

**From medieval Apologetics to
contemporary Fundamental
Theology: a change of relationship
between philosophy and theology**

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This article is comprised of two parts, derived from the seminar talks the author gave to the mainland seminary clergy about the relationship between philosophy and fundamental theology. He points out that the Church has been using human reasoning to express faith. He adds that, however, the approach of the Church during the Middle Ages focused more on apologetics, while in modern times it emphasizes dialogue more.

— editor

Introduction: From European Christian *Neuzeit* to Post-Christian *Moderne*

Obviously many Chinese intellectuals are very much interested in European medieval philosophy. Some few years ago the professor of one of the leading universities of Beijing asked me whether I could provide him with the publications of the German philosopher Josef Pieper (1904-1997), so I sent the *Collected Works* of the famous mediaevalist in eight volumes to Beijing¹.

The incident is interesting because at the same time in my home country, Germany, young people ask themselves why they should study a “dead” language like Latin instead of learning “living” languages like Spanish, Chinese or Arabic. So the classical education in humanities, including Latin and Greek, is being widely replaced by modern languages and research in science and technology. The medieval age is still widely defamed as the “Dark Ages”, — “dark”, because too many things were still unknown and obscure, “dark” also, because of the Crusades, anti-Semitism, witch hunts and the Inquisition. In contrast, the following centuries are praised as a time of brightness and light, — illumination, “Enlightenment”. And yet, even if many contemporaries do not recognize it any more, in their aversion and turning-away from the medieval sources of western culture and scholarship, westerners remain indebted to the patrimony of medieval thought and discoveries, including medieval philosophy. In view of the radical changes in history

1 See Josef Pieper, *Werke in acht Bänden* (Hamburg: Meiner, 1995-2008). Vol. 2 contains the publications about Thomas Aquinas and Scholasticism.

we are witnessing in our days, we have to strongly insist on this fact.

Actually, reflecting on this division of European history and the time following the Middle Ages, in my teaching of fundamental theology I distinguish between the following two periods: a European Christian Modern Time (*europäisch-christliche Neuzeit*), superseded by a period which from a western point of view I call “Post-Christian Modern Time” (*postchristliche Moderne*)². The first part — “European Christian Modern Time” — is to be characterized by many discoveries and revolutionary changes: (1) New territories were discovered: West India which in fact was not true India, but the entrance to the two parts of America, North and South, the circumnavigation of Africa on the way to the real India and the Far East, including finally China. (2) The geocentric world-view was replaced by the heliocentric world-view. (3) The art of printing was invented. (4) The time was called the “Renaissance”, because art and literature originating from pre-Christian times were “reborn”, and began to be disseminated by the way of book printing. (5) The break in the western Church and its splitting into a Roman Catholic Church and a plurality of national and denominational Churches and ecclesial congregations, called the “Reformation”, was the starting point of a process of general dissolution ending up in today’s manifold pluralism. It was the very beginning of the Roman Catholic Church as an independent organization besides others. The fact of being one group among others cannot be denied, even if the Roman Church claims to be the real Church which, founded by Jesus

2 See Hans Waldenfels, *Kontextuelle Fundamentaltheologie* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005), pp. 484-486; also id., *Phänomen Christentum. Eine Weltreligion in der Welt der Religionen* (Bonn: Borengaesser, 2002), pp.15-28.

Christ, preserves and proclaims his message firmly and unshakably, unchanged and in full truth.

The first period of modern times was strongly Eurocentric and, from a religious point of view, its background and standards were grounded in Christianity and its ancient scholarly roots in Greece and the Roman Empire. Even when the political power moved north to the German Emperors, it was called "*Sacrum Romanum Imperium*", sometimes enlarged by "*Nationis Germanicae*", "the Holy Roman Empire of German nationality". It was the Austrian Emperor Francis II who declared on August 6, 1806 that the Roman Empire was extinguished, and continued his reign as the Austrian Emperor Francis I, until he died in 1835.

The final blow to the Eurocentric hegemony occurred after World War II³. It found its expression among others in the following facts: (1) the end of European colonialism and the establishment of young nations around the world, (2) the rapid development of new mass media and ways of communication, (3) a new process of migration and an intermingling of races, nationalities and religions, (4) the final loss of Christian hegemony among the religions and the worldwide plurality of value systems, religious and secular⁴ consequently, the plurality of world views. For these reasons, from a western Christian point of view I named the new period "the Post-Christian Modern Time".

3 See Hans Waldenfels, "Das europäische Christentum – im Kontext globaler Interreligiosität," in *Kontextualität und Universalität. Die Vielfalt der Glaubenskontexte und der Universalanspruch des Evangeliums*, edited by Thomas Chreijack and Knut Wenzel (Stuttgart: W. Kohlhammer, 2012), pp. 111-128.

4 See Hans Waldenfels, *Phänomen Christentum*, pp. 1-14.

In the following deliberations we shall reflect on the consequences for Christianity and Christian theology in two steps. First, we call attention to the basis of modern scholarship which dates back to the junction of medieval philosophy and theology. Second, we try to describe what happened to Christian theology when the connection and harmony between philosophy and theology ended and theology had to look out for its proper place in the scholarly world.

A. Medieval Philosophy and Apologetics

I. Middle Ages

The term "Middle Ages" (*media aetas, medium aevum*) signifies the period between western antiquity and the beginning of a new era called the "Renaissance", and implies —as mentioned above - a rather negative evaluation of the period squeezed between antiquity and modern times⁵. The Latin term appeared, first, in Italy in the writings of Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374) and others, and later in Switzerland. The German term "*Mittelalter*" was used for the first time in 1538 by the Swiss historian Aegidius Tschudi (1505-1572); the French term "*moyen âge*" has been known since 1572, and the English translation "Middle Ages" since 1611⁶. Wherever the word appears, it indicates that a new period was about to dawn, in the terminology of the Canadian

5 Josef Pieper explicitly states that *media aetas* originally was an invective (German a "Schimpfwort"); see Josef Pieper, *Werke in acht Bänden*, pp. 302ff.

6 See U. Niedermeyer, "Mittelalter," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 7, pp. 339-341; U. Köpf, "Mittelalter," in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 5, pp. 1350-1357.

philosopher Charles Taylor: “A Secular Age”⁷. The beginning and the end of the Middle Ages cannot be determined exactly, although it is connected with specific events at both ends⁸. Considering what had been before and what followed afterwards, we realize that the time-between bears rather negative connotations. Here, we will concentrate on medieval philosophy and its relation to theology.

2. Scholasticism

Medieval philosophy is characterized by two main features: its methodology and its contents. The elaboration of a special way of schooling led to the name “Scholasticism”⁹. Schooling was not completely new. The history of learning goes back to pre-Christian times, but it took on a new meaning from the 12th century. We encounter teachers and students in a new way. The places of study were not only the abbeys of the Benedictines and other religious orders and the monasteries of the newly founded mendicant orders, Dominicans and Franciscans, of Augustinians and other religious communities, and cathedral schools. The first universities were established: Bologna, Paris, Oxford, Montpellier, Padua, Cambridge and others. “University” was an abbreviation which stands for *universitas magistrorum et*

scholarium, the community of teachers and students. At the same time it refers to the different fields of research, teaching and studies, and finally, to all fields of knowledge arranged in so called “faculties”, which qualified the students as teachers and researchers by awarding degrees like baccalaureate, licentiate and doctorate.

The main forms of teaching were lectures and disputes. Lectures dealt with the understanding and interpretation of texts and were delivered as various forms of comments. In this period of time, texts were the starting point for the authorities to begin with and to rely on: in theology Holy Scripture, the Church Fathers, *Doctores Ecclesiae* and the official teaching of the Church, in philosophy the Greek philosophers, especially Plato, and later on, Aristotle and their publications, in law the juridical codes, in medicine, mathematics, etc. the axiomatic sentences and books as they were delivered from former times.

The situation changed when natural sciences developed their own methodologies such as observations of natural events, appropriate instruments were invented, and experiments were made; consequently, the old concept of authority was seen critically, and human reason became the supreme judge; at the end everything was brought into the court of human reason.

Besides lectures disputations became important. Students were invited to utter their questions and discuss them. Disputes were arranged between teachers and students, but also between teachers of the same or of different faculties.

7 See Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2007).

8 Often the year 529 is mentioned as the beginning: in 529 the Academy of Athens was closed by the Byzantine Emperor Justinian I, and the abbey of Monte Cassino was founded by Benedict of Nursia.

9 See Josef Pieper, “Scholastik,” in Josef Pieper, *Werke in acht Bänden*, pp.299-440; L. Honnefelder, H. Möhle and J. R. Söder, “Scholastik,” in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 9, pp. 199-202; U. Köpf, “Scholastik,” in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 7, pp. 949-954.

Both forms of learning found expression in books, collections of commentary works, statements or “sentences”, and *quaestiones*. In “questions” different points of approach and view were presented in the form of *sic et non*, *sic* and *e contra*; a solution was offered and had to stand up to the test of various opinions proposed. The arrangement of questions demonstrated the argument, its logic, the various steps to be taken, the different aspects to be considered, and the process leading to a final solution. Entering such a question-answer-process invites further reflection, produces new questions, calls for further deliberations and may provoke corrections and deepening of knowledge. Accordingly, a whole library of comments on the comments came into existence. To mention only the *Summa theologiae* of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), it was not only translated, but further commented on by colleagues and successors, which led to the production of new books on the *Summa*, too.

This short description of the important events in scholastic learning indicates that the process continues unfinished until today. There are a few points to be added. First of all, as mentioned above, reason turned out to become the leading faculty and norm of human existence. It became the tribunal for any knowledge and any decision to be taken, and the counterpart to any other authority such as faith, religion and the Church. This tendency was strengthened when natural sciences and experimental knowledge began conquering and governing the field of knowledge – this is clearly indicated by the fact that today in French and English the concept sciences is often reserved for the field of natural sciences, and theology and even metaphysical philosophy are considered outside the field. Unlike in the Anglo-French world, in

German the term *Wissenschaft* was never reserved for natural sciences alone. Germans make a distinction between *Geisteswissenschaften* (“spiritual¹⁰ sciences”) and *Naturwissenschaften* (natural sciences), and more recently between *Kulturwissenschaften* (cultural sciences) and *Naturwissenschaften*. By this we maintain that the concepts of science and scholarship are not to be reduced to the field of experimental knowledge and technology.

3. The Shift to Aristotle

Turning to the content of medieval philosophizing, this was marked by a turn from a more Platonic approach to the teachings of Aristotle¹¹. St. Thomas and others used to call him simply “the philosopher”. Aristotelian thought reached Europe via the Arabic world. No wonder that an erudite Moslem can claim that the Arabic world met with the ideas of Enlightenment much earlier than the West¹².

Actually, it is a big mistake to describe the medieval encounter between the Christian and the Islamic world only in terms of war, mutual conquest and hatred. It is worthwhile to study, for example, the history of the Iberian Peninsula in which periods of peaceful co-existence between Moslems, Jews and Christians alternated with times

10 “Spiritual” is here the opposition of “material” and not to be confounded with the modern understanding of “spirituality”.

11 See F. Van Steenberghe, “Aristotelismus III-IV,” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol.1, pp. 511-515; G. Wieland, “Aristoteles III/IV”, in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 1, pp. 977-979.

12 For the following data see W. Kluxen, “Aufklärung aus dem Islam? Die Rolle der mittelalterlichen Philosophie,” in *Der Islam – Religion und Politik*, edited by Hans Waldenfels and H. Oberreuter (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2004), pp. 85-93.

of suppression and persecution¹³. Today we are confronted with the call for dialogue and peaceful cohabitation. That is reason enough to explore more intensely how in former times, too, people were engaged in finding ways of societal co-existence. Spain was not only the country where the Inquisition was flourishing; it was also the country where great translators contributed to the development of European culture and erudition.

At least three names of Arabic scholars should be mentioned who exercised a tremendous influence on the development of medieval philosophy by bringing Aristotle's philosophy to the West: Al-Farabi (875-950), Ibn Sina resp. Avicenna (980-1037) and Ibn Rushd resp. Averroes (1126-1198). Whereas Al-Farabi was of Turkish origin and Avicenna an Iranian, Averroes was born in Cordoba. The Arabic translations of Aristotle's works reflect the search for new forms of scholarship and the growing interest in natural philosophy. A huge amount of Arabic literature dealing with philosophy and theology, medicine, mathematics, astronomy and other sciences was translated. This forced the great scholastics such as Albertus Magnus (ca. 1200-1280), Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), Duns Scotus (1266-1308) and others to become acquainted with Aristotelian thought.

The great significance of Albert the Great regarding future scholarship comes from his way of studying a non-Christian author

13 See M. Delgado, "Der Mythos 'Toledo'. Zur Konvivenz der drei monotheistischen Religionen und Kulturen im mittelalterlichen Spanien," in *Toleranz – Weisheit, Liebe oder Kompromiss? Multikulturelle Diskurse und Orte*, edited by Sabina Hering (Opladen: Leske + Budrich, 2004), pp. 69-91.

like Aristotle¹⁴. He did not restrict himself to dealing with Aristotle's metaphysics and theology, but paid even more attention to his profane and physical teaching. Personally he is one of the first theologians who began observing natural phenomena, and thus inspired botanical and zoological studies. He also distinguished between the report of someone's ideas and the interpretation of the ideas. He first wanted to give a clear description of someone's thought, and he wished it that the listener would understand it as the author wished it to be understood. Only at a later stage did Albert begin to ask whether or not the idea was correct and true, or where it needed correction or deepening. For Albert the results of natural observations or the engagement in studying strange texts like the writings of Aristotle's were worthwhile in themselves. Not everything he studied had to be seen from the perspective of faith or theology. In this respect he was a very modern personality. No wonder that some contemporaries became suspicious. Albert the Great was canonized and named a *Doctor Ecclesiae* rather late in 1931 and appointed patron of natural sciences in 1941. When Pope Benedict XVI recently gave solemn recognition to Hildegard of Bingen and enrolled her rather lately among the teachers of the Church, it recalled similar happenings in former days.

Moreover, the fact that Aristotle reached Central Europe through the translations of Arabic authors, reminds us that—besides warlike controversies—the intellectual discourse between Christianity and Islam began in the Middle Ages. Shortly before he died, in 1141

14 See G. Wieland, "Albertus Magnus," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 1, pp. 337-339.

Peter Abelard (1079-1142) composed *Collationes sive Dialogus inter Philosophum, Iudaeum et Christianum*¹⁵. In the same year 1141 the first Latin translation of the *Qur'an*, ordered by Petrus Venerabilis (1092-1156), was finished. Ramon Llull (1232/3-1315/6), a fervent layman and mystic, was determined to sacrifice his life by propagating the faith among the Muslims, to write the best book against all heresies of the infidels and to motivate the Pope and other sovereigns to found monasteries with language schools¹⁶. Nicholas of Cues (1401-1464), the famous precursor of today's interreligious dialogue, had a good number of predecessors¹⁷.

Undoubtedly to a large extent the philosophical and theological engagement of this time still served apologetic purposes. Therefore, our lecture is correctly entitled "Medieval Philosophy and Apologetics". In fact, in the Middle Ages philosophy and apologetics were closely connected. Before turning to medieval theology it is meaningful to insert some remarks on the subject of apologetics itself and to show that apologetics is one of the original tasks of the theological enterprise. In fact, we know of apologists since the beginnings of ecclesiastical life.

15 See Peter Abelard, *Gespräch eines Philosophen, eines Juden und eines Christen*. Latin and German, edited and translated by von. H.-W. Krautz (Darmstadt: WBG, 1995). The "philosopher" is a Moslem, because for a Christian it was doubtful whether Muhammad's speaking about God was inspired by true revelation.

16 See H. Riedinger, "Raimundus Lullus," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 8, pp. 810f.

17 See M. Ridenauer, *Pluralität und Rationalität. Die Herausforderung der Vernunft durch religiöse und kulturelle Vielfalt nach Nikolaus Cusanus* (Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2007).

4. Apologetics

Apologetics is part of theology, more precisely: today of fundamental theology. 1 Peter 3:15 already offers the biblical foundation of Christian apologetics by demanding: "Be ready to give an answer to every man that asks you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear."

The original Greek text uses the term "*apologia*" = justification. It is a juridical and rhetorical term stating that a conviction, statement or doctrine calls for its justification or—in case of attack—of defense. This requires suitable language which both the questioner and the opponent understand.

From its beginnings, Christian theology pursued two goals: propagating the message of Christ and leading people to conversion, on the one hand, and defending the Christian doctrine against contradiction, opposition and misunderstanding, on the other hand. After the first witnesses, Holy Scripture became the authentic basis for the positive teaching, and this called for its deeper understanding. A deeper and more correct understanding, however, was also requested, where the preacher met with people who were unable to understand the doctrine proposed, or who were challenged to give up their former way of thinking or their way of life, and answered with protest, resistance and arguments, and even with violence.

Considering the basic tasks of modern fundamental theology I would like to distinguish three different perspectives: (1) the situation of resistance which calls for apologetics; (2) the situation of not-

understanding which needs hermeneutics; (3) the situation of the refusal of communication which demands dialogue.¹⁸

Considering medieval society and order, we must emphasize the situation of resistance. The ruling language of the Roman Empire, Latin, had become the unifying language of scholarly reflection in Central Europe. As a matter of fact, whoever wanted to investigate the historical sources of medicine and law, philosophy and theology, even the basic writings about sciences, could not avoid learning Latin. Latin was at the grass-roots of any kind of scholarship. Only in recent times have young people lost their respect for tradition and history and do not grasp any longer the value of learning classical languages. In a time where everything seems to be in a state of flux, this attitude will lead to a loss of stability and certainty.

5. *Fides quaerens intellectum*

In a brief lecture such as this we can draw attention to only some of the central ideas of medieval scholasticism. One of its representatives is Anselm of Canterbury (1033-1109) who is called the "Father of Scholasticism". Often phrases like "*credo ut intelligam*" or "*fides quaerens intellectum*", both referring to his *Proslagion*¹⁹, are taken as encapsulating the new attitude of the time. People living in the Middle

18 See Hans Waldenfels, *Kontextuelle Fundamentaltheologie*, pp. 81-90. For a more detailed analysis of the present situation, *ibid.*, pp. 92-94.

19 See M. Seckler, "Credo ut intelligam," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 2, pp.1243-1245; and M. Dreyer, "Fides quaerens intellectum," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 3, pp. 1275f.; also Hans Waldenfels, in *Kontextuelle Fundamentaltheologie*, pp. 144-146; Josef Pieper, in *Werke in acht Bänden*, pp. 330-359.

Agnes were in general not skeptics; they were people of faith, but a few tried to go in the strength of reason as far as reason would carry them within the horizon of faith. When blessed Pope John Paul II and his successor Benedict XVI stress the deep relationship between faith and reason, it sounds like a remote echo of Anselm's endeavors.

Anselm wanted to delve into the depth of divine being. Actually Christian theology knows about a twofold approach to the divine: one by way of human reason resp. reasoning, the other given by the grace of God and communicated by God Himself which we call "revelation". Philosophy as a work of human reasoning, rooted in man's yearning for comprehensive knowledge, is purely human or "natural". In fact, the human being feels in himself an infinite desire for all he can obtain, all he can know, and all he can comprehend. But at the same time, he feels himself finite, weak and powerless. Only by faith is the human being released from his weakness and carried beyond his limitations; by God's grace and benevolence he feels invited to participate in divine life, but that is a "supernatural" approach.

Anselm is a man of faith, but within the horizon of faith he also wishes to realize his human faculties, especially reason, to their fullest extent. For in human self-understanding there is nothing more important and decisive than thinking. Thinking occurs in time. Living at *this* place and at *this* moment confronts us with the perception that there was a before, and that there will be an after (leaving aside the fact that there are also different places to stay). We discover the fact that we are endowed with the faculty of memory which connects us with the past. We realize in us the faculty of imagination and a certain creative

power which allows us to project at least partially our future. Life is expanded between past and future, a definite beginning and a definite end, between birth and death. We are “living in history”, and we are “historical beings”.

Since we are able to think beyond in both directions, we start asking about where-from and where-to: Where are we coming from, where are we going? And soon we add the question: Why? Why is all this? We ask for cause and reason and for aim and meaning. And we ask all this, feeling ourselves part of a greater entity. This might be human society or the world in which we live. Moreover, we realize that the earth, on which we live, is only a small entity in a much greater entity which we call the universe. And we experience that all this is and works independently of us. And we ask again: How come?

This way we can continue asking questions. We find out that we are “beings”—as the Greeks taught us to say—who do not give up asking questions. And this reminds us of Anselm’s formula “*fides quaerens intellectum*”, faith is seeking and asking for true understanding.

“Faith”, of course, as Anselm uses the word, refers to Christian faith. However, we can understand faith in a general way, too, as for example John Paul II does in his encyclical *Fides et ratio* n. 31f.²⁰. It points to the fact that before using our own reason, we are surrounded by and related to other persons, by and to the world, by and to traditions

²⁰ See Hans Waldenfels, “Mit zwei Flügeln”. *Kommentar und Anmerkungen zur Enzyklika “Fides et ratio” Papst Johannes Pauls II* (Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2000), pp. 40-42.

and history. Nobody starts from nothing. This implies that as soon as we live, we are forced and obliged to rely on others. And our actions are determined in various ways and we are not simply free to do whatever we wish to do, although we find out that we are also invited to take free decisions and to act freely. It is true that unlike modern people, the contemporaries of Anselm became conscious of the power of reasoning, but they remained humble, knowing that the faculties of reason and free will were not their own creations. They acknowledged that they had received these faculties from someone else whom they encountered, therefore, with respect, even with fear, and whom they adored. People realized that human life is a life in interdependence and dependence, dependent on others, on tradition, on the knowledge and skill of others, on their authority, and finally, on someone they called “God”.

One more observation is to be added. Humans recognized that on the one hand the world in which they live, is wonderful, but on the other hand, there are calamities, disasters, epidemics, evil and crimes, and for many evils in the world the human race is responsible. The consciousness of sin was strong in the Middle Ages. Once again, Christian faith was helpful. One of the most influential writings of Anselm was titled “*Cur Deus homo?*” God became man for the sake of man, for his salvation.

For the people of that age Christian faith answered the fundamental questions of man. The final answer consisted in one word: God. God is the creator of the universe and created man “in his image, after his likeness” (Gen 1:26). This implies that man is gifted with the faculties of memory, intellect and free will, as had already been taught by

Augustine. God is the aim of all life, because He Himself is the fullness of life. God is the Redeemer. He became man Himself in order to restore man to his original state of innocence and grace.

6. Proof of God's existence

"Theocentric" means the way of thinking where God is the center of thought. However, if we follow more attentively this brief introduction into the human search for self-understanding, we come to the point where we see that a profound turn of thought is about to occur. Evidently it is not God who stands any longer in the center of questioning, but man puts himself into the center of reflection. Consequently, traditional theocentrism tends to change into anthropocentrism, and brings about the decisive turn in direction of modern times²¹. In fact, religious traditions introduced by Judaism and Christianity, even by Islam, begin to fade away. So far God and only God was the Lord of world and universe and man was at the most his vicar; but from now on man enthroned himself as the lord of the world. By the end of the 19th century Friedrich Nietzsche cried out, "God is dead. We have killed him."

Authors such as Ludwig Feuerbach (1804-1872) and Karl Marx (1818-1883), Sigmund Freud (1856-1930) and others declared God to be a human projection. At the end it was not God who created man in his image and likeness—in Feuerbach's words it was man who created God in his own image and likeness²².

21 See J. B. Metz, *Christliche Anthropozentrik. Über die Denkform des Thomas von Aquin* (München; Kösel, 1962).

22 See Hans Waldenfels, *Kontextuelle Fundamentaltheologie*, pp. 51-56.

Returning to medieval thought, we recognize that man developed his own subjectivity, but at the same time tried to strengthen and to deepen his knowledge about, and his contact with, God. Theologians had such strong confidence in the power of reason that they were convinced that by reason alone they could prove the existence of God. Accordingly they spoke about the "proof of God"²³. Anselm elaborated the so called ontological proof, which has been discussed among philosophers until today²⁴. Thomas Aquinas composed the famous "*quinque viae*" (*S.Th. I q.2 a.3*), which for a long time were also called "proofs of God". He proposed them in five steps starting from five different points of view²⁵. For Thomas the demonstration of God's existence is not the result of God's revelation and, consequently, a question of faith, but of human reasoning and, therefore, of natural reason. His conviction was confirmed as dogma by Vatican I with the definition that:

God, the origin and goal of all created things, can certainly be recognized with the natural light of human reason from the created things (*Deum, rerum omnium principium et finem, naturali lumine e rebus creatis certe cognosci posse*)²⁶.

The frame work of Thomas' argument is determined by objections against the existence of God ("*videtur quod*") and God's own reply ("*sed contra*"). Thomas argues within the horizon of faith

23 See D. Schlüter, "Gottesbeweis," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 3, pp. 818-830; O. Muck and F. Ricken, "Gottesbeweise," in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 4, pp. 868-886.

24 See G. Gabriel, "Gottesbeweis, ontologischer," in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 3, pp. 833-835.

25 See my explanations in *Kontextuelle Fundamentaltheologie*, pp. 147-149.

26 Dogmatic Constitution *Dei Filius*, chapter 2; *Denzinger-Hilnermann*, n. 3004.

in the following steps: (1) Starting-points are observations we come across in daily life: motion; causality; contingency (necessary and non necessary; but possible things); different grades of being; determination or tendency towards a goal. (2) All things observed point to something beyond: motion to a mover; an effect to a cause; the merely possible to the necessary; the partial good or true to the fullness of goodness or truth; a tendency to the goal. (3) The reaching-beyond cannot be endless, but calls for an end; in technical terms: the “*regressus in infinitum*” is excluded. (4) Consequently, there is a first mover; a first cause; an in itself necessary; an absolutely perfect; a final aim. (5) This is identical with —what all people call— “God”.

The strength of the argument lies in the fact that it starts from our worldly life and proceeds step by step up to the point where man reaches the end of his questioning. In fact, it does not make sense to ask infinitely the same question “why?” And yet, the question does not die, as we know while listening to Martin Heidegger’s (1889-1976) inaugural lecture of 1929, where he asked, “Why after all is there being and not rather nothing?” (*Warum ist überhaupt Seiendes und nicht vielmehr Nichts?*)²⁷

In the “secular age” a growing number of people around the world are not satisfied with the simple identification of the presupposed answer with “what all call God”. For is it true that all people stop asking by

27 M. Heidegger, *Wegmarken*, vol. 9, *Collected Works* (Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1967), p. 19. Heidegger’s distinction between *Sein* (= to be, used as a noun) and *Seiendes* (= being, a participle, also used as a noun) cannot be rendered in English without difficulties; often the distinction is simply neglected.

saying “God”? Or is the number of people not increasing who deny this final reply by contesting the existence of a God? Moreover, in present times many people doubt the human capability of obtaining access to real truth. They are not sure whether we reach final truth or how to achieve it. And as already mentioned, others presume that “God” is nothing but a projection of human imagination. Agnosticism is widespread²⁸.

7. Beyond the Thinkable

Anselm of Canterbury wrote in chapter 15 of his *Proslogion* in the form of prayer,

Lord, you are not only above whom of nothing greater can be thought, but you are greater than can be thought (*non solum es quo maius cogitari nequit, sed es quiddam maius quam cogitari possit*).

One of my books carries the title *An der Grenze des Denkbaren*, “*At the Boundary of the Thinkable*”²⁹. The formula intends to remind us of the fact that human reason is finite in its ability, and yet human hope does not cease to yearn for a beyond. When in the Middle Ages humans awakened to themselves, they were less aware of the finiteness of reasoning; they were rather fascinated by the possibilities to advance by the strength of reason, and that to an extent that they believed that they could be immersed in the depth of the inscrutable. At the end revelation

28 See Hans Waldenfels, *Kontextuelle Fundamentalthologie*, pp.133-137, 349.

29 Hans Waldenfels, *An der Grenze des Denkbaren. Meditation — Ost und West* (München: Kösel, 1988).

and the doctrine of faith seemed to become superfluous. Josef Pieper calls this “rationalism”, i.e. the assertion that there is nothing which surpasses the capacity of human reason³⁰.

And yet, medieval philosophy and theology possessed a corrective in Negative Theology resp. negative philosophy. This is ascribed to a person of whom we know little today: Dionysius Areopagita. He was most probably a Syrian contemporary of Boëthius, who lived at the turn from the 5th to the 6th century. The pseudonym relates the author to Dionysius of Athens, a convert of St. Paul (cf., Acts 17: 34), with the result that for centuries his books had almost the character of canonical writings. These writings, however, were the channel by which basic traits of eastern theology regarding God were transferred to the West. Contrary to western tendencies, in eastern theology the finally incomprehensible mystery which we encounter in the holy liturgy and in mystical prayer and contemplation, remained prevalent.

According to Pseudo-Dionysius God can be approached in three ways: (1) the kataphatic way or *via affirmativa*, in which God is spoken about in an affirmative manner, (2) the apophatic way or *via negativa* resp. *remotionis*, by describing God in terms of what he is not, (3) the supereminent way or *via eminentiae*, in which God is dealt with in an analogous and enhancing manner above and beyond all other expressions³¹.

30 See for the following Josef Pieper, *Werke in acht Bänden*, pp. 329ff.

31 See J. Hochstaffl, “Negative Theologie,” in *Lexikon für Theologie und Kirche*, vol. 7, pp. 723-725; R. Stolina, “Negative Theologie,” in *Religion in Geschichte und Gegenwart*, vol. 6, pp. 170-173.

It was the negative manner which cautioned the pillars of medieval theology to insist rather on what God is not, instead of saying what he is³². Thus Thomas Aquinas begins the *Summa theologiae* with the phrase, “because we cannot know what God is, but rather what He is not, we have no means for considering how God is, but rather how He is not.” (I, q.3 *prologus*)

And in *Pot.*, q.7 a.3 ad.14 we read, “It is the utmost of human knowledge about God to know that we do not know him” (*quod sciat se nescire*).

According to Jacques Maritain, Thomas Aquinas speaks about the *via negationis* in two series of texts³³. The first series deals with the process of knowledge, where he makes statements like these:

The fact that we know what God is not, provides a place in divine science for knowledge of what he is; for just as one thing is distinguished from another by virtue of what it is, so is it also so distinguished by virtue of what it is not. (*Boëthii De Trin.*, q.2 a.2 ad.2)

Now, in considering the divine substance, we should especially make use of the method of remotion (*via remotionis*). For, by its immensity, the divine substance surpasses every form that our intellect reaches. Thus we

32 In the following consideration I return to some former explanation of mine as to be found in Hans Waldenfels, *Absolute Nothingness. Foundation for a Buddhist-Christian Dialogue* (New York, Ramsey: Paulist Press, 1980), pp. 135-137 (enlarged German edition in preparation).

33 See Jacques Maritain, *The Degrees of Knowledge* (New York: Scribner's Sons, 1959), pp. 236ff.

are unable to comprehend it by knowing *what it is*. Yet we are able to have some knowledge of it by knowing *what it is not*. Furthermore, we approach nearer to a know-ledge of God according as through our intellect we are able to remove more and more things from Him. For we know each thing more perfectly the more fully we see its differences from other things; for each thing has within itself its own being, distinct from all other things. (*Summa contra gentiles*, I c.14)

The second series of texts is related to the “knowledge of non-knowing”, which is the highest kind of wisdom reached in mystical theology. In *I Sent.*, dist. 8, q.8 a.1 ad.4, Thomas explains:

When we approach God by the *via remotionis*, we begin by denying him all corporeality; next, we go on to deny in him anything intellectual—such as goodness or wisdom, to the extent that these are found among creatures. And then there remains in our minds only the fact that he exists and nothing more so that a certain confusion comes to surround him. But we reach the end only when even this very fact of being, to the extent that it can be applied to creatures, is also removed. And then he comes to rest in a kind of shadow of unknowing in which, insofar as it is a stage along our way, we are most closely joined to God, as Dionysius says. This is the darkness in which God is said to dwell.

From our present point of view we can add that apophatic theology does not end up in pure agnosticism and negativism provided that language is seen as a positive opening up and keeping open of the

knowledge and experience of the “non”. Both questions will return in the second part of my lecture: the question of experience and the problem of language. In our time it is the openness to an experience of the incomprehensible and infinite mystery through the “no—” which brings new meaning to the message of theology. Therefore, in our days it is quite common to speak about God-experience.

Josef Pieper gave the experience a name and called it “unquenchable light”³⁴. It is a light that time and again brings to naught the claims of systematizing thought to self-containment, and yet at the same time it does not set man loose into a problematic chaos but makes possible the build-up of a higher intellectual order. Pieper chose the famous saying of Lao Tse’s *Tao-Te-King* I, 1 as a motto of his essay: “The name that can be pronounced is not the eternal name.”

The second question refers to language. Reason is expressed in Greek by *logos*. Most of western scholarly disciplines end up with “-logy”, from “theology” to “technology”. *logos* is the inner core of everything. *logos* in the prologue of St. John Gospel is mostly translated the “Word” in western languages und leads us to the problem of language and languages. As everyone knows, in Chinese, however, a well-used translation is *dao*, and again we are facing the question of translation: Is it the Way or something else, something beyond? With these last remarks we leave the Middle Ages.

34 See Josef Pieper, “Unaustrinkbares Licht. Das negative Element in der Weltansicht des Thomas von Aquin,” in Josef Pieper, *Werke in acht Bänden*, pp.112-152.

B. Contemporary Philosophy and Fundamental Theology

1. From Unity to Plurality

The outstanding difference between the Western European Middle Ages and modern times is marked by the change from unity to plurality. In the Middle Ages, Western Europe was unified in one God, one Church and one Empire. The symbol of unity in the Church was the Roman Pontiff, in worldly affairs the Emperor. Similarly, there were two leading pillars of scholarship: philosophy and theology, both universal in their claim and outlook. Philosophy emphasized human dignity and rational capability, theology God's constant intervention ultimately revealed in the incarnation of the Son of God Jesus Christ. Everything was scholarly explained in one language, Latin, which centuries before had replaced Greek in the intellectual world.

All that changed gradually since the time of Reformation. The Roman Church broke apart in Germany, Switzerland, and England, and Protestantism spread throughout the Western world. The loss of religious unity changed the political map, too. The Emperor lost his hegemony over Central Europe. In Germany alone a large number of small states came into existence. Gradually a secular society arose. For a long time human reason as such was the new unifier.

The Canadian philosopher Charles Taylor described in his book *A Secular Age* the radical change which took place in European society towards the end of the Middle Ages and the beginning of modern times³⁵:

³⁵ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2007); the following quotation is re-translated from the German edition: *Ein säkulares Zeitalter* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2009), p. 15.

The change which I would like to point out and to reflect upon is the change of a society in which it was practically impossible not to believe in God, to a society in which even for very religious people this belief is only one human possibility among others. ... The belief in God is no unalterable presupposition any more. Here we are facing alternatives.

However, where the belief in God is just one possibility among others, unity breaks down, and the phenomena of pluralism appear. The process which began with the Reformation accompanied by the discoveries of other continents and a number of inventions reached its peak in our time, more precisely: in the 1960s after World War II. As mentioned earlier in my lecture, colonialism ended and many new nations were established in Africa and other parts of the world. The United Nations was founded. The World Council of Churches, on the one hand, reflected the loss of unity inside Christianity, and on the other hand the plurality of Christian churches and communities. At the same time it proved necessary to find a new form of togetherness in view of a multi-religious and a growingly irreligious and anti-religious world. Western civilization and culture, politics, economics and religion had to acknowledge that it could no longer maintain its ruling position, but had to give room to other competing powers in the world of economics and politics, culture and *weltanschauung* resp. religion.

New key-words appeared like the words beginning with "inter-": international, intercultural, inter-faith or interreligious etc. We experience new forms of "inter-esse", in the original meaning of the Latin word: We live between and come to know ourselves more

and more as beings in-between. For this reason I gave my last year's Dharma Endowment lectures the title "*In-Between*"³⁶. Actually I am convinced that Asians are better equipped to understand existence in community than than Western people who have developed a stronger affinity for individuality and its consequences.

Plurality calls for new ways of understanding, comparative studies, dialogue and all kinds of discourses. That means in turning to philosophy we have to investigate new forms of philosophical enterprises. After that, — considering our special interest in theological research and study — we shall ask what follows from the new situation for Christian fundamental theology. We have to study what follows for Christian doctrine, when it is taught in different situations, cultural surroundings and a diversity of languages.

We have to be aware of the language problem much more than in former times, when Catholic theology in most places in the world was taught in Latin, the Eucharist was celebrated in Latin and most members of the Roman Church did not realize that there existed other rites in languages other than Latin. I would just like to recall the fact that in the time of Francis Xavier the missionaries hardly recognized that flourishing Christian communities existed in India, but of Syrian origin³⁷. It is also little known that in 1615 through the intervention of Cardinal Roberto Bellarmino (1542-1621) the Jesuit procurator

36 See Hans Waldenfels, *In-Between. Essays in Intercultural and Interreligious Dialogue* (Bangalore: Dharmaram Publications, 2011).

37 See Hans Waldenfels, "Dreimal katholische Kirche in Indien," *Stimmen der Zeit* 137 (2012), pp. 447-458.

Nicolas Trigault (1577-1628) received permission from the Holy Office that the liturgy could have been celebrated in Chinese instead of using Latin. Chinese seminarians could have been admitted to the priesthood without learning Latin, and Holy Scripture could have been translated into Chinese. Unfortunately all these permissions were not promulgated and transferred into action, because the Jesuit superiors in China refused to act accordingly³⁸.

2. Contemporary Philosophy

We focus upon contemporary philosophy. That means we do not return to the end of the Middle Ages and then describe the various steps of philosophical research leading up to our present time. However, we must mention that modern Western philosophies did not develop so much against the background of medieval thought, but against German idealism, Kant, Schelling and Hegel, and later British empiricism and analytical philosophy and French existentialism and phenomenology. Between the time of scholasticism and contemporary thought a process of disintegration and dissolution took place regarding metaphysics.

This has to be emphasized because to a large extent Catholic theology remained tied to the premises of medieval scholasticism. In his encyclical letter *Aeterni Patris* from August 4, 1879, Pope Leo XIII underlined the importance of Thomas Aquinas for Catholic philosophy and theology and urged those responsible to reestablish and propagate his wisdom. At least outside of Germany and partly of France, where

38 See C. von Collani, *Die Geschichte des Christentums: Religion – Politik – Kultur*, vol. 8, edited by J.-M. Meyer et al. (Freiburg: Herder, 1992).

since the 1930s the *Nouvelle Théologie* came into existence, Neo-Scholasticism dominated the Catholic world.

Before calling attention to the main streams of contemporary philosophy, the crisis of metaphysics has to be considered³⁹. “Metaphysics” as such dates back to the origin of Greek philosophy and points to the so called “first philosophy”, in other words, to the roots and principles of philosophy. It is engaged with what is beyond sensuous perception and is “transcendent” resp. transcendental, and with the foundations of human thinking and reflection. As the term indicates, philosophy is “love of wisdom” and yearns for “wisdom” beyond all knowledge.

In Greek philosophy the most profound expression of transcendence is the all-encompassing concept of being = on. Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) distinguished very clearly between *Sein* (in German an infinitive used as a noun) and *Seiendes* (in German a participle used as noun) and its relation to time⁴⁰. Unfortunately the distinction of *Sein* and *Seiendes* can be rendered into English only with great difficulty. The linguistic transfer becomes even more problematic, whenever a more generic Western term is to be translated into an Asian

language, Chinese or Japanese, or an Indian idiom. Considering the various functions of the verb “to be” is exercising in Western languages, but often the equivalent in Asian languages is completely missing. We do not enter more deeply into the problem, but I would like to indicate that here we are confronted with the most intricate problem of human comprehension, because grammar and language structure have their consequences in the expression of world view and human behavior.

Certainly everyone admits that all human beings as human beings will deal one way or another with the ultimate and — maybe — insoluble questions of human existence. But for a long time Westerners were not aware that we are lacking the instruments which we need to make ourselves understood by peoples from different cultural backgrounds. The problem of “barbarism” is old, but in periods of hegemonic thinking and physical and military power it was the problem of the people defeated and subjugated to learn the language of the conquerors and to accommodate to their way of life. Only when colonialism came to an end and equal rights were guaranteed to all nations, the attitude toward different cultures, including *weltanschauung* and religion, began to change and Westerners started to learn the languages of the conquered countries.

Without discussing the Western view of the “loss of metaphysics” in detail, we, nevertheless, realize that we are confronted with a number of questions. Among others there are the question of languages and their grammar, the question of hermeneutics, interpretation and mutual understanding, the question of possible dialogue and communication. Before dealing with some of these, we should mention the question of history and historicity.

39 For a detailed history of Metaphysics see L. Oeing-Hanhoff, Th. Kobusch and T. Borsche, “Metaphysik,” in *Historisches Wörterbuch der Philosophie*, vol. 5, edited by Joachim Ritter, Karlfried Gründer and Gottfried Gabriel (Basel /Stuttgart: Schwabe & Co., 1980), pp. 1186-1279; for the present problems: *ibid.*, pp. 1272-78.

40 See Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: M. Niemeyer, 1972); on the question of metaphysics in his inaugural lecture (1929): Martin Heidegger, “Was ist Metaphysik?” in *Wegmarken* (Frankfurt: V. Klostermann, 1967), pp. 1-19.

In his best known book Martin Heidegger connected being and time. For a while “time”, regarding “being” in world, was discussed in a rather general and comprehensive way, but soon the point was reached that it was not time and history as such, but the plurality of historical facts and perspectives that became the far greater problem. Finally the challenge and the difficulty of the task surpassed the capability of any single researcher or scholar, because no single person is able to obtain a total survey of everything that has occurred or is occurring in the world, and to contemplate it from all thinkable perspectives. In each moment of time we live through the quantity of knowable facts is increasing so rapidly that no individual can manage to know everything and to keep it all in mind. That calls for modesty and humility. The internationally known theologian Karl Rahner (1904-1984) reminded us that in most fields of knowledge we remain simply amateurs, and he exemplified this by pointing out that being a systematic theologian, he felt himself an amateur in the fields of exegesis or history.

The loss of metaphysics has various roots, and Westerners will admit that it started from within and from without. Inside, the Western world lost its center of unity. The unifying faith in God might have been the most decisive factor. However, it finds its expression in various other points which we touched upon, too. The basic unity found its scholarly expression in two ways: in philosophy where human reason tried to advance to the first cause and the ultimate goal of everything, and in theology where by faith and trust in God’s grace, man was invited to participate in the mystery of God’s inner life revealed and communicated in its fullness by the incarnation of Jesus Christ. Both ways are very much endangered in modern times, from within and from without.

After all, when the Western mind turned to the regions outside of Europe, it had its inevitable repercussions. Europeans were soon confronted with plenty of different cultures and human developments, with other forms of social, political and religious life, with other world views, with the use of natural resources and progress in technology and the sciences. At first they were convinced that they would be able to bring the rest of the world under their political and religious governance. However, the course of time taught another lesson. It was especially because the Far East, China and Japan which resisted it so effectively, that finally European colonial policy did not really succeed⁴¹.

One result of the interest in factual knowledge was that the basic questions of human life were ranked as being less important. In the meantime we have even reached the point where cyberspace indicates the loss of metaphysics⁴²; in a way “cyberspace” stands for the replacement of metaphysical reality by the human creation of a virtual space. And yet, similar to the ambiguous state of religion where we have to deal today simultaneously with its disappearance and its revival. Metaphysics, on the one hand, also seems to have reached its end, but on the other hand, as a matter of fact, the fundamental questions of man cannot be silenced.

3. Positivism

For a while Auguste Comte (1798-1857) seemed to dominate

41 China’s weakness in the time after the Opium wars and the boxer rebellion does not disapprove my thesis.

42 See C. von Barloeewen, *Der Mensch im Cyberspace: Vom Verlust der Metaphysik und dem Aufbruch in den virtuellen Raum* (München: Diederichs, 1998).

Western thought by his law of three stages⁴³. He divided the progress of history into three stages: (1) the theological or mythical stage, where everything unexplained or unexplainable is reduced to myths or “theology” (here understood in the sense of mythical speech) and the actions of divine personalities, (2) the philosophical or metaphysical stage, where the divinities are replaced by abstract impersonal concepts and powers and the idea of a personal God is rejected, (3) the “positive” or scientific stage, where things are explained by observation, experiment and comparison which leads to the assembly of collections and classifications of data and facts and the question of causality loses its bearing.

“Positive” is not to be misunderstood. It is not the contrary of “negative” but reminds us of the original Latin verb *ponere* and its participle *positum* = posited, set in a place, put into a certain position. It refers to facts and events, natural and historical processes. In fact, positivism resp. a positivist habit implies the victory over speculative ideas and restricts itself in the strict sense to the observations at hand, to the experiences we make and we produce.

It is true many educated people find the law of three stages an oversimplification. And yet, in practice the law is very effective. For example, in his recent book *The Grand Design*, Stephen Hawking, an internationally renowned professor of mathematics and researcher in the field of theoretical cosmology, and one of the “new atheists”, takes it for granted that philosophy is dead and, therefore, natural science has

43 I follow the German edition of A. Comte, *Die Soziologie. Die positive Philosophie im Auszug* (Stuttgart: Kröner, 1974).

to explain the origin of the world and other basic questions of life, too⁴⁴.

Contemplating the field of facts we have to look in two directions: facts in nature and facts in history, facts which occur without human intervention and facts which are produced by men and for which humans take responsibility. At the same time, it is worthwhile to look for the consequences in the scientific world. By talking about a “scientific world”, however, we should take care that “world” is not taken in a general and unhistorical sense, but with its geographical and historical features, too. Only in this way do we do justice to a situation which is determined by pluralism.

4. Nature and History

As mentioned, two prominent factors call for precise observation, examination and investigation: the events and occurrences in nature and history. They are well reflected by the various reorganizations and new foundations in the scientific world. One main emphasis is given to the research in the field of natural sciences and technology. Nature has its own characteristics, independently from human intervention. However, in technology there is an overlapping of human action and the use of natural laws and forces. The other emphasis is put on the big field which more recently has been summarized under the heading of “cultural sciences”. This is the field which we may also call the field of “applied anthropology”, which is formed and determined by the ideas, the will and interference of human beings.

44 See the introduction of Chapter 1 in Stephen Hawking and Leonard Mlodinow, *The Grand Design* (New York: Bantam Books, 2010).

In some universities the field still survives under a variety of terms like philosophy or in a juxtaposition of different departments or faculties like sociology, psychology, linguistics, history, geography or economics. In many places theology has left the scientific campus and retired to a rather isolated niche, although in Germany for example, theology is strongly encouraged to stay in public universities as a partner of an interdisciplinary discourse; its presence should be only enlarged by the establishment of Jewish and Islamic faculties, later on maybe of Buddhist and other faculties, too.

In these new settings the main task of philosophy consists of negotiating with the history of philosophy and thus to preserve the memory of traditions and the sources of culture. At the same time it has to elaborate the general lines of adequate theories of science(s) (*Wissenschaftstheorien*). Actually natural sciences and cultural sciences differ much in their methodologies, so that each science needs its own methodology. In both cases, natural and cultural sciences, the analytical approach became highly important, and the constructive part as well. Often the investigation of possible fallacies and fallibilities is the decisive road left in order to reach certainty and to safeguard security.

In the meantime many sciences like medicine, jurisprudence, practical sociology and psychology, but also physics and other natural sciences show a new interest in ethical orientation. Therefore, ethical studies as well as undenominational religious studies find room for new positioning in university programs. As a matter of fact, utility for human life, thus the connection of scientific discoveries and inventions with practical human life, exercises a growing influence in scholarly interests and engagements so that theories and theoretical ideas are

studied insofar as they serve human practice and practical life.

5. Understanding

The observation and collection of facts calls for one more step. Since it makes no sense, to consider single facts and events independently from each other in an isolated way, we need instructions and guidance on how to obtain true and meaningful perceptions and how to judge them in a proper way. After all, facts and events have their surroundings, texts their contexts. In our daily life which generally is the starting point of our perception, we are contained in various networks, and in a way we are even identified by our position inside the networks of family, profession, race, nation, locality, religion etc. There are networks which determine our subjective position and others which exist objectively without our personal intervention.

The complexity of life led in the course of time to the formation of various branches of sciences which deal with the problem of perception and understanding. *Aestheticism*, the doctrine of true perceiving as well as of art and beauty; *phenomenology*, a science dealing with phenomena as they appear to our senses and call for criticism and correct arrangements— the question “What is true, what not, what is correct, what not?” is still alive; *epistemology*, the study of knowledge, its different kinds, its origin, its limits; *hermeneutics*, the science of interpretation; logic, the science of correct reasoning and the rules of valid thought. These are some of the basic sciences in the field of knowledge; other names of philosophical schools with their special emphasis could be added.

This enumeration demonstrates that knowledge itself contains a diversity of perspectives which ought to be taken into consideration. There is the question of function and utility, of limits and openness, of truth and goodness, but also of beauty and creativity, on top of the question of understanding and comprehension, of insight and wisdom. However, today we meet with an increasing number of people who do not dare to think any longer up to the final goal of finding wisdom. They feel satisfied with the mastery of technical skills and at home in their virtual world.

Here I would like to recall some statements which were published in the basic document decreed by the Common Synod of German Dioceses in 1975, called *Conclusion: Our Hope*, I.6⁴⁵:

We feel more distinctly the questionability and the clandestine lack of promise in a merely technocratic planned and steered future of humankind. Does it really create a 'new man'? Or only the totally adapted man? The man with prefabricated life patterns, with levelled dreams, immured into a PC-society without any surprise, successfully installed into the anonymous compulsions and mechanisms of a world construed by insensible rationality → finally, re-cultivated into an animal capable of any kind of adaptation? And does in the fate of the individual man not become evident ever more distinctly that this 'new world' produces inner emptiness, anxiety and escape? Must not sexism, alcoholism and the

45 Quoted from *Gemeinsame Synode der Bischöfe in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Freiburg: Herder, 1976), p. 96; Hans Waldenfels, *An der Grenze des Denkbaren. Meditation - Ost und West* (München: Kösel, 1988), pp. 15-37.

consumption of drugs be taken as signals? Do they not indicate a desire of affection, even a thirst for love, which cannot be stopped by the promises of technology and economy?

The text proves that more than 30 years ago, about 10 years after the closure of Vatican II, the German Catholic Church was well aware of the critical situation the modern world is facing. Although China and Europe look back at different cultural traditions, the present situation shows more points in common than we realized 50 years ago. Therefore, before turning to theology, we would do well to take a look at the most recent developments.

6. Facing New Horizons

To the various philosophical perspectives which we have touched upon, one more has to be added, for in recent decades we have seen publications which advertise comparative and intercultural studies. As a matter of fact, problems discussed inside the Western scientific world turn out to be even more challenging as soon as we enter the field of intercultural discourse⁴⁶. A new branch of philosophical reflection even emerged: intercultural philosophy.

46 I mention only a few publications: H. Nakamura, *Ways of Thinking of Eastern Peoples: India – China – Tibet – Japan* (Honolulu: East – West Center Press, 1964); G. Paul, *Asien und Europa – Philosophie im Vergleich* (Frankfurt: Diesterweg, 1984); W. Halbfass, *India and Europe: An Essay in Understanding* (Albany, N.Y.: State University of New York, 1988); R. A. Mall, *Philosophie im Vergleich der Kulturen. Interkulturelle Philosophie – eine Orientierung* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1995); H. Kimmeler, *Interkulturelle Philosophie zur Einführung* (Hamburg: Junius, 2002); E. Holenstein, *China ist nicht ganz anders. Vier Essays in global vergleichender Kulturgeschichte* (Zürich: Ammann, 2009).

The Austrian philosopher Franz Wimmer formulated the basic rule of the new approach in two ways⁴⁷. *Negatively*: “Do not consider a philosophical thesis well established, if members of only one cultural tradition participated in its accomplishment.” *Positively*: “Wherever possible, search for transcultural overlapping of philosophical concepts, for it is likely that well founded theses have been developed in more than just one tradition.”

Hamid Reza Yousefi demonstrates in a diagram how various disciplines like philosophy, science of religions, theology, pedagogics, linguistics, sociology, political science and psychology with their own methods and results cooperate in the constitution of the new science of interculturality, the final goal of which is to create a global philosophy⁴⁸. The new discipline needs cooperation in many ways. We have to overcome a way of thinking which makes one’s own standpoint the decisive norm of judgment. We have to learn by observing the same thing or setting from different perspectives and discover the truth by taking into account and estimating different view-points. We have to get used to dealing with differences. All that certainly leads to a more careful judgment. But it is not true that a more cautious approach to reality must necessarily end up in total relativism.

Anyway, new ways of learning are required. The learning of languages becomes one of the most important tools which enable us to

47 F. M. Wimmer, *Interkulturelle Philosophie. Eine Einführung* (Wien: WUV, 2004), p. 51.

48 See H. R. Yousefi, *Interkulturalität und Geschichte. Perspektiven für eine globale Philosophie* (Lau: Reinbek 2010).

communicate with other people and their strange worlds and to come to an understanding of their ideas and opinions, their behavior and reactions. We talk much about dialogue, but only a few people reflect on the presuppositions of a successful dialogue which aims at common understanding and useful results for all participants. At the same time, we have to insist on a new attitude: on patience, modesty and humility, on the spirit of selflessness, empathy and sympathy.

7. A New Fundamental Theology

A brief survey on the state and progress of contemporary philosophy draws a rather multicolored picture. We have been confronted with a variety of different views and interests, problems and solutions. All this also forces theology to pay much attention to the concrete situations in current human life.

Considering the division of work among the various theological disciplines, the discipline closest to ordinary life is fundamental theology. It prepares the ground for listening to and receiving the divine word; it asks for human expectations, sorrows and pains, but also hopes and desires. It helps in removing the hindrances which prevent people from accepting God’s call. The destruction of universal unity in philosophy, as it was proclaimed in medieval philosophy and theology, affects theology, too. Both philosophy and theology offered themselves as roads to universal knowledge—philosophy by the power of human reason, theology by the gratuitous gift of divine self-communication in God’s incarnation, by the power of the Holy Spirit through Mary the virgin mother. Both roads were bound together in human understanding.

In accordance with its apologetic intentions, fundamental theology as developed in modern times, is divided into three main treatises: (1) the question of God as it is found and handled in human history and philosophical reflection, (2) the question of Jesus Christ, his historicity and the sources of our knowledge about him, (3) the question of the Church, its connection with Jesus Christ, its authority, and also its appearance in history, its loss of unity and its authenticity.

The three treatises have their external and their internal points of view, as they try to bridge the view of unbelievers and believers. In a way the reflections can be taken as an entrance-key to theology, and thus belong to the start of theological study. However, they can also serve as a summarizing review rethinking the road selected and the methods and theories of theological understanding and research used, and thus they have to be treated at the end of theological studies. Often fundamental theology is complemented by a fourth treatise dealing with a theological scientific theory. In a way, the approach of fundamental theology is not limited any longer to a theological discipline, but it permeates the whole process of theological studies and thus turns into a perspective accompanying theology itself.

The broader the field of dissent becomes inside of Christianity on the one side, and between Christianity and the non-Christian world on the other side, the more complicated the argumentation will become, too. Consequently, the post-medieval developments in Western society had their inescapable effect on the reflections in fundamental theology. As we can easily grasp, the manifold pluralism in society exercises its influence on Christian apologetics and fundamental theology.

8. Contextuality

The new attitude which to a high degree dominated Western fundamental theology after Vatican II, can be called "contextuality"⁴⁹. The term signifies the close connection between a text and its preconditions and surroundings. To explain it in the literal sense of the word dealing with a written text, we come to a full understanding only by inquiring more deeply about (1) the time and place when and where the text was composed, (2) its author, his origin and background, the occasion or motive to write the text, its intention etc., (3) the situation of the reader, his purposes while reading and getting occupied with the text etc. Whatever comes to light by these kinds of deliberation refers to the apparent or hidden implications of a text, the so called "con-text".

Reviewing the recent history of theology we recognize that the discovery of the relation of text and context was, first of all, the result of modern biblical exegesis. For when especially in liberal Protestant theology the biblical texts were not taken any longer as verbally inspired books, text and literary criticism in its several forms arose. This criticism was to a large extent the result of the rise of historical thinking. For quite some time the ecclesial magisterium was rather hesitant in admitting the new methods of criticism. We only recall the various condemnations uttered by the Roman offices during the time of so called Modernism, when many opinions and discoveries were rejected and theologians were relieved of their offices.

⁴⁹ See the introduction of Hans Waldenfels, *Kontextuelle Fundamentaltheologie* (Paderborn: Schöningh, 2005), pp. 16-30.

In the meantime the different exegetical methods found the approbation of the Roman authorities, and today's differences regarding the understanding and interpretation of certain text passages do not so much follow the lines of denominational belonging but of argumentative consent and dissensions. Moreover, contextuality is no longer a problem of biblical exegesis alone; contextual approaches and reflections have reached other fields of historical research and documents, too, even the history and development of dogmatic assertions. The concept itself has been broadened in its understanding and is applied to the description of life situations, historical events, cultural environments, etc. as well.

In fact, we meet with all kinds of limited forms of context-bound theologies. We know about the Theology of Liberation, the theology of labor, female or gender theology, also African or other geographically oriented theologies etc. "Liberation Theology", originally an Latin-American option, inspired many people of other regions and segments of life situations to realize their own serfdom and constraints and to become inspired to fight for their liberation. Thus the theology of liberation found its way to Africa and Asia, to the Philippines, Korea and India, later on also to Europe and the United States. With different accents it became effective around the world. In India, Liberation Theology and Theology of Religions became the two wings of local theology. I am sure that China, too, will find its own way of contextual theology⁵⁰. Zhanhe Geng gave his dissertation the title of a contextual

50 See e.g. the various deliberations of Yang Huilin, "Contemporary Chinese Thought," in *Christianity in China*, Fall 2004; id., *The work of Yang Huilin* (Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 2004).

soteriology for present China⁵¹. That means in view of Jesus Christ, the Christian message of salvation ought to become the reply to the Chinese calls for happiness, peace, welfare and justice and to the cry for a life beyond all earthly life.

9. From Localities to Globality and a New Cosmic View

In the last paragraph I would like to call attention, *first*, to some main fields of contemporary fundamental theology which demonstrate that modern life has become so immense and unsurveyable that it is impossible for any scholar to handle all fields properly and in the same way. Therefore, we find inside of today's fundamental theology subtitles like "theology and the natural sciences (biology, physics, astrophysics etc.)", "theology of religion", "theology and the secular world", "theology and unbelief or atheism" etc.

Connected with the "natural sciences" we mention biology, physics, astrophysics, etc. Similarly, "theology of religion" should be broken down into "theology of religions", concretely speaking, to "Christianity and Judaism", "Christianity and Islam", "Christianity and Hinduism", "Christianity and Buddhism", "Christianity and Confucianism and Daoism", etc. For in a dialogical approach it is improper to force all religions into one form of Western and Christian origin⁵². Needless

51 See Zhanhe Geng, *Eine kontextuelle Erlösungslehre für das heutige China* (Bonn, 2011) [doctoral thesis to be published soon].

52 For my approach in English see Hans Waldenfels, *Jesus Christ and the Religions. An Essay in Theology of Religions* (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 2009); on Buddhism: Hans Waldenfels, *Absolute Nothingness. Foundations for a Buddhist – Christian Dialogue* (New York: Paulist Press, 1980); enlarged German edition: (Paderborn: Bonifatius, 2012); *Buddhist Challenge to Christianity* (Rome / Dharmaram / Bangalore: Chavara Institute for Indian and Interreligious Studies, 2004).

to say, for discussing the relation between Christianity and other “religions” the concept of religion itself needs further clarification. Siegfried Wiedenhofer proposed an integral framework of a theory of religion⁵³. That means we need new ways of interdisciplinary cooperation.

Connected with it, this *second* point to be mentioned is the tension between localities resp. particularities and globality. A much heard slogan claims, “Act locally, and think globally”. For although local values grow again in human estimation, modern technology in the fields of communication and mobility force people around the globe into many forms of uniformity, regardless of local, national or other belonging. In fact, it seems that the former relation of spirit and matter is placed upside down. Whereas in many old schools of philosophy spirit was the principle of unity, in modern times techniques tend to occupy the place of unifiers. In this sense “globality” becomes the new name for unity.

Finally, a *third* observation should be added. Nature is about to regain its original power against all human attempts of ruling over resp. even ruling against the laws of nature. Man loses the central position in favor of nature. As mentioned, in the Western modern age theocentrism was replaced by anthropocentrism, but another turn is about to dawn: the “re-turn” of cosmocentrism. The period of space travel and space exploration just began, and we hardly can imagine how in the long run

53 See e.g. S. Wiedenhofer, “Was ist Religion?” in *Begegnen statt importieren. Zum Verhältnis von Religion und Kultur, Festschrift für F. X. D'Sa*, edited by B.J. Hiberath and C. Mendonca (Ostfildern: Grünewald, 2011), pp. 19-33.

our position in the universe is going to change. Maybe Asians have a better feeling about the future to come if they presume that the time of anthropocentrism is about to end⁵⁴.

Under the heading *Rainbow of Revelation* the Indian Jesuit Francis D'Sa criticizes the narrowness of Western understanding of history and tries to correct it by introducing the distinction between an anthropic and a karmic view of history⁵⁵. In the Western Judeo-Christian rooted anthropic view man and his deeds are emphasized. With his freedom and responsibility, he stays in the center of everything. In the Hindu karmic view, however, man is only part of a comprehensive solidarity between all beings existing in the universe, and stones, trees, rivers, stars and whatever happens with and through them will be respected in the same way. What from a Western point of view occurs outside of history in an unhistorical manner is in D'Sa's Indian view of reality part of a comprehensive cosmovision.

I do not intend to enter here into a discussion of D'Sa's conception. It suffices that we call attention to it and to introduce it here. For from a Chinese point of view also, Christian theology has to discover and to elaborate an appropriate framework for mutual understanding and

54 See R. A. Mall, *Mensch und Geschichte. Wider die Anthropozentrik* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 2000).

55 F. X. D'Sa, *Regenbogen der Offenbarung. Das Universum des Glaubens und das Pluriversum der Bekenntnisse* (Frankfurt / London: IKO, 2006); id., “Können Kulturen evangelisiert werden? Ein Diskussionsbeitrag aus seiner indischtheologischen Perspektive,” in *Evangelium und Kultur. Begegnungen und Brüche. Festschrift für Michael Sievernich*, edited by M.. Delgado and H. Waldenfels (Fribourg: Academic Press / Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2010), pp. 34-40; See my reply in Hans Waldenfels, *Evangelisierung in den Kulturen. Rückfragen an Francis X. D'Sa*, edited by B. J. Hiberath and C. Mendonca, pp. 59-70.

correction. To foster a more profound understanding and to correct my prejudices, from my Western point of view, I only can ask questions.

Since the basic solution which Christianity is able to offer to the problems around the world, is founded in the faith in a human person, Jesus Christ, we cannot escape the question of human being and his position in the created world, — a question, however, which is strongly tied to the question of God. Many thoughtful Western Christians see the greatest *Western* problem in the loss of faith in God and in the fact that a growing number of men live a life “as if there is no God” (Hugo Grotius, 1583-1645). This, however, is less a problem of theory, but of life practice. The God-question might not be so urgent in a subcontinent like India, maybe also not among the Chinese, but the question of man is of equal importance.

The human being is a being-between. He can look beyond himself, above and below, being transcendent and immanent to the surrounding world. Undoubtedly he is part of the world of living beings, in this sense part of the animal world. He can certainly be self-complacent with a life in narrow and limited surroundings. But most people know about their gifts and abilities, their talents to proceed and surpass their limitations and to go beyond in the power of reason and intellect. According to Western world view and understanding the individual human person is given an inalienable dignity, and he is entrusted with a high sense of responsibility for the non-human world and for others.

It cannot be denied that in the course of history Westerners to a high degree have exaggerated their self-esteem and neglected the

indissoluble connection of fundamental relationality and individuality, so that they ended up in crass egotism. Yet, that is no reason to run to the other extreme and to disregard and ignore the dignity of the little ones and the poor. Looking at our guide Jesus Christ as he emptied and sacrificed himself for us (see Phil. 2), we find him on the side of the needy ones and all creation. And that is human vocation: to do justice to all, to meet them with love and sympathy, to foster harmony in the world and thus to fulfill the eternal law.