they define time objectively; to this corresponds man’s subjective perception of time” (ibid., 133). This keen sensation of time is connected with bodily rhythms, present not only in man but in everything that is alive and of course closely related to the movement of the heavenly luminaries reflected by their rhythms of intensity. Bodily rhythms as sleep and wakefulness, work and rest, eating, heart-beat, pulse-beat, and respiration can give an impression of a point in or an interval of time without referring to any sort of spatial movement. What is really experienced and comes to life in the rhythms of the human body and of the intensity of the heavenly luminaries are time-rhythms and not time-movements. Life cycles are not experienced nor described as lines in space but as rhythms in time. “They thought of the circular course as the eternal rhythm of beginning, continuation, return to the beginning.” And they did not learn it from the course of the sun but “from the round dance and their rotating themselves in the dance”. (Ibid., 134) Life is full of these rhythms: in speech, unaccented - accented - unaccented; or like the pulse-beat weak - strong - weak. As for the period of day and night, the rhythm for the Hebrews was dull - bright - dull, or morning - evening - morning; the week has the greater rhythm of rest day - workdays - rest day and so has the month the rhythm of new moon - full moon - new moon which correlates with the daily rhythm of dull - bright - dull. The year ends and begins after the harvest time when the strength of the year was at its lowest level. And this basic rhythm of weak - strong - weak also returns in man’s entire life span: earth - life - return to the earth. (Ibid., 135) So the same pattern that applies to the smallest units of time is also applied to the bigger units of time, and even eternity. First we have the return of something to its beginning, then we have recurrence, and from this repetition the idea of duration is born. The pulse-beat of the heart serves as a model for the rhythm of day and night, that passes into the rhythm of week, month and year. And the seven beat rhythm of the week is easily continued in the rhythm of the years with each seventh year a sabbath year and every fiftieth year a jubilee year. For the Israelites, (calculable) time is something qualitative, “because for them time is determined by its content.” (Ibid., 137)

If time is not conceived of spatially, but experienced as rhythm, in the Hebrew mind, what then does this mean for Hebrew life? As space was the “container” for the Greeks in which the whole of reality was stored, arranged and experienced, time had a similar function for the Hebrews. However, space can more easily be divided in parts and still have meaning than time.

Rhythm and beat are a function of time and never stand on themselves. In music for instance they remain the same throughout the entire piece comprising many bars with notes. Now, what counts in music is not one isolated single bar but the whole flow of the melody experienced as a coherent whole. Once the piece of music is performed it can be performed differently on other future occasions, but *this* performance can never be altered. It stands for itself; but through its musical qualities as rhythm, melody, harmony it will always be connected to all future performances. Therefore, through the different rhythms of life, the Israelites were connected to everything that had happened and would still happen in life. And this produced a more solid unity of consciousness than in the case of space being the basic organizing principle, or primary mode of thought. "The life of a man encompasses a small part of the history of existence, the life of a people a greater part, the life of humanity a still greater part, but the life of God encompasses everything. God's consciousness is a world consciousness in which everything that takes place is treasured and held fast in the eternal and is therefore as indestructible as 'matter'. ... For the Israelites the world was transitory but the words (and deeds) of JHWH were eternal." (Ibid., 139)

"We see the spatial and hear the temporal." (Ibid., 142) As the Greeks paid special attention to the content of space, i.e. the thing, the Hebrews valued more the content of time, i.e. the event. "... our distinction of past, present and future, like the Greek conception of time in general, is much more a matter of space than of time. ... the Greeks employ space as the primary mode of thought, considering it so important that they model the other mode of thought, time, in its image". The Hebrews, on the other hand, time being defined by its content, "view what happens principally from the standpoint of completed and incomplete action". Consequently the Hebrew verb knows two tenses, the perfect and the imperfect. And here it is the judgment of *the speaker* that is decisive: the action can be considered as concluded (perfect tense) or still in process of development (imperfect tense). Instead of objectively moving actions around in space or along a time line, the speaker performs personal empathy with the action in question and then considers it as completed in time or not yet. (Ibid., 144/5) And this pertains to the Hebrew experience of "eternity" as well. Our notion of eternity that we inherited from Plato is basically the same thing as the divine beyond (*Jenseits* in German) being more a spatial than a temporal reality. "Hebrew equivalents for eternity are temporal to the extent that they do not signify things beyond but things pertaining to this life." *Olam* - eternity – backward to an *archè* or

hoary antiquity as well as forward to a *telos* or boundless future – is therefore also a temporal reality related to the speaker: “time extending so far that it is lost to our sight and comprehension in darkness and invisibility.” Time is not “transcended”, completely surpassed or changed into something totally else in a reality beyond a certain borderline we define as eternity. Eternity - or better, infinity - is simply so far away that it becomes impossible for man to experience any direct contemporaneity with it. *Olam* is not an endlessly long time in the linear or spatial sense; it is “simply a boundless time.” (Ibid., 151) In the meantime human lives move somewhere between the completed and incomplete actions in time. The presence is where the two tenses overlap, and this too is characterized by action and dynamics. In the Hebrew mind, the verb is more important than the noun<sup>8</sup>. There is a lot of work to do. *Sjema jishrael* – “The first [commandment] is ‘Hear O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one; you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.’ The second is this, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ There is no other commandment greater than these” (Mark 12, 28-31)

### **Space as the Greek primordial mode of thought**

Boman holds that the Western, i.e. Greek, conception of time is so common that most of us, even philosophers, use it uncritically. “Western minds represent time as a straight line upon which we stand with our gaze directed forward; before us we have the future, behind us we have the past. On this line we can unequivocally define all tenses by means of points. ... At first one does not think about whether this straight line is finite or infinite, for all our attention is concentrated upon the present and upon the times that are grouped about it; however, the line is obviously without limit, and that is true for the forward direction as it is for the backward.” (Ibid. 124) As we have seen before, the Greek verb has developed many tenses to indicate very precisely all the spots, or portions of time-space, on this line of time. On the other hand, when we want to measure time, we use the apparently circular movement of the sun around the earth as a standard – limited and unbounded at the same time - and represent it by means of a (sun)clock: hands indicating the different points on a (half)circle.

Aristotle combined the two conceptions of time – the cyclical, cosmological and measurable time on the one hand, and the linear, psychological or grammatical time on the other - in the following definition of time: “time is

the continuous dimension of successive movement.” (Ibid. 125) And so we have to represent time as a line, or as movement along a line, either linear or circular, or even both like in a spiral. The line itself as an external feature of space is more important than its specific occurrence and content. And so time is conceived of spatially here. A point in time, a segment of time, a time span, they all refer to a portion of a line, time has a dimension – it can be divided into different time. Plato distinguished - in a very Greek way - between forms of time and parts of time, and he also conceived of time as a movement. For Plato “time is only a pictorial, moving imitation of immovable and unalterable eternity which presents perfection. ... time is as unbounded as the world, and just as finite; the characteristic feature of eternity, however, is not its possible boundless temporal extension but the divine content with which it is filled. It follows, therefore, that eternity, too, is something spatial, identical with the boundless sea of sublime beauty ...” The form of time we call eternity may be spatial for Plato. We must, however, realize that for him “eternity is spatial not in the sense that it is three-dimensional, and still less four-dimensional, but only in the sense that it is without alteration, hence without unrest, disturbance, privation, decay, and destruction. The ‘tooth of time’ does not gnaw on it.” (Ibid., 128) In contrast to the Hebrew *olam*, time, related to change and transitoriness, decay and destruction, is vastly inferior to space for Aristotle and Plato alike. That which exists eternally, i.e. the geometrical form, the ideal platonic “idea”, the Divine, belongs to space and not to time.

Correspondingly, form (as outward appearance) and content (reflected in inner impression) are strictly separated in the Greek mind, a distinction that makes no sense to the Hebrew mind at all. Pure form (outlines or contours) without content is of no interest, and consequently there is no word in Hebrew to describe it. For Kant, on the other hand, pure form forms the basis of our intuition of space. “If we take no account of the empirical content in objects, they are left, according to Kant, [as] empty forms which represent space intuitively; with the help of such pure forms (points, lines, triangles, etc.) geometry defines the properties of space” (Ibid., 154). The starting point for Kant was sense experience, but this was transcended by intuition which gave the intuition of space even more validity because it was independent of concrete experience. And yet, unlike Plato, who had his starting point in the eternal – one thinks of Ideas intuitively, one has union with the eternal (ibid. 155) – Kant remains tied to the sensual world. Pure form - sharp outlines and clear contours - is a matter of space and visible delinea-

tion; and in Greek thinking, this can go very far. “The significance of the outline and form of objects increases to the extent to which all perception is disregarded as the Greek ideal requires or as the Kantian ideal requires still more” (ibid., 157). For the Hebrew mind, however, no outline is as sharp as we imagine. Reality is always more multi faced than a simple sharp line on paper or in the mind suggests. Furthermore any appearance is determined by its inherent dynamic qualities. And therefore any outline, contour or boundary is something artificial. Israelites do not see contours, they experience reality.

Thus we arrive at the meaning of the word boundary or border which is of crucial importance in a concept like infinity. The Latin word for boundary is *finis*, which comes from *findo* – to split. When a piece of wood is split into two parts and put together again then there is a boundary line between the two halves and this is “a line which takes up no space”(ibid., 157). In Hebrew there is no such thing as an imaginary or mathematical line. A border is always some “thing”, a mountain, a river, a sea; and the border always *implies* or even *includes* the areas being bounded. When the sea is the boundary of the land (Num.34,6), then a part of the water belongs to the land being bordered. The expression “all the borders of Israel” (I Kings 1,3) means the entire land of Israel. A similar expression, *Qetsoth ha’arets*, means not only the ends of the world but includes everything from here to there, i.e. the whole world. For the Hebrew mind a boundary *line* is not a datum of nature or of the physical world. This line is a product of the Greek and European mind, “an imaginary line that *we* have necessarily in order to govern the world practically and theoretically from our suppositions. With the help of boundary lines we make representations of our visual perceptions and arrange them in an orderly way; with the aid of abstract boundary lines, we make representations which we can also define (definition comes from *finis*) and compare with each other. It is in such acts as these that Greek Indo-European logical thinking consists.”(Ibid., 159) However, boundary lines are auxiliary lines that help to delineate reality. They should be erased after their task is completed, because reality is more than can be imagined by whatever artificial means. When we refuse to see this we are bound to run into trouble as becomes clear in the concept of infinity.

The literal meaning of infinity, as we can see now, would then be something like “un-split” or “without dividing line”. And this could be summed up in boundless reality or quantity which in the Greek mind is a contradiction because quantity is always limited. Nevertheless, we know two bound-

less quantities: boundless time (eternity) and boundless space (the universe). “We have further abstracted both of these quantities in the idea of infinity, an idea that has occupied European thinkers far too much.”(Ibid., 159). This concept had to lead into trouble because it was filled quantitatively and not qualitatively. Kant had to get into serious irresolvable problems when he divided reality in two realms: the world of the senses that can be known, and the world of the spirit to which belongs the *Ding an sich* that can never be known as such. And so he ended up with in a whole series of antinomies inherent in the notion of infinity, culminating in two independent worlds that can never be reconciled. However, the dividing line between these worlds is an auxiliary line, something artificial that does not exist as such in reality and should be erased. When preserved, it will produce a serious anomaly: knowledge of the other side is presupposed, because otherwise the line could not have been drawn, but knowledge of the other side is impossible. Infinity becomes in this way an abstract spatial reality – in whatever way it is filled, with spatial dimensions or with platonic beauty - far away and unattainable for the senses and for the mind. The Hebrews do not use this imaginary line, and for them infinity is more naturally related to experience and time. “The boundless may very well be experienced and even thought about as follows: *Every* visual perception is at its sharpest and then diminishes in clarity in all directions until it ends in imperceptibility. There is to be found no trace of a boundary surrounding the field of vision like a circle; the boundless is not the difficult, problematic notion, but the natural, the primary, and the always newly given thing. ... The *born* religious man lives in the infinite and eternal world as his home (Phil. 3,20). It is no accident therefore, that the Semites who can live without boundaries have been responsible for three world-religions; for them infinity or boundlessness is no problem” (Ibid., 160/1)

So, for the Greek mind, the ideal of eternity is immutability which is more related to space than to time; while, for the Hebrew mind, infinity is more a matter of time than a matter of space. Both modes of thought have their problems and restrictions. The Greek mind will ultimately – when the correspondence of being and saying is no longer guaranteed, as in Kant’s epistemological system - end up with *aporia*, logically unsolvable problems. The Hebrew mind has no problem with *aporia* as such. It is part of the awe and the miracle of existence in itself and will lead easier to grief and admiration than to frustration related to failure of the mind. In the mean time, while boundlessness is no problem for the Hebrew mind, the religious realm of infinity can stretch out considerably further both in time and space than when

artificial boundary lines are constructed *and* preserved. Maybe we could say, that as the Greeks “spatialized time”, the Hebrews “temporalized space”. When space is the primordial mode of thought for the Greeks, that favors the sense of vision this does not mean that hearing was unimportant. The same applies *mutatis mutandis* for the Hebrew preference of time in their thinking. For them seeing is also one of the human senses and as such important. But what may have become clear by now, is that Hebrew *olam* is more related to here and now experience and stretches out to a considerably more extensive reality than the Greek “boundless sea of beauty” as Plato defined eternity.

### **Greek and Hebrew thought, an eternal dichotomy?**

“Being”, says Boman, can be approached in two different ways. “Becoming must have its ground in being; then either the same thing is always happening, or else becoming is something other than previous being. The former is the scientific-mechanic notion founded upon the law of conservation of energy; the latter is a typical religious conception.” (Ibid., 169) The former avoids the difficult problem of becoming, tries to understand its object from a distance by means of the rules of causality, and is thoroughly Greek. The latter is an integral part of the becoming object; understanding proceeds from within by means of experience and is thoroughly Hebrew. This basic attitude is reflected in the Greek preference of geometry, with its spatial treatment of numbers, and the Hebrew preference of algebra and temporal treatment of numbers. The number two, for instance, indicates in Greek thinking especially a two dimensional surface like the square (as three represents the cubic). In Hebrew, on the contrary, the number two – *shenayim* - comes from *shana*, which means to repeat. In historiography, the Greek way is to describe the whole of history from a distance, to think causally and consequently in terms of natural science. “History is an eternal repetition, nothing new happens under the sun” (ibid., 170). In fact the Greek mental life is a-historical. “If God is to be found he must be sought in the unalterable, in mental life, in the Ideas” (ibid., 171). The Hebrew way is to consider each event as unique, to place oneself in the events and become contemporaneous with the events and with the psychic lives of the men and women involved and how they directed themselves forward in thought and will. Here one thinks finally and teleologically. “God revealed himself to the Israelites in history and not in Ideas; he revealed himself when he acted and created. His



being was not learned through propositions but known in action.” (Ibid., 171)

The same line of reasoning can be applied to the two other main distinctions that Boman makes in his book: instrumentalism and symbolism on the one hand, and psychological understanding and logical thinking on the other. Symbolism and logical thinking are the Greek elements in these relations, seeking for immutable knowledge of *how things really are* in big systematic constructions. Instrumentalism and psychological understanding - the Hebrew counterparts - *engage themselves* in a struggle for a better life for one and for all. Basically this distinction comes to the difference of seeing and hearing. Greek thinking is visual: to *see the thing as it is*, is what matters. Hebrew thinking is a matter of hearing: to *hear the word in its being spoken* is what matters. (Cf. *ibid.*, 200/1). Boman has great admiration for both ways of thinking. “The Greeks have given the world the science of history; the Israelites gave the world historical religion. In contrast to all their neighbors both peoples knew what history is; this is no consequence of their mental giftedness, however, for there is another reason.” (Ibid., 170) And this other reason is connected to the different existential roots of the Greek and Hebrew mind.

Is it also possible to reach any kind of synthesis between the two conceptions of reality or modes of thought? Here Boman’s reasoning is more ambiguous. On the one hand, he holds that “it is necessary to keep the two conceptions separate and distinct; if they are mixed, both are corrupted. In modern times this has happened twice: in Hegelianism and in Evolutionism, i.e. the modern belief in progress promulgated science.” (Ibid., 171) And: “Since both of our chief senses, sight and hearing, must pay for their astonishing accomplishments the price of an externally stamped bias, both highly developed peoples of ancient times, Hellas and Israel, could achieve their magnificent contributions to civilization only in virtue of their bias” (*ibid.*, 207). On the other hand, Boman – speaking of the difference of psychological understanding (Hebrew) and logical thinking (Greek) - says: “we mean the two different ways of thinking by means of which the reflecting man is able mentally to appropriate reality; formally speaking they are mutually exclusive, but speaking materially they are complementary” (*ibid.*, 195). And when it comes to our heritage of both Hebrew and Greek thinking (mediated among others by the New Testament) Boman is searching for an outright synthesis. “As their cultural successors and heirs, we can pay them no greater homage than to attend equally to both heritages, to protect them, and, if possible, to

*find a synthesis* between them just as we try to in our lives to make the most of all five senses if we would understand reality and have a thorough grasp of all of it” (ibid., 207, italics mine). According to Boman, this search reflects what happens in Niels Bohr’s quantum mechanics where “some experiments show that the atom has wave structure, and others show that it consists of particles (quanta).” And this means that “the findings of the atomic physics are *complementary*, i.e. they cannot be described without resorting to expressions which are logically irreconcilable.” Boman then holds to the theorem that “reality possesses opposite properties which complete each other”. He therefore ends his book saying: “In that sense, Hebrew and Greek thinking are complementary; the Greeks describe reality as *being*, the Hebrews as *movement*. Reality is, however, both at the same time; this is logically impossible, and yet it is correct.” (Ibid., 208)

In spite of my sympathy for Boman’s work, I have two main objections to its completion. First of all, Boman does not distinguish between the different theories of truth and the resulting logical systems that we have seen in the previous chapters. True, he distinguishes between the Greek conception of truth, *alètès* (literally un-hidden or un-veiled), and the Hebrew conception of truth, expressed with derivatives of the verb *aman* – to be steady, enduring, faithful, trustworthy as in the well known expression *amen* – verily (cf. ibid., 202). But he does not employ the different logical systems that have developed since Frege out the Greek *logos* system with the correspondence of being and saying at its basis, as Wouter Slob so lucidly explains in his dissertation *Verily, I say unto Thee*<sup>9</sup>. In several cases Boman seems to adhere to the correspondence theory of truth wholeheartedly. The Greek way of studying history for instance, at a distance “objectively”, is as legitimate as the Hebrew, more empathic way of subjective engagement. Both ways of naming being result in different findings, find different aspects of truth, but the correspondence of being and saying and truth as such are not criticized. Now, searching for synthesis is dialectics, and this implies a different logical system in which correspondence of being and saying and the status of truth are no longer taken for granted but become issues for battle and, eventually, agreement. To switch between logical systems without any effort to account for the switch weakens the theory. Boman does not explicitly leave the correspondence theory behind. And, although he may have some problems with Kant’s epistemology - Kant using time as an internal and yet spatial, i.e. divisible dimension (cf. ibid.126) – and seems to accept conflicting logical

systems in Niels Bohr's theory (cf. *ibid.* 208), he stays in my view within Kant's mono-logical, basically pre-modern or Greek *logos* theory of truth.

Boman then remains throughout his whole book more Greek than Hebrew in his thinking, and this explains his rather arbitrary use of Greek terms to explain Hebrew notions like the spatial term "eternity", or "eternal" for the temporal notion of *olam*. We think as the Greeks did, and Hebrew thought is the wholly other whom we nevertheless try to grasp by means of our own concepts. Of course, many Hebrew terms are extremely difficult to translate because of the differences in experience and conception in Hebrew and Greek thinking. This is particularly clear when it comes to general and existential notions as time and space. Where one is explained in terms of the other, in spite of the differences in order to grasp the differences, these notions are used as *a priori* pure forms of intuition pertaining to "the total system" in a Greek way. Boman says that the idea of infinity "has occupied European thinkers far too much" but I would say that they did so in the wrong way, to get some kind of control where no control can be obtained. In this way, we pretend to have exhaustive knowledge while in the mean time I cannot get rid of the impression that "something" Hebrew – like Israel's relation with the Indefinable - is lost out of sight.

My second objection follows out of the first and pertains to the fact that Boman calls Hebrew thinking psychological understanding, in contrast to the Greek logical thinking. Here I have the feeling that Hebrew existence is swallowed up in the great Greek logical system of thought of which psychology inhabits just one little compartment. The theory of the existence of the soul, independent of the body, comes from Plato and is thoroughly Greek. Hebrew thinking is much more characterized by unity – of body and soul, individual and collectivity, completed and incomplete action, in short unity of consciousness – and this takes the Hebrew mind much further than what pure psychology is interested in. I think the Hebrew mind, in spite of its emphasis on personal engagement, is much more than mere psychology, just as the Greek mind surpasses the world of the senses. However, this Hebrew surplus is not transcendence in spatial terms of passing an imaginary line that is non-existent in reality. It is being connected through time with reality as whole, comprehensible, expressible for human beings or not. *Rosh hasjana*, New years day, connected to the creation of heaven and earth, is celebrated in the month *Tisjri*, which is the seventh month of the year. It is an indication that before and beyond everything that lies in our field of perception, completely different realities are presupposed to exist. And so real-

ity to which the Hebrew psyche is related surpasses widely what the human psyche can grasp or comprehend. Therefore, it is not psychological intention or existential choice that constitute meaning, but the “objectivity of the new being that the text offers us.” (Ricœur, 1986, 126) We may delay or precipitate the coming of the Kingdom of God, but its coming in itself does not depend on human intention or decision. Its “being” is taken for granted from the very beginning. It means a sign of hope.

Being born and raised in the Judeo-Christian tradition, Hebrew and Greek thinking have equal weight for me and this makes the dialectical process even more exciting. By realizing the equivalence of their mental power, the opposition of their respective modes of thought grows stronger. Let us turn to two contemporary Jewish philosophers, Rosenzweig and Lévinas. Both are thoroughly Western and Hebrew at the same time, and it should be interesting to get an impression of the syntheses they reach in their respective thinking.

## **Jewish philosophy**

Although Western, Greek thinking has led to huge achievements in science, technology and insights in an ever extending reality through the different eras of its history, it nevertheless came more or less to a standstill in post-modern negation and nihilism with all the regressive reactions this has set into motion. I am curious whether the Hebrew consciousness of an extended reality – infinity, *olam* - that surpasses human mind, faith and psyche and that has been there from the beginning, helps Jewish thinkers to avoid the postmodern deadlock. Both Rosenzweig and Lévinas are thoroughly familiar with Western philosophy and lived in the most violent century of Western history, the former during World War I the latter during World War II. Will Western civilization annihilate itself or do these Jewish philosophers see rainbows shining in a dark sky?

## **The Star of Redemption, Rosenzweig**

The *hubris* in Hegel’s Absolute Knowledge or Spirit has been the real evidence of Europe’s philosophical bankruptcy around the year 1800 for Franz Rosenzweig. A bankruptcy that culminated in the First World War in which Rosenzweig served as a soldier. In fact, he wrote *The Star of Redemption* in

the trenches of the battlefield. However – honoring Schopenhauer, Schelling, Nietzsche - I think he also previewed a century before its massive actualization postmodern radical criticism coming to take over Western thought and he reacts in advance by proposing another way. In doing so he does not use the hopeful sign of the rainbow from Noah's Alliance pertaining to humanity as a whole, but he puts Jews and Christians under the Jewish sign of the shining Star of David as a first move of transcending and universalizing Jewish self-centeredness.

### **Revelation: middle word and starting point**

The Massoretes let each Bible book that they had copied and provided with dots and lines to indicate the vocals of the text follow by a tiny little epilogue in which they indicated the exact number of words in the book and the middle word of the book. In this way, they secured the exact copying of the holy texts. A similar sort of precision shows up in Rosenzweig's *Der Stern der Erlösung (The Star of Redemption)*<sup>10</sup>. Franz Rosenzweig (1888 – 1930) took his starting point in the keyword *revelation*, around which he built his whole work that focuses on the Star of David. This starting point and center of his thinking, did not form the beginning of the work, but Rosenzweig placed it in the very center of *The Star of Redemption*. Dealing with revelation, he says: “For verily the Name is not, as unbelief keeps asserting in proud and stubborn emptiness, sound and smoke, but word and fire. The Name must be named and confessed: I believe him.” (Rosenzweig, 1996, 209). From this middle point we have to look backward to what preceded and forward to what will follow. “It is the middle word that dominates the whole work, Rosenzweig will say later on in a commentary on *The Star*” (Rosenzweig, 2000, viii).

### **The symmetrical construction**

*The Star of Redemption* consists of three parts with each an introduction, three books and an epilogue. The first part is called, “The elements or the everlasting proto-world”. The introduction deals with the “possibility to know the all” that philosophy promotes but which is in fact an impossibility while philosophy does so at the price of denying death which is impossible. About the elements themselves – God, world, man, that philosophy pretends to know - we know nothing. Hegel's failure to unite the three elements in one philosophical system illustrated philosophy's general failure to build an

overall system of knowledge of the “all”. Rosenzweig holds that all three elements are independent of each other, they cannot be deduced one from the other nor objectively and exhaustively known. So he describes the elements in the first part with his own meta-language: God or meta-physics in the first book, the world or meta-logic in the second, and man or meta-ethics in the third book. And with these concepts Rosenzweig develops some basic thoughts about God, world and man that move within the “nothing” of knowledge, in the pre-lingual realm of the mathematical operators “yes”, “no” and “and”. Therefore, Rosenzweig uses, in the first part, visible mathematics as his *organon* or reflective tool. Thus the first triangle made up by the three elements emerges and in the epilogue of the first part, called “transition”, the way is prepared for a second and totally different triangle that could describe the relationship between the elements.

The second part – “The road or the ever renewing world” – in fact searches for this inner relationship between the three different elements. The introduction deals with the possibility to experience the miracle that philosophy’s presumption of the knowledge of the “all” had dispelled. But miracles do occur when the elements interact, and the resultant of this activity can be represented by a second triangle. Between God and world, the relation is creation (described in the first book). When God and man are opened towards each other, this is called revelation (described in the second book focusing through the Song of Salomon on love!). Finally man is called to cooperate in the redemption of the world (described in the third book). The *organon* that Rosenzweig uses in this part is more encompassing than visible mathematics. Here hearing and relationship are more important, and therefore grammar and language provide for the set of concepts that will give clarity of thought. Art is also used in this part in a number of contemplations about how creation, revelation and redemption operate in this world. The epilogue called, “threshold”, glances at the third part where the two preceding triangles will be united. “At the end of the first part we stood (more or less passively, waiting) before the transition; here we go (actively) over the threshold of the miracle towards the light”. (Rosenzweig, 2000, xii/xiii)

In the third part – “The figure or the eternal transcendent world” – the elements of the first part and their inner relations in the second are interwoven, and they form as two different triangles together the Star of David. The introduction deals with the possibility to implore by means of prayer the Kingdom of God, and so the *organon* Rosenzweig uses in this part is the liturgy. Jews and Christians both have their different roles to play in this drama and

form “necessary” elements in the eternal truth. The first book describes the fire that keeps burning inside the Star of David and which refers to the eternal life of the Jewish people with a holy land that they do not possess, a holy language they do not speak except for liturgical purposes, and a holy law that they can run away from but never change. Peoples and nations that live *within* these concrete circumstances of life (land, language and law) are living people, and so they die. The Jewish person does not, and therefore is eternal (in the Hebrew sense of *olam*). This is reflected in the Jewish religious festivals that are described by Rosenzweig as feasts of creation, revelation and redemption. The second book deals with the beams of the star referring to the eternal way Christians seem to go, evangelizing and bringing the Gospel of the Holy One throughout the world. For the Jew – living outside of time (in the Greek sense of the word) - the unity of God, of the people, of truth, and of life is dominant. The Christian on the other hand – living on the curve of time - always goes somewhere on two lanes: the Father and the Son, the priest and the saint, the state and the church. Again the religious festivals are analyzed as feasts of creation and revelation. The Christian liberation feasts, however, are celebrated as state festivals. In the third book both elements of the star – fire and beams – are brought together in the idea of eternal truth. God is the truth. What is at stake in the world is the relation between the truth, facts and reality. And man, living in the truth, must be able to say “*amen, verily*”! When these conditions are met, the star of redemption will send the beams of its fire everywhere. And this brings us up to the “gate” – the title of the epilogue – of the Kingdom of God. (Cf. Rosenzweig, 2000, x - xiv)

As in the symmetrical outline of the whole book, Rosenzweig has been meticulously precise in his use of individual words in *The Star of Redemption*. When he ends the epilogue of the first part with the word “miracle” he will deal in the introduction to the second part with the miracle. Likewise the epilogue of the second part ends with the miracle of light, and so he deals in the introduction to the third part with praying for the light of the Kingdom. And so we have to take notice of the very first and the very last word of *The Star*: from death ... to life. This is Rosenzweig’s itinerary. He wants to take his readers from the - by philosophy and theology - undeniable death to the miracle of life with its roots in the love of God. And finally it is also worth noting that Rosenzweig writes above every introduction of each part an address: the first introduction has, *in philosophos!* (against the philosophers who presumptuously pretend to know the “all” by chasing death out of their

systems); the second, *in theologos!* (against the theologians who, following the philosophers, have chased the miracle out of their faith); and finally the third introduction has, *in tyrannos!* (against the tyrants who want to hasten and therefore delay the coming of the Kingdom).

This transparent setup of *The Star of Redemption* penetrating into the smallest details however is also misleading. Gershom Scholem calls it the most difficult book ever written in Western philosophy (Rosenzweig, 1996, 529). This is not surprising. When you are using for your own purposes precisely that what you are criticizing, reorganizing the whole Judeo-Christian system and attributing totally different positions to the different elements than can be accounted for on the basis of tradition, logic, faith, than understanding will be difficult. Furthermore, the language that Rosenzweig uses in *The Star* is so multi-layered that it is difficult to follow his thoughts on particular issues. We will look into a few of them discussed in the three introductions to the three different parts of *The Star* in some more detail.

### **Three important themes**

#### **“Nothing”**

To relate philosophy with the unarticulated proto-world that can only be reflected upon by means of basic operators as “yes”, “no”, or “and” is the first surprising move that Rosenzweig makes right from the start. And from a philosophical point of view it sure comes as an unexpected surprise. The possibility to know to the “all” is denied by death and is at the same time itself a denial of death. “To shake of the fear of the earthly, to take away from death its poisonous sting, from Hades its sick breath, this is what philosophy arrogates to itself.” (Rosenzweig, 1996, 3) Separating body from soul she abandons the body to the grave but lets the soul flutter over it. However, the fear of death knows nothing about such a separation and screams “I”.

All natural existence is destined for death, only through suicide – this horrible power with which man distinguishes himself from all other creatures – man can step all by himself out of the natural order. And then again the earth wants him back and therefore every attempt – no matter how sophisticated – to deny death is vain. Man will have to live in the fear of death. “Philosophy deceptively liberates man from this fear by weaving the blue veil of the concept ‘all’ around all earthly things.” (Ibid., 4) Of course the “all” does not die, only individuals die, but this distinction between the one and the all is



betrayed by philosophy. Moreover by means of this betrayal death is swallowed not in the eternal victory but in the one and general night of “nothing”. However, death is not nothing but an undeniable relentless something. “... in the night of nothing philosophy could swallow death but she could not extract its poisonous sting, and the fear of man trembling for the stab of this sting belies philosophy’s compassionate lie in a terrible way.” (Ibid., 5)

Now, by means of this artificial construction of death as a one and general nothing instead of a multitude of horrible “somethings” philosophy distracts our attention to the lie of the almighty power of thought. In the millennia old query by means of the question “what is the world” the answer has always been searched in thought. Thinking the “all” overshadowed and even dispelled all other possibilities. The everlasting discussion between science and faith comes to an end when knowledge of the “all” closes in itself. And enclosure it is “when this knowing the ‘all’ in itself no longer contains only its own theme, the ‘all’, but also the totality of itself, that is according to its own pretensions and in its own way. This happened when Hegel introduced the history of philosophy in his system. Thinking seems not to be able to go any further than that it presents itself as the deepest fact that is acquainted with, but now as a visible part of system building and of course its concluding part.” (Ibid., 6)

Schopenhauer and Nietzsche representing the new philosophy will tear this proud building apart, step out of the inanimate “all” of philosophy and be some-*one* again. And although not directly belonging to the realm of philosophy but very well at home in this new current in philosophy we could add Goethe here as well. For Rosenzweig himself the time has now come to go his own meta-way through the proto-world. Here in the realm of the proto-world the concept “nothing” also plays an important role for the knowing subject. We know nothing about the basic elements God, world and man. However, the introduction to part one ends with some hope. “The ‘nothing’ of our knowledge is not a unique nothing but a triplicate nothing. Therefore it holds in itself the promise of definability. And so we may hope with Faust to find in this nothing, this triplicate ‘nothing’ of knowledge, the ‘all’ that we had to cut into pieces. ‘Submerge then! I could also say: rise!’ ” (Ibid., 24)

### **The miracle**

Love is a miracle that – with all the other miracles - has been chased out of the system by philosophy *and* theology according to Rosenzweig. And this

happened precisely at the moment that philosophy's reign over the "all", that "two thousand years old dynasty that Thales and Parmenides had founded" (Rosenzweig, 1996, 104) fell into pieces. But what is meant here by miracle?

*The affirmative character of the miracle*

Within the old dynasty people were well aware - as we are - that they were dependent on the laws of nature. Only, in their minds these general laws of nature were directed by inner or higher powers or God, not independent entities standing or operating on themselves as modern rationality started to portray them. And therefore in the old - as in the Biblical - times people experienced the miracle in a quite different way than we do nowadays. For modern man a miracle is a deviation from what is natural, not bound to the natural order, which is only there as some sort of background. The miracle then becomes a surpassing or even negation of the natural order and the magician who produces miracles proves himself to be above and independent of this order. Now, in Biblical times - although there is also evidence of magic performed in the sense mentioned above - the real miracle did not deny but *confirmed* the natural order and the divine providence behind it. And this is the miracle Rosenzweig has in mind, performed by the true prophets in the Bible.

The magician and the false prophet use the miracle to determine the direction of the natural order to their own liking - even when this direction is against the will of God - and thus commit a capital crime. The miracle in the hands of the true prophet on the contrary unveils prospectively that what is wanted by providence and thus proves the reign of Providence - denied by the magician. And so, in the Bible, true prophecy - even with magic and verbal signs - reigns over human magic, that is Providence reigns over man's self-righteousness. "The miracle proved in its own time precisely that what destroys its credibility in our days: the destined regularity of the world." (Ibid., 106)

Therefore, the miracle of true prophecy has two important moments that make it a powerful sign. First there is the prediction itself, the actual constitutive moment of true prophecy. But the prediction itself is not enough, it has to be proved, i.e. followed by the realization of what has been predicted. The proof can be based on indications, but the most solid basis of proof is given by the eyewitness or - even stronger- the blood witness. The sign character - prediction and realization - has always been extremely important. In the He-

brew Scriptures the promises made to the fathers and in The New Testament the prediction by the prophets have given actual realizations a prophetic, miraculous, i.e. Providential basis. Augustine goes the other way round. He starts in the eye- and blood witnesses that make up the *ecclesiae auctoritas* – the authority of the Church – without which he would not attach any value at all to the witness of the Scriptures.

So, this miracle faith – in incidental cases but also in its central theme of revelation - is truly a historical faith. Luther could not change this, he did not create a new faith, only a new believer. Nor could the Enlightenment of the natural sciences destroy the life of this miracle - faith - with strong roots in history. It would take a third, the historical Enlightenment around the end of the eighteenth century to do the job - the ancient Greek struggle of pre-Socrates natural philosophy against the pagan myth being the first and the sixteenth century struggle of the natural sciences against intellectually sustained medieval superstition being the second Enlightenment. (Cf. *Ibid.*, 107/8)

*The loss of the miracle in Western 'Enlightenment'*

The omniscience ideal of the first Enlightenment taken over by the old church ( Luther fighting “Aristotle”) the second Enlightenment condenses its positive (Thomistic) attitude towards nature – surpassed but not denied or rejected by the supernatural - into trust upon experience. The third Enlightenment directed its criticism towards this easy credulity of experience and in so doing gradually became historical criticism. Unlike the earlier criticism that still relied on reason, nineteenth century historical criticism doubted the very possibility of the experience of the past. And now the miracle comes under attack because “it is tried to prove the implausibility of the tradition, the inadequacy of the up to then reigning arguments for their credibility, [and] the explicability of that what could still stand up to criticism, by natural causes, i.e. *without accepting a foreseeable and thus foreseen development.*” (*Ibid.*, 109, italics JCV)

Faith's dearest child – the miracle as foreseen and actualized event - would from then on be rationalized away by means of rationalistic reasoning of the natural sciences. For Rosenzweig this means the beginning of a new era. So as historical knowledge became problematic this could bring the Roman Catholic Church as mediator between the Biblical texts and the community of faith as well as the Reformation with its emphasis on direct access to the

Biblical sources in great trouble. However, Pietism had developed already a new faithful attitude that was as good as independent from the historical objectivity of the miracle and this attitude went along very well with the ideal of progress inherited from the second Enlightenment. “The past was abandoned to knowledge, but the will was liberated from the past and turned to the present and the future.” (Ibid., 110)

“In Schleiermacher this whole system of denial of the ongoing value of the past and the anchorage of the always present religious feeling [*schlechthiniges Abhängigkeitsgefühl*] in the eternal future of the moral world has found its classical representative.” (Ibid., 111) However, the past could not be denied and so the new historical theology had to interpret the past in a way that it could do no harm. It took the appearance of the presence as we have seen Dilthey do it. And in the end past and present looked exactly alike, the past being subsumed in present and future. The earlier central miracle of revealed faith – predicted and actualized - was thus ordered into a timeless system and equalized to the experiential contents of the present. This manipulation and even elimination of the past assigned to and performed by the historical theology “signifies in fact the construction of a Chinese Wall against knowledge.” (Ibid., 113) But then historical theology became historical reality itself, collapsed and vanished – in terms of its own praxis - in oblivion, inexperienced. A new construction had to be invented.

When personal hope and present faith experience must be based upon the certainty that “the kingdom of what is noble will finally come” (Ibid. 113) than the claims of knowledge have to be more fully and more directly satisfied than the mere cosmetic act of making up the past in a somewhat more favorable way is able to realize. For Rosenzweig this means a new collaboration of philosophy and theology. Philosophy with its knowledge of the world in its systematic totality, i.e. creation, will have to be rehabilitated by reintroducing revelation and the coming moral kingdom of the final redemption, this whole coherence as *the* core of present faith, back into the system of creation.

*The miracle regained in a new relation of philosophy and theology*

Both philosophy and theology had been deprived of central values. The former of the possibility of knowledge of the “all”, the latter of its dearest child the miracle. When the consistency of the total system vanished, the contingency of the individual remained. Where can philosophy find the

bridge between these two extremes? In “theology’s concept of revelation”. (Ibid. 117/8) When theology’s sources of authority are reduced to individual experience of hope in uncertain future redemption, where can it find a more solid ground? In philosophy’s prediction based on knowledge. Because theology considers her contents as event, as experience, she also considers the conditions “not as conceptual elements but as present reality; the philosophical concept of truth is therefore substituted by the concept of creation. So philosophy contains the whole content of revelation, but this content not as revelation but as condition for revelation, as introduction to revelation, therefore not as revealed but as created content. In creation revelation with her total content according to the concept of faith of the actual era, thus also including the redemption, is “foreseen”. The philosophy performed by the theologian becomes prediction of the revelation, the Old Testament so to say of theology. And thus revelation regains much to our amazement authentic miracle character, - authentic because she becomes complete fulfillment of the promise that happened in the creation. And philosophy is the Sybille who makes the miracle, by predicting it, into a sign, a sign of divine providence. ... thus knowledge returns faith its child that was imagined to be lost, the real miracle, back into its arms.” (Ibid. 120) And now we have returned into the realm of the loving relationship, in which in analogy to the basic entity of discourse - the linguistic sentence - basic elements join and support each other to create, reveal redemptive light. “And God said: Let there be light – and the light of God what is it? the soul of man.” (Ibid. 123)

### **Prayer**

Man can pray, has prayed, in a wide variety of ways, but most of the time he prayed in a tyrannical way: in his prayers he did not seek the experience of the miracle - the confirmation of providence - but the satisfaction of his own will over and against providence. What is at stake here is man’s free will – most of all active in the realm of redemption. Can man tempt, influence God in his prayers, even prevent the creator to do his work or enforce his own law upon the love of the revealer? Not directly, if so the creator would not be creator and the revealer would not be revealer. But it can be done indirectly, there where the work of creation, revelation and redemption come together. “The redemption is after all not directly God’s work or deed, for as God gave to creation the power to live and grow in itself, He liberated in his love the soul for the freedom of the loving act” (Ibid. 297) Now, as the saying goes, love is blind. It finds its way groping around and - faster than knowl-

edge - directs its activity to what it lays hands on: the nearest neighbor. Prayer on the other hand is not blind. It puts the act of love in the light of the divine countenance and is a quest for an enlightenment whose rays reach to the far ends of the world. And thus prayer draws near what was very far away, even creates the manifold human orderings of the world, and this in sharp distinction from the unique divine world order. Now, prayer can interfere in this divine world order.

*The sinful prayer missing its kairos*

The first possibility for prayer to interfere in the divine world order is by hurrying love to the farthest ends of its spectrum, and in doing so forget all about and thus violate the nearest neighbor. In this way a hesitatingly approaching future is preliminarily and violently drawn near while it was not ripe for it yet. (Ibid. 301/2) And this means a violation of the loving act itself which in turn renders redemption impossible. Well then, prayer has to keep pace with love. In the case of the fanatic zealots who draw near the far away future in a violent way, it goes too fast. The result is that the coming of the kingdom of love that had to be accelerated was in fact delayed. Prayer can also come too late – prayer instead of thanksgiving for something that was already given to man in creation and revelation, like the prayer for the potential of growth or inner peace for one self. What is sinful in this prayer is not its contents but that it holds for unfulfilled what already had been realized, given to him as God's loving Spirit living in his own body and soul. (Ibid. 305) This prayer of the sinner also misses his nearest neighbor and delays the coming of the kingdom of love. On God, being eternal, time has no effect and so for Him every prayer comes in time. For man, however, it is essential that he prays his prayer with the right focus and at the right moment. But can this moment, prayer's *kairos*, be established and realized? Are there more voices participating in our prayers than just the voice of the fanatic and the voice of the sinner?

*The prayer of the unfaithful realizing its kairos*

There is a prayer that is prayed at the right time, at precisely that moment of well being and grace, fulfilled as soon as it prayed. This is the individual personal prayer to one's own destiny as it was prayed by Goethe: make, high bliss, that I will complete the day's work of my hands (ibid. 306). This prayer cannot come too soon or too late, because it happens at its own hour, and "it cannot happen at a strange hour because it is a prayer to the own des-

tiny and not to a stranger.” (Ibid. 308) First of all the praying individual is not the ungrateful sinner here who prays for something he already received, nor is he the fanatic zealot who reaches too far. On the contrary he is standing *before* a limited point in time in which he wishes to accomplish something in his nearest nearness. Rosenzweig indicates this point with the term *Stunde*, the German word for hour<sup>11</sup>, which is etymologically related to the word *stehen* – to stand. And he attributes it to the individual destiny as something steady in the general flow of time. The individual destiny is part of the world destiny, but it is an indivisible part, standing on its own, insoluble, creating its own value. This *Stunde* - hour, metaphor of the individual lifespan which is portrayed as a sequence of *Augenblicke* (moments) can contain the individual’s coherent experience of his life. It still has to be filled, made one’s own, moment after moment. “This own *Stunde* - hour within the growing eras of the world, the hour that has come for him, that is what man grabs when he prays to his own destiny” (Ibid. 308) And so the heathen Goethe could see himself as “probably the only Christian left in his time such as Christ would have wanted.” (Ibid. 308) Beyond mere knowledge and comprehension – acceptance of Christian dogma’s – life is now seen as the individual completion of one’s own unique life drawing on the redemptive power that comes from Christ. The redemptive power destined for the whole world order coming from Christ, concentrating on, culminating in and coinciding with one’s own individual destiny and lifespan is what matters.

Hope – “this basic force of the new completed world” (ibid.317) – is related to completion, not founding new forms but reforming within old forms. Therefore, it can be expected that it will begin a new process of conversion, not heathens by Christians this time, but the conversion from paganism within and by Christians themselves. When the individual destiny has to coincide with the world destiny, then the reunion of body and soul, of love, faith and hope has to be the first condition to be realized. “The real essence of man is not in his bodily nor in his spiritual being, it is only completed in the course of his life. It is not, it becomes. ... The own destiny is body and soul at the same time, that what one feels in his own bones. Because destiny unites man in himself it also unites him in some sense with the world.” (Ibid. 314) Love being female in character and faith thoroughly male, hope, uniting the love and faith, creates childlike trust. It is badly needed when man prays to and relies on one’s own destiny, this perilous prayer so precariously rising above the abyss of the sinner’s prayer at one side and the abyss of the fanatic’s prayer at the other. Thus, hope will carry love and faith (! cf. ibid.

316). In this union the individual destiny bound to time will be transcended and completed with eternal support. And that means that the individual prayer to one's own destiny must be completed by the prayer for eternal life, the prayer of the faithful (cf. *ibid.* 321).

*The cultic prayer "transcending" its kairos*

Can prayer precipitate the coming of God's eternal kingdom of peace and justice? The prayers of the fanatic zealot and the sinner had delayed the coming of the kingdom. The prayer to one's own destiny hastened nor delayed the coming of the kingdom and didn't want to because this prayer always comes at its *own* time. Here personal enlightened insight and blind love for what the hand touches coincide. Now, the right prayer of the faithful anticipates the eternal kingdom and wants it to settle down in our era. For this, something more is needed than the – also - necessary condition that it comes on time, that is not too early and not too late. "Such an anticipation of the future within the moment would mean a true *recreation* of the present. What would such a present look like?" (*Ibid.* 322, italics JCV)

The basic idea of Rosenzweig's conception of eternity is repetition (like in the Hebrew verb *shana*- to repeat, also the Hebrew word for "year"). In eternity the moment will not be started anew but will come back. The "newness" that new moments produce is not what we are looking for. "The *Augenblick* [literally: the glance of the eye] shows to the eye every time it is opened something new. The new that we are searching must be a '*nunc stans*', not a volatile moment, but a static, standing moment. Such a 'standing' now is called, in distinction of the moment [*Augenblick*], an hour [*Stunde*]. The hour, because it is standing [*stehend*], can already contain in itself the multiplicity of the old and the new, the wealth of moments. Its end can lead to its beginning, because it has a middle, no, many moments of the middle between beginning and end." (*Ibid.* 322, additions JCV) Now, when an hour ends not only a new hour begins but the hour starts again as well. The hour is not only a succession of moments but it can start *again* because man has given it a beginning and an end in the form of a ringing bell. Creation knows nothing of a ringing bell, there only the ticking of the clock is heard, the succession of moments in analogy to the succession of seasons. It is only in the realm of man made decisions, the world of redemption, that bells begin to ring. Succession in creation becomes human time and because its basic entity, the hour, can be repeated, it becomes a circle and thus it wins an extra quality of experienced eternity. This repetition is actually realized by estab-



lishing beginning and end of the cycles of creation, day and night, the succession of the seasons. And: “It is only by fixing this point, in the feast, that the repetition becomes observable.” (Ibid. 323)

Between the day and the year, the cycles that were tied to and visible in creation that determine man’s rhythms of being awake and asleep, of sowing and harvesting (“God’s promised fundament of his covenant with humanity”, *ibid.* 323), the week has been placed, this “purely human time without a basis in the world of creation.”(Ibid. 324) The week, explained by the Scriptures as a parable *resembling* the work of creation, is introduced as “*nunc stans*” organized around the Sabbath as its beginning and end for man to regulate work and rest, sign of human freedom focused on its goal instead of on its ground. The week, this true “hour” not bound to the course of the world and yet law for the world, regulates the work of culture rhythmically in order to imagine and represent the eternal in the ever repeated present tense where beginning and end merge in the Sabbath cult. In Hebrew the word for culture and cult, the work in service of world and the work in service of God’s kingdom, is one and the same. In this way the week represents the purely human way to fix the volatile moment and thus serves the divine and supernatural perpetuation of the moment. In the same way the week makes the day and the year into human “hours”, i.e. temporary lodgings in which the eternal is invited. “In the daily, weekly and annually repeated cycles of the cultic prayer faith transforms the moment into ‘hour’, it makes time ready to admit eternity; and eternity, by being admitted into time, becomes itself – as time.” (Ibid. 324) Which, after all, is not too great a leap for the Hebrew mind, because in the concept of *olam* time is implicitly present.

Now, how can the cultic prayer force the eternal to enter its time? Because the time that cultic prayer prepares for the eternal to visit is not the time of the individual, but the time of all people. Day, week and year belong to everybody, they are not the exclusive property of anybody. And the prayer of the faithful is prayed within the faithful community. Here the personal enlightenment of the individual must be the same enlightenment of all people. This communal enlightenment surpasses “all individual standpoints and the plurality of perspectives caused by these different standpoints.” (Ibid. 325) And therefore cultic prayer can only focus on the end of all things and days. The spotlight of this prayer illuminates for each and everyone only what it illuminates for all: that what is the most faraway, the kingdom of God. Everything what is before this terminal point would appear differently to each individual depending on where and when he is. And while the far

away kingdom of God shines here in the cultic prayer as the most near, “the entire power of love addresses itself hither and attracts its light with magic power through the night of the future into the presence of the praying community. ... This cultic prayer enforces the redemptive coming of the eternal in time, because it shows the eternal to love as the nearest neighbor and thus inundates the eternal with the irresistible power of the love of one’s neighbor. God cannot act differently than accept the invitation.” (Ibid. 325/6). And so the cultic prayer of the faithful completes the individual prayer to the own destiny of the unfaithful. The cultic prayer is not focused on my own destiny and the work of my own hands, but directed to “the Eternal, who may bless the work not of my hands, or yours, or his, but of ‘our’ hands, so that He and not ‘I may complete it’. This prayer that, beyond everything individual, focuses on the communal and on this alone, pulls the eternal into the moment with a powerful grip.” (Ibid. 326)

#### *The liturgical gesture*

As the miracle mediated between the elementary proto-world of the elements (God, world, man) of part 1 and the renewing world of relations between the elements (creation, revelation, redemption) of part 2, prayer mediates between these two worlds united by the miracle and the transcendent eternal world of part 3, in which the elements and their relations are united. Revelation is the central realm around which the other realms, creation and redemption described in part two, are organized. And prayer is the central activity that supports the relations between the three worlds, the proto- the public and the “transcendent” world described respectively in the three parts of *The Star of Redemption*. “Prayer is the force that carries over the threshold, that leads from the without speech created secret of the very growth of life and the with language bestowed miracle of love to the silent enlightenment of the end which brings full redemption.” (Ibid. 327)

The *organon* or intellectual tool used to describe the proto-world in part one was formed by mathematical symbols, “secrets within the secret, silent keys preserved in a secret drawer within the innermost interior of the cabinet of the proto-world itself. ... a priori inheritances from a proto-creation.” (Ibid. 327) The forms of grammar and language, *organon* of the second part, are no longer secret and hidden, they speak out the miracle in a very direct way. “... public signs of a public life. They are exactly simultaneous with their world. Where that world is, there is language as well, ... without the word the world would not have been.” (Ibid. 327) Now, the forms of liturgy,

the *organon* of the third part, lack this simultaneity with what they offer to knowledge, because they anticipate to something of the future that they want to transform into something of the present. They are not keys or mouths but silent representatives. “They represent the redeemed transcendent world to knowledge, knowledge only knows *them*, it cannot see beyond them; the eternal hides behind them. They are the light in which we see the light, a silent anticipation to a world that shines in the silence of the future.”(Ibid. 327, italics JCV)

So the real vehicle of liturgy is not a key that opens (in-)visible systems, nor a mouth that speaks audible language, but the silent gesture that transcends both vision and audition. Eyes and ears, these separate senses, are transcended in the silent body language of the liturgical gesture in which mankind will be united and redeemed. “The divine truth hides itself for everyone who reaches for it with only one hand, regardless if this reaching hand is the hand of the philosopher who imagines to be without presuppositions or floating in a matter-of-fact way above things, or the hand of the theologian who in his blindness, and proud of his experience, disconnects himself from the world. She wants to be invoked with both hands. Who ever invokes the divine truth with the double prayer of the faithful and of the unfaithful, him she will certainly accompany. God gives his wisdom to both, to faith and non-faith, but only if their prayer will come to him united. It is the same man who with double prayer and thanksgiving, and who uniting in himself the unfaithful child of the world and the faithful child of God will have to step before Him who gives of his wisdom to flesh and blood and to those who fear Him alike.” (Ibid. 329/30)

### **Rosenzweig and postmodernism**

In the first part of *The Star of Redemption* Rosenzweig refers implicitly to the idea of multiple systems of logic in order to show that whatever we may say about whatever element is always provisional, in part, using one individual standpoint in a whole matrix as dominating perspective, while in fact we know nothing of the different elements themselves. In the second part he leads the reader away from philosophical systems of thought that pretend to encompass the “all” to the Hebrew Scriptures by focusing on the miracle of love in the Song of Salomon and prophetic revelation in which God and man open themselves towards each other. And so prayer will bring us in part three not to a postmodern multiplicity of truths that can no longer provide for

any basis at all, but in the very Jewish unity of truth based on the love of God and the light of His Kingdom in which many more than just one dominating culture, thought system or sensory guideline in consciousness can function. Manifold truth based on and finding unity in divine love instead of chaos and war based on truth confusion. Here is at least a first answer to postmodern radical criticism and total collapse of truth with its inherently depending sense of normativity.<sup>12</sup>

What is especially fascinating for me in Rosenzweig's "system" of the shining star, is that right from the beginning philosophy and man in general are liberated from the urge to design thought systems that cover and know "the all". Uncovered mysteries continue to participate in the "system" and in fact form its very basis. No truth theory can guarantee knowledge or function as the basis of the life of humankind. As the elements of the proto-world remain unknown, only giving rise to some faint ideas, any correspondence of being and saying remains questionable throughout the whole "system". To suppose complete knowable correspondence would be pure arrogance, to suppose complete lack of correspondence would produce chaos, contradicting creation, revelation and redemption. The truth must be somewhere in the middle and there it is. However, Rosenzweig's conception of truth - although it may look alike - is not based on dialectical logic. As we have seen dialectical logic ran into trouble regulating beforehand the discussion that would have to produce its own regulating rules. The powerful - convention or problem solver - would prevail and the powerless be cut off. But in Rosenzweig's dialectic - maybe triple-lectic is a better word - the powerful are deprived of their power and the powerless participate and together they end up in a different world. Rosenzweig did not establish his different world of redemption on any conception or possession of whatever final expressible truth, but on the secret love of God revealed miraculously to man in the Scriptures and drawn near silently by man in the liturgical gesture that transcends prayer. No individual tradition has the last word and the Jew Rosenzweig transforms this conviction into praxis by introducing the Christian tradition as a necessary part of the shining Star of David that will procure redemption.

I feel the flows of chakra energy - liberation and manifestation - go up and down Rosenzweig's "system". All the senses and different intelligences are called for in the liturgical prayer. There is a liberating movement from survival towards intuition and cognition. Western philosophy However, fails when it shuts itself up in its own systems. But when these centers of energy are opened again, when philosophy with its knowledge of creation becomes

endowed with prophetic force that predicts revelation and thus returns the miracle as the lost and most beloved baby to theology, redemption is at hand. That is, the grace of the Kingdom of God will flow downwards, manifesting itself throughout the whole system. There is one difference. Because we know nothing of the elements God, world and man, the possibility of a totally other reality is left open. We have no reason to assume that God will be different there than he is for us here and now, i.e. merciful, liberator, etc. but we cannot know. In the chakra system the transcendent world was exclusively connected to man, the rainbow being reflected by the energy centers of the human body. In Rosenzweig's system this is not so. His universe is more extended, infinite, *olam*, not necessarily and exclusively tied to humankind and therefore, in the same line of reasoning, cultic prayer is not for Jews only. *The Star of Redemption* leaves plenty of room for the miracle and for love as mediating and relating factors serving humankind that exists in time. Will this optimistic view have any chance to survive when a Second World War will have beaten humanity in an even more severe and cruel way than the first had done?<sup>13</sup> Let us turn to Emmanuel Lévinas to find an answer to that question.

### **Totality and infinity, Lévinas**

World War I took the lives of eight million soldiers, five million on the German / Austrian side and three million of the Allied Forces. As Geert Mak has told in his book about the twentieth century<sup>14</sup>, Europe was in the mood for war. The young men marched to the battle fields in high spirits and joyful patriotism as if they went to a party, full of plans for a beautiful future (Mak, 1999, 54). They didn't have the faintest idea that they would end up dead with millions in a mess of mud and human remains. However, this was a war of "professionals", if you can call those naïve youngsters professional. Anyway they had enrolled for war out of their free will. At home they were cheered at when leaving and mourned for as they did not come back, leaving the village population almost halved. Civilians lost their beloved ones and their ideals, not their lives. Deep frustration of all ideals was the result for many European nations especially for Germany that was condemned to pay huge sums of reparation that could never be raised. And thus the Germans had to forget about the restoration of their own country or look for other solutions which were found by the nazis rather quickly. Now, World War Two was not only a war of "professionals". Warfare was not restricted to the bat-

fields and trenches but moved to the civilian centers as well, countries occupied, cities bombed. Besides the many millions of soldiers who lost their lives, many millions of civilians did so as well, among whom six million Jews found the “final solution” in the gas chambers of Auschwitz, Dachau, Bergen Belsen etc.. And if you have walked around in the museum for peace built in the central area of Hiroshima on the exact spot where the bomb had exploded, you never forget the devastating impact of the newest high-tech device of the time, blowing away an entire city and taking so many lives in one single blow. The war was over, but its impact internalized.

World War I had destroyed the ideal of bigger systems like the state to guarantee or even create meaning for its members. Except perhaps for the Dutch, who had succeeded to remain neutral during this first war and continued to organize their lives in religious and social structures that functioned as strong sustaining pillars of their own identities, all loving the queen as a symbol that carries the nation. But the resulting moral complacency and attitude of “the know it all” was an explainable exception in Europe and vanished, although not completely, as a result of World War Two. Now Europe started to doubt the blessings of its own technology. Auschwitz and Hiroshima had put serious question marks in the margins of European, say Western civilization, to the mere possibility of morale, and to the ethical status of each and every individual person. This was the kind of Europe – contemplating thirty years of self-destruction (Mak, 1999, 360) - that Emmanuel Lévinas, coming from Lithuania, found in France. And he reacts in his own philosophically original way in two major works *Totalité et infini* and *Autrement qu’être ou au delà de l’essence*.<sup>15</sup> Just like Rosenzweig Lévinas uses multi layered language – although the distinctions he makes are different in character - which makes his texts also often difficult to understand. We will concentrate on his first major work and on what I think the most important distinction in Lévinas’ work: the distinction between totality closely related to war on the one hand and infinity closely related to ethics on the other.

### **Totality and war**

Lévinas begins his preface to *Totality and Infinity* with an exposition of the close connection of totality and war. “Does not lucidity – opening of the mind towards the true – consist of the suspicion of the permanent possibility of war? The state of war suspends morale; it strips off the eternity from insti-

tutions and eternal obligations and then cancels, within the provisional, the unconditional imperatives. It projects in advance its shadow on the acts of man. War does not settle itself between – and as the greatest of – the tests of which the morale lives. War makes morale ridiculous.” (Lévinas, 1961, 5) To win the war is all important and the activity to do so – politics - presents itself as the very practice of reason. In Heraclitus’ *panta rei* the elements already suffered severe collisions and this is reflected by war as a political act: “it interrupts the continuity of persons, makes them play roles that are not theirs, makes them betray not only engagements but also their own substance, makes them perform acts that will destroy every possibility to act (ibid.,6).” But arms always turn against the ones who hold them and therefore war establishes an order to which no one can take any distance, leaving no exteriority whatsoever. “War does not manifest exteriority and the other as other, war destroys the identity of the Self” (ibid.,6).

When the other disappears out of sight, the self is all that remains and by fear of elimination it overestimates itself as measure of all things. And Lévinas concludes: “The face of being that shows itself in war is fixed in the concept of totality that dominates Western philosophy.” (Ibid.,6) It is in the “value free” conceptualization of the big systems that the real war between the self and the other comes to an artificial end. Totality emerges at the cost of excluding the other as other and including him - or her - in the self. This is what we see happen in the big philosophical conceptualizations of the totality of being (Hegel, Heidegger). And yet this artificial construction cannot conceal, according to Lévinas, its real character: “Ontology as a primary philosophy is a philosophy of power. It ends in the State and in the non-violence of the totality without bothering about the violence upon which this non-violence is based and that appears in the tyranny of the State. The truth that should reconcile persons only exists anonymously here. Universality presents itself as impersonal and this is another inhumanity.” (Ibid.,37)

Moral consciousness (unconditional, universal) can only bear the mocking glance of politics at the condition of peace. However, every peace rests, is based on *war*. Subjects do not find back their lost identities in this kind of peace. For that a more original relation with being is needed, reaching farther than even a Messianic kind of peace based on whatever victorious ideology or religion. Although Lévinas thoroughly agrees with Rosenzweig – “too often present in this book to be quoted” (Ibid.,14) - in his rejection of the mere idea of totality, his philosophical method is different. Lévinas proves to be a real adherent to Husserlian phenomenology using not only the

eidetic but even more the transcendental reduction and giving it an own turn. Heidegger's concept of being was still based on totality and war. By fear of destruction of the self and absence of the real other who had been reduced to and controlled by the conceptualizing self, ontology is in fact based on the primacy of the self, leaving no room for authentic ethics towards the other as other. "Being" as an abstract concept is more important than the existence of concrete human *beings*. Lévinas searches for something beyond Heidegger's being that is irreducible to the self, principally other, unattainable and thus indestructible by any kind of war. Where Husserl ended up in pure consciousness of the philosopher being only responsible to himself, Lévinas directed his attention to what this consciousness was *conscious of*, otherness transcending any kind of totality, otherness irreducible to the self, otherness with ethical implications for the self: infinity. And so, metaphysical transcendence that finds infinity precedes and surpasses any kind of ontological system of totality and creates an authentic ethical relation between the self and the other in which the other is respected as other.

### **Infinity and ethics**

Lévinas starts his search for infinity in eschatology, the oracle that seems to complete philosophical evidence in religion and even in theology. "However, reduced to evidences eschatology would already accept the ontology of the totality that came forth out of the war. Its real sense is elsewhere. It does not introduce a teleological system in totality and it does not consist of indicating the direction of history. Eschatology brings forth a relation with being, *beyond totality* or history, and not with being beyond passed and present. ... It is relation with *a surplus that is always exterior to totality*, as if objective totality did not fill the real measure of being, as if another concept - the concept of infinity - had to express this transcendence of totality, uncontainable by whatever totality and as original as totality." (Ibid.,7) This infinity however is not purely negative with regard to totality. It is reflected *within* totality and experience and that is why phenomenology can trace it. This kind of eschatology frees beings out of the jurisdiction of history and future, places them in their full responsibility where they are called for, gives them identity before eternity and life starting in themselves instead of in totality.

How can we be so sure that this eschatology reflecting infinity within totality is as real as or even more real than totality that reduces the other to the



self? Well totality as a system enforcing war implodes as the exteriority or transcendence of infinity breaks through in the face of the other. In the nudity of the face the total vulnerability of the other who is not part of my system is expressed. Beyond any system of conceptualization the other, the widow, the orphan and the stranger of the Bible are calling me silently to respect their rights. (Cf. Ibid. 43, 72-74, 203- 242) “This revelation of infinity does not lead to the acceptance of whatever dogmatic content” (Ibid.,10) not even that of the transcendental truth of the idea of infinity. Here Lévinas leaves phenomenology behind and comes very near to Derrida’s notion of *différance*. But, although infinity can never be forced into any system of totality, it does have substance. “It is against infinity – more objective than objectivity – that the hard law of war breaks and not against an impotent subjectivism that is cut off from being.” (Ibid.,11) And this is why the idea of infinity has philosophical priority on the idea of totality, and why the *reality* of infinity - breaking through as a furtive trace in the face of the victim entering the gas chamber - has priority on the *idea* of infinity. “Every knowledge as being intentional already supposes the idea of infinity, inadequacy *par excellence*” (Ibid.,12). Phenomenology may discover, unveil phenomena but it never constitutes them (cf. *ibid.*,13).

Well then, the first part of *Totality and Infinity* – “The self and the other” – introduced infinity as “the wholly other” of totality (*ibid.*, 21-111). Infinity “other than being beyond essence” (the latter so closely related to *esse* = being) breaks the laws of war that destroy the identity of the self in favor of some anonymous whole. And therefore it is from this transcendent reality of infinity that the self receives a new ground for its existence within real communal life. The Hebrew word *yada* not only means knowledge but also what is always supposed by knowledge: communion, sometimes even sexual intercourse. The concept abstracts from this second meaning and knowledge is crippled by this abstraction. Infinity as pure exteriority restores this second meaning to knowledge. And this has important implications for communal life of the self – with one self and with the other – that Lévinas calls interiority and to which he dedicates the whole second part of *Totality and Infinity* - “Interiority and economy” (*ibid.*, 111-203). However, within this real communal life as it is fed by pure exteriority, the other regains the right to be genuinely other and even receives priority on the self. The accusing glance lighting up in the face of the suffering neighbor calls upon me to act, moves my conscience towards his well being. To this pure exteriority appearing and disappearing in the face of the other, reflection of infinity, the third part of

*Totality and Infinity* – “The face and exteriority”- is dedicated (ibid., 203-284). Ethics receives by this new foundation in the metaphysical perspective a transcendental intention, described in the fourth part “Beyond the face” (ibid., 284-321). “Ethics already *by itself* is a perspective. It does not restrict itself to prepare the theoretical exercise of thought to monopolize transcendence. The traditional opposition between theory and praxis fades in metaphysical transcendence where a relationship is established between the absolute other or truth and in which ethics is the royal way.” (Ibid.,15) And so Lévinas can end the final part of *Totality and Infinity* – “Conclusions” (ibid., 321-342) – in a very positive way with a paragraph on “Being as goodness – Me – pluralism - Peace”.

### **Lévinas and postmodernism**

Lévinas is – quite naturally - more postmodern than Rosenzweig. This of course is not surprising because Lévinas was influenced by and reacted to the terror of the Second World War which was more encompassing, more horrible and also went deeper than the terror of World War One. And therefore the solution that Lévinas finds lies further away, is more transcendent, more totally irreducible to man’s systems and totalities than the solution Rosenzweig offers. Liturgy for Lévinas does not belong to infinity, the metaphysical desire and the Invisible, but remains within the realm of totality (ibid., 23). Of course Auschwitz and Hiroshima scream for alternatives that cannot be perverted by man and Lévinas’ philosophical project is an admirable effort to find such an alternative. So the circumstances may have differed, their critical analyses yielding different results, both authors reacted nevertheless to the same bankruptcy of Western thinking and came with an alternative and positive solution with strong roots in the Hebrew Bible.

Ricœur, very sympathetic with Lévinas’ work, nevertheless thinks that Lévinas’ ethics based on exteriority is too much a one way affair as he explains in a book called *Soi-même comme un autre* (“Oneself as another”)<sup>16</sup>. “E. Lévinas’ whole philosophy is based on the initiative of the other in the intersubjective relationship. In fact this initiative does not implement any relation to the extent that the other represents the absolute exteriority with regard to a ‘me’ that is defined by the condition of separation. The other, in this sense, absolves himself from every relation. It is even this very ‘ir-relation’ that defines exteriority. Because of this ir-relation the appearance of the Other in his *face* withdraws from vision of forms and even from hearing of voices. In

fact the face does not appear, it is not phenomenon but epiphany.” (Ricoeur, 1990, 221) Probably Lévinas would not object when Ricoeur calls the appearance of the face not phenomenon but epiphany. In fact it is here that Lévinas steps out of phenomenology and consciousness based on imaginative variations to be expressed in comprehensible language into the metaphysical realm of infinity that can never be expressed adequately and is irreducible to being or whatever other manifestation of totality. Lévinas, taking his starting point in this infinity, differs significantly from Ricoeur who takes his starting point in written language, the text, and thus remains within the realm of being that can be investigated by phenomenology. Symbols may have their roots in this metaphysical realm, but we can only receive that particular meaning by means of the meaning we give to it in language. Furthermore, Lévinas rejects vehemently Hegel’s dialectics of totality and inserts infinity - in which we have no guarantee whatsoever of the correspondence of saying and being - into totality. And so Lévinas seems to be very near to a deflationary variant of the truth theory, although he does not seem to really bother about that subject. Therefore, Lévinas is closer to postmodernism and Derrida’s radical idea of *différance* than Ricoeur, although all three share an equally strong aversion with regard to totalitarian systems.

For Lévinas the question “what is truth?” is not the most important one. In this, he is loyal to Rosenzweig and to Hebrew thought in general. The coming of the Kingdom of peace and ethics is more important than whatever theory claiming total truth. Lévinas’ metaphysical reality including the one beyond human consciousness that he calls infinity is even vaster, more in line with Derrida’s concept of *différance* than Rosenzweig’s reality called the Kingdom of God. Yet it is substantial when it is related to humankind in the sense that every imaginable totality, closed entity based on violence and war is opened by the most furtive manifestation or slightest glimpse of this infinite realm. And this means that in principle infinity will open all world religions and prepare them to join hands in an impressive gesture of prayer that will precipitate the coming of the infinite Kingdom of peace and universal love.

Lyotard’s *cloud of terror hiding in the limpid blue of language* is countered by Lévinas’ *infinity*. Infinity may be traceable, a faint lightning sometimes, somewhere as was Lyotard’s cloud of terror and it is also a transcendent – i.e. totally other, different and irreducible – reality with regard to language or whatever totalitarian system created by the self. However, infinity is not a form of terror but calls for, even creates ethics, a loving responsibil-

ity towards the suffering other instead of charity based on and strengthening the self and its totalities. God, the O/other, enters into the world through my responsibility. Once again - as in Israel's Scriptures - I am called to witness against totality and war, against evil and annihilation. Here is a second, and in my opinion, even more adequate answer to postmodernism than the one Rosenzweig gave, thoroughly Western and yet coming out of that other, non-Western, world - the world of the Hebrew Scriptures. Maybe the world of God's Kingdom of peace and justice that these texts project in front of themselves incites more reciprocity than it is given by Lévinas. On the other hand, Rosenzweig's liturgical gesture and Lévinas' infinity transcending – not in terms of space but in terms of time - any totality of knowledge, even phenomenology, do give a positive alternative, an authentic Biblical answer to postmodern nihilism.

## **Torah morality/morale and universal love**

If the question “what is truth?” cannot be answered unconditionally – the postmodern condition – then truth can no longer be the basis of an overall morality. When truth is something that humankind can only participate in and never “own”, then logical systems that supposedly guarantee “the truth” also become less important. There are no guarantees here, we will have to negotiate and come to some sort of agreement. The determinable and definable relation between being and saying and its exact correspondence becomes less important as well and may even turn into arrogance, *hubris*, once the mono-logical system of *logos* has collapsed. This ancient Greek and to some extent even modern way to attain immutable knowledge and eternal beauty or virtue belong to the past for good and can no longer function as basis of moral, ethics and normativity. We will have to look elsewhere if we want to preserve at least some norms and values to guide our activity. We did so in the previous chapter where we developed a normative rhetoric based on universal love. The question now is: can Hebrew thought as we encounter it in the Biblical texts as well as in contemporary Jewish philosophy meet the conditions that we have set for such a normative rhetoric?

In my idea of normative rhetoric, there is no exact correspondence of saying and being, because room has to be left open for surplus of meaning. Total absence of correspondence of saying and being is no option either, because that would mean that truth and normativity are totally non-existent. So

I choose for a dialectic where conventions and problem solving are based on modesty and good will instead of brutal power, on universal love that engages all the human senses and intelligences instead of total control. That means that the limited perspective of vision as guide for logical mathematical intelligence – the predominant Western mode of thought – has to be surpassed and chakra-psychology offers itself as an interesting “system” to reach a more universal way of understanding and love between different cultures. Now, how does Hebrew thought relate to this universality?

I think Boman was right in emphasizing the Hebrew roots in the experience of time rather than in the control of space as the primordial Hebrew mode of thought. The philosophies of Rosenzweig and Lévinas confirmed his ideas on this issue. However, being basically an adept of Kant’s monologic, at best puzzled by Niels Bohr’s findings of logical incompatibility in reality, he remained Greek in his search for a big system that could encompass the totality of time as well as space. In Boman’s system there is little room for the Indefinable and the unthinkable. And this is the point where he is contradicted and surpassed by Rosenzweig and Lévinas. The Hebrew way to see no boundaries – not even as imaginary lines - implies that Hebrews have no problem with boundless reality, even when this reality can no longer be controlled by the human mind because it extends to infinity, that is beyond human reach.

What strikes me in both Jewish philosophers is that they criticize Western thinking as radically as the postmoderns do, but they do not feel the need to distinguish - by means of imaginary border lines - the eras of premodern, modern and postmodern thought for their own philosophies . No need for total mind control of time (or space) – such control is unthinkable, surrendered into the “hands” of the Indefinable from the outset. And thus exact correspondence of being and saying is not an issue for Hebrew thought either. Truth therefore is not experienced in these terms of the mind but in terms of reliability for the whole human being and for the collectivity of the community including humankind. When normativity is not based on a logical system it cannot be disturbed by any logical system, not even postmodern radical criticism. “Something” remains intact, if only the human relation to the Indefinable, as we have experienced being vividly alive in Rosenzweig’s Kingdom of God as well as in Lévinas’ infinity. Seen from this angle the term *différance* from – Jewish – Derrida is not total destruction of truth but deconstruction of the Greek conception of truth. What is left is a differant, i.e. a “wholly other” experience of truth. “A writing exceeding everything

that the history of metaphysics has comprehended in the form of the Aristotelian *grammè*, in its point, in its line, in its circle, in its time, and in its space” (Derrida, 1986, 67)<sup>17</sup>.

If we decide to step into the world that the Bible text unfolds in front of itself, then morality is no longer a derivative of whatever truth conception, but instead truth becomes a function of morale, Divine love and the normativity of God’s Kingdom infinitely effective in time. And I think this would suit postmodern non-centered man fine. Dividing space and even time in all sorts of controllable smaller units is of no use to postmodern man because infinite space cannot possibly be imagined anymore and therefore not be divided as well. In that case human control is even more totally out of the question. This Greek way to approach reality is paradise lost for postmodern man. So why not try the Biblical way and live in space as we live in time, i.e. in a moral way inspired by the Kingdom and love of God as expressed in the Torah. Truth for Hebrew thought is what is trustworthy, reliable for the time being, and life’s rhythms are as they continue into the eternal - being more a function of time than of space. It all comes to hearing the music until infinity touches us in our limited finite existence. No need to embrace it all, no desire to control it all. A good life tuned in to the infinite melody is what matters.

In the Hebrew experience of truth, correspondence of being and saying might be there but then again it might not, because reality has an immense, even infinite surplus of meaning that humans cannot even begin to name. The Kingdom of God can be incomprehensible but as it is predominantly related to time it can be precipitated in the liturgical gesture as Rosenzweig suggested. Infinity can be only furtively visible as a trace in the face and in the accusing glance of the victim entering the gas chambers, but it can still touch us deeply as a horrible dissonance or antitype of the infinite melody. I think Lévinas’ infinity ultimately escapes phenomenology and Western theory based on totality because it is time related and not space related, because it is heard as a melody and not seen as an appearance or even epiphany as Ricœur did. And “truth” may finally even be “*différance*” following Derrida, unimaginable, wholly other and still exist.

There is one point where Hebrew thought surpasses the chakra system and its universality. This is the point to which Ricœur has drawn attention, the cosmic order that exists for its own sake, the order that does not know “me”, where the I-Thou relationship of religion has no priority at all and where the

gods of the religions are surpassed by God as the Indefinable. On the waves of infinite time, we are somehow related to this realm that pervades the entire history of human thought in every thinkable culture or era. There may be many “worlds” out there of which we know nothing. However, this is not a “gloomy mess” that swallows up everything, not one great nothing that conceals the philosophical arrogance in a pretended “all”. There are at least three, maybe even four, nothings to be distinguished: God, the worlds, the world, man and that gives us hope of some definability. But no definition can claim complete sovereignty, or claim to be a closed entity that can be based on violence and war. Time, infinity as a vital energy, flows through them all and keeps them open towards exteriority and its incentives to do good, thereby supported by Torah Law. This makes Torah morality based on a Hebrew conception of universal love even more universal for me than the love of the fourth chakra that unites, coordinates and stimulates the flow of universal energies through its whole system. The rainbow is connected to the earth’s atmosphere, a star is located much farther away.

Following the arrow of Ricoeur’s biblical hermeneutics has far reaching consequences that can lead us to a completely new way of experiencing reality, more congruent, or better: more in harmony with the world and with the matter of this text, the Kingdom of God. It will have another foundation than Western or Greek thought, in time rather than space, in love rather than power, in morale rather than rhetoric, in dialectical agreement that does not rule out but include the powerless. Postmodern man already lost his central position in modernity, so why not give up all aspirations of central control? And this, not as a postmodern sort of consciousness of loss of the very idea of any center, but as a sign of sacrificial love that is stronger than death. Lyotard’s concept of the “Jews”- the quotation marks indicating that no reference is made to any political, religious or philosophical figure or subject – will be countered by Rosenzweig’s idea of the Hebrew identity – a people with a holy land it does not possess, a holy language it does not speak except for liturgical purposes and a holy law it can run away from but never change. A new being will come in time and fill the space where “the cloud of terror hiding in the limpid blue of language” is unveiled as a horrible dissonance by a furtive glance on the face of the victim, as Lévinas suggested and resolved by a harmonious song of “infinite” – in the sense of *olam* - love.

## Postlude: normative rhetoric inspired by the codes of Zion

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The normative rhetoric that I have in mind searches for a unity of saying and doing, of rhetoric and praxis that finds a common ground in universal love, morality and morale as we may find it in different sources coming from the world religions as well as in rabbinical texts and in the Biblical texts, Te-NaCh and New Testament alike<sup>1</sup>. Therefore, normative rhetoric will combine different senses and intelligences and tries to find a harmonious sort of equilibrium between them. The prayer from the *Tefillah* - a collection of prayers gathered from the long Jewish history and still used at a daily basis by Jews all over the world – is an illustration of normative rhetoric as I see it before me, language radiating and realizing confident creativity. The interpretation of Psalm 131 that follows is an essay in basic trust that ideally characterizes normative rhetoric. Here I formally follow Ricœur's interpretation theory and fill it in my own way.<sup>2</sup> Finally, I will give - inspired by Troeger's understanding of culture as constellation of the senses - an enlarged conception of Pentecost: "all of us for all of God". I will end my "quest for hope" in the spirit of philosopher Stanislas Breton and theologian Paul Tillich with *The White Crucifixion*, a painting of Marc Chagall.

I will thus concentrate on sources of Jewish and Christian culture and faith. I do so because they are the most familiar in our Western culture. Furthermore, I think that in Hebrew culture the senses and intelligences have always been more in equilibrium than in Western culture where the equilibrium was gradually lost through its biased concentration on the logical-mathematical intelligences. This, plus the constant awareness of an infinite surplus of meaning in reality kept Hebrew thinking more open to the Indefinable and to other cultures than most of the Western thought patterns. My aim then is not an idealization of the premodern sources or to throw away all subsequent achievements of Western culture. Rather, I would like to see these achieve-



ments supplemented with respect for the other intelligences preferred by other cultures and with modesty due to the limited use of them in the West. The result then could be a more global sort of responsibility for creation as a whole and more mutual benefit of each other's resources.

## **A morning prayer from the Tefillah**

*Blessed are you Eternal One, our God, King of the world (olam), who has formed man with wisdom and who has created in him all kinds of openings and hollow organs.*

*To you, who have your seat in full majesty, it is well known that when one of them bursts open or becomes obstructed, it is impossible to exist or stand before you.*

*Blessed are you Eternal One, who can heal everyone and does wonderful things*

*(Siach Jitschak, Siddur tefilloth lecol hashanah, Prayer of Jitschak, a collection of prayers for the whole year, p.4)<sup>3</sup>*

*Tefillah* is the name by which Jews living in Holland indicate the *Siddur*, the ordered collection of prayers that accompany life rhythms during the year. Morning and evening prayers, Sabbath prayers and prayers for all the feasts that are celebrated throughout the year are gathered here for personal use within the intimate family life as well as for more public use in the synagogue. The prayers in this collection go back as far as the times of Ezra and Nehemiah, just after the Babylonian exile, and have been completed with other prayers from later times throughout the Diaspora. These prayers accompany Jewish life – personal, family and communal – the whole day long around the year, year after year, and are prayed all over the whole world, wherever Jews live.

What is important in such a life of prayer is that we humans are not only talking to God with our questions and implorations but that God is much more talking to us and that therefore we should listen. *Tefillah* is more than just prayer in the sense of begging and imploring. "*Tefillah* is a whole complex of pieces from the Torah, Psalms, pieces of prose and poetry from all times, thanksgiving, prayers, philosophical contemplations. *Tefillah* aims at freeing us from daily life routines in order to let us contemplate upon our

mission in life, be aware of our responsibilities in everything we do and have us concentrate on what God expects from us. *Tefillah* is to enter into a relationship with God, feel contact with God on regular times everyday. *Tefillah* is conversation with God. But a conversation in which primarily God is speaking and we are listening.” (Siach Jitschak, 1986, p. IV)

All this becomes particularly clear in the morning-prayer above that was taken from the *Tefillah*. Like in Hindu or Buddha meditation techniques, the praying person is gratefully concentrating on his or her own body. When everything flows through the openings and hollow tubes and organs, what has to flow and nothing is obstructed, when we gratefully feel the rhythms of our body, then we may live and stand before the Lord in a relaxed sort of confidence. Flowing means “softness, resilience, the force of flexibility”. Obstruction means “harshness”, and – as a result from this inflexibility – “the weakness of fragility”. So God created man – in body and soul – to be flexible, soft and loving. Power tends to forget the receiving dependence of man on these basic conditions of life and thus makes a person harsh, rigid, breakable and fragile. However, whenever an obstruction may occur we may have faith in the Lord who can cure everyone and do wonderful things. What a relaxed and trustful basis to begin the day with. Whatever we will do on that particular day will be done under the sign of trust and love which will give the day a warm tone. And not just this particular day, but – as it is a daily prayer – all days.

This prayer means thanksgiving and glorification of the Lord. It confirms and improves the grace of a well functioning body together with all its senses by means of trust and relaxation in an intense moment of meditation. And so I would say this is a prayer of the faithful that can precipitate the Kingdom of God. It surpasses the purely individual prayer because it is part of a liturgical setting – be it a very simple and intimate one. It surpasses the senses and the intelligences, even language and becomes some sort of liturgical meditative gesture. Man is not the center of the universe this prayer is referring to, God is. God is King of the world, of *olam*, that is the universe in its infinite quality beyond and within human reach. Within the human reach the God given basis, hollow tubes and organs and a gentle flow within a wonderfully created structure, is gratefully accepted and realized in loving consciousness and given to the world in and through language. And God cannot do otherwise than accept the invitation it contains and bless the world with his Spirit.

## An interpretation of Psalm 131

In this relaxed atmosphere of daily meditation I will now try an interpretative essay in basic trust in order to reinforce the flows of energy in the lower chakras.

### Imaginative language

- 1 O Lord, my heart is not lifted up,  
my eyes are not raised too high;  
I do not occupy myself with things  
too great and too marvelous for me.*
- 2 But I have calmed and quieted my soul  
like a weaned child near its mother;  
my soul within me is like a weaned child.*
- 3 O Israel, hope in the Lord  
from this time on and forevermore.*
- Psalm 131 (NRSV).

*Yet I thought I saw her stand,  
a shadow there at my feet,  
high over the shadowy land.*

Tennyson: Maud (Tennyson, 1855, p. 409)<sup>4</sup>

Imagery makes me play with images. Images that fix, images that open, images that stand, images that move. Imagery makes images play ... with me. Playing is what I want, playing with images. Images are fun. Sometimes they force themselves upon you, but you can also imagine them yourself. Sometimes they show you a glimpse of what reality is about in its bottomless depths. And when you create your own images all by yourself you can watch this same reality in a very different way. Maybe you can even create a little piece of new reality. Just try and fill old images in a new way and new worlds will open themselves before you.

## **The text of Psalm 131 and the world it unfolds**

The structure of Psalm 131 is in beautiful harmony with its contents: what matters in this psalm again and again is childlike simplicity. The repetitions take turns with two not repeated remarks (in vs. 2 and 3) that together imagine and stress again the childlike simplicity: “But I have calmed and quieted my soul” and “O Israel, hope in the Lord from this time on and forevermore”. How is it possible that a serious poet fills a whole psalm with this childlike simplicity and presents himself therein as a weaned child, that no longer drinks from its mothers breast and that from now on makes its own little steps in life?

Psalm 131 is a so-called wisdom-psalm from the late post-exilian period, a couple of centuries after the Babylonian exile, say second century before CE. It is the fruit of much and serious thinking about life. The harvest of old and wise men, picked in a life full of experiences. Kushner’s sigh in which you hear Job’s complaint, was heaved many a time by these men. How can it be that evil strikes good people? Just and law abiding people are hit by one disaster after the other. Godless idlers have success after success. The image of a just God that rewards the good and punishes the bad is vanishing. The God who is known from history and from all the stories, the God with whom one had always lived in trust and intimacy, has become an incomprehensible God. The God who liberated His people, and who taught its enemies painful lessons, now allows that His temple is dishonored and that His people is trampled by barbarians. The God who took such great care of the order in His creation and in society now hides Himself in disorder.

Here is a complete theology at stake. The entire faith of the fathers becomes questionable and does not make much sense any more. God has become unreliable, unpredictable. Okay, it may be a little naive to think that God will always pick us up as He did when we were in Egypt to bring us to the Promised Land. That we have learned in Babylon. The Prophets have made it very clear to us that it was because of our own faults that we were brought to Babylon in the first place. But they also gave us new hopes for the future right through all misery and destruction. God creates new order on the ruins left behind by His people. Were not Jerusalem and the temple rebuilt in a beautiful way? But why? To lodge Greek idols? To let the most holy part of the temple be dishonored by atrocities that have nothing to do with the God of Israel? Evil has crept right into our bones, evil is in our hearts, blood and kidneys, evil has invaded us. Greek is modern, Greek is in.

The faith of the fathers is old-fashioned, out. Here and there some fanatics are still very active in defending the faith of the fathers, but they seem to fight a lost battle. All we have learned in the history of our people, seems of no importance any more. Even the scope of our own fault and will that Babylon taught us is not interesting any more. With open eyes, as a flock of sheep destined for the slaughtering-table, this people is running into its own abyss. And then, in a little while, the moment they will fall, they will cry out in utter amazement and scream, "help, I'm falling". And God lets it all happen. He doesn't even send prophets of some caliber to whom people would be willing to listen. Everyone for himself, and God for us all. God bless you, brother. Unreliable, unpredictable, indigestible. Where is this mighty God in this era that hides its impotence with so much empty display of power?

The old, wise men sigh and ask themselves if their complaint reaches the heavens. And they search. They search for ways out of this new deadlock. The future looks like an unknown scenery, that they will have to pass through, but where they can hardly find any practicable ways. And maybe they will even have to make the ways themselves. The psalmist sighs with his companions, and it is just like he is giving us a hint, calling us, inviting us to watch together with him this unknown scenery, to set foot on this unknown land before us. He is an interesting man, the author of Psalm 131, and he has courage. He is well decided to make his step. He fills his short psalm with dynamics and movement and shows us that he accepts the movement of life itself. But these dynamics are also characteristic for the history of the people of Israel. They indicate the source of trust needed in the movement of setting foot on any unknown land. Alone or all together: Israel hope for the Lord, from now on and for ever.

I propose, now that we have made a little survey of the world in which this text was born, to detach the text of Psalm 131 from its author. No author can determine for all times the influence of what he has written. The biblical authors form no exception to this rule. Each text will lead its own life once it has been published. An author can not do anything else than let go of his text, give the effects of his texts into the hands of God and leave it to the work of the Holy Spirit. This may hold for the author, it holds for the reader too. The direction of looking back, a reader assumes almost automatically, will change in the direction of looking forward. In the analysis, you look back and walk around in the world of the text. In the detachment that follows the analysis, you look forward, you answer the invitation of the author positively, and join him on his way through the unknown land before you. This

world full of difficulties and problems to be conquered trustfully is the world the text projects beyond itself. Both movements with regard to this world are necessary and also complementary. Without the analysis the world of the text remains unknown and it would not be possible to accept the invitation of the author and join him to set foot on the land he sees before him. Without the dynamics of detachment and of hitting the road together with the author the analysis remains a sterile activity that keeps the text at a distance and alien. The synthesis of analysis and detachment creates room for the adventure of the meeting of text and reader.

## **Of metaphors and symbols**

### **The metaphor of the weaned child**

Then come the images. An old wise man introduces himself as a weaned child. A beautiful metaphor, this image of a child that has just grown free of the motherly breast and sets his first little steps into the unknown world. The metaphor both is and is not what it describes. The old man is not a weaned child, and yet he is. A new road is constructed here in an unknown and bare land, a new way is created to look upon reality. One could even say the psalmist is creating new reality. Some centuries later Nicodemus will ask Jesus how can a man be reborn? Is it possible for an old man to go back to his mother's womb? According to our psalmist, it can be done, in his own special way. And the effect is a big shock. For what does this image really have to say?

As a weaned child near his mother, as a weaned child is my soul in me. The old, wise and powerful man does not feel so old, wise and powerful at all. He feels very small, just capable of taking some solid food and setting some tiny little steps in an insecure world. This is the first shock. He who can be reckoned among the leaders of Israel, he who should lead the people through the night, he is not so sure of himself any more. He is not so self-assured as one could legitimately expect regarding his position. And he does not make a secret of it. He even makes a psalm out of it.

The first shock prepares the second. The little child only sets his steps by the grace of the safe feeling, that his mother is right behind him and will put him back on his feet again when he falls. Otherwise he would not move himself for just one inch. Israel has always got this safe feeling from JHWH, the

God of Israel. That is again the psalmist's recommendation. Nothing has changed in this respect. Israel hope for the Lord. But as the psalmist introduces himself as a little child he introduces God as a mother. And that is new and shocking in a patriarchal culture that presents God usually as King, Shepherd, Husband, in short as a *man*.

The third shock that is caused by this metaphor of the weaned child near his mother is that this wise old man is showing the people of Israel a completely new way that surpasses all the old images and fills them in new ways. Well, the circumstances ask for it. The old ways just won't do any more. Passing this new desert asks for new ways of believing. God shall have to be experienced in a different way. As a mother, letting go of her child and leading it to independence. As a mother, who prefers to die herself rather than to let her child perish abroad. As a mother, who prefers to see her child grow up to be a loving steadfast and modest man than an arrogant hero spreading around death and misery to others and to himself.

### **The symbol of power**

In the symbol - unlike the human creation of language or images in the metaphor - pre-lingual being, good and bad, gives itself in the language of the direct and literal meaning. Metaphors being the linguistic surface of symbols, owe their power to connect that semantic surface with the pre-semantic layers in the depths of human experience to the two dimensional structure of the symbol. Let us therefore have a look at the symbolic reality that may lie beneath the metaphoric creation of our psalm text. We will do so by means of another text, the poem *Maud* by Alfred L. Tennyson.<sup>5</sup>

“Yet I thought I saw her stand, a shadow there at my feet, high over the shadowy land.” It is not so difficult to distil some literal meanings from Tennyson's verse. There is a person - the poet - watching out over some scenery. There is a shadow of another person, a woman, who - in the imagination of the poet - is standing behind him and whose shadow falls before the I-figure of the poem. The sun is low because the shadow goes from his feet high over the shadowy land. The presence of the woman does not coincide with the expectations and reflections of the I-figure: *yet* I thought I saw her stand.

Now, what hidden meanings sparkle through this foggy surface? The poem, *Maud*, out of which this verse was taken is about a sad love affair. The I-figure of the poem is a man. The woman his beloved. She is there

against his expectations, but only as a shadow in his mind, in some sort of a surrogate of real love. In fact he has fled away from her and her family. Maud's father - like the poet's father - had been a brutal character, while her mother - as the poet's mother - had been a sweet and caring mother who had died very young. After her father had vanished Maud's brother had taken his place to defend her honor. Now, while the poet and Maud, who already played with each other when they were still kids, saw their childish friendship change into a mature love relation, her brother tried to marry her to some silly lord. One dramatic night there was a ball where Maud was, and the poet was not invited. The I-figure of the poem had been waiting all evening outside until she came out. And then when she came out in company of her brother and the silly lord, it came to a fight. The poet seriously injured Maud's brother and may have even killed him. He did not wait to see. He fled with a last cry of Maud full of agony and pain hovering over the hollow behind the little wood and piercing into his ear to stay there forever. Over the sea he fled to *Bretagne* in France, and there he imagines to see her shadow.

Man and woman do not look each other in the eyes. He only imagines her shadow. Their love is an impossible love, because of its outspoken Oedipal character. Fathers and mothers play a powerful and regressive role. They pull the lovers back to a lonely and dark past and prevent them from making moves together towards a sunny future. The dark is "pregnantly" present in the shadows. That is why the sun that shines is an evening sun that will sink lower and lower and will make the shadows longer and longer. The shadowy land will soon be dark and the I-figure will soon be wandering in the dark, lonely and without his beloved. He watches death in the eyes in a last glance at the shadows of his life, of what should have been his life. And yet in this symbolism of low sun and long shadows there is also a hope hidden in shadows, a hope for the next dawn, for life after death.

The era of modern relativism is over, so I have heard. Yet I thought I saw her stand, motionless behind me, looking over my shoulder into the shadowy darkening land before us. Not to be denied, hard to escape. Even if I tried, we would soon be one in the darkness, because it's high over the shadowy land.

New images fill my mind. Collapsing twin towers, wounded soldiers returning from the frontlines, terrified hostages begging to spare their lives, innocent children and adults lying dead in the streets after an air raid. Why, I ask myself, does the idea that we in the post-modern era have left premodern



absolutism and modern relativism behind us, cause such a nasty feeling of confusion, emptiness and insecurity? You get the feeling that you're looking into a shadowy land. Does this mean the end of Western culture, the end of the *Abendland* - the evening land - as the Germans call it? Will our basic axioms still function in the 21st millennium as they have done in the passed two millennia, or do we need something new? I think, we do need something new. The basic structures of Western thinking are under discussion. And this is confusing, alarming. What now? Is it not worth trying to stop making our Western culture absolute and try to combine its positive elements with the positive sides of other cultures? Wouldn't it be a nice idea to stop reckoning Psalm 131 to a very far past and apply it to all times into infinity? As a song that gives us a glimpse of the unknown land beyond modern relativism ahead of us and on which the psalmist invites us to set foot?

In the third and last part of the poem, *Maud*, the I-figure – the poet – has changed. His exile at the shores of *Bretagne* has given him new insights that will take him back over the sea to his country. No longer will he fight to obtain the love of Maud as an opium against his existential doubts. No longer will he use a human being to project his regressive fights with his own father on in order to obtain the love of his mother, only to expel his own insecurity. He is determined to fight once he will be back in his homeland, not for himself but for the honor and glory of his country. Maud has left his mind.

And now I know for sure that I saw her stand, but I have turned around. I do not want to flee anymore, although I know that she is there. The dark and fearsome shadow has vanished. The sun no longer sets in the West, it rises in the East. Now the reflection of the morning sun - a warm and shining, trustful presence – helps me to focus on my own shadow, paints rainbows in the waves, removes the fear and gives me new courage. The Oedipal struggles are over. I've come to terms with fear, desire and death, so that love can flourish. I am free to move forward and backward into a sunny future in a newborn land, for "I have calmed and quieted my soul like a weaned child near its mother". She the source of my life whose origin is hidden in the unknown, who gives me strength and joyful responsibility.

### **Suspicion of imagery.**

"Man created God to his own image" was, as I think to remember, a thesis of Feuerbach. I am convinced he was right in a double sense. Why should we not use images for God? It is a very biblical praxis to think of God in im-

ages. In the Bible we find great freedom to invent, introduce and use in varied circumstances images for God. Images that brought God's people one step further in an uncertain future. Images that were taken right from the own practical life and life's conditions and were used to tell something about - the only partially comprehensible - God. When the circumstances changed the images changed with them. To present God as a shepherd presupposes a different social and political setting than when God is portrayed as a king. Every new image that is invented is as a new road constructed in an unknown scenery to make progress possible. There is nothing bad about this.

What is bad is when one of these images is taken out and changed in an absolute idea of God: the only right way to think about God from now on. This can be an image cut out of wood, but also an idea or a scientific paradigm. By promoting just one image as the absolute and final "truth" about God, we close the future and make progress impossible. We will not set one foot on the unknown land and prefer to perish with the old images that will not meet the needs of the new conditions in life. This is very bad. It is even prohibited in the first of the Ten Commandments, the commandment that organizes the intercourse with God. Also, in this respect, Feuerbach was right when he said that this commandment was nowhere offended more than in Western thinking and in Christianity. God and Jesus too have to stay within the images that we invented for them. Although it seems to be a natural tendency for a religion to conserve what one has got, we see in the Bible a quite different tendency. If God can and may not be bigger, more, even more incomprehensible than what we have in mind, then God has become an idol that we should not have before His Countenance. According to Lévinas, this is totalitarian thinking, wanting to capture the Spirit of God in little systems that the inventor can control and manipulate. How much resistance has not called forth the image of God as a mother in the last decades? And yet it is a very biblical image. But it is an image that we in our Western culture do not accept. God may not be different than what we all have in mind, and thus God becomes an idol having not much to say any more.

In fact, in a way, we have not come one step further on our way through the bare and unknown scenery than the author of Psalm 131. And this, in spite of all our theology, science and church history. Sartre and Nietzsche have put their fingers on a very sensible spot when they exposed our fear for freedom and individual responsibility. In fact the psalmist is ahead of us. He is on his way, *moving*. Although he fears and trembles, he is also full of trust in the near presence of the incomprehensible God. For us remains, I some-

times think in a gloomy mood, only the fear and the trembling while we stay on our spot, *waiting* ...

### **Metaphor and symbol in the image of horse riding**

I may play, sing, set little steps, grow into independence, and love because God is near me with her motherly care and will teach me to become as Her. For the Christian tradition this means to become a follower of Christ. That is to say, to become responsible and to step backwards in order to give room to the new life that God creates, to surround and to protect this new life with the gentle powers of love. It means exercising modesty instead of heroics that carry death and destruction for others and for oneself. And ultimately, it even means to prefer your own death above the fall of someone else in the abyss, because nothing can separate us from the love of the Lord. Her motherly care surrounds us, even in the midst of death and in the end of a culture, way up into the resurrection life that will follow and lead us into the Kingdom of God.

Personally I like to see being a minister, or leader of whatever group or community, as riding a horse. The minister as a rider. But, you may object, this metaphor is - from a biblical point of view - abundantly filled with power symbolism. It was just for this reason that Jesus entered Jerusalem on Palm Sunday humbly riding a donkey and not as a proud king sitting on a powerful horse. It's true, the horse does not have a very good image in the Bible. In biblical times, the horse specifically was a strong symbol of power, because wars were fought with horses; and, with them, will was forced upon peoples who were to weak to fight back. But there is even more that can be said about the power symbolism related to horses. When a man is riding a fierce horse this tells something about the inner power and strength of its rider, because he proves to be able to reign over one of the most primitive and powerful forces of nature.

Why then do I like to see the minister as a rider on a horse and do I use a metaphor that calls forth a very strong power symbolism? We would fill old images in new ways. This is done over and over again in the Holy Scriptures in general, and in the Gospel in particular. That is why I don't want to take, in this image of horse and rider, the rider as the starting point, but the horse. I do not see the horse as a primitive force that has to be controlled, but as an anxious, fearful being that has to be put at ease. There is a beautiful story about the horse of Alexander the Great that can serve as an illustration here.

Everybody was afraid of this fiery animal. No one could come near him, except the emperor himself. So the legend was borne that the mighty emperor rode the mightiest stallion in the country. In fact, the truth was that the horse was frightened by its own shadow and that with a lot of patience Alexander finally discovered the source of its fear. So every time he wanted to mount his horse Alexander had to put him with his head towards the sun so that the horse could not see its own shadow. This was the only position in which the horse would stand still and permit its rider to mount him. Alexander was the only one who knew and he carefully kept his secret for himself as long as his horse lived and carried him from battle to battle ...

But, you may think, if the minister is the rider, than the congregation may be a “noble” but yet irrational animal. Is this decent, is this permitted? In the image of the shepherd the congregation is also painted as a herd of irrational animals for whom the grass of the neighbor is always better than the grass in the meadows they are in. So this cannot be a problem. Plato too gives a helping hand when he compares reason with a driver who can only keep two totally different horses under control by the dynamics of their movement forward. The one horse is the metaphor for the lower material needs and the other horse is the metaphor of the higher spiritual needs in every human being, ministers and members of congregations alike. The real resistance felt with regard to the image of horse and rider is generated by the power symbolism that we have been projecting on this riding animal for centuries and to which it already refers by its so called “nobility”.

The big secret and basis of all riding is to be relaxed. When you are relaxed you transfer this same feeling to your horse and you put him at ease. Then you can have your horse do what you want by means of almost imperceptible signs and keep your horse happy to work with you at the same time. When he is frightened by something your first reaction should be: relax, slacken the reins, and don't pull. If you tighten yourself as a reaction, if you pull up your legs, pull the reins to stop him, then you can be sure the horse is going to resist you. He will pull the reins as hard as you do, will jump up and down and eventually throw you off his back before he runs away. For every rider knows that if he really starts to fight a horse he will inevitably lose this fight. The horse is stronger anyhow. Power exists as long as it is granted and a rider can sit on the back of a horse as long as the horse allows him to, until the moment he throws him off. He who sows wind shall yield storm and this applies in a very special way to riding on the back of a horse.

When, however, the element of fight disappears from the rider metaphor, then the sting of power symbolism also disappears from this image and what is left is miraculously beautiful. What is more gorgeous than galloping along the beach or through the woods? What is finer than feeling that your horse guesses your intentions and performs after a slight sign of your leg in a harmonious way exactly what you had in mind. What is more beautiful than hovering above an obstacle or enjoying together the smell of the wood and the beams of the sun that pierce through its roof of leaves. It's a lovely feeling to be one with your horse, to enjoy this beautiful piece of nature as it runs in the meadows in springtime and to see it prosper while it is taken care of properly. Okay, you are the one who steers, but he was there first. This simple fact makes you small and also grateful that he bears you on his back. And, as a logical consequence, it makes you responsible for his well being. So Nietzsche's fear for freedom will no longer be compensated by will to power but will change in a freely shared inner strength and joyful responsibility.

This is roughly how I experience to be a minister. Not only in my relation with the congregation, but also in my relation with the Scriptures, with the "spirit of the age", and with the whole range of hermeneutical possibilities as expressed in the rhetoric of sermons. There is movement, dynamics, lots of effort in everyone, but always coming out of relaxation, with the peace of the Gospel as its basis, trusting that the Lord lives and surrounds us with His motherly care. When I think of progress beyond modern relativism into the postmodern era, then it is in this sort of dynamic moving images that grow out of inner peace, quietude and trust. And do you know, who are the best riders? Children! They are less vulnerable than grown-ups, because they are much more open-minded, trustful and free of fear.

### **Towards a deeper understanding of Psalm 131**

Playing was what I wanted, playing with images. With Ricœur, I took the starting point for my interpretation of Psalm 131 in the text in order to see what can happen in the meeting of the reader and the text. Texts can open up worlds and realize new ways of self-understanding. This new self that comes forth out of the understanding of the text, is the complete opposite of the ego that claims to precede this understanding. It is the text that precedes the ego. Maybe I played a game with images on Psalm 131. But this game resulted in the loss of my ego filled with lust of power. And, in this way, the text played

a game with me, so that I find myself standing in a new way before God and my neighbor.

*It is the text, with its universal power to open the world, which gives a self to the ego<sup>6</sup>.*

And so, the imaginative game of text and reader becomes an art of dialectics between structure and event, hermeneutics and rhetoric, analysis and literature, self and ego. And if this self comes from the Kingdom of God, filled with love and inner peace, of which the Bible text is speaking all along, then I would say there is plenty of material at hand for artful and imaginative sermons and for a rhetoric that transmits hope for a beautiful future.

### **Pentecost: “All of us for all of God”**

Pentecost is the beginning of the Christian church, is an often heard opinion based on the story about the descent of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2. In fact, this may be true as far as the Christian church is concerned but that is only one part of the story. In Acts 2:1 is said “When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place.” (NRSV)<sup>7</sup> So Pentecost already existed in Jesus time, being the Hebrew Feast of Weeks, *Shabuot*. *Pentecostè* is the Greek word for fiftieth (day) indicating fullness (the number 7) raised to the square. When seven weeks of seven days have passed, the feast of *Shabuot* (the Sabbaths, with roots in the numeral seven)) is celebrated on the fiftieth day. Originally, *Shabuot* was a feast to celebrate the harvest and its first fruits were offered to the Lord. Later this feast was also related to the giving of the Torah and the installment of the Covenant on Mount Sinai. A beautiful combination because the Lord’s trustworthiness for his people in the Promised Land was affirmed every year in the new harvest and so in the celebration of *Shabuot* nature, culture and cult come together.

So Jesus’ disciples were together on the Hebrew feast of *Shabuot* and then, Acts 2 continues, “suddenly from heaven there came a *sound like* the rush of a violent wind and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, *as of fire*, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.” (Acts 2, 2-4, italics JCV) First they *heard* a sound like the rush of a violent wind, then they *saw* tongues as of fire. Christians have always experienced these tongues of fire dancing on the heads of the disciples as the most mysterious part of Pente-

cost. They just could not understand it and interpreted them as supernatural, beyond normal *vision*, not affirming the laws of nature and God's Providence but transforming normal reality. In so doing the miracle – foreseen in creation, revealed in public, to precipitate universal redemption – was denied. That made Pentecost the least understood feast of Christianity. A recent survey of a Dutch radio and television station into the familiarity of people in Holland with this feast showed that less than half of the interviewed knew that it had something to do with a "spirit". One third knew that its symbol was fire. But what this fire could mean for your own personal self, was as good as unknown. However, if we remember that Luke speaks of a sound *like* a rush of a violent wind and of tongues *as* of fire, then it becomes clear that it is not concrete wind and fire what is meant but something *like* wind and fire. In other words, Luke speaks in metaphors and symbols that did not raise such uncertainty in his time than it does in our days.

How come these symbols were so familiar to Luke's audience? Exodus 19 and 20 describe the giving of the Torah and the installment of the Covenant. Before Moses receives the Ten Commandments out of the hands of God he gathers the people at Mount Sinai, where God had descended to meet his people. Now, the description of God's presence on the mount makes an appeal to the senses and surpasses at the same time all sensorial perception. Thunder and lightning, a thick cloud, tremendous blasting of trumpets, earthquakes, smoke and fire are the accompanying phenomena of the Lord's presence. "Now Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke because the Lord had descended on it in fire; the smoke went up like a kiln, while the whole mountain shook violently" (Exodus 19:18). Not only in Exodus do these phenomena show up. When the prophet Elijah is led by the Spirit to Horeb - the mount of God - after he had defeated the Baal priests on mount Carmel, he will meet the Lord in "a sound of sheer silence" *after* he experienced a great wind "splitting mountains and breaking rocks", an earthquake, and a fire, being the phenomena that preceded the appearance of the Lord. (cf. 1 Kings 19:11-14) And, in the book of Joel, it is said the Lord "will show portents in the heavens and on earth, blood and fire and columns of smoke. The sun shall be turned to darkness and the moon to blood, before the great and terrible day of the Lord comes. Then everyone who calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved; for in Mount Zion and in Jerusalem there shall be those who escape." (Joel 2:30-32) Throughout the Hebrew Bible these mighty phenomena precede and accompany the presence of the Lord who is God of the whole universe, Lord of all peoples and nations. In his will and acts, He sa-

ves and protects the oppressed and He wants human beings to do as He did. Therefore his commandment is not exercise of power, but love. The mighty phenomena *precede* his presence; He can be actually *met* in a sound of sheer silence. And this was all very familiar in Jesus' time and to the audience for whom Luke wrote his Bible book of Acts. Only *we Christians* forgot somehow ...

Wind and fire that accompany the descent of the Holy Spirit in Luke's story in Acts are metaphors related to symbols that are strongly rooted in the Hebrew Bible and they act accordingly. A deep pre-lingual layer of meaning gives itself in a direct literal meaning *as* something that can be grasped by means of language or the senses but is much more in itself. A sound like a rush of a violent wind, tongues as of fire refer to a universal God who can be met in silence and is motivated by love. This symbolic wealth and infinite surplus of meaning in the stories of God's presence in his creation and in the human heart inspires me to celebrate Pentecost as the Hebrew *Shabuot* celebrated in the fullness of time - including nature, culture and cult - together with all creation, i.e. with as many people and cultures as possible.

In chapter 4 we encountered Tom Troeger's ideal of the reconciliation of the senses that he related to Pentecost: "All of us for all of God"<sup>8</sup>. "Analyzing the deep, material roots of our cultural differences leads us to realize that the only one capable of understanding all sensoria simultaneously is God. When God's spirit is present among us, then we are gifted with a glimpse of the divine vision, a moment of Pentecost that recapitulates the first Pentecost (Acts 2:5-12). People of multiple languages do not suddenly speak one language, but a universal understanding is granted to them while they speak in their distinct tongue. The result is amazement and astonishment." (Cf. Troeger, 2003, 125). Because I think, that the transmittance of the use of the senses is not only a matter of conventions and socialization but eventually involves also the genes, I think we have to look for this reconciliation on an even deeper level. While in *Shabuot* nature, culture and cult come together, I would also want to search for the metaphorical potential of the symbolic wealth in which the biologically given multiplicity of intelligences (and their senses) and the cultural preference and development of these intelligences are brought together. And this to create new relations between cultures and world religions and precipitate the coming of the Kingdom of God.

The symbolic wealth of Hebrew Scriptures gives this ideal the double meaning - individual and corporate - that it basically has in Israel's core



confession as basis of the covenant. “*Sjema*, Hear o Israel, the Lord our God is one, you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind and with all your strength.”(Mk.12: 29b-30) With heart and mind (i.e. will and intellect), with soul (i.e. vitality of selfhood), and with strength (of body and spirit) (Ibid., 21), we shall love God with everything that is inside us, which means with all our senses and intelligences. Social and cultural preferences related to these intelligences are not of predominant importance, for they were all created by the same God and therefore we can love God together with all of humanity and of course, as Jesus concluded his summary of the Torah, our neighbor – the one coming from another culture - as our selves.

## The suffering servant

What is a meaningful ground for postmodern non-centered human beings to live on? Hope. In Christian liturgy the color of hope is green. This is also the color of the heart-chakra, and so, hope is intimately connected to love. When love is not restricted within the narrow boundaries of Western, Greek thinking, then hope is to be found everywhere. In every breaking wave that produces a curtain of water with bright, shiny rainbows. That is why, I want to finish this book - in the spirit of philosopher Stanislas Breton and theologian Paul Tillich - with a painting of Marc Chagall.

In his book, *the Word and the Cross*<sup>9</sup>, Breton confronts two Pauline texts on the Cross - *Stauros* (1 Cor. 1:17-31 and Phil. 2:5-11) with John’s text on the Word – *Logos* in the prologue to his Gospel (John 1:1-5). Breton reverses Paul’s expression *Logos Staurou* - the Logos of the Cross – and turns it into the crucifixion of the *logos*. “The word of the Cross effectuates the transcendence of the *Logos* by setting it over against the paradoxical figure of the servant who is obedient to death, even the death on the Cross. The Cross is thus the place where two excesses intersect, the one by which thought itself is out-passed, the other where willing ceases, especially the willing of oneself in any form.” (Breton, 2002, 1) How is this *kenosis* or self-emptying activity related to the bright and shining Johannine, proto-logical *Logos*? For Breton, this *Logos* is “a movement that originates in the Word in its ‘Principle’, unfolds itself in creation, and is achieved in the Incarnation in which a regime of grace and truth is substituted for the Law of Moses.” (Ibid., 101) A first condition for a fruitful relation between the Word and the

Cross is theological courage, which, instead of particularizing the Cross, “would universalize it”. Furthermore, we would have to be obedient to “a detached and questioning rigor that characterizes this side of what can properly be called knowledge, the ironic ‘I think’ of faith”. (Ibid., 115) Such an irony opens closed doors. And with it, the constructive, creative Johannine *Logos* and the critical Pauline *Stauros* (in the sense of word, folly and power, cf. *ibid.*, 11) can sustain one another, joining together “beatitude, service and death.” However, “that strange trinity remains yet to be thought.”(Ibid.,128) And so for Breton, logical systems are surpassed in and by reality of the Cross and therefore we are encouraged to search for a new Word that expresses a more universal unity of reality.

It is precisely this universalizing move that Paul Tillich makes with his concept of “ultimate concern”<sup>10</sup>. “Being religious”, says Tillich, “means asking passionately the question of meaning of our existence and being, willing to receive answers, even if the answers hurt. ... It is the state of being concerned about one’s own being and being universally.” (Church, *The Essential Tillich*, 1999, 1) With this concern however, Tillich reaches through and yet farther than the particular religions. Transcending their gods, ultimate concern hints at “God above God” (cf. *ibid.*,11/12). “A god disappears; divinity remains.”(Ibid., 23). This turns the religious concern into an “ultimate concern” and connects it to universal love that will overcome death that results from idealizing and defending anything finite. “It is love, human and divine, which overcomes death in nature and generations and in all the horror of our time. Help has become almost impossible in the face of the monstrous powers which we are experiencing. Death is given power over everything finite, especially in our period of history. But death is given no power over love. Love is stronger” (Ibid., 161) And therefore, our hope lies beyond our finite frontiers. “Nothing finite can cross the frontier from finitude to infinity. But something else is possible: the Eternal can, from its side, cross over the border to the finite. It would not be the Eternal if the finite were its limit. All religions witness to this border crossing, those of which we say that they transmit law and vocation to the peoples. These are the perfecting forces from the Unlimited, the Law-establishing, the founding and leading of all being, which makes peace possible. ... These perfecting forces are ever there. But they only become effective if one opens himself to them.” (Ibid., 249)

The Jewish painter, Marc Chagall, has painted the crucifixion of Jesus in his own peculiar way. Chagall located the cross with the suffering servant of

the Lord (Isaiah 53) in the center of his painting in the midst of a suffering people. Light from heaven falls on this scene. However, it does not fall on the cross, but just behind it and thus this light not only makes the suffering of Jesus visible but also the suffering of the people that brought him forth, in reminiscence of their trials and tribulations in Egypt, Babylon, Diaspora and Holocaust. So I think Chagall said with this painting: “Jesus you are one of us. You may even be more important than any one of us, Isaiah’s suffering servant of the Lord placed in the center of the scene. But if redemption will come it will not be a result of your own personal ego-success in the battle with evil.” That light does not radiate from the cross. The light comes from heaven, from our *adonai olam* (“Lord of the heavens and earth”), whom we respectfully name as *hashem* (“The Name”) and intimately invoke as *ab* (father<sup>11</sup>). No personal victory, no *theological* system can ultimately beat evil in its abysmal depths and make suffering superfluous. Only the grace of The Eternal One can and, as Isaiah 53 promises, He will. And in His redeeming plan the suffering servant, the suffering people and the suffering world will all play an important role.

There is one word in Isaiah’s account of the suffering servant that has called forth long debates and commentaries in Old Testament scholarship. It is the word *tasim* (verbal form of the root טָשַׁם) in Isaiah 53,10b: *im-tasim asham naphsho jireh zerah ja-arig jamim*. Now, different translations vary widely when it comes to Isaiah 53,10b and it all comes down to how the verbal form *tasim* is interpreted. NRSV for example has: if [conditional] *you* make his life an offering for sin, he shall see his offspring, and shall prolong his life.” The Dutch NBG translation, however, has: “when [temporal] *he* will have made himself into an offering for sin he will see offspring and have a long life” (italics and additions JCV).<sup>12</sup> The first translation is possible if *tasim* is interpreted as a second person singular form (if you – Isaiah’s audience - make). The latter translation sees *tasim* as a third person singular female form with *nafsho* – the soul or person of the servant – as its subject (when he - the servant – will have made).

Although both translations respect the imperfect tense – related to the future - of the verbal form, I choose to follow NRSV. I consider *tasim* as a second person singular verbal form that includes – *pars pro toto* - men and women and addresses the prophet’s audience, whole Israel and beyond that all religions, cultures, in short, the whole world. In that case we do not need to design an all-encompassing *theological* Christian satisfaction theory, that determines and controls who will be redeemed or go to heaven and who will

not. On the contrary, we are asked to consider the suffering of the Lord's servant as an offering for sin. In this light, the suffering of the world becomes visible as personal guilt, social bondage and impersonal evil, but in the offering itself, we experience a sacrificial love that is stronger than death, stronger than all evil in its abysmal depths. This love is a free gift from heaven, pure grace that we cannot earn but receive for free just like the oxygen we receive with every breath we take. If we consider it as such, we will accept it, let ourselves be transformed by it and spread it around the world. Then the suffering servant of the Lord will not have suffered in vain, but he will see his offspring and prolong his life - and with him all who suffer. And the lamentation will gradually be transformed in a song of praise, *All of us for all of God*, and transcend into the liturgical gesture of a praying and loving community that will precipitate the coming of the Kingdom of God.

## Endnotes

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### Prelude

<sup>1</sup> W. Slob, *Verily I say unto Thee*, rhetorical normativity after postmodern theologies. Dissertation defended in public on January 24, 2002 at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (RuG) in Groningen. The dissertation itself has not been officially published, but was published by Kluwer Academic Publishers in an elaborated and modified – less theological - form under the title: *Dialogical Rhetoric*, An essay on Truth and Normativity After Postmodernism, Dordrecht, Boston, London, 2002. In quotations I will add references to the book – if available – with DR ... (page number).

<sup>2</sup> H. Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, The Theory of Multiple Intelligences, New York, 1983

<sup>3</sup> P. Ricœur, *La métaphor vive*, Paris, 1975

### Chapter 1

<sup>1</sup> J. Gaarder *Sophie's World*, New York, 1996; B. Russell, *Geschiedenis der Westerse Filosofie*, Katwijk aan Zee, 1984; F.J. Thonnard, *Extraits des Grands Philosophes*, Paris, 1946; in this and the following chapters I will quote more directly from the work of Paul Ricœur because his work will be an important focus of my present study.

<sup>2</sup> Plato, *Crito*, 43a-46a, Dutch translation in: G. Koolschijn, *Plato schrijver*, teksten gekozen en vertaald door Gerard Koolschijn, Amsterdam, 1988.

<sup>3</sup> Plato, *Politeia*, 515a-518b, Dutch translation in: G. Koolschijn, *Plato schrijver*, teksten gekozen en vertaald door Gerard Koolschijn, Amsterdam, 1988.

<sup>4</sup> Russell regrets that Aristotle brought Western thinking to a stand still, that lasted for two thousand years (Russell, 1984, 197)

<sup>5</sup> W. Slob, *Verily I say unto thee*, rhetorical normativity after postmodern theologies. Dissertation defended in public on January 24 2002 at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (RuG) in Groningen

<sup>6</sup> P. Ricœur, *La métaphore vive*, Paris, 1975

<sup>7</sup> Much of the ancient Greek philosophy has been primed by political and social instability, but by treating the great themes it surpasses in my opinion mere politics. One can also be astonished about the great extent of stability it reaches when even Heraclitus' constant flow becomes some sort of solid ground to stand on. From a Ptolemaic – closed, simple and univocal - worldview however this is hardly surprising. Many centuries later Kant will use the same distinction of reproductive and pro-

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ductive knowledge that is operative in Aristotelian rhetoric, but in an entirely different worldview and yielding considerably less stability.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. M. Leezenberg, *Islamitische filosofie*, Een geschiedenis, Amsterdam, 2001

<sup>9</sup> St Augustine's world was already thoroughly hellenized when he started thinking about the great themes of philosophy and theology. We can think of the Greek translation of the Hebrew Bible, the *Septuaginta*, and authors like Philo, Justin the Martyr, Plotinus, and currents like Gnosticism, Manicheism, Neoplatonism with whom St. Augustine occupied himself intensely. For a thorough study in this realm see: S.L. Dixon, *Augustine, The Scattered and Gathered Self*, St Louis MO, 1999.

<sup>10</sup> P. Ricœur, *Le conflit des interprétations*, Paris, 1969

<sup>11</sup> Anselmus van Canterbury, *Proslogion, gevolgd door de discussie met Gaunilo*, Ingeleid, vertaald en geannoteerd door dr. Carlos Steel, Bussum, 1981

<sup>12</sup> K. Heussi, *Kompendium der Kirchengeschichte*, Tübingen, 1979

<sup>13</sup> R. Descartes, *Discourse on Method and The Meditations* translated and introduced by E.E. Suttcliffe, New York, 1968

<sup>14</sup> I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by J.M.D. Meiklejohn, New York, 1990

<sup>15</sup> P. Ricœur, Biblical Hermeneutics, in *Semeia 4*, 1975

<sup>16</sup> T. de Boer, 'Fenomenologie, een lied van schijn en wezen' in: R.C. Kwant en S. IJsseling, *Filosoferen, gangbare vormen van wijsgerig denken*, Alphen a/d Rijn, Brussel, 1978 (73-89)

<sup>17</sup> J.F. Lyotard, *Phenomenology*, Albany, New York, 1991

<sup>18</sup> P. Ricœur, *Du text à l'action*, Paris, 1986

<sup>19</sup> P. Ricœur, *Le lieu de la dialectique*, in *Dialectics* edited by Ch. Perelman, The Hague, 1975. Cf. *Temps et Récit 3*: 'To take distance from Hegelian thought means to avoid the desire to figure out the all encompassing intrigue'. (Ricœur, 1985, 298)

<sup>20</sup> P. Ricœur, 'Biblical hermeneutics' in *Semeia 4*, 1975

<sup>21</sup> P. Ricœur, *Philosophie de la volonté, Finitude et Culpabilité, II. La symbolique du mal*, 'Conclusion: Le symbol donne à penser', Paris, 1960, p.323 ff. Cf Ricœur, 1969, 284

<sup>22</sup> P. Ricœur, *Temps et récit, Tomes I, II, III*, Paris, 1983, 1984, 1985 (*Time and Narrative*)

## Chapter 2

<sup>1</sup> This chapter presents a summary of the greatest part of my dissertation. For a complete description of the interpretative models and of the analytical model I designed in my dissertation to analyze sermons on Biblical interpretation see: J.C. Vaessen, *tussen Schrift en preek* (design of an analytical model for the Bible interpretation in sermons using Paul Ricœur's textual hermeneutics), Kampen, 1997

<sup>2</sup> H.W. de Knijff, *Sleutel en slot*, Kampen, 1980, p.77.

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<sup>3</sup> P. Ricœur, *Du texte à l'action*, Paris, 1986, p.83.

<sup>4</sup> See M.I. Wallace, *The second naiveté, Barth, Ricœur and the New Yale Theology*, Mercer University Press, Macon, Georgia, 1995 p. 87-110 (Studies in American Biblical Hermeneutics 6)

<sup>5</sup> K.A. Deurloo, 'Exegese naar de Amsterdamse traditie' in: *Inleiding tot de studie van het Oude Testament*, onder redactie van A.S. van der Woude, Kampen, 1986, p.188-198.

<sup>6</sup> H.G. Gadamer, *Wahrheit und Methode*, Tübingen, 1986

<sup>7</sup> H. Küng, D. Tracy, *Theologie – wohin?*, Gütersloh, 1984

<sup>8</sup> Th.C.W. Oudemans, 'Gadamers wijsgerige interpretatieleer' in: Th. de Boer e.a., *Hermeneutiek*, Meppel/Amsterdam, 1988

<sup>9</sup> P. Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory, discourse and the surplus of meaning*, Fort Worth, Texas, 1976

<sup>10</sup> P. Ricœur, *La métaphore vive*, Paris, 1975

<sup>11</sup> P. Ricœur, *Le conflit des interprétations*, Paris, 1969

<sup>12</sup> P. Ricœur, *Philosophie de la volonté, Finitude et Culpabilité. II. La symbolique du mal*, Paris, 1960

<sup>13</sup> 'Cette circonscription des expressions à double sens constitue proprement le champ herméneutique. En retour, le concept d'interprétation reçoit lui aussi une acceptation déterminée; je propose lui donner même extension qu'au symbole. *L'interprétation, dirons-nous, est le travail de pensée qui consiste à déchiffrer le sens caché dans le sens apparent, à déployer les niveaux de signification impliqués dans la signification littérale.*' (This description of expressions with double sense constitutes the very field of hermeneutics. In turn the concept of interpretation receives itself as well a determined acceptance; I propose to give it the same extension as [I gave (JCV)] to the symbol. Interpretation, we say, is the work of the mind that consists of deciphering the hidden meaning in the apparent meaning, and of the deployment of the levels of signification that are implied within the literal signification.) (Ricœur, 1969, 16)

<sup>14</sup> P. Ricœur treats this extensively in his magnum opus *Temps et récit* (Time and narrative), Paris, 1983,1984, 1985.

<sup>15</sup> P. Ricœur, *Du texte à l'action*, Paris, 1986. You can see an analogy of this spiral movement in the sequence of first naivety – analysis – second naivety that Ricœur employs in the realm of *Geistesgeschichte* (history of human sciences) in premodern and modern times (Ricœur,1969, 293-296) and in the sequence of prefiguration – configuration – refiguration in *Time and narrative* ((Ricœur, 1983,1984, 1985).

<sup>16</sup> 'C'est avec Schleiermacher et Dilthey que le problème herméneutique devient un problème philosophique.' (It is with Schleiermacher and Dilthey that the hermeneutical problem becomes a philosophical problem.) (Ricœur, 1969, 8)

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<sup>17</sup> In *Le conflit des interprétations* Ricœur relates these terms with the development within the history of the spiritual and human sciences (*Geistesgeschichte*) in pre-modern and modern era's. (Ricœur, 1969, 293-296)

<sup>18</sup> D. Buttrick, *Homiletics, moves and structures*, Philadelphia, 1987, p.23-83

### Chapter 3

<sup>1</sup> R. Rorty, *Contingency, irony and solidarity*, New York, 1989

<sup>2</sup> J. Derrida, 'Différance' in: *Margins of philosophy*, Chicago 1986

<sup>3</sup> B. Allen, *Truth in philosophy*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1993

<sup>4</sup> J. Derrida, 'Ousia and Grammè: Note on a Note on *Being and Time*' in: *Margins of philosophy*, Chicago 1986. This article is a critical footnote on Heidegger's footnote on the primacy of the present in Western thinking and the oblivion of Being confusing 'presence' (*ousia*) and 'what is present' (*grammè*).

<sup>5</sup> J.F. Lyotard, *Heidegger et les 'juifs'*, Paris, 1988

<sup>6</sup> P. Ricœur, *Le conflit des interprétations*, Paris, 1969

<sup>7</sup> S. Freud, *L'homme Moïse et la religion monothéiste*, 1939

<sup>8</sup> With thanks to my colleague Rev. R.J. ten Have who devoted a sabbatical leave to the evangelical movement and wrote a report entitled 'Wat beweegt evangelischen en wat kunnen we van hen leren?' (What moves evangelicals and what can we learn from them?) Unpublished, 2000

<sup>9</sup> C.J. den Heyer, *Opnieuw: Wie is Jezus? Balans van 150 jaar onderzoek naar Jezus (Again: Who is Jesus? Account of 150 years research of Jesus.)*, Zoetermeer, 1998

<sup>10</sup> H.M. Kuitert, *Jezus: nalatenschap van het Christendom. Schets voor een christologie (Jesus: heritage of Christianity. Outline for a Christology)*, Baarn, 1998

<sup>11</sup> R.J. Allen, B.S. Blaisdell and S.B. Johnston, *Theology for preaching, authority, truth and knowledge of God in a postmodern ethos*, Nashville, 1997. I will refer to the authors with 'Allen, c.s.' (*cum suis*).

<sup>12</sup> D.R. Griffin, *God and Religion in the Postmodern World*, Albany, 1989, p. x

<sup>13</sup> Cf. A.K. Ploeger and J.J. Ploeger-Grotegoed, *De gemeente en haar verlangen, van praktische theologie naar de geloofspraktijk van de gemeenteleden*, Kampen, 2001. (*The congregation and her desire, from practical theology to the faith praxis of church members*). This book lacks a thorough analysis of postmodernism, confuses different theories of truth that are all equally valid for practical theology and thus ends up with an 'anything goes' moral.

<sup>14</sup> A. Altena *Wolken gaan voorbij, een homiletisch onderzoek naar mogelijkheden voor de preek in een postmodern klimaat (Clouds pass by, a homiletical research into the possibilities for the sermon in a postmodern climate)*, Zoetermeer, 2003

<sup>15</sup> Wouter Slob calls this the formal<sub>3</sub> logical space. It is the logical space opened by dialogical rhetoric and communication as proposed by Slob in contrast to formal<sub>1</sub>



logical space, i.e. premodern mono-logic and formal<sub>2</sub> logical space, i.e. modern dialectical logic.

<sup>16</sup> *Op Goed Gerucht*, May, 2001 'De predikant, voorganger of ...? This paragraph is an elaboration of that article.

<sup>17</sup> That is in *The Matrix*, not in its successors.

<sup>18</sup> Codes of interpretative models attributed to keywords in the sermon.

| <i>Keywords</i>                       | <i>Codes</i> |        |       |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|--------|-------|
| 1 liturgy                             | 3b1          |        |       |
| Isaiah 2; Psalm 122                   | 3b1          | 3d3    |       |
| Romans 13; Matthew 24                 | 3b1          | 3d3    |       |
| 2 the preacher's worries              | 3c2.1e       |        |       |
| Autopilot                             | 3c2.1e       | 2b3    | 3a    |
| do you still believe?                 | 3c2.1e       | 2b3    | 3c3.4 |
| part of the community                 | 3c2.1g       |        |       |
| crisis in preaching                   | 3c2.1e       | 3a     |       |
| September 11 <sup>th</sup>            | 3c2.1e       | 2b3    |       |
| further doubts                        | 3c2.1e       | 3c3.3  | 2b3   |
| Do the impossible in a sermon         | 3c2.2        |        |       |
| you have the right to know            | 3c2.1g       |        |       |
| 3 culture and Bible interpretation    | 2b3          |        |       |
| interpretative models / time spirit   | 2b3          |        |       |
| Jesus non-western yet important       | 2b3          | 3c3.3  |       |
| serious problem in postmodernism      | 2b3          | 3c3.3  | 3d1   |
| am I the only one with this problem?  | 3c3.2        |        |       |
| I get frightened                      | 3c2.1e       |        |       |
| 4 postmodern uncertainty              | 3c2.1e       |        |       |
| Chaotic period of time                | 2b3          | 3c2.1e |       |
| values morals fade, God disappears    | 3c2.1e       |        |       |
| empty basic Christian notions         | 3c2.1e       |        |       |
| religion suspect: holy war            | 3c2.1e       |        |       |
| New Age holism: vague generalities    | 3c3.3        |        |       |
| fundamentalism: defense of traditions | 3c3.3        |        |       |
| p.m. theology: open community         | 3c3.3        |        |       |
| holy must enforced by the culture     | 3c3.3        |        |       |
| liberal church officials conservative | 3c3.3        |        |       |
| the 'T' and power                     | 3c3.3        |        |       |

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|   |        |        |        |       |
|---|--------|--------|--------|-------|
| 5 losing solid ground and God           | 3c2.1e |        |        |       |
| stay faithful: thoroughly naïve         | 3c2.1e |        |        |       |
| problems on a deeper level              | 3c2.1e |        |        |       |
| time and space: a priori, given data    | 3c2.1g |        |        |       |
| p.m. time/space: human experience       | 3c2.1e | 3c3.3  |        |       |
| objectivity: what comes from outside    | 3c2.1e | 3c3.3  |        |       |
| All = nothing                           | 3c2.1e | 3c3.3  |        |       |
| pluralism = individualism               | 3c2.1e | 3c3.3  |        |       |
| internet: human time/space creation     | 3c2.1e | 3c3.3  | 2b3    |       |
|   |        |        |        |       |
| 6 the impotent almighty individual      | 3c2.1e |        |        |       |
| the solid ground fragmented             | 3c2.1e |        |        |       |
| reigning uncertainty                    | 3c2.1e |        |        |       |
| growing difficulties with God/religions | 3c2.1e |        |        |       |
| God giver of solid ground disappears    | 3c2.1e |        |        |       |
| religion has become impossible          | 3c2.1e |        |        |       |
| cultural trends implemented             | 2b3    | 3c3.3  |        |       |
| preaching in time spirit: conflict      | 2b3    | 3c2.1e |        |       |
| p.m. preaching: god disappears          | 2b3    | 3c2.1e | 3c3.3  |       |
| defending old traditions: hostility     | 2b3    | 3c2.1e | 3c3.3  |       |
| still hope for faith and inner peace?   | 3c2.1e | 3c2.2  |        |       |
|   |        |        |        |       |
| 7 some ways out                         | 3d3    |        |        |       |
| Apocalypse now                          | 3a     | 3b2    | 3c2.1e |       |
| relentless struggle for life            | 3b2    | 3c2.1e |        |       |
| Persecution of Christians               | 3b2    | 3c2.1e |        |       |
| be community of Christ                  | 3b2    | 3c2.1g |        |       |
| show love (c.f. Paul to Romans)         | 3b2    | 3c2.1g | 3c2.2  |       |
| Isaiah's vision on Jerusalem            | 3a     | 3b1    | 3c2.1g | 3c1.1 |
| Hebrew God will not disappear           | 3b1    | 3b2    | 3c3.3  | 3d1   |
| God's love radiating from Zion          | 3b1    | 3b2    | 3c2.1g | 3d1   |
| global turning point                    | 3b2    | 3c2.2  | 3d1    | 3c1.1 |
| psalm 122 pilgrim's song                | 3b2    | 3c2.1g |        |       |
| new ways of worship                     | 3a     | 3b2    | 3c2.1g | 3d2   |
| true meaning of the gospel              | 3b2    | 3c4.1  | 3c2.1g | 3d3   |
| living church of Gasselte               | 3b2    | 3c2.1g | 3c2.2  |       |
| God keeps his promises                  | 3c2.2  | 3c4.1  | 3c4.2  | 3d3   |

#### Chapter 4

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<sup>1</sup> In the following chapters I will use both “morality” and “morale” as terms to describe praxis based on universal love. In my use of these terms “morality” hints more at the systematic side of the matter while “morale” is more connected to personal experience. In spite of this distinction both terms are intimately related.

<sup>2</sup> P. Ricœur, *Du texte à l’action*, Paris, 1986

<sup>3</sup> W. Slob, *Verily I say unto thee*, rhetorical normativity after postmodern theologies. Dissertation defended in public on January 24, 2002 at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (RuG) in Groningen. Published by Kluwer Academic Publishers in an elaborated and modified – less theological - form under the title: *Dialogical Rhetoric*, An essay on Truth and Normativity After Postmodernism, Dordrecht, Boston, London, 2002 (in quotations referred to as RD).

<sup>4</sup> P. Ricœur, *Figuring the Sacred*, Religion Narrative and Imagination, Minneapolis, 1995, ‘The “Figure” in Rosenzweig’s *The Star of Redemption*’, pp. 93-107.

<sup>5</sup> P. Ricœur, R. Barthes, P. Beauchamp and others, *Exégèse et herméneutique*, Paris, 1971.

<sup>6</sup> P. Ricœur, *Philosophie de la volonté, Finitude et Culpabilité, II. La symbolique du mal*, ‘Conclusion: Le symbole donne à penser’, Paris, 1960, p.323 f., cf. Ricœur, 1969, 284, 293-295.

<sup>7</sup> T.H. Troeger, *Preaching and Worship*, Chalice Press, St. Louis, Missouri, 2003

<sup>8</sup> H. Gardner, *Frames of Mind*, The Theory of Multiple Intelligences, New York, 1983

<sup>9</sup> Anodea Judith, *Handboek Chakra Psychologie*, Haarlem, 2003. This is a Dutch translation of *Eastern Body, Western Mind*, Berkely CA, 1996.

<sup>10</sup> *Sat-Chakra-Nirupana*, ‘Description of and Investigation into the Six Bodily Centers’, by Tantrik Purnananda-Swami, translated in English by Arthur Avalon in *The Serpent Power*, New York, 1974.

<sup>11</sup> In the classical texts there are only five elements, the last one being ether, which was subdivided by Judith in: sound, light and thought

<sup>12</sup> For a clear overview of the whole chakra-system see: Anodea Judith, *Handboek Chakra Psychologie*, Haarlem, 2003, 20/21.

<sup>13</sup> C.W. Graves, *Levels of Human Existence*, Santa Barbara CA, 2003

<sup>14</sup> Anodea Judith, *Waking the Global Heart*, Elite Books USA, 2006.

<sup>15</sup> Topography: the unconscious, pre-consciousness and consciousness. Economy: superego, ego, id. See P. Ricœur, *Le conflit des interprétations*, Paris, 1969, p. 105 ff.

<sup>16</sup> P. Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory: discourse and the surplus of meaning*, Fort Worth, 1976, p.59

<sup>17</sup> Cf. P. Ricœur, *Le conflit des interprétations*, Paris, 1969, p.280/2

<sup>18</sup> R. Zerfasz, *Grundkurs Predigt 1 und 2*, Düsseldorf, 1997

<sup>19</sup> D. Buttrick, *Homiletic, moves and structures*, Philadelphia, 1986

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<sup>20</sup> J.A. Jungmann, *Missarum Sollemnia*, Explication génétique de la Messe Romaine, tome I, II et III, Paris, 1951, 1952 et 1954

<sup>21</sup> Cf. Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy (pronounced as Nodge), *Invisible Loyalties*, New York, 1973 and *Between give and take: a clinical guide to contextual therapy*, New York, 1986.

<sup>22</sup> C. W. Graves, *Levels of Human Existence*, Santa Barbara CA, 2003

<sup>23</sup> J. Drontmann, *Hoofd ontmoet hart* (Head encounters heart), Utrecht 2002

<sup>24</sup> D.D. Ofman, *Bezieling en kwaliteit in organisaties* (Inspiration and quality in organizations), Utrecht, 1998

<sup>25</sup> W.J.H. de Liefde, *Van dialoog tot besluit*, African tribal leadership voor managers (From dialogue to decision, African tribal leadership for managers), Kluwer, Deventer, 2002

<sup>26</sup> Solid Consult, a company who coaches managers in Holland, uses Ayurveda, 'the science of life in old India', as they describe it, in her coaching trajectories

<sup>27</sup> Cf. Ivan Boszormenyi-Nagy, *Invisible Loyalties*, New York, 1973 and *Between give and take: a clinical guide to contextual therapy*, New York, 1986.

## Chapter 5

<sup>1</sup> Don Ihde relates the visionary character of Western thought especially to Leonardo da Vinci and the Renaissance (see: D. Ihde, *Postphenomenology*, essays in the postmodern context, Evanston, Illinois, 1995, p. 15 – 20) while Boman sees it as the main characteristic of Greek thinking in general.

<sup>2</sup> M.I. Wallace, *The second naiveté, Barth, Ricœur and the New Yale Theology*, Mercer University Press, Macon, Georgia, 1995. (Studies in American Biblical Hermeneutics 6) See also: K.J. Vanhoozer, *Biblical narrative in the philosophy of Paul Ricœur*, Cambridge, 1990

<sup>3</sup> The Dutch *Amsterdamse School* that we encountered in Chapter 2 can be considered as a counterpart of the New Yale Theology with structural attention for the text *as it is* and great influence of Karl Barth's theology. However, I would say that they are more interested in the Old Testament as an independent entity or canon than the new Yale theologians are.

<sup>4</sup> 'Myth as the Bearer of Possible Worlds' in Richard Kearney (ed.), *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers*. Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1984, 36-45

<sup>5</sup> P. Ricœur, *Du texte à l'action*, Paris, 1986, p. 119-137

<sup>6</sup> See for example: P. Ricœur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Oneself as another), Paris, 1990, p. 222. See also: M.I. Wallace, *The second naiveté, Barth, Ricœur and the New Yale Theology*, Mercer University Press, Macon, Georgia, 1995. (Studies in American Biblical Hermeneutics 6), 'The wager of faith', p.27-30

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<sup>7</sup> Th. Boman, *Hebrew thought compared to Greek*, New York, London, 1970. A nice illustration of the different Hebrew and Greek perception and description of reality can also be found in the first chapter of Erich Auerbach's book *Mimesis*, where an episode from Homer's *Odyssee* – the description of Odysseus' scar - is compared to the Genesis report of the *Akeda* – Abraham who sacrifices his son Isaïc. E. Auerbach, *Mimesis, De weergave van de werkelijkheid in de westerse literatuur*, 2004 (edited by Olympus) 7-29. (Dutch translation of: E. Auerbach, *Mimesis: Dargestelde Wirklichkeit in der abendländiscjhe Literatur*, 1946/2004, Bern/München)

<sup>8</sup> In Dutch this becomes particularly clear: the Dutch word for verb is *werkwoord* which means literally 'working word', while the word for noun is *zelfstandig naamwoord* – self-reliant substantive.

<sup>9</sup> W. Slob, *Verily I say unto Thee*, rhetorical normativity after postmodern theologies. Dissertation defended in public on January 24, 2002 at the Rijksuniversiteit Groningen (RuG) in Groningen. The dissertation itself has not been officially published, but was published by Kluwer Academic Publishers in an elaborated and modified – less theological - form under the title: *Dialogical Rhetoric, An essay on Truth and Normativity After Postmodernism*, Dordrecht, Boston, London, 2002.

<sup>10</sup> F. Rosenzweig, *Der Stern der Erlösung*, Frankfurt, 1996 (5th edition, with a prologue by Reinhold Meyer and an epilogue by Gershom Scholem). I will quote from this edition. The book has found an excellent translation into Dutch in: *De Ster van de Verlossing* by A.P.J. van Ligten, Delft/Meppel, 2000. This book has a nice introduction from which I will quote as well (pp. vii-xx).

<sup>11</sup> The English word 'hour' is derived from the Latin word *hora* which indicates moments in time as well as the seasons.

<sup>12</sup> Many of these for Rosenzweig important themes come back in a recently published book that Paul Ricœur wrote together with André LaCocque (historical criticism): *Penser la Bible*, Paris, 1998

<sup>13</sup> It did not in the novel *De ontdekking van de hemel* (The discovery of heaven) by the Dutch Jewish author Harry Mulish (Amsterdam, 2000) In this novel the author also creates two triangles but they describe uncertainty and mass destruction. The first triangle represents the triangular love relation between Ada, Onno and Max. Both of the men had sexual intercourse with Ada on the same day in some bay in Cuba and therefore it remains uncertain who the father is of the child Quinten born out of this union. The second triangle represents three cities in Poland in the middle of which lies Auschwitz that Max visits to get some clarity about his Jewish identity. Both triangles are interwoven as a reminiscence of the Star of David in a spectacular literary way when Quinten steals the Ten Commandments – being the most important *Hebrew* inheritance from history – from a secret safe hidden in the dark catacombs of the Roman Catholic Church in the Vatican. At the very moment Quinten lays his hands on the tablets they fall apart in thousand pieces, leaving no hope

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whatsoever for humankind. The film that was based on this bestseller novel had a different ending. Man, especially the masses paying for their tickets, cannot live without hope and so an angel turns up at the end of the film and brings the tablets into safety, leaving hope and the film's revenues unharmed.

<sup>14</sup> G. Mak, *De eeuw van mijn vader*, (The century of my father), Amsterdam / Antwerpen, 1999.

<sup>15</sup> E. Lévinas, *Totalité et infini* (Totality and infinity), The Hague, 1961; and *Autrement qu'être ou au delà de l'essence* (Other than being or beyond essence), The Hague, 1974. I will quote from (TI) Edit. 6792 5/1990.

<sup>16</sup> P. Ricœur, *Soi-même comme un autre* (Oneself as another), Paris, 1990.

<sup>17</sup> J. Derrida, 'Différance' in: *Margins of philosophy*, Chicago 1986

### Postlude

<sup>1</sup> When this unity is absent, then the real intentions are revealed in a transparent way by action more than by speech.

<sup>2</sup> This is an elaborated version of the paper that I wrote some ten years ago for a meeting of the Academy of Homiletics in Santa Fe (New Mexico). This paper was published under the title *Relativism and beyond ...* in the Academy of Homiletics 31<sup>st</sup> meeting, Santa Fe, New Mexico, December 5-7, 1996, Papers of the Annual Meeting, p. 104-113

<sup>3</sup> *Siach Jitschak, tefilloth lecol hashanah*, prayer of Jitschak, *Siddur*, the ordered prayers for the whole year / Dutch translation [from Hebrew] by Jitschak Dasberg, Amsterdam, 1986 – 5747.

<sup>4</sup> A.L. Tennyson, "Maud" in *The Works of Alfred Lord Tennyson*, Wordsworth Editions Ltd., Ware, Hertfordshire, UK, 1994

<sup>5</sup> Here I follow the advice that Ricœur once wrote me: interpreting a text by means of another text leads us beyond pure relativism into the realm of creative imagination.

<sup>6</sup> P. Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory: discourse and the surplus of meaning*, Fort Worth, Texas, 1976, p. 95.

<sup>7</sup> Quotations from the Bible are from the New Revised Standard Version

<sup>8</sup> T.H. Troeger, *Preaching and Worship*, Chalice Press, St. Louis, Missouri, 2003

<sup>9</sup> S. Breton, *the Word and the Cross*, New York, 2002

<sup>10</sup> I will quote here from an anthology of Tillich's writings edited by Forester Church: F. Forrester Church, editor, *The Essential Tillich*, Chicago, 1999

<sup>11</sup> Cf. Deuteronomy 32,6; II Samuel 7,14; Isaiah 63,16; Jeremiah 3,4; Malachi 1,6

<sup>12</sup> NRSV – New Revised Standard Version; NBG – (translation by:) Nederlands Bybel Genootschap (Dutch Bible Society)

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**Jan Chr. Vaessen** is a pastor for the Protestant Church of the Netherlands (PKN) in a small village in the outskirts of Groningen, a university lecturer and an acclaimed speaker.

Vaessen was born in Oldebroek, Netherlands on March 31, 1952. After passing the lower schools, he completed his HBS-A diploma in Zwolle (Netherlands) and then went on to work for six months as a bellboy on the ship 'ss. Nieuw Amsterdam' of the Holland America Line (New York - Caribbean), further studying marketing at the HEAO in Arnhem in 1973. Later, in place of Dutch military service, he worked as a volunteer with the SNV in Côte d'Ivoire (West Africa).

In 1979, Vaessen started theology studies in Groningen. In 1986 he earned his doctoral degrees and then two years later his church diploma. He then started his doctoral research in Groningen, which in 1997, resulted in a thesis *Tussen Schrift en preek* (Kampen, 1997) on the relationship between rhetoric and hermeneutics. With help of the French philosopher Paul Ricoeur and the Dutch homiletician Gijs Dingemans he developed an analytical model to analyse sermons on Bible interpretation and rhetorical power.

From 1997 to 2008, Vaessen – apart from his work as a pastor – has also worked as a university lecturer in the Religious Studies program in Groningen and the College Ubbo Emmius in Stadskanaal. He also lectured on hermeneutics at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver (USA) and has written about the development of Western thought and the Christian faith in a postmodern society: *A Quest for Hope* (Groningen, 2008) and *Geloof in beweging* (*Faith on the move*, in preparation for publication). Furthermore, he lectures on change management, leadership, education, communication, trust and authenticity in a changing culture and he teaches courses to managers on rhetoric and critical self reflection.