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Political Authority

A Christian Perspective

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GENERAL REFLECTION: APOCALYPTIC AND UTOPIAN MODELS OF PROGRESS AND RELIGION

European tradition of thought is shaped by two different mythical imaginations of time structure: apocalyptic thought and the concept of utopia.

Jewish apocalyptic thinking culminated in the expectation that God would finally complete the processes of history at the end of time. In conjunction with Iranian dualism this expectation was interpreted metaphysically: After the collapse of the existing order God would create a messianic kingdom of peace and justice, that is, a kingdom under the direct rule of God. This was not “political progress” in the modern sense of the term, for the subject of these final events was God himself or God alone. Human beings might participate in accelerating or slowing down these divine actions by lawful or unlawful behavior—measured according to the Mosaic Law, but human historical acting itself would not lead to a betterment in this sense. Nevertheless, this form of thought gave history a direction, and this is what inspired later Jewish and Christian intentionality. Early Christianity was shaped by the expectation of the coming end of time in the immediate future; however, at the same time it added a remarkable tension to the traditional apocalyptic idea: the tension of fulfillment of time, which had happened already in the advent of Jesus as the Christ (messiah) and an expectation of the imminent completion of time (the return of Christ, which would finally end history and start the new kingdom). Since the second century AD this myth of future time became ontologized or platonized—that is, the future was transferred into an “other world.” This means that the new quality would not be a dimension of the future (only) but graspable in the ecclesiastical mediation of the sacraments. The eucharist was the *pharmakon athanasias* (medicine of immortality). At the same time there was a mystical dimension that holds that in a specific spiritual experience this dimension might be experienced by any person who would be prepared to receive it as divine grace. The paradigm of early Christianity failed: Christ did not return. There was no new kingdom that would have ended known history. In order to cope with this disappointment, two forms of life emerged that shaped the

spirit of Christianity throughout the Middle Ages, so to speak, until the end of the eighteenth century: ecclesiastical mediation of the saving reality and mystical participation in a transtemporal Beyondness.

Utopia develops on the basis of difference between imagination and reality. At least structurally utopian thinking can be found in all cultures; usually it is expressed in the power of myths. This marks a difference between utopia and apocalypics. There are three different types of utopian thinking: spatial, temporal, and in terms of different states of consciousness. Spatial utopia expects the final accomplishment or climax of history, that is, the essence of hope, in spatial terms, in different regions of the world, faraway, behind oceans or mountains (Atlantis, the country flowing with milk and honey, El Dorado, Shambhala, the islands of the blessed, etc.). These spaces lost their power of inspiring imagination because there are no more white spots on the map, and that is why this utopia had to emigrate into extraterrestrial spaces of the universe (the contemporary myths of *ET*, *Star Wars*, etc.)

Temporal utopia transfers the field of expectation to the beginning of the world (paradise, Golden Age) or to the end of history (millennialistic thought, communistic utopia). These temporal expectations lost their power of inspiring imagination because the fulfillment was heralded time and again but never happened.

Utopia in terms of a different state of consciousness transfers the catastrophe (the turning point of time and history) into the consciousness of human beings (the prophets of Israel, Buddha, Jesus, in a certain way Confucius, modern New Age movements, etc.). An individual or even collective awakening of consciousness in humans would transform the world from within into a new paradise. The credibility of this model is challenged by the actual suffering in the world, which does not seem to diminish.

In actual history these three types occur in mixed forms. The Western idea of progress is the result of a specific blend of apocalyptic and utopian models.

WHAT IS RELIGION?

Religions are mental, social, and material systems that endow societies with a sense of coherence and the individual with a final frame for life and meaning in reality, integrating both dimensions. During the history of the last three or four thousand years religious systems have created or legitimized regional identities (polis, regional states, empires). Religion, to make a most general statement, has two anthropological roots: the contingency of human existence and the ecstatic experience of human beings. With regard to the experience of contingency religion creates a world of meaning that interprets contingency in a wider frame of meaning by integrating temporal and spatial patterns in a wider and transcendental frame. Here, emotional and cognitive elements interplay in mutual dependency. This overcoming of contingency is even more important in times of change and turmoil, which create excessive uncertainty. Religion in this sense is the quest for *certitudo* (certainty) under the condition of *insecuritas* (insecurity). On the other hand it is the ecstatic experience (in arts, in nature, in eroticism, etc.), an altered state of consciousness that breaks through time and space and connects humans at least for a short time with a transcendental reality

that is beyond the ordinary experience. All cultures know such events and formalize or structure them in different ways.

Religions develop in historical and political contexts. In a certain way they are the stratifications that mark the text of those contexts. They never have a fixed identity but are the continuing process of identification in terms of development of geographical and political-cultural potentialities. Taking into consideration the last five thousand years of documented history, we can make a distinction between four models that also mark epochs of history: isolation, confrontation, tolerance (coexistence), and cooperation (proexistence).

Isolation is the model of separated developments of the peoples that gradually settled down, changing their nomadic behavior and settling at the great rivers Nile, Euphrates, Tigris, Indus, Ganges, Huang Ho, and so on. Gradually these cities grew into territorial states. Later on they swallowed up other cultures and shaped empires (Greece, Persia, Rome, China of the Han, India of the Mauryas, etc.). Conflicting empires generated conflicts of dominance that intrinsically shaped religious systems: The gods of those conquered were either integrated into the victorious empire or eliminated. In rare cases such as under Aśoka in India (third century BC) or—partially—in the *pax Romana* there was a tolerance toward strange gods and ritual practice. In fact, the model of tolerance has different roots and shapes in different cultures. At the end of the nineteenth century, however, we have a new development: cooperation and the conscious attempt to integrate the cultural experience of the other (stranger). This model is related to the cultural and economic globalization due to the technological possibilities created during the first industrial revolution (World Parliament of Religions 1893 in Chicago in context of the World's Fair). This model got a strong impetus after the breakdown of colonialism and the two world wars after 1945 when a globalized world required a globalized cooperation in order to secure the survival of humankind. Here, cooperation grew into the idea of mutual support of religions in the wake of consumerist materialism and the communist war against religion in general. A certain communion of mutual help and learning was envisaged. A possible nuclear self-eradication of humankind and the ecological imperative strengthened these developments.

POLITICAL AUTHORITY AND EARLY CHRISTIANITY AND MEDIEVAL DEVELOPMENTS

Originally it was Jewish prophecy that called for a new model of political authority. Sacred kingship had been introduced in Israel against strong resistance motivated by religious concerns (Samuel and Saul), but finally a model emerged, so that God “adopted” the king. The prophets, however, reminded political power that it was related to the religious law. If kings violated the religious order they had to be taken to task. Resistance was a possible need legitimized by the prophetic interpretation of the law. In other words: kingly power was not absolute but related not only to the ritualistic institution (in relation to the temple) but to the right behavior prefigured by the Torah. Early Christianity is an expression of this tradition.

At the same time the people around John the Baptist, the groups in Qumran, and certainly the early Jesus movement as well were imbued with apocalyptic expectations. They believed they lived at the end of times. Internal corruption of the state (note the image of King Herod) and the political oppression of the colonial power (Rome) activated the apocalyptic model and made it a political realization since the Maccabean wars. As Mark expresses it at the beginning of his gospel: the kingdom of God is near (Mark 1:15). There was no idea of institutionalizing a new political process, for God himself would end all political ambiguities. Political power was of no interest.

In the meantime early Christianity lived in a dual model of respect for the Roman state, which, however, is totally different from God's claims: Give Caesar what is Caesar's and give God what is due to him, as Matthew expresses it. This duality, in different formulations and actual political practice, has been the Christian model ever since.

Owing to the historical collapse of the Roman Empire over the next centuries we have a remarkable reshaping of older models in breaking with the apocalyptic paradigm: Sacred "kingship" is restored by the institution of papacy, combining the regalia of the Roman emperors with the vicarious messianic presence. By no means did the early popes have the power of Roman emperors, but the ideological development instituting a papal monarchy started early until it became a political reality, climaxing during the twelfth century (Innocence III). Equally important was the adaptation of the Roman law by the church, which gradually enabled Europe to emerge as a legal structure holding different political territories together. Thus, the Christian church forming Europe was not only a spiritual inspiration but also a legal reality. The conflict between the emperor and the pope, however, shattered Western Europe for centuries. This was not only a matter of personal conflict or political structures but a tension within the whole construct of political authority in Christendom. The empire of the Ottonian emperors had renewed the unity of ecclesiastical power (teaching the doctrine and administering the sacraments) and political power. This unity broke down during the last decades of the eleventh century. One of the reasons was reformed monkhood, which had disseminated new ideas about the character of the church. But most of all it was the conflict between the emperor and the pope concerning the investiture of bishops, which destroyed the system of balances. Innumerable pamphlets were distributed, and the struggle was not just for political power but for ideological superiority. The side of the emperor could certainly refer to certain biblical passages that state that all political power is given to the king by God himself, and to the tradition of late antiquity as well, for here we have the institution of an ecclesiastical coronation of kings. But the institution of emperor did not have an independent or extra-theological theoretical foundation. It was only in the twelfth century that Roman law was taken as a substitute for the same. Here the supremacy of the emperor and the subordination of priesthood were clearly established. On the basis of Aristotelian construction of polity one could argue that before any theological determination human beings by nature were political beings. But during the eleventh century there was not yet any system or argumentation that could theoretically establish political authority independent of the church. Therefore, the papal side had

the stronger arguments on a purely theological basis. An interesting argument stating the supremacy of the pope was that emperors execute their power in the name of the people. Therefore, political power has to deliver. If a king, however, does not deliver (to the people), he can be removed by the people (Manegold of Lauterbach, d. 1103). The strategy is clear: Papal power is invested by Christ; the emperor's power is derived from the people and can be relativized, and it is stripped of its sacred garb. This desacralization of the monarchy was a strong instrument to strengthen the power and authority of the pope.

The ideological instrument to bind the people to the church is sacramental theology. The sacraments, as it were, substituted the advent of the coming kingdom. This kingdom was "present" in the Eucharistic ritual. And this ritual was valid only when performed by the priests who were consecrated by the church. Therefore, the church was not only the door to heaven but the key to any order on earth, for all expectations (apocalyptic or utopian) were bound by the sacramental distinction. Moreover, the validity of the sacramental mediation was legitimized in hierarchical succession. Thus, a religious organization (the hierarchical church) became the political power or at least the legitimizing reference for any political power. This is the root for the later conflicts between the emperors and the pope, state and church.

Augustine's idea of the two cities (of God and of the world) is not new; it is an elaboration of the model we just outlined. It is a rewriting of the duality referred to already into a dualist model of earthly matters and divine matters. It does not call for a prophetic reorganization of politics, but insists on the status quo. Augustine accepts the political power of the state because of original sin: power is a dam against excessive disorder. Augustine in his later writings deepens the gap or cements the dualism by his uncompromising teaching on predestination: God alone selects the final destination of men, and most human beings are damned to hell, anyway. Political action is irrelevant in a religious perspective.

There are other models that became influential. Most of them are founded in the rule of St. Benedict, simply expressed in his famous formula *ora et labora* (pray and work). The spiritual quest led to a world-shaping attitude. This also means that religious enthusiasm should be transformed into political programs. This is precisely what Benedictines, Cistercians, Franciscans, Dominicans, and others contributed in shaping the new territorial, cultural, economic, financial, and structural order of Europe. They exercised political authority in the surroundings of the "foundations," and this authority was grounded in economical power. Moreover, the orders were the builders of trans-territorial infrastructure (in terms of geographical connections, cultural connectivity, financial networking, etc.; see especially the role of the order of Templars).

Most of the reform movements against a corrupted papacy and church were rooted in these monastic institutions, which exercise both spiritual and political authority. Most notably the Franciscans need to be mentioned here. They called for a reform that implied all authority must be devoted to the service of the poor. Even political authority had to be qualified by this requirement. Most Franciscans, however, did not link this up with a general reflection on political authority, which would have led to revolutionary ideas. An exception is Joachim de Fiore, who in terms of the uto-

pian model expected the new kingdom to come in 1260 AD. He linked the utopian model with the apocalyptic expectation and interpreted his view of history in terms of the model of the Trinity. Not hierarchy but spiritual quality should be the basis of political authority. History would follow three stages. The first one, the rule of the Father, would be the rule of the law (Mosaic law) with all legalized external authority. The second one, the rule of the Son, represented the sacramental type of rule by the church. The third one, the rule of the Holy Spirit, represented the direct mystical inspiration of the people who would follow an internalized law; that is, a developed spiritual authority of all the people would make an external political authority obsolete. This, of course, is a type of our third model of utopian thinking, the model of change of consciousness, as envisaged also by Jeremiah 31:31 and others.

This new construction of political thinking is not limited to Joachim; in fact, there are earlier roots which can be traced back to Abaelard's theories on the trinity before 1140 AD. Father, Son, and Spirit stood here for power, wisdom and love. Unrestricted power was the essence of the Father, represented in the Son only in as much as the Son would have the power to distinguish between good and evil. In love, however, the element of power disappears completely. Here, we have the seed for a new political theory, that is, a new notion of power. Power, which is essentially divine and good, transfigures itself in the power of judgment between good and evil and gives itself up finally in the reality of the Holy Spirit as spiritual reality. The highest divine potency is its self-negation. Here, God is no longer the highest feudal lord, but he is *essentially* wisdom and *essentially* the negation of power in love! Even if the doctrine of the Trinity had always insisted on the equality of the three elements (persons), the Father always held a patriarchal supremacy. Here, however, we see a systemic model of power that probably has influenced later political theories in Western Europe.

The more general practice of political authority in medieval Christianity is represented by the architecture and institution of the cathedral. The cathedral is the path of procession towards the Divine, it is the Body of God (shaped like the cross) directing human pilgrims toward the divine polity. But at the same time the cathedral is the place of coronation and celebration of political power and victory (until the twentieth century, when de Gaulle celebrated the victory over the Germans in the streets and the church).

DEVELOPMENTS IN REFORMATION AND MODERNITY

The fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were shattered in revolt against the papal church by the different reformations. Here, we have the idea of the two kingdoms (very much the Augustinian model as adapted by Luther), the idea of the kingdom of Christ (as sacralized power ruthlessly executed by Calvin) and the priesthood of all believers, which had political consequences in different protestant groups already in the sixteenth century, but also in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most notably in the Anglo-Saxon world. The different Protestant sects draw on earlier ideas of the political implications of the Holy Spirit (see Abaelard, Joachim de Fiore), the immediacy of power which is prophetic heritage, and the criticism of the authority of the

kings as well as ecclesiastical authority that never ceased to exist since the time of the prophets of Israel and the monks and nuns in medieval times. Their ideologies and practices also mixed with apocalyptic and millennialistic models of thought, and this is the case until today especially in the United States but also in new religious movements in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

The old "throne and altar" model, which is the institution of divine power reflecting itself in political as well as religious authority so that one side stabilizes the other, came to an end with the French Revolution. At the end of the eighteenth century the old Aristotelian idea of political power based on the nature of the human being and not being granted by a special divine institution ripened to its full political implementation, resulting in different forms of secularization. Ever since we have had a vital debate between the role of the church in different national states, ranging from indifference, differentiation, and a certain involvement to active political resistance, as for instance during the reign of National Socialism in Germany, when the "Confessing church" argued against the so called "German Christians" on the basis of a *solus Christus* principle, interpreted politically: no human institution (including political or religious concerns for power) should be mixed with the divine reality and authority that is the "totally other," as the Barmen declaration on the basis of Karl Barth's theology has it.

The idea of the Enlightenment epoch was that religion is more or less a matter of individual concern and not of social or political relevance. This is more than a separation of church and state, which was most radically implemented in the French laicistic model and much less visible in the German or English compromises. We cannot go into the details of the relation between church and state in different modern European and American societies, but they are all characterized by an attempt to balance out the different factors inherited from history in different ways. Today there is a tendency to acknowledge that any state (and law) requires a foundation that the state itself cannot generate, that is, a general code of values that constitutes its own authority, a view classically formulated by the former member of the German Supreme Court Boeckenfoerde. And everywhere, the prophetic function of the church in terms of engagement for peace, justice, and a new ecological order is being called for.

SYSTEMATIC QUESTIONS CONCERNING THE TOPIC IN TODAY'S PERSPECTIVE

"Tolerance" in Christianity

Christianity has inherited the Jewish monotheistic exclusivism concerning God talk. There is only one God revealed in the person of Jesus Christ. All other Gods are false. This has had political consequences for Christian exclusivism expressing itself as authority negating other religious and political claims (such as by Jews and Muslims, but also by other Christians developing different attitudes and lifestyles than the ruling paradigm of the respective political elites).

Moreover, as has already been said, Christianity of the first generations believed that it lived at the end of times. The return of Jesus Christ would happen soon, and until then the gospel should be preached to all known peoples (more or less the

Mediterranean world). The gospel was understood as a personal encounter with Jesus Christ, not as an institutional claim. Therefore, something like “tolerance” could be practiced—tolerance not as a pragmatic acceptance of the “false Gods,” however, but as the offer of charity toward the erring sinner. Only after the fourth century, when Christianity had turned into a state religion and the empire was interpreted as *corpus Christianum*, the sociopolitical order was more and more defined in religious terms and the *civitas Dei* became amalgamated with the *civitas terrena*. This model was valid until the *imperium Christianum* or “Christendom” broke apart in the split of two politically potent confessions in the sixteenth century. The earlier split between the Eastern and the Western church had a different background, and it happened for many reasons at the border between Rome and Byzantium, the two parts of the Roman Empire that were in conflict from the beginning of the Christian political system. Therefore, this split was not so much a philosophical-theological problem of authority challenging the self-understanding of Christianity. Now, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, neither of the two sides could win. Therefore, the first principle of tolerance—*cuius regio eius religio*—was the result of political pragmatism, which had become necessary in view of the self-destruction of central Europe during the Thirty Years War (1618–1648). Here, political authority was delinked from a metaphysical foundation and interpreted in relativistic terms of changing historical conditions for the first time. There was a theological argument making the shift possible, a concept that was worked out by Ramon Lull and Nicolas of Cusa in confrontation with Islam and Judaism during the fifteenth century: *una religio in rituum varietate*. Interestingly, the notion of religion is used here as a more general term in order to bring the different realities of religions and confessions onto a common platform of perception, interpretation, and political law. Here, difference could be tolerated at least theoretically. Later on, Enlightenment thinkers used reason or the religion of reason as a reality that should be a yardstick of authority—both in intellectual and political terms—a reality that would be placed above conflicting religious claims.

This remains a model today: Tolerance in the modern sense is a product of the Enlightenment that answers the unsolvable conflicts of authority within Christianity, being not a nonreligious but a transreligious perspective based on a new concept of religion. It is an attempt to find a consensus of religious values for a pluralistic society that is based not on the claim to possess revelation but on communicating arguments based on reason. The presupposition for this reflected tolerance is the acknowledgment of mutual dependency and historical conditioning of religions. Historically speaking there is hardly any parallel development in other religions, but all other traditions are being confronted today with this history of Christianity and its political consequences, and they certainly do react to it in their specific ways.

Breakdown of the Idea of Historical Progress

The collapse of a unilateral claim for political authority based on religious claims is also linked with the breakdown of the self-confidence of progress as the driving force of Western (Christian) civilization. The idea of progress in science and technology

is linked but not identical with the idea of progress in social and political terms as developed during Enlightenment and in the nineteenth century all over in France, the United States, England, and—later—Germany. The sociopolitical idea of progress was never unchallenged from within these cultures, but it remained politically effective as the ideology for the expansion of the European-American civilization until World War I.

From the beginning the idea of progress was not shared by the whole population, but it remained a characteristic mark of the ideological self-awareness of the bourgeois classes. It is connected with the development of this social class. Especially in Germany, the aristocracy, peasants, and clerics, as well as neo-pietistic circles (not to mention the romantics), were not the classes shouldering the first Industrial Revolution, and they were not the soil for “progress” in the modern sense. Literature, music, and intellectual circles that expressed themselves in the establishment of the “humanities” at the universities not only criticized but openly revolted against the “idea of progress.”

Still today Europeans and Americans justify colonial activities and their claim for political authority by a proclaimed superiority of their civilization (based on Christianity and its values). By establishing the Western school system in non-European/American countries they could dominate the debates on self-identity and values in the upper and middle classes in the colonized countries. In counterreacting, the spokespersons of those cultures (such as Gandhi) compared Western claims with actual political behavior of the Western powers. This also led to a deconstruction of the ideology of progress (supported by cultural critics in the West such as Tolstoy, the New England Transcendentalists, and others).

In the aftermath of World War I the optimism of progress broke down, especially in Germany but also to some extent in France (Stefan Zweig, Romain Rolland, Oswald Spengler, Dialectical Theology). The self-destruction of Europe was more than a political catastrophe; it was an unmasking of the Western consciousness and its claims based on the ideology of progress. The two most powerful totalitarian movements of the twentieth century, fascism/national socialism and communism, were attempts to react to this breakdown. Another answer was Oswald Spengler's *Untergang des Abendlandes* (*The Decline of the West*), which finds echoes even in the warnings of “limits to growth” issued by the Club of Rome in 1972 and ecological concerns today. A contrasting answer was Jean Gebser's *Ursprung und Gegenwart* (*The Ever-Present Origin*, 1949), which calls for a mental leap in humanity based on a mythical-mystical realization. All New Age movements after the 1960s are based on this new vision of reality.

ANGUISH AND FEAR AS BACKGROUND FOR THE NEW RELIGIOUS REVIVALS

It is not possible to develop a phenomenology of fear here. I only want to mention fear as a result of the meeting or clash of different cultures that is influencing the political realities of today. These fears have three roots: loss of identity, loss of power, and economic as well as cultural marginalization.

Loss of identity is experienced when familiar patterns of life change. Even if they were repressive, they offered stability. We know that the unknown or uncertain is more difficult to cope with than repression, and this is why many people take refuge in repressive structures, including fundamentalist ones. Identity, however, is not static but always is becoming. In order to realize this fact, knowledge is required, that is, study of one's own as well as the other traditions in their mutual interpenetration in history and at present. This, it seems, is necessary to overcome fear of the loss of identity. Such loss and the fear of loss of orientation that is connected herewith causes individuals as well as groups and whole societies to react with aggression and violence.

Loss of power is unavoidable under the conditions of differentiation and pluralization in modern societies. It is a loss of power for institutions that once represented certain interests and dominated the definition in terms of values and religion. Instead of authority and power a dialogical discourse is being initiated. To organize the same institutionally in sufficient manner has not yet been achieved on a large scale, however. This would require local, national, and international organization.

Economic and cultural marginalization is the fate of the middle and lower classes of whole continents. The economic asymmetry in certain countries as well as between whole groups of states is obvious and frequently discussed. Yet cultural marginalization captures more and more even the educated ones in such societies, which, by structural imbalance in the public discourses, excludes large groups of the population from expressing themselves in public. The reasons might be economic or political, or due to the organization of the media sector (control of media by bureaucratic hierarchies). The culturally marginalized ones (who have no platform of self-expression) and the economically unnecessary ones (who are not needed for maintaining the economy) are those who express themselves in excluding fundamentalisms in order to find a subcultural security. These fears of the marginalized ones generate a potential for violence that is hardly calculable.

What we see everywhere on the globe at present is not a clash of cultures, but a struggle against loss of identity, loss of power, and economic as well as cultural marginalization. Countermeasures would be cultural, political, and economic development, but one of the most important factors here is cross-cultural education.

THE POLITICS OF INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE

Authority in politics cannot be constructed only on religious claims. Rather, it needs to take into account these factors of the dynamics of history, which we are outlining here to some extent. Religion needs to be aware of absolutisms, for they are constructed by certain groups to gain political authority, as history shows. Today, from Iran to South Africa, from China to the Arabian world, from India to Indonesia, from the United States to Russia, we can observe movements for the creation of specific identities that are motivated nationally and religiously, most often containing both aspects. These movements are partial counterreactions against globalization. In countries where poverty, corruption, decaying economies, and violence are daily reali-

ties, globalization is experienced as horror. People feel powerless facing anonymous financial centers of power that they cannot confront. Regaining their own (and in most cases newly constructed) cultural self-determination is the attempt to be acting subject at least in one area of life; it is a matter of self-esteem.

Religion, like all historical reality, is not something given, but a reality being created in processes again and again. It is created by people who engage in the discourse about religion. Religion happens anew all the time in contexts insofar as people claim to think and act on the basis of what they call religion in order to find individual as well as collective identity. Religion is in becoming. Religion is not an abstract collection of rituals and ideas for life, but the common struggle in the search for identity, authenticity, and meaning. On the basis of historical evidence it is obvious that identity cannot be gained without but only in partnership with the respective other. This has political consequences.

“Evil” that generates fear and the potential for violence is not only explicit violence but appears also in stupidity, egocentricity, and laziness.

Stupidity is the inability to see and act in wider contexts, realizing the connectivity of things. Stupidity is not only (but also) intellectual deficiency, but self-imposed limitation, a lack of creativity and curiosity facing the other or the yet unknown. It is the inability to be open for the new and the other and the possible acceptance that the other view (or way of life) might be authentic and valid.

Egocentricity is the clinging to one’s own ego, usually governed by fear. Development of ego is, of course, a necessary psychological development of each individual. However, to remain in that attitude generates mental and social sclerosis. We cling to the ego because of ignorance (and stupidity, as we have it here), as Buddhists say. But this is also a Christian insight that should inform the evaluation of authority in politics—in Christian terms it is the primacy of love, not only as an emotional factor, but as the interconnectivity of all creation.

Laziness is the clinging to the known, it is inflexibility on the basis not of judgment but hearsay. Lazy are those who are not willing to accept change, who are afraid to be up against the (main)stream. Laziness also is a lack of humor, a lack of self-knowledge, which keeps its distance from all opinions, ideas, and patterns of life, especially one’s own.

A politics of dialogue or dialogical politics is dependent on one basic assumption: that partners regard themselves mutually as possible sources for knowledge and wisdom. Mere tolerance in the sense of letting be is not sufficient. We need to engage in the otherness of the other, expose ourselves, in order to learn. This includes the other religion, for it is religion that is the deepest source of dignity in different cultures. For if I accept the other only in his “worldly” concerns, excluding religion, I miss the final source of inspiration. This is God, the Transcendent, or whatever we call it. If I remain exclusive in religious terms I finally deny the deepest source of dignity for the other. Theological exclusivism (regarding salvation) is the ideological expression of exclusive political authority, based not on the mutuality of love but on the hierarchy of claims.

This is a principal precondition that does not exclude debate and the confront-

ing exchange of arguments. Quite the contrary: When we accept each other we owe each other also our expression in truthfulness, and this includes conflicting searches for truth. Life is complex, and so are ideas and insights. Therefore, contradictions in knowing and acting are unavoidable, especially because the contexts differ time and again. What follows is that the consistent argument needs to be acknowledged, an argument that is expressed in such a way that the partner in debate can follow it up. This is how differences need to be approached, not by a violent political claim for authenticity but by the mutuality of the process of arguing.

Dialogue is interdependent with economic, political, and cultural justice, for justice is the expression of a way of life that embodies mutuality: One does not live at the expense of the other, economically or in terms of cultural identity. Religions should uncover those structures that violate this principle. In dialogue we need a mental attitude that is able to bear with the relativity of all human knowing: We never have the full truth but have partial knowledge, at best. This implies the ability to see, acknowledge and accept interrelatedness, that is, partnership in identity. To my mind this is the very cornerstone of what we are accustomed to calling “mystical” experience, the transcending of ego and embracing a togetherness or wholeness of all creation without losing the sense for the value of each particular event or reality.

Here, education is required on a global scale, an education in mental training that enables humans to overcome the fears we mentioned and develop a dialogical way of life. Different cultures have their own potentials in this sense, and they should be networking in order to establish the needed cooperation. This would be an alternative to fundamentalism and political authority based on hierarchical might.

A widely used saying, often erroneously attributed to Augustine, is: “In necessities, unity; in questionable things, freedom; but in everything, love.” However, the distinction between what is necessary and what is under question must be worked out in an open discourse in a spirit of mutual respect on the basis of love. Love, again, is the fundamental insight into the mutuality of all things and events. This would establish a new authority of religion in politics, to be sure. It is the task of today to develop the same on the basis of rational argumentation and mutual respect without destructive claims of a “prestabilized superiority.”¹

NOTE

1. See also Michael von Brück, *Wie können wir leben? Religion und Spiritualität in einer Welt ohne Maß* (München: C. H. Beck, 2005).