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THE COLLECTED WORKS OF

Edward Schillebeeckx

VOLUME VII

CHRIST. THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE IN THE MODERN WORLD

BLOOMSBURY

THE COLLECTED WORKS OF EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX

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III. God the Future of Man
IV. World and Church
V. The Understanding of Faith. Interpretation and Criticism
VI. Jesus: An Experiment in Christology
VII. Christ. The Christian Experience in the Modern World
VIII. Interim Report on the Books 'Jesus' and 'Christ'
IX. The Church with a Human Face
X. Church. The Human Story of God
XI. Essays. Ongoing Theological Quests

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CHRIST.
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HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

Most secondary literature on *Christ. The Christian experience in the modern world* refers to the 1980 edition. In this new version typing errors, spelling mistakes and wrong or poor translations are corrected. Therefore we recommend that in the future reference be made to this version, though it would be a service to your readers if the page numbers of the old edition (added in square brackets in the margins) are mentioned as well. The text of this new edition should be considered as authoritative.

Please note that endnotes in the original 1980 edition are converted to footnotes (with different numbering) in this new edition.

For Father

Hold fast to love and justice,
and wait continually for your God (*Hosea 12.6*)

CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS

AB	The Anchor Bible, New York
AnBib	Analecta Biblica, Rome
ARW	*Archiv fur Religionswissenschaft,* Freiburg im Breisgau, Tübingen
ASNT	Acta Seminariorum Novi Testamenti, Uppsala
ATANT	Abhandlungen zur Theologie des Alten und Neuen Testaments, Basle, Zurich
BBB	Bonner Biblische Beitrage, Bonn
BHTh	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie, Tübingen
Bibl	*Biblica,* Rome
Bijdr	*Bijdragen. Tijdschrift voor Filosofie en Theologie,* Amsterdam
BJRL	*Bulletin of the John Rylands Library,* Manchester
BKAT	Biblische Kommentar: Altes Testament, Neukirchen
BNTC	Black's New Testament Commentaries, London and New York
BTB	*Biblical Theology Bulletin,* Rome
BuK	*Bibel und Kirche,* Stuttgart
BuL	*Bibel und Leben,* Düsseldorf
BWANT	Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament, Stuttgart
BZ	*Biblische Zeitschrift,* Freiburg im Breisgau, Paderborn
BZAW	Beihefte to *ZAW*
BZNW	Beihefte to *ZNW*
CBQ	*The Catholic Biblical Quarterly,* Washington
Conc	*Concilium* (Internationale Zeitschrift fur Theologie), Einsiedeln; ET of vols 1-10, London
ConiNeot	Coniectanea Neotestamentica, Uppsala
Daedalus	*Daedalus. Journal of the American Academy of Arts and Science,* Cambridge, Mass.
Denz.-Sch.	Denzinger-Schönmetzer, *Enchiridion Symbolorum,* Freiburg im Breisgau [36]1976
DBS	*Dictionnaire de la Bible. Supplément,* Paris
ET	English translation

ETR	Etudes théologiques et religieuses, Montpellier
EvTh	*Evangelische Theologie,* Munich
EVV	English versions of the Bible
ExpT	*The Expository Times,* Edinburgh
FRLANT	Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments, Göttingen
FrZPhTh	*Freiburger Zeitschrift fur Philosophie und Theologie,* Fribourg
FS	Festschrift
FThSt	Freiburger Theologische Studiën, Freiburg im Breisgau
GCS	Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten drei Jahrhunderte, Leipzig
Greg	*Gregorianum,* Rome
HNT	Handbuch zum Neuen Testament, Tübingen
HSNT	Die Heilige Schrift des Neuen Testaments, Bonn
HThKNT	Herders Theologischer Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, Freiburg im Breisgau
HeyJ	*The Heythrop Journal,* Oxford
HTR	*The Harvard Theological Review,* Cambridge, Mass.
IKZ	*Internationale Katholische Zeitschrift, 'Communio',* Frankfurt am Main
Int	*Interpretation,* Richmond, Va
JAL	Jewish Apocryphal Literature, New York
JBC	*The Jerome Biblical Commentary,* London
JBL	*The Journal of Biblical Literature,* Philadelphia
JETS	*Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society,* Wheaton, I11.
JNES	*The Journal of Near Eastern Studies,* Chicago
JQR	*Jewish Quarterly Review,* London, Philadelphia
JTS	*The Journal of Theological Studies,* Oxford
KNT	Kommentar zum Neuen Testament, Leipzig
KuD	*Kerygma und Dogma,* Göttingen
LTK	*Lexikon fur Theologie und Kirche,* Freiburg im Breisgau ^{2}1957-65
LV	*Lumière et Vie,* Lyons
MBT	Münsterische Beiträge zur Theologie, Münster
Meyer	H. A. W. Meyer, Kritisch-exegetischer Kommentar über das Neue Testament, Göttingen
MoffattNTC	Moffatt New Testament Commentary, London
NCB	New Century Bible, London
NLC	New London Commentary on the New Testament, London
NTAbh	Neutestamentliche Abhandlungen, Münster
NRT	*Nouvelle Revue Théologique,* Louvain, Tournai
NT	*Novum Testamentum,* Leiden

NTD	Das Neue Testament Deutsch, Göttingen
NTS	*New Testament Studies,* Cambridge
NT.S	Supplementary volumes to *Novum Testamentum*
NTT	*Nederlands Theologisch Tijdschrift,* The Hague
Numen	*Numen. International Review for the History of Religions,* Leiden
NumenS	Supplements to *Numen,* Leiden
NZSTh	*Neue Zeitschrift fur systematische Theologie,* Berlin
OTS	*Oudtestamentische Studiën,* Leiden
PG	Patrologia Graeca, ed. J. P. Migne, Paris
RAC	*Reallexikon fur Antike und Christentum,* Stuttgart
RB	*Revue Biblique,* Jerusalem and Paris
RGG^{3}	*Die Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart,* Tübingen ^{3}1956-65
RHE	*Revue d'Histoire Ecclésiastique,* Louvain
RHPR	*Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophic Religieuses,* Strasbourg
RNT	Regensburger Neues Testament, Regensburg
RQumran	*Revue de Qumran,* Paris
RSPT	*Revue des Sciences Philosophiques et Théologiques,* Paris
RSR	*Recherches de Science Religieuse,* Paris
SBS	Stuttgarter Bibel-Studien, Stuttgart
Schol	*Scholastik*
SJT	*The Scottish Journal of Theology,* Edinburgh
SNT	Studiën zum Neuen Testament
SNTS	Studiorum Novi Testamenti Societas
STANT	Studiën zum Alten und Neuen Testament, Munich
StEv	*Studia Evangelica* (= TU 73ff.), Berlin
StNT	Studien zum Neuen Testament, Gütersloh
Strack-Billerbeck	P. Billerbeck and H. L. Strack, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament aus Talmud und Midrasch,* ed. J. Jeremias with K. Adolph, Munich I-IV, ^{5}1969; V-VI, ^{3}1969
StTh	*Studia Theologica,* Lund
StZ	*Stimme der Zeit,* Freiburg im Breisgau
SUNT	Studien zur Umwelt des Neuen Testaments, Göttingen-Zurich
TDNT	*Theological Dictionary of the New Testament,* ed. G. Kittel and G. Friedrich, ET of *Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Neuen Testament (TWNT),* ten vols, Grand Rapids 1964-76
TDOT	*Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament,* ed. G. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, ET of *TWAT,* Grand Rapids 1977ff.
ThHNT	Theologischer Handkommentar zum Neuen Testament, Berlin
ThHandWAT	*Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament,* ed. E. Jenni

	and C. Westermann, two vols, Munich, Zurich 1971, 1976
ThS	*Theological Studies,* Woodstock, Md.
ThSB	Theologische Studien, ed. K. Barth, Zurich
TrThZ	*Trierer theologische Zeitschrift,* Trier
TU	Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur, Leipzig-Berlin
TvTh	*Tijdschrift voor Theologie,* Nijmegen
TWAT	*Theologisches Wörterbuch zum Alten Testament,* ed. G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, Stuttgart 1970ff. (not yet completed)
TZ	*Theologische Zeitschrift,* Basle
UTB	Uni-Taschenbücher, Basle et al.
UNT	Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, Leipzig
USQ	*Union Seminary Quarterly Review,* New York
VD	*Verbum Domini,* Rome
VuF	*Verkündigung und Forschung,* Munich
VT	*Vetus Testamentum,* Leiden
VTS	*Vetus Testamentum* Supplements, Leiden.
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographicn zum Alten und Neuen Testament, Neukirchen-Vluyn
WuD	*Wort und Dienst,* Bethel, near Bielefeld
WUNT	Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament, Tübingen
ZAW	*Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft,* Berlin
ZKTh	*Zeitschrift fur katholische Theologie,* Innsbruck, Vienna
ZNW	*Zeitschrift fur die neutestamentliche Wissenschaft und die Kunde der älteren Kirche,* Berlin
ZRGG	*Zeitschrift fur Religion und Geistesgeschichte,* Marburg, Cologne
ZST	*Zeitschrift für systematische Theologie,* Berlin
ZTK	*Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche,* Tübingen

Introduction to

COLLECTED WORKS OF EDWARD SCHILLEBEECKX

Without a doubt Prof. Mag. Dr Edward Schillebeeckx O.P. (1914-2009) is one of the most creative and influential theologians of the 20th and 21st century. His work has been much discussed and is still widely popular in academic and pastoral circles. Schillebeeckx played a major role in theological and ecclesiastic renewal. His academic studies and scholarly pastoral books, sermons and lectures continue to inspire a wide reading public. His considerable authority as a scholar is based on extensive knowledge of the Christian tradition coupled with compassionate involvement with people and movements in church and society, especially those who are exposed to injustice and suffering.

A theologian of such exceptional stature in the Dutch language area certainly deserves enduring public attention. In 2004, therefore, on the occasion of Schillebeeckx's 90th birthday, the Edward Schillebeeckx Foundation made the first moves for the publication of his collected works. Extensive discussion followed on just what kind of publication we envisaged: a complete and comprehensive overview of his work, a critical edition of his monographs, an annotated reissue of his most innovative works and/or a selective republication of articles, including reflection on their reception. The preparatory committee − consisting of Dick Boer, Erik Borgman, Wil Derkse, Stephan van Erp, Mijke Jetten, Kristanto Budiprabowo, Frans Maas, Robert Schreiter, Ted Mark Schoof O.P., Nico Schreurs and Carl Sterkens – was soon confronted with a major problem: the sheer volume of Schillebeeckx's work. He was a very prolific writer indeed. This is borne out by the updated version of Schillebeeckx's bibliography, compiled and published by Ted Schoof and Jan van de Westelaken, which can be found on the foundation's website: www.schillebeeckx.nl. A publication of his complete works, therefore, seemed virtually impossible. Some of them had been published in one language only (mostly Dutch, but also German and French), while translations, though usually meticulously checked by or on behalf of the author, at times differed

somewhat from the original. Because of practical concerns like financial constraints and the limited availability of translations we confined ourselves to a re-publication of Schillebeeckx's major works – still a daunting endeavour.

For similar reasons we decided not to republish the original Dutch texts but only translations, although we realize that not even the best translation can adequately convey the often subtle nuances and delicate shades of meaning of the original. Various misunderstandings at Schillebeeckx's much publicized 'conversation' with Vatican authorities on Christology in 1980 illustrate this risk. It seemed logical to choose translations which would be accessible to the extensive Anglophone world. Fortunately quite a number of good translations of Schillebeeckx's publications were available. Nonetheless a great deal of the *Collected Works* were revised once more, both linguistically and substantively. The translations of volumes 1 to 5 did not require checking: that had already been done at the time of the publication of the English versions (between 1963 and 1974) by Schillebeeckx's fellow brother and assistant at the time, Ted Mark Schoof, who, before concluding his theological education with Edward Schillebeeckx in Nijmegen, had followed the regular theology course of four years at Blackfriars, Oxford. Of the volumes 6, 7 and 11 the as yet untranslated parts were either translated or edited by Marcelle Manley. This applies particularly to volume 11, most of which now appears in English for the first time, but also to a new section in volume 7 (*Christ. The Christian experience in the modern world*). As for volume 6 (*Jesus: An experiment in Christology*), the (somewhat laboured) original translation by Hubert Hoskins was edited by Sr Joanna Dunham, and subsequently thoroughly revised and re-edited by Marcelle Manley, in such depth that she should be mentioned as co-translator. The substantive accuracy of John Bowden's original translations of volumes 7 to 10 (and of volumes 6 and 11 as well) was checked Ted Schoof. Hence they are now published as 'authorized' versions. Volume 9 (*The church with a human face*) required such extensive terminological corrections that the earlier translation can no longer be considered reliable. In each volume the section 'How to use this book' synoptically outlines a format for references to the text.

Although many linguistic and substantive changes were introduced, we did not opt for gender-inclusive language. Present-day translations would undoubtedly have used this style, but for the sake of maximum fidelity to the original text, and for the practical reason that the English versions of volumes 1 to 5 did not require checking, we decided not to do so.

These *Collected Works* include Schillebeeckx's unquestionably major theological works. We chose them for their historical significance, theological relevance and impact on developments in theology and church communities. It was no coincidence that these works were mostly out of print. In the *Collected Works* each volume will have a short introduction providing a brief sketch of

its background, context and relevance.

The Edward Schillebeeckx Foundation is proud to present Schillebeeckx's most influential works in one readily available series. We thank the Flemish and Dutch provinces of the Dominican Order for making this publication possible. We hope its readers' enjoyment of these works will be as great as our appreciation of the support we received.

Prof. Dr Nico Schreurs
Chairman, Edward Schillebeeckx Foundation

Introduction to the new edition

CHRIST
THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE
IN THE MODERN WORLD

The second of Edward Schillebeeckx's 'Jesus books' appeared in 1977, under the title *Gerechtigheid en liefde, genade en bevrijding* (Justice and love, grace and liberation). In presenting the volume, Schillebeeckx saw it as following upon the first volume as a continuation, albeit from a different perspective: 'I might say that the first volume was a "Jesus book", though it did not neglect the Christ; this second volume is a "Christ book", though it does not forget Jesus of Nazareth' (p. [022]). The translations of this second volume (in German, Italian, English and Spanish) all tried to show this by creating a new title for the book, with the word 'Christ' prominent in the title, to parallel the 'Jesus' in the title of the first volume. Likewise, Schillebeeckx's promise of a Christological trilogy no doubt had its influence as well.

Schillebeeckx saw continuity in that he envisioned this second volume as taking up where the first one had left off. If the first volume concentrated on locating the historical figure of Jesus as much as possible, this second volume was to reflect the early Church's encounter with the Risen Christ by presenting they had experienced him. Again, Schillebeeckx found two critical voices contravening his approach. From the side of exegetes, he seemed to forego the work of form and redaction criticism in setting up his case for the New Testament experience of grace. He responded that he was trying to capture the experience of those first disciples rather than situate the texts as texts. What he was seeking was a soteriology—how the first disciples would have experienced salvation in Jesus Christ. From the side of the theologians, he was reprimanded for not creating a proper Christology that took the Councils of Nicaea and especially Chalcedon as the fulcrum points. He responded that he was interested in creating a 'genetic' approach, i.e., an approach that showed how the Church came to see Jesus as their Lord. This was done out of an apologetic interest, one might say: to help modern men and women trace their own path to faith as the early followers of Jesus had done.

Yet the genetic approach was not merely an historical one; Schillebeeckx shows throughout, even in his reconstruction of those early experiences based on the New Testament texts, that his concern is for the modern believer and those struggling to believe. To help readers ease into this, he prefaced this volume with a long reflection on experience and belief—how these two phenomena interact in the lives of contemporary human beings. This reflection has taken on a life of its own apart from the volume where it first appeared. It has helped two generations of theologians clarify for themselves how human experience provides a context and a foundation for receiving revelation.

Parts One and Two of Christ are given over to Schillebeeckx's reconstruction of the New Testament experience of grace. They constitute two-thirds of the entire text. Throughout, 'encounter' provides the framework for entry into the New Testament texts, a theme that runs through Schillebeeckx's entire oeuvre, reaching back to his early work on sacraments and continuing down to the last publications. The language of encounter provides a special opening for the modern reader. The New Testament texts are not to be approached as a dead letter, but as a living invitation to experience the primal encounter once again, in the context of life today. The choice of 'grace' as the central theme for salvation—with a frequent reference to liberation, a theme much in discussion at the time—can be seen as an attempt to break through some of the time-honoured metaphors (such as redemption and expiation) that might stand in the way of contemporary persons trying to grasp the Christ experience. At any rate, Parts One and Two were praised by many reviewers at the time as a masterful reconstruction of grace and salvation as understood in the books of the New Testament. It remains in many ways unsurpassed down to the present time. In so doing, Schillebeeckx achieved his avowed purpose for the book as being 'a first attempt at a modern Christian soteriology' (p. [022]).

In the reception of Christ, especially by the second generation of theologians, it has been Part Four—on suffering—that has captured the most attention. More specifically, two themes that Schillebeeckx develops there have been the subject of the most reflection: the negative contrast experience and human suffering, and the anthropological constants.

The negative contrast experience and the threatened humanum were concepts Schillebeeckx borrowed from the Frankfurt School of Critical Social Theory. The humanum, or the full sense of what it means to be human, was seen by Adorno and Horkheimer as an unfinished product, impaired by the experience of human suffering. For Schillebeeckx, the unfinished humanum is translated into an eschatological idiom. Schillebeeckx devotes the Fourth Part of Christ to the problem of suffering, especially needless and unjust suffering. The experience of negative contrast—'This is something that should not be!'—animates a critical power to question and resist suffering, and to struggle to overcome it.

Schillebeeckx was particularly interested in the social and political dimensions of this refusal to acquiesce to suffering, a theme he continued to develop through his work on the political and the mystical in the latter 1980s. In Christ we see his first development of this. Suffering is the underside of soteriology; it answers the question about what human beings need saving from. Indeed, because of this preoccupation, Schillebeeckx's soteriology goes beyond the more accustomed individualist approach to soteriology to embrace a socio-political perspective.

No fewer than six doctoral dissertations have been devoted to aspects of Schillebeeckx's concept of suffering and negative contrast in the past two decades, from both First and so-called Third World settings. This attests to the fecundity and the attractiveness of his reflections on suffering to the youngest generation of theologians today.

Schillebeeckx's brief treatment of the six anthropological 'constants' (pp. [731-744]) has likewise generated keen interest among the youngest generation of theologians. The previous generation had been relatively indifferent to them, perhaps feeling that they verged upon the elusive 'cultural universals' that were largely dismissed in modern cultural anthropological circles. The youngest generation, perhaps from a more post-modern perspective, is more willing to accept an attempt to provide some anchorage for a philosophical and theological anthropology in the absence of a shared metanarrative about the human. Schillebeeckx was keenly aware of modern objections to positing anthropological universals and would have shared the insight of the post-modern generation. The constants help, so it seems, to give more contour to the unfolding humanum, in both its positive and negative sides. It has been noted that Christology was the major preoccupation of dogmatic theology in the final quarter of the twentieth century, and that theological anthropology may take centre stage for theologians in the first quarter of the twenty-first. Seeing the interest in aspects of the anthropology that Schillebeeckx sketches in the final part of Christ to young theologians would appear to bear that out, as well as account for the enduring interest in his work in the youngest generation of theologians.

The translation of Christ that appears here has been thoroughly reviewed and emended in a number of places. In addition, there is a new section, on liberation theology in Latin America, that Schillebeeckx had inserted into the second edition of the Dutch original to replace a text in the first edition (the section following p. 781 onwards in this new edition). The original translation of Christ was done from the Dutch first edition. The addition to the second Dutch edition has been translated and inserted here.

Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord remains an essential part of Schillebeeckx's two-part Christology. Although not a full Christology in the traditional sense (of culminating in, and revolving around, the Chalcedonian definition), it will likely long stand as an example of a 'genetic' approach to

coming to faith in Christ, something that continues to be important in secularized societies.

Robert Schreiter
Catholic Theological Union, Chicago, USA

PROLOGUE

Exposed as a foundling and brought up under Egyptian protection, cared for by [017]
Pharaoh's daughter, far away from where his people, the Hebrews, were living, 'one day Moses went out to his brothers' (Ex. 2.11a) and 'looked upon their forced labour' (Ex. 2.11b). At this first conscious meeting with his people, 'he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one of his brothers' (2.11c). Moses became angry, intervened and killed the Egyptian.

The next day, at a second meeting with his people, Moses saw 'two Hebrews struggling together' (Ex. 2.13). A passionate champion of justice, he wanted to mediate between the two men and settle the dispute. But his people, the Hebrews, rejected him (Ex. 2.14): 'Moses supposed that his brethren understood that God was giving them deliverance by his hand, but they did not understand' (Stephen's speech, Acts 7.25-28).

A little later, resting by a spring, Moses saw how some maidens, bringing their cattle to drink, were brutally driven away by shepherds who wanted their flocks to drink first. Once again Moses sprang up in holy indignation against these violent men (Ex. 2.15c-17).

These are three stories about Moses before he was called by God. A young man, who took the side of those who were at a disadvantage - without much thought, straight from the heart. And at the same time he was the leader who was not accepted by his brethren.

After these events had been forgotten, 'the people of Israel groaned under their bondage, and cried out for help, and their cry under bondage came up to God. And God heard their groaning, and God remembered his covenant with Abraham, with Isaac, and with Jacob. And God looked down graciously on the Israelites and had pity on them' (Ex. 2.23-25).

Then God called the man who had shown such solidarity with his people: Moses - of whom it was later written that he spoke with God as with a friend, 'as a man speaks with another whom he loves' (Ex. 33.11), 'face to face' (Ex. 33.11), 'mouth to mouth' (Num. 12.6-8). 'Yahweh said: "I have seen the affliction of my people in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters; I know their sufferings, and I have come down to deliver my people ... to bring them out of that land to a good and broad land, a land flowing with milk and honey" ' (Ex. 3.7f.). 'I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring forth my people, the sons of [018]
Israel, out of Egypt' (3.10). Moses will have to tell the people: 'He is has sent me to

you' (Ex. 3.14), which means: 'I am concerned with you' (Ex. 3.16). God's name is: solidarity with the people.

Moses, a suffering servant of God, 'who bears the burden of the people' (Deut. 1.37; 4.21f.; Ex. 32.30-32), 'a prophet from among you, from your brethren' (Deut. 18.15-18) becomes the liberator of Israel. 'By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasure of sin. He considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt' (Heb. 11.24-26).

'The law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ' (John 1.17).

A few righteous men could have saved the city of Sodom (Gen. 18.23-32); indeed, just one righteous man would have been enough to save Jerusalem (Jer. 5.1), and 'many' were saved thanks to the suffering prophet, the suffering, righteous servant of God (Isa. 53).

The New Testament proclaims that the one 'suffering righteous man', the one unique and eschatological 'suffering prophet', Jesus Christ, has saved the whole world. Neither the vision that turns against suffering nor the message - not even the message of Jesus - bring deliverance of themselves. Both message and vision, after all, are rejected. Even suffering does not bring salvation. The one who brings salvation is the suffering witness, the crucified one, the man who makes the supreme sacrifice for righteousness and love and precisely because of that suffers through and for others, for the sake of the God who is concerned for mankind: he brings salvation. Before one who gives up his life, in solidarity with God's own merciful identification with vulnerable, yet at the same time evil and unfathomable men, man finally bends the knee and kneels before him. 'My Lord and my God' (John 20.28).

'But there are also many other things which Jesus did; were every one of them to be written, I suppose that the world itself could not contain the books that would be written' (John 21.25). These words express the boldness with which the New Testament set about relating to the contemporary world not only the testimony to the life of Jesus Christ of Nazareth but the Tanach - the Law, the Prophets and the Writings (see p. [907] below). The account of the actual life of Christians in the world in which they live is a fifth gospel; it also belongs at the heart of christology.

Edward Schillebeeckx

Introduction

JESUS, THE STORY OF A NEW LIFE-STYLE

1. It began with an encounter. Some people - Aramaic- and perhaps also Greek-speaking Jews - came into contact with Jesus of Nazareth and stayed with him. This encounter, and what took place in the life of Jesus and in connection with his death, gave their personal lives new meaning and new significance. They felt that they had been born again, that they had been understood, and this new identity found expression in a similar solidarity towards others, their fellow-men. This change in the course of their lives was the result of their encounter with Jesus, for without him they would have remained what they had been (see I Cor. 15.17). It had not come about through any initiative of their own; it had simply happened to them. [019]

This astonishing and overwhelming encounter with the man Jesus became the starting-point for the New Testament view of salvation. To put it plainly, 'grace' has to be expressed in terms of encounter and experience; it can never be isolated from the specific encounter which brought about liberation. Furthermore, this means that any further reflection on the meaning of grace and salvation must always go back to the original 'source experiences' without which any theology of grace soon turns into mythology and ontology (in the pejorative sense).

So the story of a new quality of life, a new life-style or praxis, began with an encounter. However, interpretation begins long before the point when people ask about the significance of what they have experienced. Interpretative identification is an intrinsic element of the experiences itself; to begin with, perhaps, it is still implicit, and only later is it brought to the level of reflection. The renewal of life which Jesus had evoked from his disciples and the process which he had started off led the disciples to reflect on their experience. They began to analyze it, to consider its various aspects and give it a place in their consciousness, which was full of many other things and ideas. Familiar things became familiar in a new way, now that the followers of Jesus had a completely new focal point. On the basis of their common experience they arrived at what we might call a Christian theory of grace, the beginnings of what in Christian tradition is called a 'theology of grace': [020]

soteriology, a thematic account of the meaning of Christian redemption and Christian salvation.

These experiences were also set down in writing. Every single New Testament writing, every gospel and every epistle is concerned with the salvation experienced in and through Jesus. The experiences of grace expressed in them to the praise of God indicate one and the same fundamental event, but each writing expresses it in a different way. This compels us to ask: what are really the formative, constitutive or constructive elements in these New Testament understandings of grace? This question is concerned with their content as articulated in its logical context and above all as a meaningful invitation to men in search of happiness and fulfillment, for the world and for themselves.

However, the synoptic gospels and the Pauline and Johannine writings (to mention the three main strands in the New Testament) arise out of an earlier history in which grace had already been experienced and analyzed: this history extends from the Old Testament through the period between the Testaments to the time of the early church. In the spiritual climate in which the New Testament Christians lived and the New Testament was written, disappointments had changed the old Jewish dream of a just kingdom on earth under the rule of an Israelite theocracy into the idea of a world which was both temporally and spatially on two levels. There was the old age and the heavenly new age to come: this new age would either descend to earth or would be the time when at least part of the earth, the world of the righteous, would 'arise'. In both instances, any renewal of life was seen in terms of a super-terrestrial, heavenly mode of being. However, the concern here was less with a 'hereafter' than with a mysterious sharing and involvement of the earthly in super-terrestrial, heavenly spheres - though we should not suppose that these people of late antiquity were naive: it is not as though they had no awareness of a difference between what they meant by all this and the thinking-in-models with which they attempted to articulate the reality to which they were referring. It is, however, true that for them 'model' and 'reality' formed a closer unity than they do for us. Be this as it may, here are the presuppositions which were shared in one way or another by the Christians whose voices we hear in the New Testament.

At the same time, from the beginning the New Testament concept of grace was directed along certain lines by the Jewish tradition, in which distress was experienced as a consequence of disobedience towards God's commandments. Because of their disobedience, men were entangled in sin and guilt. Salvation was then quite naturally experienced as the reconciliation of the sinner with God, the possibility of access to the kingdom of God. This is indeed a fundamental notion, though to our present sensibilities it seems to put everything that can be included
[021] in the experience of distress on a somewhat narrow basis. For if man has a right to speak anywhere, it is surely at the point of defining what he himself experiences as

distress and lack of freedom (though he may well have blind spots here). Thus the experience of distress already formulated in the Jewish tradition can develop into a new, Christian analysis, the experience of salvation in Jesus (and it is with this analysis that we are concerned in the New Testament).

Hearing and experiencing that Jesus Christ opened up a new way of salvation immediately confronted the disciples of the time with a danger, that of simply filling out the social and religious view of the world which they already had with the name 'Jesus'. For if adversity is sin, and salvation therefore reconciliation and the forgiveness of sins, then it is Jesus who by his death on the cross has expiated the guilt of sin. In that case he is the one who brings us into the kingdom of God by taking us out of death into the spiritual realm of light, God's own world. If that is the case, the chief danger, that Jesus becomes merely a symbolic point of reference for what is experienced from other sources as salvation or its absence, is very great indeed. However, we can see how the New Testament is constantly on its guard against this obvious view. Such a view does, however, keep rearing its head among the Christian communities. So while the writers of the New Testament use religious conceptions from this spiritual milieu, they distinguish them clearly from their experience of Christ.

Furthermore, philosophical and anthropological presuppositions also play a role in the New Testament history of experiences of grace with Christ. They derive from the culture of the first century which was becoming increasingly amorphous and syncretistic, not because of a lack of ideas but because of a superfluity of them. This was especially the case during the last decades of the century. In cultural terms, Palestine was not Syria, and Syria in turn was different from Asia, the Roman province of Asia Minor, which was itself culturally different from Greece and Egypt. Egypt, with its cultural record housed in the two great libraries at Alexandria, attained heights far beyond those reached by the Palestinian community at Qumran and its collection. Jewish, oriental, Hellenistic and gradually even Christian traditions began to fuse. This complex situation acted as a cultural melting-pot from which at a later stage, in the second century, a distinct religious philosophy was to emerge, based on a completely new synthesis: gnosis or gnosticism. A particularly significant influence on the New Testament was exerted by the attitude to life current in late antiquity, which, for example in its fear of demons, expressed a special dissatisfaction over this world and its society. That is evident above all when Christianity rejects this particular feeling of the time.

Anyone who is aware of all this will immediately understand why we cannot [022]
relate the New Testament theology of grace and salvation directly to our times. We begin to realize that a purely *theological* analysis of the New Testament concept of grace has a chance of providing inspiration and a sense of direction for Christians only if this theological analysis is coupled with an analysis of historical

circumstances, both then and now.

Furthermore, history shows us that over the course of church history a radicalism or monism of grace has continually provoked a counter-movement. Paul gave rise to the Letter of James and above all the Pseudo-Clementines; Augustine to Pelagius, Bañez to Molina, Jansenism to the 'Jesuit doctrine of grace', Martin Luther to Thomas Münzer, the traditional doctrine of redemption to the modern theology of liberation. Almost every theology of grace at the same time provokes a related criticism. True, the criticism has been suppressed time and again, but it keeps recurring in a different form; at a later stage it is often rehabilitated and taken up into a new synthesis. This historical swing of the pendulum demonstrates how there is something in man (above all in the truly religious man) which struggles against excessive praise of God *at man's expense.* From this we see that a theology of grace which does not include this element immediately comes up against a profoundly human protest and loses any chance of success.

On the other hand, no meaningful Christian theology of grace can ignore the absolute initiative of God without at the same time infringing the potentialities of our human existence. Any man who does not have an egotistic attitude to life, who is aware that he constantly lives by virtue of the favor and goodwill of others, experiences in a variety of ways that there is such a thing as 'grace'. Man achieves his identity precisely in being confirmed by others (within structures and within a society which make this possible). And in this solidarity many people will sometimes be able to experience a deeper mystery of universal mercy - and as a result perhaps be able to call upon 'God' in prayer.

In this book I want to analyze the New Testament experience of grace and salvation from God in Jesus Christ as an orientation for what we might call a first attempt at a modern Christian soteriology.

2. The perspective of this book is different from that of its predecessor, *Jesus. An Experiment in Christology,* of which it is a continuation. At this point I am not concerned, as in the first volume, with those features of the 'historical Jesus' which may have led to the New Testament confession of him. Now I am immediately concerned with the New Testament elaboration of what Christians experienced in their encounter with Jesus the Lord. I might say that the first volume was a 'Jesus book', though it did not neglect the Christ; this second volume is a 'Christ book',
[023] though it does not forget Jesus of Nazareth. The consequence of this new approach is that the method also differs from that of the earlier book. Some critics of that book have made the same mistake over it that they accuse me of making over holy scripture, in that they fail to respect the particular literary genre and type of communication presented by a specific text (in this case my book). They did not read and understand the book 'as it was', but either wanted to give it some position in the *history of ideas* or, in reaction to form criticism and redaction

criticism, and their justified plea for structural analytic treatment of the text as a whole failed to see that in its particular literary genre my text was dominated by a single, all-pervasive literary intention (namely to penetrate as adequately as possible into the history of the origin of Christianity). The first book was not concerned with the New Testament *texts* as such. That is, however, the case with this second volume. Here I am no longer dealing with form, redaction and tradition criticism in order to get as close as possible to the 'historical Jesus', but am taking the texts seriously in their unity and as a whole. This means seeing them in their specific *literary* context against the background of the literature of the time, within the specific socio-cultural reality of the milieu above all of those for whom these New Testament texts were directly written, so that they could be read aloud in the liturgy.

We may regret the fact that modern exegesis of the New Testament did not first grasp this literary method of reading and understanding the texts 'as they are', only then to go on to investigate the further perspectives on the results that this approach produced which might be gained through form criticism, redaction criticism and the history of traditions. From the point of view of literary criticism, the dominant trend in modern exegesis began at the wrong end. However, we should not forget that at least the original form critics (and above all Martin Dibelius) tended to analyze texts primarily in a literary-critical way. However, their aim was historical and not primarily literary-critical: they were concerned with the historical Jesus (who was denied by some people at that time); this is true even today, though the questions are now put differently. As long as the Christian movement is seen not as the religion of a book or as a movement which was brought into being by inspiring literature, but as a movement deriving from a living person with a place in history, this historical approach also remains valid and fundamental for religion. In this approach the tradition of the church's account of Jesus is the presupposition for the discussion of the history of Jesus.

However, if we regard the New Testament as literature which needs to be read and understood - and this is primarily the case for interpreters and believers - then (as I already said in the first volume, pp. 90f.) form criticism and redaction criticism will not give us much of an insight into what *the text* means to say (the acceptance of a particular tradition and the omission of another is itself 'redaction', so that from a literary-critical point of view, everything in a text is 'redaction'). In that case we may not *begin* by splitting the text into redaction and tradition or into a number of independent units. It has to be taken as a whole. But if Christianity does not live only from sacral literature - though this cannot be left out of Christianity and as such even represents a fragment of grace - and if, moreover, New Testament texts, in addition to a whole variety of other linguistic functions, also have a referential function by pointing to the historical event in, with and about Jesus of Nazareth, then we will not make any progress by excluding critical [024]

questions, and referring to the special logic of the 'religious language game' on the basis of the fact that these texts are *religious* texts. There is no way of denying the autonomy of this language game with its own criteria and its own logic. On the contrary, from a theological point of view it is extremely important, and if we recognize it for what it is we will avoid many theological pseudo-problems. However, such recognition does not mean that no communication is possible between the different language games (e.g. the historical and the religious) and that one and the same man would have to live simultaneously in two completely disparate language games. In that case these would function like cages in which the same men were held prisoner, in the last resort in a state of schizophrenia: believers here and historians there.

Still, I am clear (more so than in the first volume) that even if our concern is historical - and this can be pursued only by means of particular texts - we must first use the method of literary criticism and only then use other methods to get through to the historical 'sub-stratum'. If that happens, I believe that we shall arrive at a more varied and even richer historical picture of Jesus than we discover when we follow the reverse sequence. Furthermore, these points to what I have called the never finished study of the Jesus event. The use of particular methods also occurs as an event in a history.

However, quite apart from the question of the proper assessment of my intention in my first book about Jesus, in this second volume I am no longer concerned with the historical phenomenon of Jesus in our history, nor with the reactions to this event before the writing of the New Testament: all this is presupposed on the basis of my first book (even if it has not been 'solved' once and for all). Here we are directly concerned with the question how *New Testament Christianity* experienced and analyzed salvation in and through Jesus, and with the question of the historical circumstances (then and now) through which this New Testament witness forms a normative orientation for our experience and interpretation of salvation in Jesus. That is a different set of problems and a different literary genre from those of the first book. An author who writes about
[025] Jesus is not judged directly by already existing 'christological' criteria, but by his approach and perspective. A contemporary christology which is faithful to Jesus and the gospels, which comes to influence our questing awareness and in so doing communicates salvation, can only be built up by stages. Perhaps it will be possible to make a beginning on what is called 'christology' *after* this second volume. I would be inclined to call even this second volume a prolegomenon: not out of a certain critical scepticism (though also in fear of over-hasty totalizations), but because I am convinced by the Christian eschatological vision that any christology which is relevant to life is only possible in the form of a *pro-legomenon:* a word before the last word, a search for the right 'legomenon' or word. For in our history I know redemption only in fragments which are experienced personally and

collectively; in which, however, Jesus' critical and productive promise of an indefinable definitive future salvation remains in force. Nowhere do I see signs of an 'objectively completed' redemption. Yet I believe that our action in helping people, healing them and bringing them political liberation, fragmentary though it may seem, has definitive value in and of itself, even when it fails. It is precisely to this that the living God will grant an even greater future. 'He gives a new face to darkness and light, to all that we did.'

Even in his Christian view of grace and redemption, the Christian will have to remain aware of his human condition. To that I want to devote this second volume, and thus at the same time fulfill a promise made in the first.

Part One

The Authority of New Experiences and the Authority of the New Testament

At present it is clear that many believers and quite evidently a number of students of theology are reluctant to engage in theological activity which has its starting-point in scripture and tradition (a method which, moreover, presupposes the knowledge of various dead languages: Hebrew, Greek and Latin, not to mention others, if it is to produce fruitful results). They are of the opinion that a modern, living theology must begin from men's present-day experiences. They want to begin 'at the other end'. [029]

I think that this problem, put in such a way, is a false dilemma (see below). However, this question brings up the even older suspicions of many theologians about 'experiences'. They do not seem to be aware that with such an attitude they remove the basis for any 'divine revelation'. In my view this gulf between *faith* and *experience* is one of the fundamental reasons for the present-day crisis among Christians who are faithful to the church.

Precisely so that we can gain some insight into the meaning of 'a theology of grace', redemption and salvation, I would like to present an analysis of the special authority which lies in 'experiences' and an analysis of the authority of holy scripture which is apparently opposed to it.

In this analysis I shall not be immediately concerned with experience in the more superficial sense of 'It says nothing to me', 'It means something to me', even if 'experience', the phenomenon to be analysed, does have something to do with this. Nor am I so concerned with experience in the sense of piety and feeling, or of qualities of experience, although these emotional aspects are essential, above all in religious experiences. In the analysis the main emphasis will be on the particular cognitive, critical and productive force of human experiences. Under this aspect, above all, revelation has everything to do with 'experience'.

Chapter 1

THE AUTHORITY OF NEW EXPERIENCES

'Back to the rough ground' (L. Wittgenstein)

Literature: The concept of 'experience':[1] T. Adorno, *Negative Dialektics,* ET London 1973; id., 'Thesen über Tradition', in *Ohne Leitbild,* Frankfurt 1967, 29-41; Ian G. Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms,* New York and London 1974; id., *Issues in Science and Religion,* Englewood Cliffs and London 1966; H. D. Bastian, *Verfremdung und Verkündigung,* Munich 1967; H. Berger, *Erfahrung und Gesellschaftsform,* Stuttgart 1972; P. Berger and T. Luckmann, *The Social Structure of Reality,* New York and London 1967; H. Blumenberg, *Legitimität der Neuzeit,* [030]

[1] The following literature is important in connection with the problems of the relationship between empirical *experience* and *science,* which are not dealt with explicitly in this chapter. H. Albert, *Traktat über kritische Vernunft,* Tübingen 1968; id., *Plädoyer fur kritischen Rationalismus,* Tübingen 1971; K. O. Apel, 'Szientistik, Hermeneutik, Ideologiekritik', in *Hertneneutik und Ideologiekritik,* Frankfurt 1971, 7-44 (this article was first published in 1968); L. Boon, 'De nieuwe visie op de wetenschap. Een overzicht', *Mens en maatschappij* 43, 1974, 350-79; M. Gatzmeier, *Theologie als Wissenschaft?,* two vols., Stuttgart and Bad Cannstatt 1974, 1975; L. Gilkey, *Religion and the Scientific Future,* New York and London 1970; D. S. Greenberg, *The Politics of Pure Science,* New York 1967; A. D. de Groot, *Een minimale methodologie op sociaal-wetenschappelijke basis,* The Hague 1971; J. Habermas, *Gegen ein positivistisch halbierten Rationalismus,* Frankfurt 1969; id., *Knowledge and Human Interests,* ET London 1972; id., *Theory and Practice,* ET London 1974; id., *Technik und Wissenschaft als 'Ideologie',* Frankfurt [4]1970; W. Heisenberg, *Physics and Beyond,* ET London 1971; A. Hollweg, *Theologie und Empirie,* Stuttgart [3]1974; K. Holzkamp, *Wissenschaft als Handlung,* Berlin 1968; id., *Kritische Psychologie,* Frankfurt 1972, esp. 88-98; M. Horkheimer, *Kritische Theorie,* ed. A. Schmidt, two vols., Frankfurt 1968; id., *Zur Kritik der instrumentellen Vernunft,* Frankfurt 1967; H. Koningsveld, *Het verschijnsel wetenschap. Een inleiding tot de wetenschapsfilosofie,* Meppel and Amsterdam 1976; T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions,* Chicago and London 1962,[2]1970; I. Lakatos, 'Criticism and the Methodology of Scientific Research-programmes', in *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 69, 1968, 149-86; id., *Wetenschapsfilosofie en Wetenschapsgeschiedenis,* Meppel 1970; E. Nagel, *The Structure of Science,* London [3]1971; W. Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science,* ET London and Philadelphia 1976; C. van Peursen, *Wetenschappen en werkelijkheid,* Kampen 1969; G. Picht, *Wahrheit, Vernunft, Verantwortung,* Stuttgart 1969; M. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge,* London and New York 1969; K. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery,* London 1969; id., *Conjectures and Refutations. The Growth of Scientific Knowledge,* London 1969; id., *Objective Knowledge,* Oxford 1972; P. van Schilfgaarde, *Het kennisbegrip in wetenschap en beroep; objectiviteit als pretentie,* Alphen a/d Rijn 1970; F. Schupp, *Auf dem Weg zu einer kritischen Theologie,* Freiburg 1974; H. Seiffert, *Einfuhrung in die Wissenschaftstheorie,* Munster 1971; W. Stegmüller, *Probleme und Resultate der Wissenschaftstheorie und analytischen Philosophie,* two vols., Berlin 1969 and 1970; J. M. Ziman, *Public Knowledge,* Cambridge 1970. Composite works: *Der Positivismusstreit in der deutschen Soziologie,* Neuwied 1969; *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik,* Frankfurt 1971; *Hermeneutik und Dialektik,* two vols., Tübingen 1970.

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§1 Experience is always interpreted experience

> 'The distinction between discovery and invention or between fact and theory will, however, immediately prove to be exceedingly artificial.'
>
> T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Chicago 1962, 52.

The basic meaning of the Dutch word for experience is travelling through the country[2] and thus - through exploration - being taken up into a process of learning. Experience means learning through 'direct' contact with people and things. It is the ability to assimilate perceptions.

It is of the nature of this process of learning by experience that the new experience is always related to the knowledge that we have already gained. This gives rise to a reciprocal effect. The discoveries about reality that we have already made and put into words open up new perspectives: they direct perception in our experience to something particular; they select and demarcate, they guide our attention. In this way they become the framework within which we interpret new experiences, while at the same time this already given framework of interpretation is exposed to criticism and corrected, changed or renewed by new experiences. Experience is gained in a dialectical fashion: through an interplay between perception and thought, thought and perception. The function of experience is not [032]
to find room for constantly new material in existing patterns of thought which are taken as unalterable, and which are constantly confirmed as a result - though there are also experiences which bring confirmation. No, the connection between experience and thought is rather that the constantly unforeseen content of new experiences keeps forcing us to think again. On the one hand, thought makes experience possible, while on the other, it is experience that makes new thinking necessary. Our thinking remains empty if it does not constantly refer back to living experience.

Granted, we recognize a difference between the objective and the subjective, but we have grown away from the Cartesian dualism of subjectivity and objectivity. The experience of ourselves and the world cannot be completely analysed in terms of a difference between objective and subjective. Therefore 'to find salvation in Jesus' is not *either* a subjective experience *or* an objective fact. To experience salvation is experience *and* interpretation at the same time. In experiencing we identify what is experienced, and we do this by classifying what we experience in terms of already known models and concepts, patterns or categories. We see whether something fits or not. I see something and say, 'a chair'. Experiencing this thing, I interpret it and identify it in the process of experiencing it. For I do not interpret this thing as a chair; I *see* a chair, though this seeing is

[2] In Old Dutch, *varen* means simply to travel; only later was the meaning restricted to travels by sea or on inland waterways. Thus *ervaren* means to get to know something, not by hearsay but by seeing it oneself: by sight and living contact.

intrinsically also an interpretation. The same is true of seeing in faith. Religious faith is human life in the world, but experienced as an encounter and in this respect as a disclosure of God. This latter is not an interpretation in the sense of a theory which is subsequently presented as a retrospect on *recalled* experiences; it is the *particular way* in which religious men in fact *experience* the events of their life. Here the experience influences the interpretation and calls it forth, but at the same time the interpretation influences the experience. Man experiences actively, with his whole being and having, and contributions of object and subject can never be distinguished with complete exactitude. What we experience as objective - what comes to us - is dependent on our concepts and our terms of reference, even independently of our projects and the interests which are served as a result.

Furthermore, the content of every new experience is put into words: a new experience is also a speech event. Speech is an ingredient of experience. However, a whole tradition of experience has already been accumulated in the pre-existing language which we use to describe experience, and this also colours our experiences. For the believer, this also means that the original element of religious experience will be expressed in the structures of the prevailing tradition:
[033] experiences are communicated socially. For that very reason, experience is only competent where it takes into account the presuppositions under which it came into being.[3]

Moreover, there is the objectively existing form of society in which we live here and now, for example in the West. This form not only exists outside us but also lives within us. Thus the subject who experiences is in reality also part of existing society and not an 'abstract individual'. To a considerable degree the personal needs, expectations and possibilities of experience of any person are already prescribed by the society in which he or she lives. The world of our concrete experience is also a manipulated world. Therefore new experiences have 'authority' only when all this has been taken into account.

Consequently experience is a richly nuanced totality in which experience, thought and interpretation run together in the same way as past, present and expectations of the future. This throws us up against the question of the objectivity and subjectivity of what we call 'new experiences', and thus raises the question of their authority.

The capacity for answering, in other words the sphere of resonance within us, which makes us capable of taking up and digesting an appeal from outside - or from our innermost depths - influences the magnitude and depth of our experience. Personal involvement in no way prevents our being open to what encounters us objectively. A man with a musical ear will hear more in a symphony than someone with little feeling for music. Does that mean that he is more

[3] See W. Korff, *Norm und Sittlichkeit,* Tübinger Theologische Studien 1, Mainz 1973,131-42.

subjective? Or is it not rather the case that this subjective capacity is the very element that makes him open to hear all that is to be heard in this symphonic reality? In other words, our real experiences are neither purely objective nor purely subjective. On the one hand, they are not purely subjective; for we cannot simply make something out of something at our whim. At least partially, there is something which is 'given', which we cannot completely manipulate or change; in experience we have an offer of reality. On the other hand, it is not purely objective; for the experience is filled out and coloured by the reminiscences and sensibilities, concepts and longings of the person who has the experience. Thus the irreducible elements of our experiences form a totality which already contains interpretation. We experience in the act of interpreting, without being able to draw a neat distinction between the element of experience and the element of interpretation.

However, there are elements of interpretation in our experiences which find their basis and their source directly in the experience itself, as the content of a conscious and thus to some degree transparent experience, and at the same time there are elements of interpretation which are brought to us from elsewhere, at the least from outside this experience. Thus for example an experience of love has interpretative elements in the very act of experiencing, suggested by our own particular prior experience of love. The love experienced is automatically aware of [034]
what love is; it even knows more than it can express at the particular moment. This interpretative identification is an intrinsic element in love that is experienced. Later, this experience of love will perhaps also be expressed in language taken from *Romeo and Juliet,* the biblical Song of Songs or Paul's hymn to love, or perhaps from phenomenological and philosophical descriptions of what love is. This further analysis is no indifferent or superfluous addition to love. Interpretation and experience exercise a mutual influence on one another; real love lives on the experience of love and on its own progressive interpretative expression of itself, which makes possible the deepening of experience and reveals this to itself from the experience. As we shall see when we analyse the New Testament, this is equally true of what believers call experiences of grace. And these in particular have a very close connection with experiences of love.

This analysis shows that there is no experience without 'theorizing'; without guesses, hypotheses and theories. Specific, private, so-called direct experiences are always communicated by general terms - in pre-reflective experience as well as in scientific empiricism and philosophical experience. This is also true of everything that we call 'religious experiences'. We experience reality - on all these levels - always through models of reality. Thus our experience of the daily rising of the sun is a direct experience, but it is communicated through a model of reality, just as the 'scientific experience' of Copernicus and Galileo was gained by means of a model. In pre-critical experiences the models are concealed and remain unnoticed. Hence the criticism of *'le monde vécu'* by E. Husserl or *'le langage vécu'* by M.

Merleau-Ponty, because even these so-called 'direct experiences' are already full of human constructs.

It emerges from this that man is a constructive, rational being: a *projecting* existence. Nevertheless, reality remains the final criterion: it can destroy all our projects or at least weigh them down or change them. Men live by guesses and hypotheses, projects and constructs, and therefore by trial and error; their projects can constantly be blocked by the resistance or the refractoriness of reality, which will not always fit in with these rational anticipations. These projects are very different and as such are not universally valid. But where reality offers resistance to such outlines and implicitly therefore guides them in an indirect way, we come into contact with a reality which is *independent* of us, which is not thought of, made or projected by men. At this point we have a revelation of that which cannot be manipulated, a 'transcendent' power, something that comes 'from elsewhere', which asserts its validity in the face of our projects and nevertheless makes all human plans, products and considerations possible, by virtue of its critical and
[035] negative orientation. It is clear that human thought is not enough for mankind, even if this too becomes evident only through the mediation of his human thought and action. Surprising, unexpected, new ways of perceiving are opened up in and through the resistance presented by reality. In this respect real experience only becomes productive when inherited insights are given critical consideration as a result of the resistance offered by reality, when something new is experienced or when what has already been experienced is suddenly seen in a different context. On our side we have to experiment, make conjectures, and frame hypotheses, i.e. 'invent', if reality is to reveal itself to us as that which is confirmed, corrected, shattered and constantly given new direction by what we contrive. The permanent resistance of reality to our rational inventions forces us to constantly new and untried models of thought. Truth comes near to us by the alienation and disorientation of what we have already achieved and planned. This shatters the so-called normativeness or the dogmatism of the factual, of what is 'simply given'. The hermeneutical principle for the disclosure of reality is not the self-evident, but the scandal, the stumbling block of the refractoriness of reality.[4] Reality is always different from and more than had been thought. It is a surprising revelation for thought, for which thought can only be a witness. In such experiences of what proves completely refractory to all our inventions we shall finally also discover the basis for what we rightly call revelation.

Were reality simply to confirm or 'verify' our human projects, we would never know exactly whether we were dealing with 'reality'. This confirmation can indeed illuminate something of reality, but we have no guarantees of that; a logical project directed elsewhere can equally well 'correspond' with reality. A project

[4] W. Kasper comes to the same conclusion from an analysis made in a different direction: *Glaube und Geschichte,* 235.

game within a system can be ever so coherent, yet this coherence does not say anything about its truth-value. Many scientists therefore avoid the term truth and speak only of the *validity* of scientific insights. Moreover, with some justification scientific theorists have consequently abandoned the principle of verification as a decisive method (at least as a universal principle); the case for this is all the stronger because it is pure convention which decides at what point the endless process of verification shall be called to a halt. By contrast, the 'negativity' which makes us revise earlier insights as a result of the resistance offered by reality is productive; it has a quite special positive significance as a 'revelation of reality', even though it may be dialectically negative and critical. People learn from failures - where their projects are blocked and they make a new attempt, in sensitive reverence for the resistance and thus for the orientation of reality.

This demonstrates that human experience is *finite,* that man is not lord of reality, for all his plans, though without them experiences would be impossible. Absolute knowledge is not granted to man, yet he refuses to take refuge in scepticism. Reality constantly directs our planning and reflection like a hidden magnet: we grow wiser as a result of sorrow about failures that reorient us. There is something remarkably positive about this implicit awareness of the hidden magnet. It is a knowledge which cannot be completely objectivized and [036] articulated. Precisely because of this, the negative experience of contrast is never an end in itself; in that case it would be destructive and unproductive.

By coming up against resistance, our planned search continually follows a new orientation. In offering this resistance 'the truth' stimulates and directs our ever wider searching. Thus it proves that on the one hand man is a theory-forming, rational being, and that on the other hand precisely because of this he stands under the norm of a reality which he has not planned. Men are not blank screens on which reality projects the reflective images. On the contrary, man as it were begins to develop a theory of the world but in so doing finds himself constantly opposed by the special quality, the otherness, of this reality which forces him to ever new attempts and is always ahead of him. Thus the revelation of reality in human designs and experiences never takes place through a direct appeal to 'experience'. The authority of experiences will reveal itself in a *dialectical* appeal to experience. Experience is supported and constrained by a permanent reference to the inexhaustibility of the real. It is not controlling reality, but allowing oneself to be guided by reality in all plans to control it, that opens up a way to human living. We must have something to say ourselves, and then listen to the reactions. This is the way in which men arrange their life - in everyday life, in science, in religion. In view of the negativity or the 'refractoriness' in all this, one might say that the intensity but also the authority of the experience of life culminates in 'suffering', in the suffering of disaster and failure, in the suffering of grief, in the suffering of evil, in the suffering of love. Here are the great elements of the revelation of reality in and through men's *finite experiences.*

§2 The authority of experiences

> From this time forth I make you hear new things, hidden things which you have not known. They are created now, not long ago; before today you have never heard of them, lest you should say, 'Behold, I knew them' (Isa 48.6b-7).

The preceding analysis conceals two questions:

(a) How must our thought be framed to make experience possible? That means experience in which the real presents itself in such a way that it goes beyond our projects and in so doing shows its authority.

(b) How must we understand 'experience', which on the one hand breaks
[037] through the dogmatism of human thought and on the other hand guards this thought against scepticism and a surrender of the will for truth?[5] This is the question of a way of thinking which does not dogmatically preclude new experiences and yet of a view of human experiences in which these do not block any will to the truth by a meaningless chaotic mass. From this it already emerges that the authority of experiences does not come from the experience itself or from the emotional capacity to experience fascination and thrill (as R. Otto thinks). The quality of experience is not the measure, but what is measured; the authority of (new) experiences is itself defined by the surprising nature of reality, which continually proves different from what we think. The real, with which man has to do in his experience, is a never to be reached, surprising event.

It can hardly be denied that authoritarian institutions and conformist groups often show as it were innate mistrust of new experiences, of 'experience' *tout simple*. They instinctively feel that in experiences an authority can present itself which is a criticism of the normativeness of the factual and of any authority which would merely assert itself as contingent facticity and thus as power. That they must nevertheless acknowledge the critical and productive force - the authority - of experiences emerges from the fact that they often seek to manipulate new experiences. It is also striking that 'the powers' (in no matter what areas) only refer to experience if this is not critical and productive, but confirms what already exists. Indeed such experiences are instructive, and may not be brushed aside; but here we find only one aspect of the authority of experiences. Above all, experiences which put in question our established thinking and acting open up new perspectives. But precisely out of fear of the reflection or the change which they require, they are often manipulated: their critical force is not allowed, but they are 'integrated', by taking away their sting.

Only if we take all these circumstances into account can we speak of the authority of experiences if these stand under the presupposition of freedom and

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[5] For an analysis of 'dogmatism' and 'scepticism' see R. Schaeffler, *Religion und kritisches Bewusstsein,* 235—42 (though I have fundamental reservations about this book, see Part Four).

are also allowed space within the institution. The question arises whether 'the system', and that means not only the deposit of all experiences which have been had and accumulated at an earlier stage, but often also 'experiences' which have been 'manipulated', and thus ideologically transmitted, can make room for new experiences. Not in the superficial sense of adaptation to what already exists, but as an alteration of what has been acquired, perhaps a total alteration - without destroying the critical force of the recollection of earlier experiences. A new 'divergent' experience is a challenge, it subjects the prevailing models of experience to criticism. Experience is therefore never 'innocent'. For it is communicable. Anyone who has had an experience *ipso facto* becomes himself a *witness:* he has a message. He describes what has happened to him. This narration opens up a new possibility of life for others, it sets something in motion. Thus the authority of experience becomes operative in the telling. The authority of experience has a narrative structure.[6]

We term the totality of an individual's experiences 'life-experience'; this coincides with a conviction about life which is lived out in practice. In the case of a historical collective we then speak of a *tradition,* the particular tradition of experience of a community which makes history, e.g. of Christianity, Buddhism, Islam - Western or African cultures. Experience is retained in reminiscence and language: it becomes a living 'deposit', which is handed on as tradition. Experiences which are handed down - tradition - are at the same time a means of objectifying new experiences and integrating them in what has already been attained. Experience is traditional experience: experience and tradition are therefore not opposite *per se:* they make one another possible. Even new experiences are possible only within the sphere of a tradition. Our thought and experience are subject to historical and social influence. Reflection means thinking with presuppositions. This bond to a particular cultural tradition of experience is on the one hand positive: it makes understanding possible. On the other hand it is

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[6] Literature about 'narrativeness': R. Barthes, *Mythologies,* Paris 1957; E. Bochinger, *Distanz und Nähe,* Stuttgart 1968; R. Dithmar, *Die Fabel,* UTB 73, Paderborn 1971; W. Harnisch, *Eschatologische Existenz,* Göttingen 1973; A. Jolles, *Einfache Formen,* Darmstadt ²1958 (1930); R. Koselleck, *'Historia magistra vitae.* Über die Auflösung des Topos im Horizont neuzeitlich bewegter Geschichte', in *Natur und Geschichte. K. Löwith zum 70. Geburtstag,* Stuttgart 1967, 196-218; R. Koselleck and W. Stempel (eds.), *Geschichten und Geschichte,* Munich 1972; C. Lévi-Strauss, *The Savage Mind,* ET London 1966; G. Lohfink, 'Erzählung als Theologie. Zur sprachlichen Grundstruktur der Evangeliën', *StZ* 99, 1974, 521-33; J.-B. Metz, 'Erinnerung' in *Handbuch philosophischer Grundbegriffe,* Munich, vol. 1, 1973, 386-96; id., 'The Future in the Memory of Suffering', *Conc* Vol. 6 no. 8 (ET of 8.6), June 1972, 9-25; id., 'A Short Apology of Narrative', *Conc* Vol. 5 no. 9 (ET of 9.5), May 1973, 84-96; D. Mieth, 'Narrative Ethik', *FrZPhTh* 22, 1975, 297- 326; id., *Dichtung, Glaube und Moral,* Mainz 1976; F. Mildenberger, *Theologie für die Zeit,* Stuttgart 1969; W. Nestle, *Vom Mythos zum Logos,* Stuttgart 1940; K. Reinhardt, *Vermachtnis der Antike,* Göttingen 1960; W. Schapp, *In Geschichten verstrickt,* Hamburg 1953; id., *Philosophie der Geschichten,* Leer 1959; K. Stierle, 'L'histoire comme exemple, l'exemple comme histoire', *Poétique. Revue d'histoire et d'analyse littéraires* 10, 1972, 176-98; H. Weinrich, *Tempus. Besprochene und erzählte Welt,* Stuttgart ²1971; id., *Literatur für Leser,* Stuttgart 1971; id., 'Narrative Theology', *Conc* Vol. 5 no. 9 (ET of 9.5), May 1973, 46-56; H. Zahrnt, 'Religiöse Aspekte gegenwärtiger Welt- und Lebenserfahrung', *ZTK* 71, 1974, 94-122.

negative: it limits our understanding, is selective, and already guides new experiences in a particular direction. In its direction, this understanding is limited by the distinctiveness of one's own tradition.[7] That is why even a very old tradition of experience is always subject to the challenge of new experiences. Of course these do not have authority simply and solely because they are new. For we have no guarantee at all that the history of human experience is only progressive and not at the same time also regressive. Therefore the discerning of spirits, the *discretio spirituum,* is an essential part of what we call the authority of experiences. This capacity for distinction is the result of critically digested perceptions. As I have said, experience is interpretative and interpretation also makes experiencing possible; the authority of experience is therefore an authority *from* experiences and *for* new experiences.

If the authority of experience is an authority gained from a many-sided and yet directed process of experience - which does not, however, mean *anarchic* openness to the future, specifically without critical recollection of past experiences - and at the same time directed openness for new experiences, then the widening possibility of the integration of new experiences, which does not manipulate but reinterprets what has already been attained, is a pointer towards the power of a particular tradition of experience. Humanly speaking, this is a demonstration of plausibility, of its meaningful authenticity and its foundation in truth. In that case the credibility of the given tradition is strengthened, or it gains force. For the
[039] virtues of a particular tradition emerge more clearly from the way in which the tradition is able to accord a real place to new and above all 'divergent' experiences - dynamically remaining itself, without electicism or false *aggiornamento.* On the other hand, a (religious) tradition which cannot cope with new experiences and therefore negates them, avoids them or brands them *per se* as 'diabolical modern temptations' forfeits moral authority, even if this refusal is based on age-old and honourable traditions (the presuppositions of which are not, however, explored). Furthermore, in that case there is a danger that this traditional community becomes a 'holy remnant'; it asserts itself by forming ghettoes and aggressively asserting its own group identity. At that point, it is not in fact swearing by the authority of its own tradition of experience but by the letter of what was once the expression of authentic experiences in a particular historical situation. Climaxes then become points of stagnation.

All this is also true on the individual level. Anyone who has come to experience of life or a conviction about life which is lived out in practice will try to digest new experiences within his own experience of life. Sometimes this proves successful; sometimes less so. In the long run, however, one can be compelled by the resistance offered by constantly new experiences to revise some presuppositions of

[7] P. Ricoeur, *Finitude et culpabilité,* 2 vols, Paris 1960.

one's own convictions about life. Initially this usually happens by giving way or correcting one's own view of life to some degree. Only when all attempts at integration fail is one confronted with the possibility of a collapse in one's convictions about life, at least if it is a matter of remaining true to oneself. (For it is also possible to assert one's rights more and more stubbornly and aggressively against increasing evidence from experience.) This proves once again the authority of critical experiences (quite apart from the question whether they have been formulated properly or wrongly). We can, however, still ask whether an accumulation of negative experiences will in fact bring the committed believer to change his convictions about life. The Christian and even the Stoic will say: Neither death nor life nor anxiety nor tribulation, *nothing* can separate us ... Suffering and a number of empirical proofs do not seem to be able to shift the believer from his faith that God loves him. No accumulation of empirical indications to the contrary will cause such faith to totter. This has to do with the force of non-cognitive, emotional elements in man's experiences and conviction of life. The experience of faith is capable of living with doubt. Within his own varied projects for life everyone can give good reasons for his convictions about life, despite experiences to the contrary: the history of our human experiences is not so clearly negative or positive. Above all, religious and para-religious and even atheistic convictions about life are highly resistant to falsification from negative experiences. But if anyone wants to maintain the relevance of experience for faith, then negative experience cannot be the last word. Moreover, in the last resort the emotional elements must draw their strength from the cognitive element or the [040] evidence of experience in the conviction of faith. If the particular value of the aspect of knowledge or the evidence of experience were irrelevant, there would be no way of distinguishing illusion from reality. If existing convictions about life are not in any way connected with actual experiences, they become empty and irrelevant, even if it seems that someone only gives up the conviction when more meaningful alternatives present themselves.[8]

As will become even clearer as we proceed, to have come this far is to say that experience of something new and surprising will always also be an experience of the familiar, though of a different kind from what we might have imagined. We discover the familiar through alienation or negative experiences and nevertheless see it in a form that surprises us. Discovering something new is also a rediscovery. This does not do away with alienation from oneself, which in fact becomes an essential element in the real knowledge of truth; it brings the new element into view as something that is to a degree familiar and expected, even if this also goes beyond all our expectations. The new is never *radically* the 'wholly other', for the simple reason that in our experiences we ourselves are part of this reality which

[8] I. Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms*, 130.

reveals itself to us. Reality has already revealed itself, albeit in such a way that we only recognize this revelation as something that is already familiar to us as a result of alienations from ourselves.[9]

§3 Revelation and experience

> 'I bear witness to experience and appeal to experience ... I say to one who hears me, "It is your experience. Reflect on it, and dare to acquire as experience what you cannot reflect on"… I have no doctrine. I am simply pointing to something. I am showing reality. I am showing something in reality which has not been seen, or has not been seen adequately' (M. Buber, *Werke* I, Munich and Heidelberg 1968, 1114).

Literature (in addition to the literature already cited at the beginning of chapter 1):

1. *The concept of 'revelation'*

T. P. van Baaren, *Voorstellingen van openbaring phaenomenologisch beschouwd,* Utrecht 1951; H. Berkhof, *Christelijk Geloof,* Nijkerk [3]1973, 43-109; H. Bouillard, 'La formation du concept de religion en Occident', in *Humanisme et foi chrétienne,* Paris 1976, 451-62; W. Buist, *Offenbarung,* Düsseldorf 1960; R. Bultman, 'The Problem of
[041] "Natural Theology"', ET in *Faith and Understanding,* London 1969, 313-31; id. 'The Question of Natural Revelation', ET in *Essays Philosophical and Theological,* London and New York 1955, 90-118; K. Goldammer, *Religionen, Religion und christliche Offenbarung,* Stuttgart 1965; F. G. Downing, *Has Christianity a Revelation?,* London 1964; E. Heck, *Der Begriff* Religio *bei Thomas von Aquin,* Paderborn 1970; F. Konrad, *Das Offenbarungsverständnis in der Evangelischen Theologie,* Munich 1971; H. Kuitert, *The Necessity of Faith; or, Without Faith You're as Good as Dead,* ET Grand Rapids 1976; R. Latourelle, *Théologie de la révélation,* Bruges 1963; W. Luypen, *De erwtensoep is klaar,* Bilthoven 1970; id., *Theologische overwegingen,* Bruges 1971; id., *Theologie is antropologie,* Meppel 1974; id., 'Christelijk geloof. Een confessionele hogeschool?', in *Tussentijds,* Tilburg 1975, 205-35; J. Moltmann, 'The Revelation of God and the Question of Truth', *Hope and Planning* (ET of *Perspektiven der Theologie),* London 1971, 3-30; G. Moran, *Theology of Revelation,* London 1966; G. Scholem, 'Offenbarung und Tradition als religiöse Kategorie im Judentum', in *Über einige Grundbegriffe des Judentums,* Frankfurt 1970; F. Schupp, *Auf dem Weg zu einer kritischen Theologie,* Freiburg 1974; M. Seyboldt et al., *Die Offenbarung. Von der Schrift zum Ausgang der Scholastik* (Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte, Vols I-II), Freiburg im Breisgau 1971 (with a detailed bibliography); G. Schiwy,

[9] If the experience were radically of the *'wholly* other', it would in fact have no hermeneutic significance whatsoever for revelation.

Strukturalismus und Christentum, Freiburg im Breisgau 1969; W. Veldhuis, *Geloof en ervaring,* Bilthoven 1973; H. Waldenfels, *Offenbarung,* Munich 1969.

2. *The language of faith, religious language or the language of revelation*

Ian Barbour, *Myths, Models and Paradigms,* New York and London 1974; P. Barthel, *Interprétation du langage mystique et théologie biblique,* Leiden 1967; L. Bejerholm (and G. Hornig), *Wort und Handlung,* Gütersloh 1966; K. Bendall and F. Ferré, *Exploring the Logic of Faith,* New York 1962; M. Black, *Models and Metaphors,* Ithaca 1972; W. T. Blackstone, *The Problem of Religious Language,* New York 1963; J. Bochenski, *The Logic of Religion,* New York 1965; E. Bonvini, 'Interrogations sur le langage religieux', in *Humanisme et foi chrétienne,* Paris 1976, 157-68; E. Cassirer, *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen,* three vols, Berlin 1923, 1925 and 1929; M. Clavel, *Dieu est Dieu, nom de Dieu,* Paris 1976; Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols,* ET London 1961; F. Ferré, *Language, Logic and God,* New York and London 1961; A. Flew(ed.), *Logic and Language,* two vols, Oxford 1951; H. Fortmann, *Als ziende de onzienlijke,* three vols, Bussum 1964, 1965 and 1968; J. Gill, *The Possibility of Religious Knowledge,* Grand Rapids 1971; G. Gusdorf, *Mythe et métaphysique,* Paris 1953; P. Helm, *The Varieties of Belief,* London 1973; R. Hepburn, *Christianity and Paradox,* London 1958; J. Hick, *Faith and Knowledge,* London ^{3}1967; H. Hubbeling, *Is the Christian God-Conception Philosophically Inferior?,* Assen 1963; A. Jeffner, *The Study of Religious Language,* London 1972; E. Lévinas, *Autrement qu'être ou au-delà de l'essence,* The Hague 1974; J. Macquarrie, *God-Talk,* London and New York 1967; P. Munz, *Problem of Religious Knowledge,* London 1959; W. de Pater, *Theologische Sprachlogik,* Munich 1971; id., 'Theologie en taal als communicatie', in *Tussentijds,* Tilburg 1975, 139-50; I. T. Ramsey, especially *Religious Language,* London and New York 1957; P. Ricoeur *(opera omnia)* and in this connection especially *La métaphore vive,* Paris 1975; R. Schaeffler, *Religion und kritisches Bewusstsein,* Freiburg im Breisgau - Munich 1973; R. Schreiter, *Eschatology as a Grammar of Transformation,* Oxford 1974; P. Tillich, *Symbol und Wirklichkeit,* Göttingen 1962; id., *The Dynamics of Faith,* London and New York 1957; A. Vergote, *Interprétation du langage religieux,* Paris 1974; J. Wisdom,, 'Gods', in A. Flew, *Logic and Language,* Vol. 1, Oxford 1951; id., *Paradox and Discovery,* Oxford 1965; also *New Essays in Philosophical Theology,* ed. A. Flew and A. McIntyre, London and New York 1955; S. E. Toulmin, R. W. Hepburn and A. McIntyre, *Metaphysical Beliefs,* London 1957.

I. RELIGION IS A RELIGION OF REVELATION

The narrative character of testimonies to new experiences through which a new way of life is also opened to others is a mark of the whole of the New Testament. In all its writings it is the story of new experiences - of experiences of grace - even when *for the purposes of argument* it wants to direct experiences with a different [042]

orientation (often because they have been manipulated by taking for granted the spirit of the time) along the lines of the gospel. Originally the authority lies more in the experiences narrated than in the 'apologetic' argumentation.

The New Testament was made possible by a previous tradition of Christian experience and, as a testimony to collective experience of grace, the whole of the New Testament forms a tradition. In this it is above all, even for us today, a critical and productive reminiscence and an offer of a chance of experience - at least if, with the help of the concepts of earlier Christian experiences, we pay more attention to the experience formulated in it than to the ancient conceptuality in which it was formulated, despite the fact that in the form of interpreted experience these two elements formed a complete unity, even for the New Testament writers.

One of the fundamental tasks of theology is to attempt to put into words new experiences, with their criticism of earlier experiences, to reflect on them and to formulate them as a question to the religious tradition, the church, and to the social and cultural circumstances in which the church finds itself. By virtue of this activity the theologian becomes vulnerable, because here he is in a special way a searcher, and because he is experimental and hypothetical in his assertions. For it
[043] is by no means clear from the start which elements in new experiences are important and which irrelevant for Christian faith. The theologian looks for the cognitive and productive force and significance of new experiences, instead of simply working on the concepts used in the New Testament and during the course of church history, in which earlier experiences were expressed.[10] On the other hand, this first attempt is not chaotic or arbitrary; for by discerning the spirits the theologian attempts to discover whether new experiences are really the present echo of the inspiration and orientation which, in the context of the recollection of the biblical mystery of Christ, present their identity anew in these experiences or prove alien to them.

At all events, from the preceding analysis of experiences in their historical context, it will have become clear that the blunt opposition between the authority of a revelation handed down in tradition and the authority of new experiences is at the least pre-critical and naive. People often say, 'Good! I accept the significance of experiences, but *alongside that* there is also the authority of revelation, the "Word of God".' Others, in contrast, confuse what we have called 'experiences' with pietistic or 'personal' experiences; each draws what is said about experiences in the direction of their pietism and along the lines of their own religious attitude, or, on grounds of anti-pietistic rationality, rejects this analysis. Wherever I have presented the essence of these notions in lectures to 'free-thinking theologians', I have found that 'experiences' are mocked. Where I have come across a group with a more pietistic attitude, my audience has been enthusiastic. I think that both

[10] J.-B. Metz, 'Joy and Grief, Melancholy and Humour', *Conc* 10, ET May 1974, 7-12.

categories have missed the point.

We must begin from the fact that 'revelation' is an element in the self-understanding of all religions. Religions and religions of revelation are quite simply synonymous. This aspect of the history of religion in no way implies the assertion that alongside such truths which are accessible to human reason there are also supra-rational truths which then become the object of religious faith.

II. TWO LEVELS OF TRUTH?

To some degree the identification of revelation with truths which were quantitatively added to the truths discovered by natural reason, and which were then handed down by authority and had to be accepted in obedience to external authority, already began to some extent in the theology of the Middle Ages;[11] however, this theology drew a distinction between revelation and the truth of faith. In medieval theology, revelation is not the doctrine of salvation, but a statement about its origin. There the concept of revelation functions as a 'meta- [044]
language'; it says something about the non-objectifiable derivation and source of certain statements. For Thomas Aquinas, everything that the believer considers in the light of the revelation of God is *revelabile,* i.e. the object of revelation.[12]

Against the background of the Enlightenment and the deism that was flourishing at the time, the First Vatican Council, in an anti-deistic context, sanctioned the identification of revelation with additional new truths going beyond the bounds of reason.[13] As a result, what had earlier been theological meta-language was now used in the sense of language about objects. Thus the objectifying thought of the deism rejected by the First Vatican Council became a special presupposition of this council. The result was that revelation began to consist formally in a quantitative extension of the content of our knowledge, thanks to divine communication: revelation becomes a particular group of truths and statements, the object of faith, alongside a series of truths accessible to reason.[14] The Enlightenment had seen revelation as the historical, outward form of a content which was already immanently present in critical human reason, and it was the moral and religious ideal of man to discover its particular content independently of the help of the outward form of historical revelations (helpful though these might be in pedagogical terms). Revelation therefore became the development of an immanent totality of meaning which justifies itself and comes

[11] E.g. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* 1, q.1 a.1.
[12] Op.cit., q.1, a.3, ad 2.
[13] Denzinger-Schönmetzer, § 3004-5.
[14] Denzinger-Schönmetzer, § 3008 (see § 3004, 3015).

to complete fulfilment in history.[15] Salvation and redemption then become a destination which can be brought into being by the autonomous development of critical reason and human freedom. The Enlightenment repudiated a revelation which was already being presented in baroque scholasticism as a quantitative addition of new knowledge, inaccessible to reason, to those truths which could be arrived at by the light of reason. The Enlightenment protested in the name of critical reason and the beginnings of freedom against a type of divine information which alienated human reason and freedom from itself - against a revelation which was understood along the lines of the model of authority and subjection, in which human experience and theory have no role to play.

Against this background the official churches, and above all the Roman Catholic church, are somewhat reluctant to make any appeal to experiences (which in any case were often misunderstood as 'states of feeling' in the narrow sense of the word: purely subjective, inner intimations), above all when experience becomes the criterion for theological statements. This restraint is even more understandable since modernism seemed to explain statements of faith as pure symbols, cyphers of human experiences and primal longing. The concept of revelation began to be interpreted antithetically: not from human experience, but *ex auditu,* from hearing, based on the authority of the God who reveals himself to
[045] our world with which he has a vertical relationship.[16] Furthermore, there was also reason for restraint in an age in which human, narrow-minded, enlightened reason was regarded unhistorically and in narrowly rationalistic terms as a merely controlling knowledge (though many philosophers of the Enlightenment were at the same time very modest about rational human possibilities!). To identify experience with a controlling knowledge, culminating in an absolute knowledge (though it was Hegel, rather than the Enlightenment, who spoke in the latter terms), goes against the very nature of experience.[17] As has already been said, experience becomes tradition, and tradition provokes new experiences.

It is clear from the same Vatican Council that the restraint of the official church over experiences was not a tenet of faith. The Council saw a source for the understanding of faith in the mediation between the content of faith and human sense-experience.[18] Besides, over the centuries Christian theology has been an attempt to combine faith and human experience, though the same history shows

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[15] Literature on the Enlightenment, at least in this connection: Peter Gay, *The Enlightenment: An Interpretation,* two vols, London 1966 and 1969; N. Hinske, *Was ist Aufklärung?,* Frankfurt, 1973; W. Oelmüller, *Die unbefriedigte Aufklärung,* Frankfurt 1969; H. M. Wolff, *Die Weltanschauung der Deutschen Aufklärung in geschichtlicher Entwicklung,* Berne, Munich ²1963; W. Schneiders, *Die wahre Aufklärung,* Frankfurt 1969; F. Valjavec, *Geschichte der abendländischen Aufklärung,* Vienna 1961.

[16] See P. Grelot, 'Du bon usage des documents du "magistère": A propos du décret "Lamentabili", Proposition n.36', in *Humanisme et foi chrétienne, Mélanges scientifiques du Centenaire de l'Institut Catholique de Paris,* Paris 1976, 527-40.

[17] H.-G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method,* 310-25.

[18] 'E mysteriorum ipsorum nexu inter se et cum fine hominis ultimo', Denzinger-Schönmetzer, § 3016.

us also that these attempts have often led to the reduction of faith. In that case, however, we may ask how far this is a matter of experiences which are stunted, manipulated and interpreted one-sidedly.

Now that the deism of the Enlightenment has disappeared over the horizon of Christian life, the church can be rather more open to human experience. However, the result of the Dogmatic Constitution on revelation, *Dei Verbum,* promulgated at the Second Vatican Council, is a kind of compromise between the opposition to deism expressed at the First Vatican Council[19] and the earlier Christian view of revelation as God's communication of himself in salvation history as the God who is gracious towards mankind.[20] In the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes,* promulgated by the same Council, more room is given to human experience. 'God reveals himself by revealing man to himself.'[21] The revelation of God is concerned with an understanding of oneself and the world, and therefore with interpreted experience.

III. ENCOUNTER WITH THE WORLD, THOUGHT AND LANGUAGE: EXPERIENCE AND REVELATION

I do not intend to present a 'complete' theology of revelation, with all its implications in the life of a church. I am simply concerned to demonstrate the basis of revelation in experience: there can be no revelation without experience.

The problem takes the following form. On the one hand, there is no single argument from outside the Christian faith which can justify this faith; on the other hand, the salvation which is freely offered to us cannot remain outside human life [046] and experience. This suggests already that the relationship between faith and experience must be an *indirect* one, and that there can be no question of an easy, direct correlation. God reveals himself by revealing man to himself.

The very fact that revelation comes to us in human language - as in the Old and New Testaments - shows that revelation is essentially concerned with human experience. However, language is the deposit of a common experience. Revelation is *experience* expressed in language; it is God's saving action as experienced and communicated *by men.* Furthermore, the language of faith is not a terminology which presents direct descriptions and assertions. In linguistic terms, the concept of 'revelation' is a protest against the exclusiveness of language which is directly descriptive and assertive. The concept of revelation is a meta-theoretical expression of a particular way of speaking, a language the prime concern of which is not to describe and explain, but which nevertheless is an indirect expression of

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[19] *Dei Verbum,* the Dogmatic Constitution on Divine Revelation, in *Constitutiones, Decreta, Declarations,* Vatican City 1966, § 6.

[20] Op.cit., §§1-5.

[21] *Gaudium et Spes,* the Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World, § 41.

reality on the basis of real experiences.[22] This must be analysed in detail.

A. God's revelation in the form of human ideas

H. Kuitert has posed the problem very acutely: all human speech about what comes 'from above' ('it has been revealed') is uttered by human beings, i.e. from below.[23] He goes on to say that Christianity consists of projections, words and usages which have been worked out 'down here' and not 'up there'. We know God's revelations only in the form of human ideas and words *about* divine revelation. According to T. Baarda, 'the argument that "all language about up there comes from down here" says either too much or too little'.[24] I am not quite sure precisely what he means, but I do see the problem. The 'too little' indicates that 'talk down here' is prompted by an initiative from up there; the language of faith is a *responsive* language. 'Too much' seems more problematical. However, it must be conceded that the responsive element is also interpretative; and as such it too comes from 'down here'. But that still does not settle things. In our analysis of experience we saw that people 'have experiences' above all when their plans and reflections, their anticipations of knowledge, come up against the refractory nature of reality, which thus reveals itself indirectly. This resistance directs all our reflections. It reveals a reality which is independent of all human plans, which does not come from men, but 'from elsewhere'. That does not mean that it comes from above, but rather that something which escapes the prevailing pattern of human knowledge makes this knowledge possible, directs it and shatters
[047] particular identifications. The basis of human thought is something that has not been contrived by men. Perhaps this is in itself an indication that truth is to be found not so much in our responsive language as in that which causes us to ask questions, and in our conscious ignorance. The clear and unequivocal character of our answers contains the relative element which derives from us and which is transcended by the reality which addresses us and can never be clearly explained. Man comes up against limits in all his experiences of knowing and trying. In these boundary experiences he is no longer the prisoner of the system of his transitory planning. Consequently reason is only rational if it recognizes this boundary experience. Reality is always more than and different from what we imagine it to be. From a negative, critical point of view this is because of our experience that man cannot ground the possibilities of his own existence, his knowledge and his ability in his own planning and his own reflection. This raises the *question* whether

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[22] K. O. Apel, *Transformation der Philosophie,* Vol. 2, Frankfurt 1973, 264-307; F. Schupp, *Auf dem Weg zu einer kritischen Theologie,* 89-94; A. Grabner-Haider, *Semiotik und Theologie,* Munich 1973, 135ff.

[23] H. M. Kuitert, *The Necessity of Faith,* ET Grand Rapids 1976, 42.

[24] Thesis 19 in the dissertation by T. Baarda, *The Gospel Quotations of Aphrahat the Persian Sage,* Amsterdam 1975.

he may not and cannot experience reality, to the degree to which it escapes human planning, as a *gift* which frees man from the impossible attempt to find his basis in himself, and makes it possible for him to think and plan endlessly, although this reality which is independent of him is for its part the basis and source of responsible human action in reason, freedom and planning.

It is by no means immediately clear that the character of this gift is *personal,* i.e. that it comes to us from the hand of a living and creative God who establishes the basis of all meaning and in so doing at the same time opens the future to mankind. However, this talk of God is primarily not something that we invent ourselves; we always find it already present historically in our human tradition as a possibility of human experience; we find it there before us as testimony to an experience, particularly in a large number of religions. As this talk of God is also the origin and basis of our culture, and even now is a significant social force, no one who wants to maintain a responsible attitude towards our world can avoid what may well prove to be a harsh confrontation with this tradition of religious language. In that case, however, we must also ask whether this religious language does not find its own context of experience in fundamental experiences of meaning which are combined with experiences of meaninglessness: of suffering as a result of evil and injustice; of suffering as a result of grief and inadequacy; of suffering as a result of love - elements which cannot be rationalized or removed, and which cannot fully be done away with through any human attempts at projection or productivity. This appearance and disappearance of meaning shows that we cannot grasp it, and that meaning comes to us from reality. We are addressed, called and summoned by it. All this has a structure which seems to compel us - however tentatively - to adopt a personal model in order to do justice as fully as possible to this experience of meaning, though without taking into account also the limitation which inalienably [048] divides two people, for all their intimacy.

The question then is: does experience of God not have an understandable foundation precisely in the context of the experience of meaningfulness? In other words, is a perspective opened up *within the horizon of our experience* on a meaning which cannot be reduced to our history of projects, discoveries and constructs of meaning and yet reveals itself in this very history of human projects? However, that is only possible if this perspective too can be *experienced as* a perspective: as the token of a greater, final salvation to come; in other words, if in fact we have partial experiences of meaning, of salvation or 'being whole'. What makes negative experiences of contrasts in reality into productive experiences is the meaning that can be found in them if we struggle with the pain of the contrast. Partial experiences of meaning and salvation are therefore had *in practice;* there is no question of a theory of salvation detached from any practice. A decision of faith which does not find any point of contact in human experience is irrational (pure 'decisionism', whether or not it is called 'intuition'). Furthermore, in this instance it

is left to man's subjective judgment to decide on the objectivity and validity of God's revelation. Even talk of a promise of total meaning ceases to be empty words or unproductive interpretation only in the experience of partial meaning and salvation. Only then can revelation be understood meaningfully as the *manifestation* of a transcendent meaning in the dimension of our historical horizon of experience and in the *responsive affirmation* of this manifestation. The offer of grace and the answer of faith are the two facets of one and the same rich reality, so that we can say with Lévinas, 'L'appel s'y entend dans la réponse.'[25] However, this cannot happen in such a way that God's action is *reduced* to this human action. For by nature it is only an indication. The transcendent lies *in* human experience and its expression in the language of faith, but as *an inner reference* to what this experience and this language of faith have called to life. Being addressed by the divine is made manifest *in* the religious answer. We cannot speak in objectifying or descriptive terms of revelation, apart from the faith of the community. This is not a denial of the objective validity of the revelation, but a denial of any objectifying and limiting 'scientific' objectivity (which is a stunted objectivity and cannot serve as model for what we may call 'objectivity'). Only in historical human experience and human practice does revelation shine out as God's action: by virtue of its transcendence this cannot be added to the efforts of historical man to create meaning. God's saving action cannot be added to human action, but it cannot be reduced to man's liberating action either. Antoine Vergote is therefore right when he declares that religious language needs models both for verticality from above
[049] and verticality from below, on the one hand to express 'transcendence' in imagery, and on the other to give 'immanence' symbolic expression.[26] What is involved is, however, a sense for the depth or the height *within* the direct encounter or the historical togetherness of human beings in the world. The gift, or God's grace, is not revealed either from above or from below, but horizontally, in the encounter of human beings with one another within our human history.

B. Revelation, an interpretative element? Seeing as ... or interpreting as …?

It is sometimes said that the element of revelation does not lie in experience but in its interpretation. In that case revelation is merely an *interpretative element.* It was said above that experience is a dialectical phenomenon, an essential interweaving of encounter with the world (above all in and through actual practice), of thought and language, in a historical 'entanglement with history'. Human existence *is* this dialectical interweaving. The encounter of many generations with man and the

[25] E. Lévinas, *Autrement qu'etre ou au delà de l'essence,* The Hague 1974: 'la "provocation" venant de Dieu est dans mon invocation' (190).
[26] A. Vergote, *Interprétation du langage religieuse*, 95-116.

world makes the particular language game of a culture what it is. Experience is therefore the pre-reflective horizon which is already given, the (incomplete) totality of the way and means through which a group of people approach their world and through which this world presents itself to them. A tradition of experience is the ongoing historical expression of the ways and means by which people deal with the world, live in it and understand it. In other words, it is the historical horizon of the experience of particular men.

Religious language shares in this dialectical interweaving of encounter with the world, thought and language. In thought, language and experience it is the expression of a *unique* encounter with the world. In that case, religion is a particular manner of human existence, a specific form of the dialectical unity of encounter with the world, thought and language. Thus in interpretative and responsive human experiences which are put into words, revelation becomes a 'revelation' which must be formally affirmed.

We may now ask what are the relations in this dialectical unity. Is the believer's encounter with the world religious? Is his thought religious? Is his language religious? Are these religious experiences or religious interpretations of human experiences? Are the experiences themselves relevant to religion, or is it simply that universal human experiences are being interpreted in religious terms?

When the contrasts are put in this way, the dialectical unity of encounter with the world, thought and language has already been broken up. We cannot see 'the religious' isolated in one of these three elements of one and the same experience which is interpretative in its experiencing and in which language is an intrinsic [050] ingredient of this experience. According to Langdon Gilkey, there are criteria for denoting experiences relevant to religion outside religious interpretation and language.[27] That I cannot understand. Experiences are always already interpreted - albeit implicitly - and loaded with theory. The criterion itself is already dependent on models and paradigms; this emerges from the fact that Gilkey himself identifies 'ultimate questions' *a priori* with *religious* questions. This may be true, but it will have to be demonstrated critically. However, this does define the place or context in which religious language can be understood meaningfully, while at the same time making clear why others do not want to speak in religious terms. That is why I prefer to say that for the believer this dialectical unity is itself religious in such a way that in the 'hierarchy' of these three elements the 'earlier' aspect always has a greater density than what is expressed inadequately in the 'subsequent' aspect. At the same time, though, these are not chronological elements but three elements of an *analysis* of what experience comprises. In this sense language, and here the language of faith, is really the weakest element in the totality of this dialectical

[27] L. Gilkey, *Naming the Whirlwind,* 305-413; see N. Schreurs, 'Naar de basis van ons spreken over God: de weg van L. Gilkey', *TvTh* 11, 1971, 275-92; id., 'Ervaring en interpretatie van de religieuze dimensie: een reactie', ibid., 293-302.

unity.

If the religious element or faith is co-extensive with revelation - revelation manifests itself in the religious response - then it is equally impossible to reduce the element of revelation to an interpretation in faith. There is the offer of revelation and the human, interpretative experience of revelation. Not only does the religious man interpret in a different way from the non-believer, he lives in a different world and has different experiences. Thus for the believer the exodus through the Red Sea can in fact be taken as an expression of an *experience* and not as a secondary interpretation or a superstructure which can be detached from this context of experience.[28]

We must be more specific in asserting that revelation is an interpretive experience by connecting revelation with its correlate, religious faith. The occasion for this is an example given by Ludwig Wittgenstein: in the twilight we see a small bush as a rabbit.[29] Are we seeing something or are we seeing something as .... or are we interpreting it as…? This distinction is subtle, but not insignificant. Above all, where we have experiences of totalities, we find ourselves in a kind of twilight in which different experiences - or are they interpretations? - are possible. John Wisdom's parable is well known.[30] Two people return after a long absence to the jungle where they have left their garden untended by any human hand. When they arrive, they find the garden decked with well-kept flowers among the weeds. A conversation develops between the 'believer' and the 'non-believer'. One says, 'A gardener must have been here.' After careful investigation this hypothesis has to be given up. So does the hypothesis that someone has been there while
[051] everyone was asleep. Besides, a gardener would have pulled up the weeds. Nevertheless, the garden looks cared for. 'There is some purpose here,' says one. Some aspects point to a gardener, others (weeds: 'meaninglessness') point to his absence or perhaps to the fact that some malicious person has been at work. However, a hedge all round, bloodhounds, and finally an electric fence show no trace of a mysterious visitor. Thereupon the 'believer' says: the gardener must be invisible, inaudible, intangible, and the sceptic retorts: in that case, what remains of your original gardener? What is the difference between an invisible, inaudible gardener who slips through every trap, and an imaginary gardener? Such assertions die the death of a thousand qualifications. The final result is that one remains convinced of the existence of a 'good God', whereas the other cannot imagine him at all. These two assertions, Wisdom claims, do not reflect any difference in the facts that both men have discovered in the garden: weeds and

[28] The same thing is true of so-called basic statements - 'protocol sentences' - in the empirical sciences. Instead of presenting 'elementary hard facts', these basic statements are already full of theories and interpretations (see n.1 and Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science,* 50-58).

[29] L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations,* Oxford 1953, 194e.

[30] J. Wisdom, 'Gods', in A. Flew, *Logic and Language,* Vol. 1, Oxford 1951, 194-214.

beautiful things. At this point, Wisdom says, the 'gardener hypothesis' has ceased to be experimental; the difference between the one who denies the hypothesis and the other who accepts it is not the question that the first expects something that the other does not. To say 'there must be a good God' is not a forecast about events in this world which would be different from what would be expected by someone who did not believe in God. In other words, this assertion does not give us any *information* about how things are in reality, about 'meaning' and 'meaninglessness'. These assertions are void of information, and because they ostensibly convey information, they are pseudo-statements. A. G. N. Flew adapts the parable to fit this conclusion and in so doing makes scientific thought the criterion and paradigm of all knowledge. Wisdom, however, interprets the parable differently. He does not by any means conclude that the whole discussion ends up in a 'non-lieu', in other words, that there should be no problems and no dispute between the believer and the non-believer. The believer certainly says something about his experience (the garden). The question then is whether there is not a 'non-experimental' point of dispute between the two. One uses the name God in connection with the garden and the other does not. This difference in what they say about the gardener is connected with a difference in attitude, emotion and quality of experience. Granted, it is impossible to test such a nomenclature as an expression of an attitude, but it can affect what is experienced, the garden, and is by no means arbitrary. Thus God's love differs from human love; it is not irreconcilable with a 'tolerance of suffering'; this love seems to be reconcilable with anything. However, Flew asks Wisdom, What is left of the term 'love'? What is the difference between saying 'God loves us' and 'God hates us' when all circumstances (whether things go well with us or not) are compatible with *both* assertions? In his interpretation of the parable Flew concentrates on pointing to elements of the same, unequivocal experiences which are common to both believer and unbeliever; Wisdom, on the other hand, points to the difference in interpretation. One sees the garden, which is the object of the experience of both, as the creation of God, the other sees it as a self-sufficient reality. [052]

The parable is taken further in the philosophy of religion. Two men are on a journey together. All the time, one sees his journey as a pilgrimage to the heavenly city; he interprets the pleasant stretches as encouragement and the hindrances as trials of his endurance. The other believes nothing of this, and sees their journey as an aimless ramble. Since he has no choice in the matter, he enjoys the good stretches and endures the bad, for better or worse. In discussion between them it is clear that the two do not differ in their experimental experiences of the good and the bad; they differ in their view of the purpose and destination of their journey. 'When they turn the last corner, it will be apparent that one of them has been in the

right all the time and the other wrong.'[31] However, in essence this conception of an eschatological verification is correct. 'He will judge the living and the dead.' Above all, however, Christianity escapes a 'pure eschatologism' because it points to a particular experience with one historical event, to Jesus. The Christian makes a statement about God which relates to a this-worldly reality - Jesus of Nazareth, and only on his foundation does eschatological verification become significant. There must already be some basis for experience in the present. Without this basis, religious statements are in the meantime purely hypothetical - we can never know.

For others, who follow the example of R. M. Hare, such general statements by believers and non-believers express a 'blik'.[32] Two people can agree completely over demonstrable elements in their experience, and yet in the last resort have radically different views. What the so-called progressive will see as clear historical symptoms of a relaxation of Russian policy will be regarded by the 'anti-Communist' as so many proofs of the diabolical cunning of the Soviet Union in its aim to gain sole control of the world. Facts can be experienced or interpreted in two different ways. Statements about them can hardly be nullified. According to Hare they are significant as the expression of a 'blik', that is, a 'view of' and a line of behaviour which precedes all knowledge of the world and is presupposed by it. He calls this a deeper level of meaning than that of purely descriptive statements, but they can be neither verified nor falsified.

This discussion was continued later on another level. In both cases, for the believer and the unbeliever, it seems to be concerned with a 'seeing as' (seeing the world as God's creation, as self-sufficient). The question is, Precisely what is that? Do we have to say, 'I *experience,* I see something *as…*' Or, 'I *interpret* what I experience or see *as…*'? Many of those involved in the discussion who have
[053] abandoned pure empiricism affirm that the experience itself is interpretative; the difference lies in the question whether the *identification* lies only on the level of interpretation or rather on the level of experience. According to some, to call an event, say, an experience of grace is in fact an experience of grace; for others, in contrast, it is to interpret experience of an event accessible to all men as grace. According to Ronald Hepburn,[33] theists and atheists have the same experiences, but interpret them in different ways. With many authors, empiricist presuppositions still lurk in the background; above all, the 'cognitive' aspect is identified with empirical verifiability; where this is impossible, statements are merely ways of expressing psychological dispositions.[34] John Hick[35] believes that it is more precise

[31] J. Hick, *Faith and Knowledge,* London ²1967, 150f.
[32] R. M. Hare, in *New Essays,* 99-103.
[33] R. Hepburn, *Christianity and Paradox,* London 1958.
[34] J. H. Randall, *The Role of Knowledge in Western Religion*, London 1958; P. Munz, *Problems of Religious Knowledge*, London 1959.
[35] J. Hick, *Faith and Knowledge*, 142f.

to say, 'I experience or I see something as (a chair, a shrub, a rabbit)'; Ian Barbour,[36] on the other hand, prefers to say, 'I interpret it as…', though he is only talking of a shift of accent.

Barbour's mistake seems to me to lie in his starting-point; in his explanation he begins from experiences which are illusions, projections (in the twilight a bush is seen as a rabbit), albeit not without a basis in experience of reality. If experience is interpretative, there can also be false interpretations. In fact we have experiences within a concept (I experience or see a chair). We are aware of the possibility of different frameworks of reference. The problem boils down to the acknowledgement that with conscious men there is no such thing as uninterpreted experience. The alternative forms in which Hick and Barbour pose the problem disguise the complexity of the real situation. Not only the reflective but even the pre-reflective consciousness makes identifications in the course of experiencing: both neglect the element of identification too much and call attention one-sidedly to the interpretative element in identification. Besides, Gestalt psychology[37] has demonstrated that, for example, a drawing of a configuration of cubes can be looked at differently from different directions. They are seen differently and not just interpreted differently. We see something against a background or a horizon. The element of structure or form is not added on in our thinking, it is an intrinsic element of our perception. So we see something in a different way and do not just interpret it differently. We can certainly take all the different perspectives together in theory, but we cannot see them all together at the same time. Thus the element of identification lies *in* the experience itself (one might say that we see 'the interpretation', or better, we see interpretatively). There is no neutral given in experience, for alternative interpretations influence the very way in which we experience the world.

Nature and human history are similarly 'ambivalent': they can be seen as 'figures' against different backgrounds; they can thus be experienced in different ways.[38] One particular kind of alternative vision of worldly reality is expressed in metaphorical and symbolic language. This symbolic language is the only adequate [054] way[39] of expressing certain dimensions. Only those who regard directly descriptive language as adequate language and thus regard it as the criterion for all language will talk of *'just* symbolic' language. They forget, however, that there is no such thing as directly descriptive language and that theory and interpretation

[36] I. Barbour, *Myths,* 51f.

[37] E.g. P. Guillaume, *Psychologie de la forme,* Paris 1942, 48-114; see also E. Strauss, *Vom Sinn der Sinne,* Berlin ²1956.

[38] See A. Jeffner, *The Study of Religious Language,* London 1972, 116-25.

[39] Adequate, i.e. adapted to and appropriate for the reality to be discussed. This does not therefore mean 'exhaustive'; the phrase is directed against the elevation of directly descriptive language to be the norm of 'adequate' knowledge; as though this latter language were not just as inadequate and already theory-laden in its description.

permeate all descriptive language. So the religious man also *experiences* grace; he does not just interpret it. It therefore seems to me short-sighted to say that the non-believer only trusts his experiences, whereas the believer builds castles on the same experiences. It is not a question of a contrast between experience and interpretation, but of alternative 'interpretative experiences'. Both the believer and the non-believer have interpretative experiences. Wittgenstein says that the world is not the same to a happy man as it is to an unhappy man;[40] he lives in another world. To call God good, even in suffering, is to give a definition of 'good' in which 'good' and 'God' *define each other,* thus shattering our limited concept of good. Only when we call God good do we know what a Christian means by 'good', and at the same time we arrive at a particular concept of goodness which then has a foundation in eschatology and partial experience.

The consequence of this analysis is that there is no reason for a contrast between a 'propositional' understanding of revelation (e.g. the creed) and an experiential understanding of revelation[41] through the dialectical unity consisting of encounter with the world, thought and language. If statements are to have meaning and truth, they must be rooted in human existence as experience. In fact, if religious faith is reduced to an 'amen' to propositional statements, this yes-word (and of course also a no-word) in fact means nothing. Religious language only becomes valid in the full context of experience of this language - both linguistic and non-linguistic. The demand means that the propositional understanding of revelation cannot be excluded, but must be kept in a right relation to the experience with which this propositional language is associated. The element of 'revelation' can thus be known *in* the experiential encounter with the reality of the world, *in* the interpretation of this experience as an intrinsic element in that encounter, and *in* the religious language of faith - albeit (in the same 'logical sequence') in ever dwindling and diminishing measure, because 'controlling' knowledge and human 'plans' are increasing to the same degree. *Allowing oneself to be determined* by a surprising disclosure of reality is given *limited human expression*.

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C. The immanence of transcendence: the possibility of expressing the reality of revelation

I said earlier that transcendence lies *in* human experience, but in such a way that this experiential content contains an intrinsic reference to what makes this experience possible and which is not constituted by the experience itself. Can we say anything about this reality which escapes us? Does it allow itself to be

[40] L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus* 6.43, ET London and New York 1961, 147.

[41] W. de Pater, 'Het theologisch verificatiebeginsel en de analytische filosofie', *Tussentijds,* 139-50.

expressed? I believe that this is possible and necessary in two directions: (*a*) in a 'mystical' direction and (*b*) in an ethical direction.

(a) Mystical thematization of the inexpressible

In so-called mystical or 'religious' thematization man seeks to express the foundation and source of the human religious response of faith. Of course this attempt is only tentative, and because of the transcendence of its concern, it has to be expressed in symbolic language. It is not therefore a question of a pattern of 'two worlds', ours and another. *Our own* reality is itself different from and more than what we believe; this reality itself, and not another higher world, is a surprising revelation of what has never been conceived of by man. For the believer, the very existence of man and the world is a symbol or a manifestation of the divine, but always in such a way that there is a necessary identity between the revelation and the concealment of the divine. For when confronted with any manifestation of the divine, God's essential reserve is always experienced: God can never be reduced to one of the forms in which he is manifested. Reality continues to surprise us. That is true in turn of both religion and the religious language of faith, which both reveal and conceal God and thus in their *own* symbols speak of the God who has already appeared in symbols - man, the world and history. However, the inadequacy of our talk of God is no reason for silence (any more than it is in the sciences). Unless linguistic expression is given to the reality which escapes us but grounds our being, even though this may only be through the 'poverty' of symbolic expressions, it threatens to disappear into forgetfulness. Out of sight, out of mind. Creeds and liturgies are therefore a necessary (and dangerous) form of anamnesis or remembrance. Relationship to the unconscious and the inexpressible is an essential part of critical human reason; 'dogmatism', on the other hand, identifies reality with what is expressed adequately, whereas scepticism falls silent because of our our ignorance. By contrast, critical knowledge of our own ignorance does not give up the will for truth, but rejects any absolute knowledge. It has the courage to express the inexpressible clumsily, knowing that this comes nearer to reality than [056] dumb silence or the dogmatic attitude of knowing better.

In philosophy since Kant this problem has been discussed in terms of the difference between the 'thing in itself and the 'object for me' - a distinction which is unavoidable, even if it cannot be realized.[42] It is unavoidable, because reality cannot in principle be comprehended by the consciousness; it cannot be realized, because man cannot distinguish what he does not know; for in that case he would have to recognize the 'thing in itself' precisely in the way in which it is distinct from the 'thing for us'. On the other hand, this distinction occurs again in our consciousness, at least in so far as this distinction *leaves room for* that which does

[42] R. Schaeffler, *Religion und kritisches Bewusstsein*, 240f.

not come to conscious awareness, 'a space which we can fill neither through possible experience nor through pure understanding', as Kant himself puts it.[43] The difficulty is as follows: how can we describe the way in which reality, under the aspect in which it does not enter our consciousness, can still be *thought of* by this consciousness? This knowledge of our own ignorance is part of the very structure of critical reason, and here the relationship to the unconscious is constitutive of man's finite thinking, which keeps being overtaken by reality. Reality and truth are 'given' to human, articulative knowledge in so far as in them man also experiences and takes into account the inadequacy of his own thought and language. From this it emerges once more that the supra-rational is part of the structure of human rationality, without our having to think in terms of 'two worlds'.

Now if that is the structure of human thought, we cannot do justice to the inexpressible element which can be found in the human tradition of experience by remaining silent about it - even if our talk in this direction is clumsy and always open to criticism. Moreover, this religious, symbolic language is experienced by believers as a gracious gift from the one whom they confess. The believer experiences the living God as the source which enables and makes possible such language. Thus however human it may be, this language is not an autonomous human initiative, but derives from an authority and mandate, by virtue of reality. Man is not master of reality, but only its steward. From this it emerges once more that this talk of God and his revelation is indissolubly bound up with our interpretative experience, as believers, of the reality of man and the world. Any religious statement about the God who reveals himself is in fact a statement about man and his world, but understood in such a way that any religious statement about man and the world is also in fact a statement about God. Theology is not anthropology, but a theological statement is *at the same time* an anthropological statement. In other words: in the self-understanding of religion there is, right at the beginning, a particular, i.e. religious, view of the world and man. God is always
[057] greater than the way in which he shows himself to man in our history, greater than the deliverance of the exodus from Egypt, greater too than the judgment of the Babylonian captivity. And even Jesus says that his disciples will do greater things than he himself has done.

Symbolic and 'negative theology' accepts the thousand names that men give to God; perhaps it will add to them new names that speak to our time. At the same it will say: none of these is wholly appropriate; it will leave room for the surprise that reality gives us. For many, the source from which we live has no name at all, but it is the task of believers and theologians constantly to name this ultimate reality and not leave it in anonymity, while at the same time being aware of their

[43] I. Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason,* ET by Norman Kemp Smith, London 1933, p. 274.

'conscious ignorance'.

At the same time, were we to claim that this 'contemplation' rests purely on itself and does not develop any critical force of its own, we would be showing a wrong understanding of this 'contemplative' thematization of the inexpressible. Thanksgiving and praise in prayer are not in fact purposive actions; they are not 'useful for ... ', but have a worth and value in themselves. But they also have a critical force. They make it clear that talk of the divine is only understood rightly to the degree to which it subjects itself to criticism, while at the same time urging the necessity of this discussability. Without it, man is abandoned in his isolation, doomed to talk to himself, to the great loss of his fellow men. Liturgical and symbolic language and theological thematization make it possible to express the unconditional without however speaking unconditionally. This language is neither 'dogmatic' nor sceptical. Liturgy and theology speak of the inexpressible, and in this they are a dangerous reminder to everyone, and also a counterbalance to the *exclusiveness* of all 'controlling knowledge'. What continues to function even in the sciences as a 'marginal condition' 'somehow' (here this word is appropriate) has to do with what becomes the theme of religious language. Reality is always different from what we think, while it as it were nevertheless grudgingly gives up its secret, so that even the completely new is never the negation of what it has already revealed of itself. Hope is surprised by the constantly unexpected, but never disappointed! The truth of religious language and the confidence of hope derive from the same source as the constantly recurring new element which surpasses all religious conceptions and expectations. Because of this, revelation finds its way through in this clumsy human talk, which must, however, speak in veiled terms about this revelation. This talk is not the truth; it is a sign of the truth. If we keep the difference between 'truth' and 'manifestation' expressly in mind, we may in fact speak of the truth or the illuminating force of the manifestation (in this context, this religious language).

[058] Because of the predominance of scientific thought in Western culture, this symbolic thinking in religious faith is often connected with the infancy of mankind,[44] as the result of a one-sided predilection for (what is often positivistic) 'instrumental reason'. Religious language is allowed to have emotional, but not cognitive value. In that case 'cognitive' is identified, as by Piaget, with an understanding which is essentially directed towards regularities, causal explanations and deductions.[45] And symbolic knowledge has no cognitive or truth value[46] except as 'childish thought'. This evaluation follows simply and solely from the fact that symbolic thinking is not subject to any empirical control; for that reason it

[44] J. Piaget, *Biology and Knowledge*, ET Edinburgh 1972; id., *Play, Dreams and Imitation in Childhood*, ET London 1951; id., *Insights and Illusions of Philosophy*, ET New York 1971, London 1972.

[45] J. Piaget and B. Inhelder, *L'image mentale chez l'enfant,* Paris 1966, 450f.

[46] Op. cit., 449f., 458

is said to be a 'mythical group-thinking of primitives'.[47] But Piaget does not describe religious symbolic thought as a 'senseless activity': not all human activity can be reduced to science. The particular task of this ideological religious language is the co-ordination of values, which are then more important than their cognitive significance.[48]

No proof is needed that such a view of purely scientific and instrumental thinking cannot possibly have a feeling for the particular cognitive value of the symbolic thinking of religious language. It betrays a purely scientistic view of human existence, the special quality of which is never really expressed, and in addition a particular view of human rationality in which no account is taken of the supra-rational presupposition of the possibility of this rationality. In the last resort the sciences do not invent the - psychological, social, religious - phenomenon to which they want to bring rational illumination. The sciences do not create man-in-the-world with his social, psychological, ethical and religious dimensions. And the more objective part of man and the world investigated by the sciences is not the whole of man, the whole of nature and the whole of history. However, we would be naive were we to assume that views like those of Piaget were not held in a popularized form by many people in this age of (neo-)positivism, to the detriment of faith.

We might say that it is empirically demonstrable that man is alienated from his own nature if he thinks he can confine himself to the symbolic thinking of the religious consciousness; we have learnt this from the criticism of religion put forward by the philosophers Marx, Feuerbach and Freud. But in our one-track Western culture we can also demonstrate that the exclusiveness and absolutism of purely scientific and technological thought (which does not reflect on its own presuppositions) allows whole areas of our humanity to die out or become stunted, and precisely in so doing alienates man from himself.[49] It is illuminating that the man who does not worship a divine God automatically prostrates himself before a non-divine God.[50] The truth about man in his encounter with the world is not exhausted by his purposive control of the world in science and technology.
[059] Precisely this justified human attempt continually comes up against the resistance which this reality offers to any purely controlling and manipulative knowledge. Yet science as it were compels reality to speak. What is said, however, often does

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[47] J. Piaget, 'Pensée égocentrique et pensée socio-centrique', *Cahiers internationaux de Sociologie* 10, 1951, 34—19.

[48] Id., *Insights and Illusions,* 46n, 54f. See also W. de Bont, 'Religieus en rationeel denken', *TvTh* 9, 1969, 79-81. See the criticism in J. Pohier, *Psychologie et théologie,* Paris 1967.

[49] G. Gusdorf, *Mythe et métaphysique,* Paris 1953, 189, and the modern criticism of purely instrumental reason: H. Marcuse, *One-dimensional Man,* London and New York 1964; J. Habermas, *Technik und Wissenschaft als Ideologie,* Frankfurt [4]1970, 48-103; M. Horkheimer, *Zur Kritik der instrumentellen Vernunft,* Frankfurt 1967.

[50] M. Bellet, *Naissance de Dieu,* Bruges 1975; P. Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith,* London 1957, 1-4.

not come out as expected. The resistance of reality and the recollection of suffering which cannot be rationalized - the suffering of evil and injustice, the suffering of grief, the suffering of love, and so on - therefore belong to the structure of critical human reason which in practice seeks to be liberating. The sciences are in themselves by no means reductionist (though they often look that way); they simply pose other, *limited* questions, to which the answer may be right but, given the nature of the question, equally limited. They only become reductionist when they are offered as *the* answer. For that reason they can never express the nature of man and his religion (nor criticize it); these are only accessible to philosophical, critical-reflective and theological ways of thinking.

(b) Ethical expression of the inexpressible

It will already be clear from what has been said that religion is 'not just' ethics and cannot be reduced to ethics. On the other hand, there is an intrinsic connection between religion and ethics, of such a kind that it is ethics which gives the density of reality to 'mystical' thematization.

Ethics uses a different language-game from religion.[51] The understanding of good and evil logically precedes understanding God and doing his will. That means that we cannot define our moral obligations primarily in terms of God and his will. On the other hand, the believer can and may see the will of his God in what he has learnt to regard as good and evil. For that reason the knowledge of the will of God is communicated historically, and indeed essentially, without the seriousness of the divine will losing any reality in the process. Hence although medieval thinkers used a now obsolete model of 'nature', they were right in speaking of the natural law as the indirect ethical norm and thus as a historical mediation between the commandment and the will of God *(lex aeterna)* and our ethical consciousness. Ethics has a certain independence, but the believer or the religious man sees its deepest foundation, source and ground in the reality of God.

Grace and religion are therefore essentially an ethical task. A religious man cannot separate the life of grace and ethical life from one another: 'Be doers of the word, and not hearers only' (James 1.22); 'He shall be blessed *(makarios,* as in the beatitudes) *in his doing'* (James 1.25c). 'So that those who have believed in God may be careful to apply themselves to good deeds; these are excellent and profitable to men' (Titus 3.8b). The Letter of James attacks a religious monism of grace: 'What does it profit if a man says he has faith but has not works? Can his faith save him?' (James 2.14). This is as authentic a mark of the New Testament as its kerygmatic [060]

[51] See G. Rombold, 'Die Frage nach dem Unbedingten', in K. Krenn, *Die wirkliche Wirklichkeit Gottes,* Munich, Paderborn 1974, 77-91; H. Kuitert, 'De wil van God doen', in *Ad Interim, Opstellen over eschatologie, apocalyptiek en ethiek,* FS R. Schippers, Kampen 1975, 180-95; D. Z. Phillips, 'God and Ought', in *Christian Ethics and Contemporary Philosophy,* ed. I. T. Ramsey, London 1966, 133-9; H. G. Hubbeling, *Criterium als kenmerk en norm,* Inaugural Lecture, Groningen, Assen 1968.

mysticism, and does full justice to the Tanach spirituality of Yahweh, who requires righteousness in *this* world. This practical and ethical 'thematization' of the mystery of God, the ground and source of religious experience, is a special and necessary 'interpretation' of the inexpressible mystery. What God is must emerge from our unrestrained involvement with our fellow man, between one man and another, and through building up liberating structures without which human salvation proves impossible.

However, it is also the case that man is limited even in his most responsible ethical action and that he experiences his limitations. Ethics demands too much of him (see Part Four). The rationality of human action is only rational to the degree that it also leaves room for the surprising event of reality, which transcends human ethical rationality. The future cannot be fully mastered by rational and ethically responsible planning (necessary though this may be). Thus the ethics of human liberation is the very context of experience in which the question of God most clearly can come into its own (see under Part Four). Despite its relative autonomy (on the basis of which ethics is possible for non-believers, and the non-believer cannot be identified with unethical people), ethics in the last resort itself points towards religion and the 'mystical' thematization of the astonishing world event.

(c) The relationship between 'mystical' and ethical formation

In all religions two trends can be found combined or locked in polemical struggle.[52] They are connected with the formation or 'making explicit' of the source of revelation in human life. With a reference to terms from the Jewish religious tradition, these two trends can be called on the one hand the 'theoretical and symbolic', the hasidic trend (M. Buber) and the 'practical and ethical', the anti-hasidic trend (E. Lévinas). The mystical and ethical dimensions are family traits in almost all religions. Giving a personal name to the ultimate ground and source of ethics and calling on the name of God expresses, albeit in the only way possible to us, i.e. a symbolically real way, the source of all ethics. This happens in the religious liturgy of thanksgiving and praise. *Theological* thought is therefore less a theoretical thematization of this ground (except in the form of *theologia negativa)* than the 'theory' which must secure by argument the inexpressible transcendence of God as he is expressed in the story of religious men and which must explore the status and the context of human experience in which this story can be meaningfully preserved and activated. Theology is an outline sketch to secure the health of religious confession and liturgy, as rooted in a profoundly human
[061] experience, and to articulate contexts of experience in which God can be talked of in meaningful terms. The true 'thematization' of the real element of revelation in

[52] See the discussion between C. Verhoeven and J. Sperna Weiland in *Ethiek en Religie, Congres voor moderne theologie, 21 October 1974, Radarpeiling* 10, 1975, no. 2, 7-17 and 17-23. To my mind both are too one-sided in their approach.

human experiences takes place both in the symbolic liturgy with its explicit naming and in worship ('mystical' element) and in ethical formation ('ethical' element).

We may ask which element has the greatest density of reality: the indirect and 'orthopractical' expression of God in ethical action or the indirect symbolic expression of the source of this practice in explicit nomenclature: 'my God', 'our God'. Both seem to me to be indispensable, but in view of the experiential structure of revelation, the symbolic-religious talk of God owes its density of reality to the *mediation* of *ethical existence*. In *this* perspective I would prefer to follow E. Lévinas: 'Tout ce que je sais de Dieu, et tout ce que je peux entendre de sa parole et Lui dire raisonnablement, doit trouver une expression éthique.'[53] We do not find salvation primarily by means of a correct interpretation of reality, but by acting in accordance with the demands of reality. We can act 'rightly' without having a correct theoretical model of reality, even if we are not professing Christians.[54] But being a Christian essentially implies liturgical praise and thanksgiving; however, these are robbed of their real basis and their density of reality if they lack the ethos of human, helping, healing and liberating love and righteousness. Religious thematization (which is always indirect or 'symbolic') forfeits that ground when it is detached from its basis in experience, i.e. the ethic or human action which, while feeling itself responsible for human destiny, does not look for the meaning, ground and source of historical success in its own autonomy, but in the unconditional mystery which directs all our experiences, overturns them and gives them a new direction: 'My ways are not your ways' (Isa. 55.8). This problem of religion and ethics recurs today in all its magnitude in the question of the relationship between redemption and man's concern for liberation and emancipation. I hope that this book will point a way towards a meaningful solution.

IV. BELIEF IN AUTHORITY

If we allow so much room to human experience as a communication of divine revelation, it might be asked: what is left of 'faith from hearing' (Rom. 10.14, 17)? Everything - though not in the pre-critical sense of blind faith in an external authority. Religious faith is faith 'on the authority of God' and not on the authority of human projects. If experience - both everyday experience and 'scientific' experience - consists in a dialectical movement of drafting, observing and criticizing the outline through the prism of the resistance offered to it by reality, the

[53] E. Lévinas, *Difficile liberté. Essais sur le Judaïsme,* Paris 1963, 33. K. Rahner also sees the density of reality of the mystical love of God as rooted originally in a radical love of neighbour, 'Reflections on the Unity of the Love of Neighbour and the Love of God', ET *Theological Investigations* 6, London and New York 1974, 231-49; also E. Schillebeeckx, 'Stilte, gevuld met parabels', in *Politiek of mystiek?* Bruges 1973, 69-81 (see Part Four).

[54] See also G. Schiwy, *Strukturalismus,* 22f.

[062] authority of God is revealed precisely in the fact that the course he takes differs from that of our human plans. 'Reality' is revealed in human thought and in God's 'guidance'. Israel had to experience this constantly in its history. The important thing was not Israel's own plans and reflections on what salvation might mean - in that respect it came under judgment - but the surprising way in which Israel's God corrected these plans, destroyed them, moved them in a new direction and finally brought salvation in a completely unexpected way. While this salvation was the fulfilment of Israel's deepest expectations, it went completely beyond all ideas of that. This faith is faith in the authority of God.

Religion is not concerned with a message that has to be believed but with an experience of faith which is presented as a message. On the one hand the religious message is an expression of this collective experience, and on the other its proclamation is the presupposition for the possibility of its being experienced by others. Revelation takes place *in* historical human experiences *in* this world, but at the same time it summons us *from* what we take for granted in our limited world. It is therefore not to be found in any direct appeal to our so-called self-evident experiences within the world. As experience, it is the crossing of a boundary within the dimensions of human existence.

This experiential structure of revelation is expressed in an extremely evocative way in the Christian revelation, which had its beginning in a historical encounter of men with a fellow man: Jesus of Nazareth. In it, something that we men could never have conceived of appears in a most surprising way *in* our history. Nevertheless, what could not have been conceived of by men appeared in the immanence of our historical experiences. In the encounter with Jesus, the authority of the (Christian) experience which he called to life coincides with the authority of the divine revelation. In that case perhaps I have analysed the concept of revelation on the preceding pages less as it functions in different religions than as it is specifically understood in the Judaeo-Christian tradition.

V. A NEW CONTEXT OF EXPERIENCE FOR PRESENT-DAY EXPERIENCE OF SALVATION IN JESUS

As man changes, i.e. as his pictures of man and the world change in the light of significant new experience, so too what he experiences as salvation and happiness also changes. Of course there are formal 'anthropological constants' in all this change, but they continually take on different colouring. The problem, then, is: how can salvation in Jesus, i.e. why we now need Jesus in the twentieth century, be expressed in such a way that it can be presented as an articulation of our
[063] expectations of salvation (duly subject to critical analysis) and the world in which we live without shaping Jesus and his salvation according to the measure of our

wishes and criticizable requirements?[55] The problem for many Christians, their crisis, is not so much that times have changed and that Christians might be accused of moving with the times and the new questions that they pose. On the one hand the crisis lies in the fact that Jesus is still regularly explained to us as salvation and grace in terms which are no longer valid for our world of experience, i.e. in terms of *earlier* experiences; and on the other hand in the fact that we seem no longer capable in words or actions to 'make a defence for the hope that is in us' (I Peter 3.15). Are we really what we confess in our creed of faith and hope?[56] Is there not a false adaptation as well? For the service of Christians to the world is a divine service. In other words, only insofar as we give form to our specifically religious, Christian task do we *ipso facto* give a specifically Christian service to the world instead of merely duplicating what the world already does, and perhaps does well.

From what has been said so far it has become clear that revelation has a structure of experience. The good that particular men experience in Jesus was experienced in the process of identifying it as salvation from God. What was really experienced by Christians in Jesus was therefore neither a purely logical conclusion nor a 'direct' experience, but an interpretative experience: an experience of faith. Because of this surprisingly new element of their experience of salvation in Jesus, Christians therefore wanted to express this in terms of their Jewish tradition of religious experience, which they made to interpret Jesus in the way in which they in fact experienced him. This led to the automatic development of the so-called proof from scripture (from the Tanach); the concern was to make an explicit presentation of the *continuity* experienced within the *newness* of their experiences with Jesus, in a tradition of the experience of faith in God's covenant with this people. At the same time this led to a new interpretation of this history in the light of the experience of a renewal of history. This finally led to a religious conception of the whole of history: the unity of a divine plan, counsel or divine dispensation which is developed in and through history by men.

What the Christian community will be concerned to say in constantly changing situations, through constantly new forms of expression, even in philosophical concepts of a very complicated kind, is ultimately no more than that in Jesus Christ it experiences decisive salvation from God. When the old concepts or interpretative elements no longer relate to new situations and when needs and necessities change, interpretative concepts also change. But the original experience persists through these changes: in their own different situations people still continue to experience God's salvation in Jesus. These changes do not themselves cause a crisis. As long as the basis of experience - experience of salvation in Jesus - [064]

[55] H.M. Kuitert and E. Schillebeeckx, *Jesus van Nazareth en het heil van de wereld,* Baarn 1975, 16.

[56] See *Unsere Hoffnung. Ein Glaubensbekenntnis in dieser Zeit*, Arbeitshilfe zur Synodenvorlage, Augsburg 1975, 19.

remains, any possible crisis takes place above all on the level of conceptual interpretation.

However, the situation becomes critical when the basis of experience is itself removed, when people are no longer clear why salvation should be sought specifically in this Jesus of two thousand years ago. In that case there is no longer any experience of salvation in Jesus. And in the end faith is undermined if it has to look for salvation from someone on the authority of others, if there is nothing that corresponds to it in the whole of their personal experience. Faith then quietly vanishes from life, dying through its own irrelevance and a short circuit of human experience.

Of course it could be argued that Christian faith is diametrically opposed to all human experience - that we believe contrary to all experience and that as a result there is no correlation and no connection between faith and life. But in that case God is so transcendentally the 'wholly other' that a really living man will immediately conclude that he himself has nothing more to do with this God because he is so far removed from man's own life. Such a view contradicts the whole event of experience from which Jewish Christianity has arisen and developed: it ignores the history of its own origins. Furthermore, it reduces human experience to its projective and productive elements and passes over what proclaims itself in experience to be an astonishing and overwhelming event in reality, correcting and crossing all our plans and achievements. It is that which makes someone an 'experienced person'.

If as a result we cannot affirm faith or talk people into it on mere external authority, Christians who continue to experience decisive faith in Jesus will be able to invite others to renewed possibilities of experience, if they search from their own Christian self-understanding for something in our present pattern of experience of salvation from God in Jesus. I sometimes wonder how, if we had never used the word 'God' before, it could be meaningfully introduced into our vocabulary. It is a thought which is worth an experiment. Besides, sometimes it is *the* event in a normal human conversation - at least if the word God is not used too early, or too late.

Chapter 2

THE AUTHORITY OF THE CANONICAL NEW TESTAMENT

Literature: The most important articles on the formation of the New Testament canon have now been collected in *Das Neue Testament als Kanon,* edited by E. Käsemann, Göttingen 1970. See also N. Appel, *Kanon und Kirche. Die Kanonkrise im heutigen Protestantismus als kontroverstheologisches Problem,* Paderborn 1964; W. Bauer, *Orthodoxy and Heresy in Earliest Christianity,* ET Philadelphia 1971 and London 1972; P. Benoit, 'Inspiration de la tradition et inspiration de l'Ecriture', in *Mélanges M. D. Chenu,* Paris 1967, 111-26; J. Beumer, 'Die Inspiration der Heiligen Schrift', *Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte,* 1-3b, Freiburg in Breisgau 1968; H. Freiherr von Campenhausen, *The Formation of the Christian Bible,* ET London and Philadelphia 1972; J. Frank, *Der Sinn der Kanonbildung,* Freiburg im Breisgau 1971; J. Leipoldt and S. Morenz, *Heilige Schriften,* Leipzig 1952; O. Loretz, *Das Ende der Inspirationstheologie: Chancen eines Neubeginns,* I, Stuttgart 1974; K. H. Ohlig, *Die theologische Begründung des neutestamentlichen Kanons in der alten Kirche,* Düsseldorf 1972; Karl Rahner, *Inspiration in the Bible,* ET Freiburg and London 1961; A. Sand, 'Kanon. Von den Anfangen bis zum *Fragmentum Muratorianum', Handbuch der Dogmengeschichte* I, 3a, Freiburg im Breisgau 1974; B. Vawter, *Biblical Authority,* Philadelphia and London 1972; Faith and Order Report, *The Authority of the Bible,* Louvain 1971. [065]

In my first book on Jesus, I described how, after their panic at the arrest and death of Jesus, the reassembling of the disciples (as the beginning of the formation of the church), the Easter experience and the sending of the Spirit were simply different aspects of a single saving event in which the disciples experienced Jesus as the risen one in their midst. The 'Jesus movement' which had begun during Jesus' life thus gained a permanent place in our history as the Christ movement. Its members ceaselessly described everywhere what this Jesus had done and what had happened to him and what had happened to them as a result and what can happen to all those who will listen to this story. That was their good news for all men.

The disciples' experience with Jesus was the dynamic origin of a religious movement and thus the actual founding of the church. This movement with its leaders was an echo of what Jesus himself had been, said and done. What enthused him began, for his sake, also to enthuse them. The message was handed on by personal example, and ultimately the movement and its leadership stood
[066] under the sole norm of Jesus of Nazareth. This *religious* reference to the historical Jesus remained essential.

The history of this Christian movement which formed many scattered brotherhoods gradually crystallized in particular traditions and models. After a number of generations of Christian life, Christian practice and reflection, a whole Christian literature had arisen which amounted to an interpretation of the Christian experience on the basis of the Tanach (see p. 907), the Bible of the first Christians. At a later stage, because of the newness experienced in Jesus, this was called the 'Old Testament' and became an essential part of the Christian Bible. This Christian literature described what had happened to Jesus and his disciples in a great many ways, often very different. Because of this varied and increasingly different literature, which in the opinion of many people also gave rise to deviations from the original proclamation of Christ, one particular question eventually arose. In which of all these writings could the Christian movement recognize itself completely and authentically? For later generations no longer had any historical recognition of Jesus.

Some of these writings which bore witness to Jesus and his 'community' were used in the worship of many Christian brotherhoods. However, there were striking differences here between the Christian communities. Some communities refused to use in their liturgies certain texts which were held in high regard by other communities, although there was unanimity over many works. In a long maturing process, marked by mutual criticism, certain texts were finally chosen from a large collection of Christian literature which Christians began to recognize as 'Holy Scripture' (along with their Jewish or Graecized Bible). Under the impact of the historical Jesus, interpreted in the light of the Tanach, certain Christian writings were counted as 'scripture' and the New Testament was regarded as part of 'holy scripture' (though among Jews in the time of Jesus there was no unanimity over what literature was *graphe,* or part of the Tanach).

In other words, the chosen literature was canonized - as a norm for handing down the story of Jesus. This was the common foundation, above all, for the many Christian communities already scattered over the ancient world, who yet saw themselves as 'the one, universal or catholic church of Christ'. In this way it arrived at a normative, recognizable group identity, from then on at the same time on the basis of the canonical literature accepted in common by all the Christian

churches (after a great many disputes).[57]

The starting point of the Christian movement was an indissoluble whole consisting on the one hand of the offer of salvation through Jesus and on the other of the Christian response in faith. And just as the living presence of the risen Jesus Christ among his own on earth was the beginning and the permanent stimulus to [067] the Christian movement, so now particular Christian texts were elevated to the status of a canonical norm because of their content, while at the same time these many communities of believers, identifying themselves with reference to these texts consolidated themselves into a mutual group identity which was visibly recognizable for all believers. The Christian movement recognized itself fully and wholly in the content of this selection of literature. Just as the beginning of the Christian movement was the work of the community and its leadership, so too this later consolidation of group identity in and through the common recognition of the canonical value of particular Christian texts was historically the work of both the community and its leaders. These writings, which had already been used for a long time by the Christian communities in their liturgy under official direction, were finally confirmed by the leaders of the church as the only official texts. (This happened globally in the second half of the fourth century. For the East this was on the authority of Athanasius; for the African churches through synods at the end of the fourth and beginning of the fifth centuries; the West followed Augustine's authority. However, these decisions by bishops or synods are only a sanctioning of much earlier traditions, and a discussion continued in the Christian churches which led to the concept of 'proto'- and 'deutero'-canonical writings which is still used today.)

The intrinsic logic of a group identity stabilized by canonical scriptures has far-reaching sociological consequences. As a result of canonization (though also because of their inspiring content) these texts took on a new significance over and above their content. This significance was *institutional;* it thus had social implications within the community. The texts give an institutional definition of the Christian group identity. Because of their official canonization, from that point on

[57] 'Canon', see also: H. Beyer, s.v. 'kanon', in *TDNT 3,* 596-602. This Greek word is a loan-word from the Semitic *qāne'*. The Semitic term means a reed, a rod (as a measure), a staff or a stake, hence a measure or ruler. The Septuagint never translates this word *kanōn,* though it occurs in IV Macc. 7.21. In Greek *kanōn* means rule, instruction or law, hence guideline, standard or criterion. Thus the Alexandrian grammarians laid down a canon of authors whose Greek was taken as a norm. Now the good and the beautiful, according to Greek thinking, were along the same line *(kalokagathia),* and therefore *kanōn* also means the moral law and an ideal of life. This meaning can also be found among the philosophers: to philosophize is to lay down norms or *canones* (Epictetus, *Diss.* II, 11.24). In the New Testament, *kanōn occurs* in Gal. 6.15f; II Cor. 10.13-16 (three times). In II Corinthians, Christ and the 'apostolate' are the canon, i.e. norm. In the early church, 'canon' came to be used also of the external union of the many scattered Christian churches; thus the books of the New Testament became the guideline for the one orthodox Catholic Church. Scripture became the 'canon of truth', the 'canon of faith' *(regula fidei)* and the canon of the church (church as canon). The non-canonical writings were also read (especially by catechumens), but it was not permissible to read them in worship.

they apply much more stringently, because they provide the basis for a socially effective norm as a result of their endorsement by the group and its leadership. On the basis of their canonization or elevation to be the standard for the Christian gospel and life in accordance with the gospel of Christ, these texts are characterized by the fact that the process of education through which people are introduced to the message of the gospel and the conduct that follows from it at the same time becomes a process through which believers are integrated pedagogically, ethically and socially into a social group whose identity is defined by its relationship to these texts. The canonization of its own foundation documents is also a first institutionalization of the Christian message or the liberating truth of the Christian movement which now consolidates and guarantees its group
[068] identity. The true story of Jesus is thus given institutional protection against any possible distortion or falsification in the course of time. It is given official sanction.

Originally this historically spontaneous and necessary general recognition (which proved controversial in some marginal cases) did not cause any alienation. Rather, this process of canonization characterized the growing of self-understanding of an essentially 'evangelical movement' which, as it extended further, could not preserve its authenticity and identity without setting up at least a few ground rules and without introducing a number of institutional elements. For members of the Christian movement, the canonically binding effect of these texts did not involve any compulsion to believe, not even a formal prohibition on criticism and interpretation. *Within* this literature which was now called the 'New Testament' there is actually some mutual criticism (see below in Part Two). Existentially these communities could not do otherwise: this was the particular way in which they identified themselves with these texts. They identified themselves wholly and fully only with these models of Christian identity, and not any others (though many Christians were fond of reading non-canonical Christian literature, see Part Two). For Christians who had brought about this institutionalization and had recognized themselves in it, no serious problems arose. These only emerged when this already existing Christian 'institution' was handed down to new Christian generations who had not been involved in the origins of 'canonical scripture'. For them this institution needed some legitimation: it had to be explained and justified. Not because it had become less effective - on the contrary, institutions tend towards rigidification; for later generations the significance and self-evidence of the self-chosen institution are a 'historical entity'; it comes down to new generations *as tradition* (and not primarily as the expression of an experience which they themselves have had). As a testimony to the experiences of those who created it, scripture is an offer - a possibility that this experience can be extended to others. However, once it becomes a historical institution, it also presents new generations with a claim to authority, and is now detached, at least directly, from the process of a particular experience. Institutionally, the authority already exists as it were

before the faith-experience of later believers. In other words, the authority does not reveal itself in the definition of a particular interpretative experience; before that, it has a 'juridical' precedence, even if this is only the *institutional* expression of the authority which had been recognized in *earlier* Christian *experiences*. During the period of the origin of the canon the authority of scripture is not in fact any juridical or formal authority (no external authority). At the beginning, the view of scripture was different from that which was to develop almost automatically on the grounds of its institutional canonization. Later, people argued that the holy scripture of the New Testament had authority because it was inspired by God. To [069] begin with, it was the other way round. A religious group of people, Christians, under the spell of Jesus, who was experienced and testified to as God's salvation, had recognized its own group identity in particular inspiring writings, as the expression of the faith experiences of fellow Christians within a developing tradition of Christian experience and an already existing *regula fidei* or norm of faith - the foundations of the later Christian creeds. Furthermore, they had already arrived at their Christian identity through the liturgical reading of these writings. For them the authority of this literature was existential, and derived from its content; in it they found an expression of their own understanding of Jesus and at the same time of their understanding of themselves as Christians. For this reason, in the end they were able with justification to formulate this existential authority in the language of faith and say, 'These writings are inspired by God', just as the whole Christian movement found its origin and its inspiration in Jesus, God's emissary. The beginning, however, was not the formal authority but the event of a new experience of salvation, narrated in texts the appealing and inspiring significance of which was experienced, acknowledged and affirmed existentially. What was involved here was the authority of the experience of Jesus himself, which the church at the same time recognized through the medium of this scripture as determinative for the meaning of its life; here it found meaning and discovered inspiration. Thus the original authority of the Bible lies in the element of revelation which has passed through the experience and interpretation of these early Christians. Within the church community it also has the special significance that in it the whole community found an authentic expression of what had happened in its Christian experience. In other words, here the element of revelation which keeps escaping us at last comes into its own; however wretched and human the expression may be, revelation is communicated in it.

Still, at the same time, in the explicit canonization of these texts which were called into life by Jesus, with their inward invitation which inspires life and gives it direction, there was also an 'institutional promotion'. For the church as an institution these now became a juridical and formal authority, a formal authority which can present some problems to later generations who had not themselves gone through this process of creating a canon. For the history of Jesus was

sanctioned by the canonization of this literature. The normative sanctioning of certain stories which gives them an official character may have been an intrinsic necessity for a developing movement, but it represents a first possible hardening of the story of the living Jesus which has continually to be taken up by other Christians. There is a danger that new 'transformations' of the same story from
[070] now on will be regarded with mistrust, even if they are not ruled out altogether. In this way a dynamic group identity can become a social group stability. Christianity can change from being a movement around Jesus Christ into the religion of a book in which the direction of the community of believers is determined by 'scribes' rather than members of the community with their charismatic leaders. For this canonization gives some degree of independence to the responses made in faith to Jesus' offer of salvation, to the multiplicity allied with a basic unity which we find in canonical scripture. It isolates them, with the danger that they may be read or studied apart from the non-canonical literary context in which they stand. In the long run, all this can suggest that the rich and never completely exhaustible talk about Jesus allows only the responses of faith that we find in the New Testament and no others. Moreover, this blunts any feeling for the historical and contingent connections which exist with the earlier responses of faith and their ethical consequences - just as it is above all particularly easy to forget the tension between Jesus and the New Testament, which then becomes a 'little red book'. Its canonization should not make us forget that this particular literature has only laid down the basic story as a model. New stories of Christian experience remain possible, provided that they are a legitimate transformation of the original story in which the person of Jesus Christ is allowed a voice within the mediation of all kinds of other historical conditioning factors. In the centuries after the completion of the biblical canon the churches understood this well, and they saw their scripture not as the letter, but as Spirit: inspiration and the indication of a particular direction. They wrote their history of Jesus within the contours of their different cultural world, in faithfulness to the original history, even if it was drawn and sometimes distorted by the spirit of their time. (Has it ever been otherwise with the 'images of Christ' in art over the course of the centuries?[58])

Without closing our eyes to the real dangers of an institutionalization of these Christian foundation documents, we should not forget that without such canonization the Christian movement would long since have faded out and vanished in eclecticism or even esoteric inwardness. Non-canonical Christian literature from antiquity already gives clear instances of this. We may not make Jesus into anything that we like if the element of revelation does not lie in the confirmation of our plans and reflections but in his refractory opposition to all our

[58] See an apt example of modern representations of Christ in G. Biemer and R. Russ, *Wenn das Antlitz sich verbirgt. Christusbilder von Roland Peter Litzenburger,* Stuttgart 1975, above all the 'ecological Christ', the 'cry about creation' (105f).

planning. We also have to concede that the boundaries between what the early church calls 'the New Testament' (as a book) and other writings from Christian antiquity are in marginal cases vague and uncertain. In terms of Christian literature, we could say that the early church made an extremely successful move. For those for whom this church is 'God's community' - for Christians - this Bible may therefore be regarded as a fragment of grace, or, to put it in religious terminology, [071] like Jesus and his community, the Bible finds its inspiration in God.

Consequently the dialectical unity and tension between the church as a movement and the church as group identity, given institutional security through its holy scripture, belongs to the concrete historical reality which may in fact be called the 'church of Christ'. And it is worth noting that the element of 'movement' belongs both to the community of believers and to its ministry or its leaders, just as the 'institutional' element belongs to both ministry and community. In view of the history of the formation of the canon we can hardly put the *institutional* element in the church exclusively on the side of its ministry and its *movement* exclusively on the side of the community of faith. Furthermore, history teaches us that sometimes it is the ministers of the church who are more on the move while the community is stabilized to the degree of rigidity, and sometimes it is the other way round.

Chapter 3

DO WE BEGIN WITH THE NEW TESTAMENT OR WITH PRESENT-DAY EXPERIENCE?

A false alternative

At the beginning of our analysis of the authority of experiences and of the authority of the New Testament we saw that some people feel that theology should no longer begin from scripture and tradition but from contemporary experiences. I would regard this as a false alternative for anthropological, hermeneutic and religious reasons. [071]

1. Men in fact live in the present, but they live from a past and are directed towards a future. The present is highly significant, precisely because it is the dividing line between past and future. But the present is not an absolute starting-point: as present, it is itself a tradition of experience. Even when we fight against our own past, whether individual or collective, we never get the better of this past, which is part of our own hidden present. At the very point where this resistance is most vigorous, this past proves to be an oppressive present.

One can never see the relationship to the future which prompts action and the hermeneutical and theoretical relationship to the past as alternatives. Relationship to the future is only possible by means of our relationship to the past, and conversely, our relationship to the past, in whatever form, traditional or critical, always already contains a decision about the future; that is why our relationship to the past is never purely theoretical and hermeneutical. [072]

It is by no means impossible to reconcile a connection of Christian faith to the past history of Jesus and Christianity with a theological orientation towards the future - provided that, as I have said, the future is not simply *contrasted* in a one-sided way with the present and the past. Such a crude contrast usually ignores the fact that a definite orientation towards the future is *always communicated* through present and past experiences which have been handed down to us. The significance of the past for any new present is shown in the process of tradition.

Whether the past becomes relevant for the present depends on our answer to the question to what extent the history of the past contains a future which we have not yet taken into account; in other words, how far it can illuminate the experience of a later present in its relationship to the future.[59] J.-B. Metz rightly concludes from this hermeneutic interrelationship that the loss of identity 'cannot be removed by a *theoretical* revival of Christian traditions'.[60]

Christian theology in particular is concerned with an interrelationship between an 'analysis of the present' on the one hand and an analysis of the historical experience of Christian life and hermeneutical reflection on this life on the other. Its concern is to distil from this totality a direction which Christians can responsibly take in the process of living towards the future. The present is in fact the 'hermeneutical situation' in which we live. But we cannot regard this present as the climax of history. This present has its own presuppositions and blind spots, just as it also has a sensitivity of its own which our ancestors never had. The present certainly is an utterly original source of new experiences and new insights as an element in a new life-style. But here too it can be one-sided. So no present as such can be a criterion, a norm by which everything is judged. Our present experience is contextual, as limited as that of any people during the course of history. Yet it forms the horizon of understanding in which we contemplate, experience and interpret everything. An analysis and interpretation of this present is necessary, if we also want to have the critical strength which makes it possible to guard against presuppositions of our own time which we tend automatically to endorse.

Even if we are in opposition to it, the first requirement seems to me to be that we should not reject solidarity with our own past, but acknowledge it. Radically to reject the past results in loss of identity, for this radical rejection still does not liquidate the past: the surest way of becoming victims of our own past is to negate it or ignore it.

[073] Furthermore, it is necessary to understand the *original* truth of institutions and traditions, particularly if they seem strange to us today. To begin with, most of them were not repressive or oppressive; they became so later, in other times. At first, they are almost called to life as an instrument of liberation and for the protection of the weaker. For that reason we need to investigate from what period and why an institution or tradition became false, ossified and oppressive. Jacques

[59] W. Pannenberg, *Theology and the Philosophy of Science*, 203f.

[60] J.-B. Metz, 'Hermeneutical procedures are themselves related to practice, in that they are concerned not only with the clarification of conditions of understanding and horizons of understanding in a particular complex of knowledge and action, but with the question of changing such conditions and horizons' (in '*Politische Theologie' in der Diskussion*, ed. H. Peukert, Mainz-Munich 1969, 283; see also in J. B. Metz, J. Moltmann, W. Oelmüller, *Kirche im Prozess der Aufklärung*, Munich, Mainz 1970, 80; W. Pannenberg, too, does not term the hermeneutical event purely contemplative, op. cit., 107-9, 202-4.

Ellul[61] has made a historical analysis of the way in which positive laws are really made by the ruling classes, but are seldom promulgated in order to favour the predominant position of the ruling class; on the contrary, they originally served bit by bit to keep the power of the ruling class in check and to prevent arbitrariness. They therefore originate in self-limitation - not for quite altruistic purposes, but simply as a requirement of the group if it is to be able to survive. Only later, in changed circumstances, do laws often acquire a reactionary significance - and are claimed to be unchangeable. Besides, the claim that the law - as a type of 'institution' - originally served to strengthen the power of the ruling class is more a positivistic argument than a Marxist one.[62] The greatest alienation consists in having no laws at all: in that case, the chaos of the power of the strongest emerges. All this means that alienation arises only where laws made at a particular time are accorded a timeless authority. Then institutions fall under the criticism of Karl Marx: they then serve the interests of the powerful and the strong in the guise of 'absolute values'.

If we are to be able to grow out of the past, we have to know it. In this sense, historical study is a catharsis,[63] a liberation of the sociological unconscious in us; for our origins are hidden from us. Therefore a *creative* anchorage in our own past is a presupposition for a new future.

2. On the other hand, a romanticism about origins is just as much an error in interpretation. People often play about with the term *primum* or *principium* in its double meaning, of beginning and principle (norm); in that case the origin is the all-controlling norm, the essence of a movement, tradition or institution - *norma normans, non normata.* There is a grain of truth in this.[64] When we are dealing with a historical movement, we find that its origin is in fact normative. But in this respect there are a number of hermeneutical implications that we need to take into account. It is illegitimate to absolutize any single historical epoch, even that in which a movement begins, and impute to it a one-sided normativeness. The beginning, considered as a canon or norm, is never a problem for the earliest period; it becomes a problem for later times. The putting of questions to the beginning, described as a norm or canon, will be intrinsically governed by the horizons of the questioner, who will belong to a later historical period. Paul and the evangelists did not themselves regard their writings as *graphe* or holy scripture; this was the standpoint of later generations, who were no longer original, when a long Christian tradition had arisen in which there were many differences of [074] opinion (the books of Karl Marx, too, only became a 'canon' at a later stage in the

[61] J. Ellul, 'Aliénation et temporalité dans le Droit', in *Temporalité et aliénation,* Cahiers Castelli, Paris 1975, 191-205.

[62] L. Dumont, *Homo hierarchicus,* Chicago 1970.

[63] H. Marrou, *De la connaissance historique,* Paris [3]1958, 233f.

[64] W. Dupré, 'Anfang', in *Handbuch philosophischer Grundbegriffe,* Munich 1973, Vol. 1, 79-90; P. Levert, *L'idée de commencement,* Paris 1961.

Communist party). Only then does the earliest period become the norm *en bloc* (and then there is always a degree of selectivity), and a particular theological tradition even talks of 'the end of revelation with the death of the last apostle'. This seems to be a sociological phenomenon of almost every group identity (for some orthodox Marxists, too, the 'Marxist revelation' ceased with the works of Engels and Lenin; any 'revisionism' then becomes treachery). 'Separatist communities' always come into being in attempts at a contemporary - called by others 'reformist' - interpretation of the ancient heritage.

That is already evident from the fact that any reference to the sources or to the origin is already involved in a hermeneutical circle, a circle in which the present and what lies between the past and the present (the whole Christian tradition) already exerts a *mediatory* function. True, we try to subject the present to the criticism of this origin, but in such an attempt we are always 'prejudiced'. We cannot *a priori* disqualify the intermediary period - the tradition - as apostasy (which is a particular tendency of Protestant theologians since A. Harnack); on the other hand we are no more justified in *a priori* pronouncing the tradition as legitimate (as Catholic theologians often tend to do). At all events, we cannot neglect the period between origin and present, because otherwise we never see what conditions in any age, even the earliest period, make possible a correct insight into the truth of Christian origins.

An idealization of origins often reveals a hermeneutical dualism, i.e. that of the nucleus or essence and the clothing or historical form. But even in the phase of the origin or the beginnings of Christianity there is a communication of faith and historical conditioning. Our problems are not solved by discovering through exegesis how, for example, church government functioned in the early church. Of course, as we put our questions our attention is also drawn to the way in which historical developments have carried on from this origin, simply by reflecting that the origin is itself historically conditioned. What was once a legitimate structure for the church (given the historical circumstances) can in changed social circumstances be seen to be illegitimate, to be a structure which is neither favourable to nor healthy for Christianity. In that case it is no longer a valid development from its origin. Therefore only an *indirect,* historically conditioned biblical foundation is possible: in any period contemporary experiences of man and the world and political and social structures find their way into the particular form of belief and the church. As Christians today, why should we not be allowed to do what the church has always done? Neither the structures of the ancient church nor our demand for reformation of the church's structures can be based *directly* on the
[075] Bible; we cannot therefore absolutize them in a one-sided way. One might even say that precisely because the religious dimension is one dimension of the whole of culture, any religion (even Christianity) has both a liberating and an alienating effect. There is no church in our world which consists only of the saintly and the