THEOLOGY AND SOTERIOLOGY: ON THE RELATION OF THEOLOGY AND ETHICS

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Introduction

Since the early sixties it has become fashionable in theology to juxtapose theology and soteriology, God's existence and his gracious benefits, metaphysics and ethics, science and pietistic individualism and theory and praxis. Critique of "personalism", "privatization", "ethization" and "dehistorization" are since that time common also in philosophy and sociology. Specifically, the Helsinki accords of the Lutheran World Federation of 1963 argued that contrary to the Reformation's concern with God's grace, contemporary man is primarily concerned with his existence. No longer does man suffer under God's wrath and his own sin and anguishes over how to obtain a gracious God, as did Luther. Modern man is concerned, rather, with the question whether God exists at all. Modern man is not concerned about how his life can be justified, but rather about the absence of God and over the meaninglessness of his life. Whereas for Luther, God's existence was the unquestioned presupposition of the quest for his grace, for contemporary man that very existence has become the principal question.

Gerhard Gloege diagnosed at the Helsinki meeting our contemporary situation in the following way: "It is generally known that in former times, for the fathers of the Reformation, the doctrine of justification was at the heart of the newly discovered Gospel. But it is also an open secret that today neither the church nor the world knows what to do with this doctrine of justification. For the fathers it was the foundation and the rule of faith and life. For the Church today it is clearly an embarassment. Modern man looks upon this doctrine as little more than a form that has come down to him from the past and has lost its meaning. It does not appeal to him. He does not ask about its importance. He neither warms up to it, nor does he contradict it" (Gloege: 1963; see Helsinki: 466f, Ebeling, 1979, III: 205f). The official Helsinki formulations do not, however, talk only in alternatives such as these. Rather, they imply also that the more radical quest for the existence of God and for meaning in human life contains the soteriological quest for justification. The point we wish, consequently, to make, is that the soteriological issue is negated by its elevation into the more radical question asking for God's existence. Man does not suffer under the

burden of sin, but he rather suffers under the burden of meaninglessness. And the problem of meaninglessness is identified with the more radical quest for God's very existence. This yearning for certainty concerning God's very existence is specifically acknowledged to have soteriological implications. We intend to argue therefore: The problem of soteriology, so prominent for the Reformation under cover of the unquestionable presupposition of God's existence, is sublated, that is, negated by being elevated into and made one with the quest for the very existence of God. Therefore we will argue: The issue of salvation from sin is and continues to be our primary consideration. But that question appears in new form as the question asking more radically for ultimate meaning.

I. The Problem

The reasons for this new situation are complex. Pannenberg argues that since the dawn of modern science as well as the assertion of human autonomy man has extended his control over almost all realms of reality, placing into question God's sovreignty. Since the very nature of human freedom is directly linked up with the reality of God (Pannenberg, 1976: 5 – 13) that question, asking for the reality of God, becomes the central intellectual issue for our modern time. "Therefore for modern man the central religious question is no longer the justification of man, but rather the reality of God itself, which was still presupposed by the reformers." (Pannenberg, 1969:18). Pannenberg observes an important shift in man's perception of himself, God and the world. Modern man no longer asks how he can find a justified existence. That question, ultimately an existential and ethical issue, a question which seeks grace and peace for man before God whose existence had been accepted *a priori*, has today been abandoned in favor of the much more radical quest for the very existence of God. The search for meaning is paramount in modern man's life, and Pannenberg's program serves to provide a theological reply to that search. Modern man is sorely pressed by the erosion of political, social and moral legitimations, which traditionally together with divine existence had been taken for granted. But more than that the ontological issue of the whole of natural reality, as exemplified by the natural sciences, ultimately confronts modern man with the question of existence and its meaning per se. For this reason the issue of God's existence is no longer what it had been at the time of the Reformation: At that time it was the *a priori* accepted axiom on the basis of which all perception of reality could proceed. By contrast, God's existence has become today the goal and ultimate purpose of all scientific endeavours. We can today no longer accept that *a priori* given presupposition of a theistic belief. The Christian religion can become understandable for us today only if it is liberated out of the "ethicistic" restriction (Pannenberg, 1971:58; 1977:41 – 54) of the experience of the sinner before a presupposed God. God's existence itself rather has to be proven first of all.

In other words, the quest for the existence of God takes the place of the former search for justification. As the reformers sought for justification, so we today seek God's existence.

But it is important to observe that the quest for God's existence is formulated in terms of the reformers' quest for justification. The issue of justification is therefore not at all transcended. It serves rather as an explanation for the search for God's existence. This situation suggests that the contemporary search for God's existence cannot be conducted apart from its soteriological purpose and implication. In fact, we are confronted with the possibility that not only Pannenberg's search for God as the "hypothesis" guiding the search for the "totality of meaning" both in the sciences and also in theology (Pannenberg, 1973:223ff but passim) is essentially soteriological in nature. This "theological" justification of the social production of "God", as we might call this program together with Hegel (1830:74ff) is programmatically rather close to the equally soteriological and hence "ethical" because "justifying" endeavor of Peter L. Berger's "bestowal of meaning" to avert "anomic terror" (1969:19 – 22). The contemporary concern with the soteriological issue of justification is so strong that one can literally speak with Franco Ferrarotti of the social production of the sacred (1977). So we are, in comparison to the Reformation, not at all faced with so vastly different a situation concerning the relation of the existence of God and justification. Modern man and also the Reformation could not separate these two issues. In distinction to our contemporary concerns, however, the Reformation understood justification to proceed from God and therefore placed into question all attempts of man to justify himself and his world.

The centrality of the theme of justification, understood also in the sense of verification, in both the science-theoretically oriented theologies such as that of Sauter (1973:9 – 49; 211 – 332; 1970; 1974; 1975; 1980), Pannenberg and Eilert Herms (1978) and also that of the Reformation is indeed tantalizing. But probably the theologically critical perspective would have to observe that whereas the theology following science-theoretical concerns achieves ethical, that is, soteriological benefits by verifying God as the totality of meaning or as a hypothesis always operative in science-theoretical concerns, the theology of the Reformation found man's existence to be verified by God's soteriological benefits.

A critically reflecting theology would further have to observe that a theology concerned so energetically with means to verify God's existence in an "intellectually respectable" (Pannenberg, 1963:98 – 102) manner, that is, in a manner which bases itself on the science-theoretical presuppositions of our contemporary time, might precisely in these aims to verify God as the totality of meaning out of the aporias of scientific discourse possibly not at all be capable of liberating theology out of its "ethicistic restriction" dominating it since Albrecht Ritschl (1977:41ff). Basing theological method on the foundations of empirical verification might in fact be most restrictive because in the end it boils down to the soteriological, that is, ethical

concern behind any meaning-bestowing enterprise. It was in fact this concern which Ebeling voiced (1969:1 – 55) over against Pannenberg's challenge (1977:47f, 51f; see Mostert, 1977:86 – 122, esp. 93,108,116ff).

For this reason the proximity of theology and ethics, the proximity of the quest for the existence of God and his benefits must be accentuated in our analysis of some contemporary trends of theological concerns. We are struck with the paradoxical claim that reason, verification, in short, scientific thought as the medium of theological discourse is to salvage theology out of its ethicistic worldlessness. This aim raises one other point which is theologically worthy of being reflected: the relation of science and ethics. If the quest for God's existence now enters the domain of rational and empirical verification, in short, the realm of science, then science itself gains essentially an ethical, soteriological significance. "For modern man, who has elevated science as an instrument of justification of existence, the question of justification has changed. It now appears as the question seeking meaning. But therewith he has turned himself into the judge of the question of justification. The meaning of existence now is ascertained by man in the context of that which is scientifically capable of being understood. But this means according to the contemporary view of science: The question of justification has as the quest for meaning the purpose of determining what active humanity can disclose and create through his research and production. *De facto* this implies production of meaning by man." (Ebeling, 1979, III:207f; see 1 69:138 – 183).

II. Theology of Questionableness

It is interesting that even those theological positions of the present time share this ethical implication in their theological structure which reject it most emphatically. God understood as the totality of meaning is an attempt to indicate the metaphysically necessary hypothesis of God as the proleptically anticipated goal of all scientific, historical and human striving and this is ultimately a soteriological concern. But God can with equal soteriological fervor by postulated by pseudo-theological positions as the guiding principle of outward, objective, natural historical developments as we find it in the thought of Teilhard de Chardin, of Edward O. Wilson and attempts by theologians such as Phil Hefner (1980) to integrate such systems into a more traditional theological disposition. In all of these cases the soteriological motivation, the openness and "excentricity" (Plessner, 41ff), the questionableness of human existence is the thoughtful origin and purpose behind the approach to "God". "God", this symbol standing for the answer of meaning or reason in human life and the world which in themselves are meaningless is then ultimately identical with that thoughtful origin, for it is conditioned and fashioned by it exclusively. However one intends, even in some of the positions mentioned, to oppose the "metaphysical" tradition which identified thought and being between Parmenides and Hegel we find in this symbol "God" the ontological proof

for his identity with human thought. We are suggesting that even that Parmenidean identification of thought with being has had ultimately and continues to have in the scientific extension of traditional metaphysics a soteriological purpose, as Nietzsche has clearly seen. Nietzsche knew that ultimately the fear of death gapes before man as an unconquerable abbyss. But he must at least attempt to conquer that fear in order to place meaning into his life. To do so he invents metaphysics and science. Therewith he hoped to "render his existence thinkable, he hoped to get a hold of it, so that it might appear as justified." (1872:85). Man suffers as all animals do. But that is not yet the particularly human suffering which distinguishes civilization from the lack of civilization. Man suffers over the lack of meaning, and this "sense for suffering" distinguishes men from animals. "The meaninglessness of suffering, *not* suffering was the curse which was stretched out over humanity – *and the ascetic ideal provided meaning*" (1887:899). But the ascetic ideal was the ideal of science by means of which man removed himself from the painful reality enveloping him, so as to conquer it. By means of science man learned to interpret and thus place meaning into his otherwise meaningless life. Nietzsche knew that it was through science that man justified his existence. And he specifically included the "historical sense" into this justifying enterprise (1882:92). In the tradition of the metaphysical-scientific tradition "God" he affirms the thoughtful elevation of the thinker into being to overcome his sickness unto death. "God" is the affirmative reply to scientific self-justification. In Marx's terms this "God" is the "sigh of relief" of an oppressed creature (Rom 8:19) the pleasant reflex of an unpleasant reality, a smile over everything dreadful, the soul of a heartless world and the spirit of spiritless circumstances (1843:378). In the poietically productive work of this tradition, "God" is always represented, that is, actively produced out of the frailty and misery of real existence. Existential deficiency finds in this production its ideological legitimation. Liberation, the breadth and wealth of reality, cannot be found on this path, because pain, depravity, deficiency and aporias are always the starting point which is in the end rationally affirmed, that is, rationalized. It is, in terminology of contemporary psychology, a masochistic impulse which attempted in "God" to find redemption from depravity and in law and order salvation from anomic terror.

Beginning with about 1900 the inner dynamic of this process, essentially soteriologically motivated, has been discovered, and the suggestion has been made, e.g. by such figures as Nietzsche, Habermas and Weischedel, that worldly existence *cannot* find an answer to its questionableness, and that "God" *is not*, or at least not knowable. God cannot be known because he is mere representation. The energetic function of *nous* could in Aristotle (Met 1072 b, 18 – 30) still be assumed to actualize essence on the basis of the ontological presupposition of *ousia*; the energetic activity of thought has the function to mimetically actualize essence by firmly locking into and identifying with its object. After Kant, however, we know that even that

presupposition to be a necessary product of the mind[1], and the post-Kantian philosophy, i.e. Hegel and Nietzsche, had realized that even Kant's critique of the proofs of God's existence and his demotion of God and of the theoretical capacity to perceive God to mere hypothetical resp. postulating status, in short, even Kant's "transcendence of *knowledge* in order to make room for *faith*" (1781:B XXX), the well-spring of morality, guaranteed neither morality nor a hypothetically postulated kingdom of freedom: Even that hypothetical postulate was nothing but the empty projection of the solipsistic, lonely human subject, a "sickness in the skin of the earth" (Nietzsche, 1883:386).

But even the agnostic suspension of "God" in the "theology of questionableness" (Weischedel, I:21 – 37), in the atheism of Nietzsche or in the social science of Habermas, that metaphysical understanding of God is still – together with its soteriological implications – the underlying motivation. For the God who is here *not* thought is, after all, the one who is discovered as the masochistic self-rationalization of a deficient humanity. Therefore the God which reason places as its "other" over against itself, that is, the God in which reason represents itself, the God which is "other", even "wholly other" to reason[2], has been discovered by contemporary

1. Kant had, in his investigations of the theoretical capacities of reason, critically redefined the content of the concept of God. He had found that this content is "mere delusion" (*Blendwerk*) which arises if one "considers that which exists merely in thought ... as a real object outside of the thinking subject" (1781:A384). Since this critical Kantian insight, basic to his "Copernican Revolution of thought", "the certain progress of science" "ceased to grope around in the dark" (B, xiv) by realizing that intuition does not orient itself by the nature of the objects which it knows, but rather vise versa: the "object ... orients itself by the nature of our capacity to know" (B xvii). Since this time it is certainly philosophical if not common knowledge that traditional metaphysics had continually pypostatized God: Metaphysics had projected subjective human thought and in self-delusive manner assumed that the project has had also objective, substantive quality.

2. We quite agree with Max Stackhouse (1976) that adjudicating principles must be found as criteria for ethical judgments. He turns in this search to Rudolf Otto's "holy" or "wholly other", which he also calls the "really real". We affirm the nihilism disclosed by Nietzsche as standing behind Aristotle's category of the "really real" as well as Nietzsche's emphasis that the soteriological motive behind it is ineffective. Both the content of traditional metaphysical hypostatizations as well as this soteriological motivation lives on in Otto's category of the "holy". Identifying with it, Stackhouse believes, makes it possible to gain ethically "adjudicating" clarity in an otherwise chaotic, anomic reality. Identifying with that "holiness" and that "real reality" bestows meaning, bans anomic terror, in short, continues the soteriological work which traditional metaphysics had always attempted to accomplish. Otto's category of the "holy" or his own category of the "really real" is specifically identified by Stackhouse as those "mediating", "apperceptive filters" argued by Luckmann and Berger. These criteria become available to us in the form of socio-psycho-cultural constructs (75,95) which provide adjudicating criteria. Stackhouse wants to understand the "holy" in its mediating power by seeing it as identical with theology's incarnational motif as represented by the doctrine of the trinity (95). As "mythos", standing over against "cosmos" it performs world-interpretive function, in short, "nomization" (Berger). It performs the soteriological function of world-nomization. The world-interpretive "mythos" is, true to Otto, a religious *a priori*

agnosticism and also atheism as the mere rationalization of reason. (With this insight reason emerged as incapable of being rationalized, unjustifiable, in short, irrational). And because the being called "God" has been found to be reason's own self-legitimation, this deity was rightly judged to be just another form expressing the *humanum* and therefore not God at all. With this process of reflection, in which figures such as Hegel, Feuerbach, Marx, Nietzsche and Freud are outstanding luminaries, it has been discovered that it is illegitimate to understand God as a representation, for in that mold he will inevitably be merely reason's own self-representation.

Our point had been to stress the soteriological *intent* of this ideological hypostatization, or ideal reduplication, of the self as "God". It is a masochistic soteriology, because the starting point of deficient existence is always the basis of this movement and characterizes it throughout. Its thoughtful self-reduplication can therefore ultimately achieve no more than rationalizing itself as permanent. God, understood as the hypostatized human depravity is tantamount to the euphemistic resignation over and stabilization of that depravity. With the help of the theistic God of thoughtful self-representation the pain, suffering and imperfection of the human condition is not at all alleviated or forgotten, but rather affirmed.

In this process the virulence of the metaphysical project of tradition gained renewed and hightened impetus in Descartes' discovery of the vulnerability and questionableness of the thinking subject. In the figure of Descartes two points coalesce: (1) The Cartesian subject must itself be

which was, however, not shared — as Stackhouse intimates (77)-by Karl Barth. We must see, it seems to me, that Otto propagated, as does Peter Berger following Durkheim, with both of whom Stackhouse identifies, primarily a philosophy of religion, and we must also recognize that such a philosophy is not identical with theology. Otto's "holy" is the religious apperception of reality as a whole in viewing reality's "eternal meaning" (Otto, 1904:22). But the totality of meaning of reality can certainly not be called the Christian God. For God created the world *ex nihilo* to be different from himself and thus meaningless apart from his communicating Word. Finding a totality of worldly meaning does therefore not get it closer to, but rather more distant from God. If meaning in the world has been discovered as its own "real reality" and its own "holiness", then precisely that ideological defense against God has been established which the OT prophets criticized (H.W. Wolff, 1969). Stackhouse does not want to say this. But in effect he does by reviving once more, now in the garb of the duality of "mythos and cosmos" (76f) the millennia-old western metaphysical-scientific attempt to identify thought and being, reason with reality, mythos and cosmos. In the metaphysical tradition the attempt had been made to discover a principle by means of which reality could be interpreted as reasonable, as logos, as thought. Such an interpretive function is assigned by Stackhouse to Otto's category of the "holy", the "real reality". It is the "map" of reality. Reality per se is bewildering and lacking grounds for "adjudicating" plural claims. But with the help of such a map, which Stackhouse identifies as the "tabernacling God" (95) displaying an "incarnational motif" and hence capable of being expressed with the "doctrine of the trinity", one has ground one's apperceptive lenses to such precision that their interpretive potential has become clear: Their nomizing potential has been disclosed. Stackhouse ultimately draws his criteria of Christian ethics from Otto's philosophy and Berger's sociology of religion, and the question must be asked: How does "nomizing holiness" differ from the justifying work of the living God?

understood as a modern destillate of human, thoughtful participation in traditional, metaphysical being and theism (Geyer, 1970:258). Geyer emphasizes the point which we are making: The "metaphysical project" was conceived in order to push back the knowledge of death. Through thoughtful participation in metaphysical being or the theistic God, the thinking subject gained legitimacy. In Descartes this subject appeared, thus legitimated, in its specifically, modern, scientific, that is, world-productive character. Therewith also (2) the second point emerges which must be noted in the Cartesian subject: Knowing its self to be world-productive, it is vulnerable on two fronts in a way in which the human thinking subject had heretofore not been: (a) The imperfection of the world which it produces was now obviously a reflection on the imperfection of the producing subject. Prior to the autonomy of the human subject, man understood himself as partner together with God as the primary agent in history. And the subject was (b) vulnerable also in view of the possibility of non-existence: World, reality and truth now stood over against the subject as a mandate still having to be produced. The producer subject stands with-out world, reality and truth. Consequently, it ails under a lack of worldliness and reality. Over against the *res extensa* of the produced reality the *res cogitans* constantly lies in danger of not being. Descartes therefore invoked the ontological proof of God's existence in order to cover these two weaknesses of the autonomous producer subject (Henrich, 10 – 22).

While since Descartes, who initiated with his ontological proof the scientific world- and meaning-production as an ideological compensate for traditional legitimations, the theistic deity of the past could still function culturally in the common conscience as a "sacred canopy" protecting commonly accepted norms from eroding. However, the advance of world- and thus certainty-fragmenting science undermined in time the basis of that cultural security. In the same degree as this process succeeded, the active, productive, i.e. energetic compensatory drive needed to be accentuated. The social or human sciences are, as Joachim Ritter has pointed out (1961) the ferocious attempt to reproduce externally something which had been lost – inner, normative, cultural meaning. Hegel knew better than anyone else how to identify this inner dynamic motivating the "tragedy" of the "unhappy European consciousness" (1807:523f): It knows "that *God is dead*" and therefore attempts to reconstruct a whole world through "external productions" of the positive sciences. Also this aspect of the modern world-productive initiative has therefore ultimately a soteriological purpose. Its purpose is to banish the fear of anomic terror in the realm of culture.

But Hegel had also identified the "tragic fate" (1807:524) of this enterprise: He knew, as we know today, that we must question the trustworthiness, i.e. normative potential of such cultural work: Having externally objectivated world-legitimating "ideologies" by placing them into the light of scientific scrutiny, can we still consider them normative and binding? Having rendered them in the process of objectification relative, can we still believe in their absolute, normative status. "Max Weber, Troeltsch,

Scheler, Mannheim were of the opinion that explanations of the sociology of knowledge leave untouched the validity of the explained opinions. But this path does not satisfy. For one, we cannot deny that it is detrimental to the absolute claim to truth of an opinion to be pinned down to definite causes, and to be thus proven to be conditioned. Secondly the consequence is unacceptable that we have then two different realms of truth, closed off over against one another: the realm of the explaining world and the realm of the explained. And finally the possibility of the explanation of such explanations opens the path of an *regressus infinitum*." (Luhmann, 1970:54).

It is of course true that the religion- and culture-critical work of Nietzsche, Feuerbach, Freud, Marx and others was the presupposition of the development of the social sciences. But this observation accentuates our point: The erosion began from within. Western culture began to wonder whether religious, and cultural legitimations were not projected by man himself rather than having absolute, godly origins, as had been presupposed before. That suspicion had to find certainty. The search for that certainty stimulated the tracing of the etiology of cultural legitimations. It was a broad movement including mainly three disciplines: sociology, psychology and history.

But the suspicion standing behind this work simultaneously caused the dogmatic production of a "world" in the sense of positivistic information. Describing how men have once and may still believe, providing information on cultural norms, the cement of clutures, is at least some compensate for original and uninvestigatable (because holy) convictions. But information on how men believe does not aid faith and the social-scientific insight *that* cultures need legitimations to survive is not normative. The "tragic fate" of the sociology of knowledge rests, however, as indicated, in the mistaken identification of the two. But that is tantamount to worshipping the represented "sculpture" and "corpse" of the "death of God" as the living God. (Hegel, 1807:523). The conclusion which we must draw, based on insights which Hegel (Theunissen, 1980) and Nietzsche had had even at the inception of these more recent cultural productions, is that man himself, an ailing and vulnerable subject has through them produced God and a meaningul world in order to protect himself from the ravages of the erosion of the cultural sacred canopy. But therewith we have discovered the questionableness of cultural and religious norms because we have discovered the questionableness[3] of the Promethian subject.

Theologically the most profound results of this development have been on the one hand the so-called "death of God" movement and on the other hand the "theology of questionableness" as we see it in Wilhelm Weischedel. However, in the theology of questionableness we still see a continuation of the ideological theologies of theism of the past: As the theistic God was

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3.   A most recent discussion of this problematic was performed by Eduard Schweizer, 1981.
     See also Jüngel, 1977, to Feuerbach 188 – 195. See also Küng, 1978, esp. 201 – 129,
     531 – 560.

heretofore projected by a frail subject to compensate for its frailty, so now God is declared to be questionableness as such. If we are going to have a theology today, after Nietzsche and Heidegger, then we can have it only in this form. The fact that a human subject projects his own God becomes here fully apparent, only this most recent theology is more honest than the previous ideological ones. (Mostert, 1977:94f). God now appears *as* depravity and poverty and questionableness, whereas before he served to ideologically compensate for it. The contemporary insight into the death of the ideological God has profoundly concluded that man has been irrevocably driven from Paradise. "We must live principally without consolation" (Habermas, 1979:165; Peukert, 1978:285). If the profound movement, starting with the Cartesian Hobbes, attempting to understand man's powers, society, religion, and politics out of his own motivations and ambitions, has seen any solution, it is in the dawning of the insight that these powers are identical with his weaknesses. For that reason conventional wisdom today understands man out of his weaknesses and not out of his strengths. But paradoxically the *suspension* of all world-legitimating categories can provide comfort: "The experience of questionableness has the unique aspect that it can grow roots neither in being nor in non-being. It remains in suspension. It does so because that which we experience in it, questionable reality, is itself experienced as suspended between being and non-being. All 'is' is experienced as threatened by non-being and is nevertheless not consumed by non-being; all 'nothing' is experienced as secretly tied up with being. The truth of being experienced with questionableness is thus ... the suspension (*Schweben*) of its reality." (Weischedel, 1972:202f. See Jüngel, 1977:45,294f). The "God of Philosophers at a Time of Nihilism" does therefore through the "suspension" of all comfort provide paradoxically after all the needed accommodation and adjustment. The suspension of all meaning paradoxically provides meaning after all, and living in the state of "floating suspension" of all cosmos, nomos and meaning does, in the end, transform the situation of secular nihilism into philosophical theology.

In either case, however, in Habermas' and also in Weischedel's suspension of meaning and comfort the thoughtful reflex serves the soteriological affirmation of the self. The suspension of means to solve social or philosophical aporias is a product of these aporias themselves. And insofar as these aporias are human, subjective in origin the "God of the philosophers", is the projected product of a questionable subject. The suspension of all attempts to answer that questionableness is the only answer left "in the epoch of nihilism".

St. Paul and the reformers had an insight which in contrast to this last form of ideological self-representation can only appear as a Copernican Revolution of thought: Man is God's rather than God being man's representation. Man is made in God's rather than God being made in man's image. Justification is not within man's reach. The history of metaphysics from Parmenides to Hegel has drawn the conclusion, voiced by Nietzsche:

Man's attempts to justify himself are ultimately ineffective. To the contrary: The more he thoughtfully attempts to reproduce himself, calling that ideological reflex "bestowal of meaning", "nomization", "science" or "God", the more the theological ethos is left behind, for that construct serves as a defense against God and against the goodness of a created order which in its fullness of phenomena could serve to unbind the self out of its self-imposed isolation (Mostert, 1977:96f,109 and passim, 1976:57 – 63 98 – 103). The tragedy of the western metaphysical tradition is that it was conceived to uncommunicatively self-reproduce man, to view God, man and the world exclusively in his own image[4]. It was appropriately called by Herbert Marcuse a "one-dimensional" perspective. This one-dimensionality and ideological isolation is particularly palpable in our modern era.

Friedrich Gogarten has characterized the "tragedy" of the modern time as the ideological attempt to transcend the secular absence of all ultimate rationalizations of the created world. The tragedy consists in the attempt to surmount the "questioning not-knowing" and in the attempt to understand all reality in terms of "the thought of wholeness", i.e. to understand all reality in terms of secularistic ideologies (1958:139,143,146,198). Therewith the historical (*geschichtliche*) reality of the worldly, secular, open horizon, a horizon always open to God, is closed off, secularity is (pseudo)-theologically transmuted into a secularism. The "gauze in the wound" (H. Thielicke) of worldly imperfection is theologically transcended. The gauze is removed, the world heals its own wounds, but therewith also history ceases to be experiencable as history (Gogarten, 146f). In this process the *saeculum's* yearning for self-verification is particularly indicative of its theological self-transcendence into a secularistic ideology. If a worldly totality has been achieved in this process, it is nonetheless a most narrow horizon which has been established, for it is no more than the thoughtful rationalization of the narrow subject. Similar to phenomena observable in individual psychology as described by Yasumare Watanabe (1980) this disposition of ideological self-transcendence is incapable of

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4. The Japanese psychiatrist Yasumare Watanabe has discovered altogether independently from the New Testament the central truth of the Gospel: (1) Man inevitably attempts to justify his existence and (2) man is just as inevitably incapable of achieving his goal. Apparently this insight touches a basic anthropological point, true of mankind throughout the ages, and we can therefore consider his work (1980) as an anthropological contribution to our basic thesis. Watanabe has found in individual-psychological perspective that the self-justifying enterprise is ultimately self-defeating because it projects itself upon others and institutions, from whom it expects an appreciation of the worth of self. Others and institutions are not seen for what they are, but only from the perspective as originators of worth of self. The subject is therefore wrapped up with itself, and this subjectivism permeates its view of its whole "world". That state is a condition of immaturity and sickness, because it rarely learns to perceive self and world as they are in reality. But Watanabe also suggests that this sickness is the universal disposition of mankind. His work has the special significance that he came to understand this psychiatric insight, only in time, in Christian-theological perspective as the centre of what the New Testament calls "sin".

experiencing the new *as* newness; it attempts to superimpose the self-image on everything else and hence cannot grow. Nor can it grow by learning from the past, for the self-legitimating impulse ideologically tarnishes equally past history so as to close off the refreshing capacity to perceive the past as it has really happened. The lack of growth out of the future and through the meaningful encounter with the past inevitably causes the withering of the subject. Ideological self-transcendence therefore accomplishes the precise opposite of what it set out to achieve: self-affirmation.

In individual-psychological terminology we have confronted here the identical dynamic standing behind the modern scientific "project" (Heidegger, Marcuse; Ahlers, 1971): The Cartesian subject had experienced itself at the threshold of modernity as vulnerable and lacking all legitimation and therefore in danger of slipping off into nothing. For this reason, confronted with the fear of death and the "not" of being, the impulse arose to produce a totality and to create a world out of nothing. God-like powers have to be weilded in order to stay death, the ever-present foe. Nietzsche's insight of his first major work (1872) therefore appears fitting in our context: The birth of the European tragedy consists in the modern, autonomous subject attempting to justify itself through the "scientific project", but this attempt was ultimately disclosed as utter futility. The virulence of world- and meaning-producing ideologies in the modern era — a virulence inhabiting similarily the modern natural law theory as founded by Hobbes (Riedel:48f, 61f,171ff) — cannot be understood apart from this worldless subject whose first and principal knowledge is that of the "Not" and of death. It is this knowledge which needs to be transcended by means of modern scientific-metaphysical productions of meaning and world. Such a production is ultimately soteriologically motivated. It is an ideological compensate for a subject which has closed itself off against God. For the experience of the "Not" is most basic to the human condition, created *ex nihilo* by God. That knowledge must therefore not be transcended and should not be ideologically repressed. The reality-totalizing impulse serves, however, exclusively this one purpose. And therefore this impulse fulfills a justifying, a soteriological, an ethical function: The "benefits" of this meaning-production are just as inseparable from the ontological status of the "whole cosmos" so produced. Modern secularistic ideologies therefore do preserve Luther's insight that we know God only through his benefits.

III. The Death of God and Justification

Certainly no one would argue that the talk about the "death of God" had its origin in modern atheism (Ebeling, II:203). Already Luther knew that the human suffering and death of Jesus alone is not enough to bring about salvation. God himself had to suffer and die to accomplish this. But even before Luther the christological reflections of the ancient church spoke about theopashitism. (See Moltmann, 1976:184 – 267). And yet the phenomenon of modern atheism, as represented e.g. by Hegel's and

Nietzsche's (1882:126f) talk about the "death of God" surely is not unrelated to the much older theological knowledge that not only Jesus the Son of God himself suffered to justify mankind. What is the relation? It appears to us that the disclosure of the unjustifiable nature of man, that is, the inability of man to justify and provide comfort for himself through his own world- and meaning-creative enterprise has direct relation to the much older theological insight that God justifies mankind in his death. If the recent atheistic knowledge about the erosion of any human potential to justify himself was characterized with the terms "death of God", and if this knowledge had social-scientific ramifications, as we had shown, then these phenomena are in fact of the highest significance for theologically responsible reflection.

The point where the two senses of the "death of God" relate to the two ways in which we talked about "justification" is the question of primary agency in the salvation- and world-productive enterprise. We had argued, with reference to Aristotle, that since the inception of the metaphysical tradition the energetic reality-enactment could be conducted only on the basis of the ontological presupposition of the priority of being. At the end of that tradition the questionableness of that presupposition had been disclosed. For it was found to depend on the agency of the producer-subject. Therefore, energetic world-realization no longer becomes a viable path to realize a frail subject, as Nietzsche had seen. For Nietzsche there were two alternatives to deal with this insight: Either to cease producing meaning and world and exert the irrational *Übermensch* or to commit suicide (1886:637). Both paths abandon the purpose of the metaphysical enterprise: to make rational thought possible. The affirmation of the purely vitalistic *Übermensch* is, judged by the criteria of traditional reflection, just as irrational as the act of suicide. Just as at the beginning of the tradition of Western thought, energetic action had been promised to be a reasonable way to realise the self, Nietzsche showed that it was not. But that insight has theological relevance.

The theological meaning of the "death of God" in the "speculative Good Friday" (Hegel, 1801:414) therefore lies in transforming man "from the rôle of the *agent* into the rôle of the *recipient*" (Jüngel, 1977:500). The path of energetic reality-enactment as a path of self-justification has been disclosed as an impasse. Western metaphysics and science was based on the ontological priority of reality over possibility (Jüngel, 1969). But "with this ontological priority of reality (*entelecheia*) productive *work* (*das Werk*) gains in Aristotle a significance which cannot be accentuated too strongly. This significance can be conceived as the end (purpose) lying either outside of the realizing act (*kinesis, poiesis*) or within the realizing act (*praxis, chresis*) (Met. 1048 b 18 – 35; Nic. Eth. 1140 a 1ff,b 4ff). Reality (*Wirklichkeit*) is or exists for the sake of the work (*Werk*) insofar as it is itself not work. And for this reason reality (actuality) (*Wirklichkeit*) obtains its name from work (*Werk*) and concerns its completion". (Jüngel, 1969:421). The soteriological dimension of world- or reality-actualizing *work*- Luther

called it "justification by works" – is basic to the western tradition of thought from the beginning, gaining hightened works-justifying significance with the commencement of the modern, scientific-technological redefinition of this tradition. Both the reasonableness of reality as well as also of the reasoning subject depended on the success of this essentially ethically motivated program. Its development from Hegel to Nietzsche disclosed, however, its inner nihilism and thus failure. That appears to be the significance of the "speculative Good Friday". Embracing that insight makes it possible then also to understand Luther's emphasis that we can know God's essence only through his beneficial works in terms of our contemporary experience of the absence of God. The contemporary experience of the meaninglessness of life enshrines the hidden knowledge that the God of metaphysics and science is not and that our self-justifying endeavours have failed. Realizing our own failure is perhaps psychologically and also culturally more painful than any other act, because it demands absolute honesty. But it appears that our culture has the capacity to face the poverty and soteriological weakness of the metaphysical-scientific "project" from Parmenides to Hegel.

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