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The "Gifted WE" - An Ambivalent Metaphor of Communion in a Digital Age and Interreligious Globe

Introduction

Thank you so much for the invitation to this Conference. During our time here, we will try to correlate actual theological questions and implications with the challenge of Social Media. In my view, communication¹ belongs to both areas: To the world of Theology as well as to the world of Social Media. Communication figures like a link. The digital culture opens the window for the plurality of religions and world views at an intensity we never have experienced before. Practicing and understanding communication in a digital world is unfortunately in the "Presence of the Other"². As you can see in my first slide, I have six main points. My first point is...

1. Short reply on Theme-Centered-Interaction by Ruth C. Cohn related to Christian Communion

Some of you know that the human concept which I have been researching and practicing for more than twenty years is the Theme-Centered-Interaction (TCI)³. Ruth C. Cohn found it after the Second World War. With the TCI approach, she wanted to prevent violence like that of the Nazi terror. As a Jewish woman born in Berlin, she had experienced the Hitler Regime with his totalitarian WE-approach. In a violent world context in which we are practicing Communion, Ruth Cohn's humanistic approach to peacemaking earns new importance. In

¹ Matthias Scharer, "Kommunikation," in *Strukturbegriffe Der Religionspädagogik. Festgabe Für Werner Simon Zum 65. Geburtstag Und Anlässlich Seiner Pensionierung.*, ed. Burkard Porzelt and Alexander Schimmel (Bad Heilbrunn: Verlag Julius Klinkhardt, 2015).

² Mary C. Boys, "Learning in the Presence of the Other," *Religious Education* 103, no. 5 (2008).

³ Matthias Scharer, "Von Der Themenzentrierten Interaktion (Tzi) Zur Kommunikativen Theologie: Ein Weg in Die Weite," in *Kommunikative Theologie: Zugänge - Auseinandersetzungen - Ausdifferenzierungen / Communicative Theology: Approaches - Discussions - Differentiation*, ed. Matthias Scharer, Bradford E. Hinze, and Bernd Jochen Hilberath, *Kommunikative Theologie - Interdisziplinär / Communicative Theology - Interdisciplinary Studies* (Wien u.a.: Litverlag, 2010).

Cohns concept, the WE is an important factor. Living Communication or Living Learning is based on a Dynamic Balance:

- of each person - it is the I-Factor,
- of Content respectively of Tradition – it is the IT-Factor,
- and of Interaction of the different Is – it is the WE-Factor: “Being ‘WE’ means the transpersonal reality and importance of each individual with every other individual; my internal and outer being does not exist without you and us”⁴, Ruth C. Cohn writes in an early manuscript. In *Communicative Theology*⁵ we speak from the WE-Perspective.

These three factors or perspectives are surrounded by the nearer and wider context – it is the Globe-Factor in which we are living and working. The Social Media is part of our Globe, which influences Communion immensely.

From an Ecclesiological point of view, Christianity is a WE-Religion. Not only the individual Christ but we all together at last the whole Creation is waiting on the Glory of God. So the human WE and the divine nature of Church which keeps the hope open, that “thy kingdom come” are deeply connected. The Basic Functions of Church, Martyria, Liturgia, and Diakonia provoke Koinonia or Communion. In *Lumen Gentium* 1 we can read: “Since the Church is in Christ like a sacrament or as a sign and instrument both of a very closely knit union with God and of the unity of the whole human race... . (LG 1). The metaphor “Gifted WE” underlines the theological perspective of each human WE which is real human.

2. WE-Experiences, Communication, and Resonance are Constitutional for Human Life
WE-Experiences are unavoidable for growing up. The Basic Trust⁶, which is formed in early childhood, comes out of intimate experiences in WE relationships firstly with a motherly psychological parent. Later on, Significant Others become necessary. So the quality of relationship and communication let us grow. The Viennese Physicist Herbert Pietschmann wishes to replace the well known "Cogito ergo sum" from Decart by "communico ergo sumus". He argues: “I communicate and, therefore, we are” or “We communicate and

⁴ Cohn, Ruth C., Manuscript.

⁵ Matthias Scharer and Bernd J. Hilberath, *The Practice of Communicative Theology. An Introduction to a New Theological Culture* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2008).

⁶ See: Erik Homburger Erikson, *Kindheit Und Gesellschaft*, Sonderausg. ed. (Stuttgart: Klett-Cotta, 1987).

therefore I am.”⁷ The individual alone is not a true human being. Only through the ability to communicate does the individual become a person.

The science of brain shows us that we are constitutional for communion and not for rival. The German brain researcher Joachim Bauer writes: “We are – from a neurobiological perspective – creations based on social resonance and cooperation. The core of all human motivation is interpersonal recognition, appreciation, donation or affection to find and to give.”⁸ The winner of the famous Wittgenstein Prize 2016, Peter Jonas, describes the brain as a system in which the individual structures are on the one hand separated and at the same time communicate via synapsis with one another. Through the functioning of our brain we are reminded of a fundamental axiom of the Theme-Centered-Interaction of Ruth C. Cohn: The individual is autonomous and interdependent. The autonomy is growing with the awareness of interdependence⁹.

The German Sociologist, Hartmut Rosa¹⁰, speaks about different kinds of relation to the world. He criticizes the speed up in our late modern economic and media directed society which let us no space for leisure. A lot of relations today are "cold relations" without any resonance in the subjects and within communities. He – as a Sociologist – trusts in Religions to make "resonance rooms" available in which people experience a responsive relation to the World including the Other ones.

3. The Ambivalence of every Human WE

By using the WE as a metaphor for Communion the ambivalence of every (human) WE are sometimes forgotten¹¹. An impressive story, The Hedhog’s Dilemma, written by the famous

⁷ Heribert Pietschmann and Peter Pawlowsky, interview by Peter Pawlowsky, 2014, interview 1.

⁸ Joachim Bauer, *Prinzip Menschlichkeit: Warum Wir Von Natur Aus Kooperieren*, 2. Aufl. d. aktualisierte Taschenbuecherstausg. ed. (München: Heyne, 2009).23

⁹ See: science.talk: Neurowissenschaftler Peter Jonas, June 15th, 2016, ORF.

¹⁰ See: Hartmut Rosa, *Resonanz. Eine Soziologie Der Weltbeziehung* (Berlin: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2016).

¹¹ See: Matthias Scharer, "Die Rede Vom „Geschenkten Wir" Als Metapher Für Das Handeln Gottes Im (Kirchlichen) Kommunikationsgeschehen - Ein Differenzierungsversuch," in *Handeln Gottes. Beiträge Zur Aktuellen Debatte*, ed. Roman Siebenrock and Christoph J. Amor, *Quaestiones Disputatae* (Basel: Herder, 2014).

philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer, illustrates this ambivalence. You can feel the cynicism of the philosopher on every kind of a WE.

3.1. The Hedgehog's Dilemma of Arthur Schopenhauer

Some porcupines huddled together for warmth on a cold day in winter; but, as they began to prick one another with their quills, they were obliged to disperse. However, the cold drove them together again when just the same thing happened. At last, after many turns of huddling and dispersing, they discovered that they would be best off by remaining at a little distance from one another.

In the same way, the need of society drives the human porcupines together, only to be mutually repelled by the many prickly and disagreeable qualities of their nature. The moderate distance which they, at last, discover to be the only tolerable condition of intercourse, is the code of politeness and fine manners; ... By this arrangement, the mutual need of warmth is only very moderately satisfied, but then people do not get pricked.

A man who has some heat in himself prefers to remain outside, where he will neither prick other people nor get pricked himself.¹²

We can probably quickly agree, that such a collection of people, even if they still so piously pray, are not representative of the Communion from a theological perspective.

3.2. The "Scapegoat Dilemma" – Echo Space in Digital Media

Each WE is ambivalent. Each WE inherits the danger of exclusion. These tendencies not only occur in face to face encounters but also in Social media Contexts; as we too often see in terroristic movements. It seems that the Social-Media-WEs are more vulnerable than Face-to-Face-WEs. My colleagues in Innsbruck, who are researching on Dramatic Theology¹³, use the

¹² Arthur Schopenhauer, *Parerga, and Paralipomena*, Vol. II, Chapter XXXI, Section 396.

¹³ Raymund Schwager, *Dem Netz Des Jägers Entronnen: Des Jesusdrama* (München: Kösel, 1991). Józef Niewiadomski, "Opfer Und Täter Zugleich! Die Mimetische Struktur Des Begehrens Und Die Ambivalenz Der "Zeichen Der Zeit", " in *Glaubensverantwortung Im*

Concept of René Girard¹⁴ to identify different types of exclusion. If WEs are close together, they use a Scapegoat to maintain Communion if a kind of crisis arises. The Scapegoat, on which the people project the crisis, becomes excluded mostly by violence. Through these violent acts, the WE gets stabilized. In Girard's theory, the victims produce new violence. For him, Jesus as a Scapegoat, stopped the circuit by praying for the tracker, forgiving them and also dying for them.

4. The "Gifted WE" in the Tension between Universalism and Particularism – on the way to a We of Free Consent.

Because of the violence-prone and excluding tendency of each WE, some researchers propose not to use the term WE for any particular WE¹⁵. For them, the WE is the whole humanity. The Universalism of common humanity and life we already can find in the biblical creation. It is a religiously justified belief. If the universal WE is not established religiously it has to be rationally justified: In the reasonableness of the subjects, in their freedom, in their communication and language skills etc. It's even harder to scientifically reason the connectedness of all creatures and all created from whom the Bible is telling. How can we deal with the tension between Universalism and Particularism and with the ambivalence of the WE which isn't entirely reducible?

A fundamental criterion for a "gifted WE"¹⁶ is, to differentiate an ideological WE from a WE on free consent. Ideological WEs – mostly under authoritarian leadership – cultivate the image of the need of an ontological WE the people can't live outside. The ideological WE regulates the whole life, knows answers to all questions, uses the only lifestyle. The uniformity of the WE is a sharp criterion for the identity of an ideological WE. In the Catholic Church, we are remembered by the centralistic Church before the Second Vatican which continues as a dream already by some Authorities. It was a long and conflictive survey for the

Horizont Der "Zeichen Der Zeit", ed. Christoph Böttigheimer, Florian Bruckmann, and René Mitarbeit v. Dausner (Freiburg: Herder, 2012).

¹⁴ René Girard and August Berz, *Das Ende Der Gewalt: Analysen Des*

Menschheitsverhängnisses, 1. Aufl. ed. (Freiburg im Breisgau: Herder Freiburg, 2008).

¹⁵ See: Udo Tietz, *Die Grenzen Des "Wir": Eine Theorie Der Gemeinschaft*, Orig.-Ausg., 1. Aufl. ed. (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2002).

¹⁶ Matthias Scharer, "Das Geschenkte Wir: Kommunikatives Lernen in Der Christlichen Gemeinde," in *Frischer Wind Aus Dem Süden*, ed. Franz Weber, et al. (Innsbruck; Wien: Tyrolia-Verl., 1998).

Catholic Church to encounter the dignity of each Catholic within the Communion as a free Subject which participates in the Church from independent judgment. In *Dignitatis Humanae* 2 we can read:

This Vatican Council declares that the human person has a right to religious freedom. This freedom means that all men are to be immune from coercion on the part of individuals or of social groups and of any human power, in such wise that no one is to be forced to act in a manner contrary to his own beliefs, whether privately or publicly, whether alone or in association with others, within due limits (DG 2).

The Council further declares that the right to religious freedom has its foundation in the very dignity of the human person as this dignity is known through the revealed word of God and by reason itself:

...the right to religious freedom has its foundation not in the subjective disposition of the person, but in his very nature. In consequence, the right to this immunity continues to exist even in those who do not live up to their obligation of seeking the truth and adhering to it, and the exercise of this right is not to be impeded, provided that just public order be observed (DG 2).

Religious freedom is a principle Ad Intra and Ad Extra of the church. Ad Intra it produced a wide variety of Communion in the Catholic Church. Pope Francis gives a strong impulse to a decentral Unity of Church, which enormously reduces the ideological impact of the Communion. To participate in the Church Communion is an experience of Gods Grace not of human force.

In Contrast to the centralistic Catholic Church in the 19th and beginning of the 20th Century the Social Media movement surfed under the flag of freedom for all humans. Everybody should have the possibility to be connected in the Global WE. Nobody should be excluded. A new social and peace movement should be possible further on.

When we realize the reality today we can see the ambivalence of the Social-Media-We. Freedom and Peace-Movements via Social Media stand side by side with Force and Terror. Also we have to respect the immense economic dependence which forces the neoliberal ideological WE of the Global.

5. “Gifted WE” within the Poor

I experienced Church Communion in Comunidades Christianas in different places. I was with Gustavo Gutierrez, the founder of the Theology of Liberation, and I participated in some of the big meetings of the leaders of Small Christian Communities in Brasil. Also, I visited small Christian Communities in some countries of Africa. All these church movements were different to that in Europe, especially in Austria and Germany. I asked myself: What is the characteristic of this Comunidades? I discovered the deep relevance of the We in situations of “pobreza mortal” how Gustavo Gutiérrez used to say when he wanted us to differentiate the situation of this people from spiritual poors like him.

I was deeply impressed by a Eucharist¹⁷ in a slum of a big city. An essential part of the Eucharist was story telling. It was not only the story out of the Bible or the story of each of the individuals, the biographical story. It was the story of the communion. In a very engaging and animated process, they told us about their fears that the bulldozers would come and destroy their homes. Some of them had to stay at home to protect their homes. You could feel the deep solidarity between the people. It was not the kind of solidarity like one hand washes the other one. Kenosis could be experienced. The individual was not thinkable without the other; but this was more than anyone could manage. Gift, grace was happening in the I-WE-Relation.

6. Experiences of “Gifted WE” in Interreligious Encounter and Social Media

Although there is not enough time to relate all of my interreligious experiences in facilitating seminars in the style of TCI, I would say that India exemplifies this model. For instance India is a populous of Hindus, Muslims and a few Christians: though, conflictive but firm “WE-Dynamic” is experienced in groups, and sometimes continues in Social Media.

I feel highly gifted by such encounters. How can the experiences of a “Living WE“ in an interreligious and Social Media Globe provoke the ambivalent metaphor of a Gifted WE? It is

¹⁷ "Eucharistie Und Kirchliches Handeln. Ein Perspektivenwechsel," in *Im Glauben Mensch Werden. Impulse Für Eine Pastoral, Die Zur Welt Kommt*, ed. Franz Weber, et al. (Münster: LIT Verlag, 2000).

a question which employs me as a Theologian enormously. How can we interpret experiences of “Gifted WE” in Interreligious Encounters and Social Media?

Can we do it in an Inclusivism like K. Rahner did with the individual as an Anonymous Christ? But to speak from an Anonymous Communion inherits the problem - besides all of the Ecclesiological questions - that the free will implicitly belongs to such a Communion, is undermined. But the free consent is a hard criterion to differentiate an ideological community from a Gifted WE of Church Communion. To find a responsible way to deal with this question is never possible for Catholics themselves. The omnipresent “of the Other” in interreligious encounters and Social Media is a Sign of Time which can't be ignored. Nobody knows where God's Spirit shall lead us in this case.

Conclusion:

Reflecting on the concept of Ruth Cohn I summarized aspects of the ambivalent WE-metaphor which is used in the Theme-Centered-Interaction as well as in the Communicative Theology as a main perspective. The discourse on Universalism contra, Particularism was discussed as well as the excluding tendencies of every WE. In general, I asked for the critical potential of a “Gifted WE” in a Digital Age and Interreligious Globe. The question remains: What could be the prophetic provocation of the "Gifted We" in Interreligious Encounter and Social Media?

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