

7. See Michael Fiedrowicz, "Wir dienen dem Logos". Die Vernünftigkeit des Glaubens in der Argumentation frühchristlicher Theologen', in: Tobias Kampmann and Thomas Schärfl (eds.), *Der christliche Glaube vor dem Anspruch des Wissens* (Munster, 2006), p. 1–24.
8. For fundamental thoughts on his approach, see Hansjürgen Verweyen, *Gottes letztes Wort. Grundriß der Fundamentaltheologie* (Regensburg, 2000), p. 133–206. For an overview of the current discussion (with detailed further reading), see Thomas Peter Föbel, 'Gott – Begriff und Geheimnis. Hansjürgen Verweyens Fundamentaltheologie und die ihr inhärente Kritik der Philosophie und Theologie Karl Rahners', (*ITS 70*), Innsbruck and Vienna: Tyrolia (2004).
9. See Hansjürgen Verweyen, *Botschaft eines Toten*, (Regensburg, 1997), p. 10–17.
10. *Ibid.*, p. 112.
11. See Hansjürgen Verweyen, above n. 8, p. 151.
12. See op.cit. p. 154–85.
13. Above n. 9, p. 114.
14. See, *Grundriß Teil II: '...ergangen?'*, (See Verweyen, above n. 8, p. 211–362).
15. Above n. 9, p. 131 f.
16. And this means, among other things, not fanatically imposing one's beliefs on others.
17. For the recent discussion on, inter alia, the criteria question, see Karsten Kreutzer, Magnus Striet and Joachim Valentin (eds.), *Gefährdung oder Verheißung? Von Gott Reden unter den Bedingungen der Moderne*, (Mainz: Grünewald, 2007).
18. See Gregor Maria Hoff, 'Begründungsnotstand? Zur philosophischen Leistungsfähigkeit der theologischen Vernunft', in J. Valentin and S. Wendel (eds.), *Unbedingtes Verstehen?! Fundamentaltheologie zwischen Erstphilosophie und Hermeneutik*. (Regensburg: Pustet, 2001), p. 92–102.
19. On the epistemological discussion with Hansjürgen Verweyen, see Gregor Maria Hoff, *Die Prekäre Identität des Christlichen. Die Herausforderung postModernen Differenzdenkens für eine theologische Hermeneutik*, (Paderborn etc.: Schöningh, 2001), p. 488–517.
20. Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimler, *Kleines Konzilscompendium. Sämtliche Texte des Zweiten Vatikanums*, (Freiburg: Herder, 19 e. 1986), p. 361.
21. See also Helmut Hoping, 'Theologischer Kommentar zur dogmatischen Konstitution über göttliche Offenbarungen *Dei Verbum*', in *HThK Vat II 1*, 696–831; here, p. 721f.
22. See also, for example, Friedrich Wilhelm Graf's revelational-theological and revelational-critical meaningful analysis, 'Wozu noch Theologie? Über die spannungsreiche Einheit von Kritik und Gestaltung', in: *FAZ* 17.8.2000, 11: 'Fuzzy religious language is used to suggest a basic consensus or binding values. Religious symbols are employed for political ends with the aim of gaining the advantage of moral superiority in the fight for power and the realisation of political interests. Both the postmodern religion of many individuals and this new public religion are diffuse, syncretic and nebulous.'
23. For a critical approach, see Terry Eagleton, *Was ist Kultur? Eine Einführung*, (Munich, 2001), p. 24–29.
24. On the methodological setting, see Lars Allolio-Näcke, Britta Kalscheuer and Arne Manzeschke (eds.), *Differenzen anders denken. Bausteine zu einer Kulturtheorie der Transdifferenz*, (Frankfurt a. M., 2004).
25. Peter Eicher, *Offenbarung. Prinzip neuzeitlicher Theologie*, (Munich, 1977).
26. Siegfried Wiedenhofer, art. 'Offenbarung', in: *NHThG4 III*, 283–301; here p. 292.
27. The christian concept of revelation was not finally formulated until recent times. Thus far it is a question of a problematic category, especially from an inter-religious perspective. Even so, experiences similar to those encompassed by the christian concept of *revelation* are also found in other religions – for example, in the form of auditions, visions, etc.

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Beyond Experience. The Contribution of System Theory in German Theology

Johann Ev. Hafner

Introduction

During the last two decades the national congresses of Catholic theologians were split into two main parties, which I would like to call the churchists and the Habermasians.¹ The main argument between them was on where the main authority lies. Should the theologians execute the will of the *magisterium*, try to find solutions for their pastoral plans, describe the sociological situation, and give advice? Or should they survey the spiritual needs of the people, conduct pastoral experiments, criticise the *magisterium's* administration, and project new models of the Church? Depending on the way authority is generated, by listening to the tradition or by intersubjective communication, the two parties revealed their idea of theology as either theory of application or theory of action. In either case there was an assumption that decisions are being made by intentional decisions and driven by individual or collective motives.

Yet, in the small talks during the conference-breaks the scholars complained about problems with the clerical hierarchy: about the Pope or a certain bishop overstretching his power, about committees consisting of unqualified delegates, about the narcissism of laymen It was obvious that on a theoretical level the theologians deal with ideal structures but on the practical level with failing persons. Under the guiding stars of obedience (of the faithful in tradition) responsible. consensus (of free participants in discourse) there was no room for a theory of *failing and misunderstanding systems*. However, do most of the conflicts not arise from the clash of organisations, offices, files? Is communication not more than the mere encounters of individuals but also the contact of schedules and agendas?

A Theory for Structures

We needed a theory that is able to analyse the high degree of organisation, especially in Catholicism, and especially in Germany. There, religion is dominated by two main, equal sized denominations (31.2 per cent Catholic, 30.8 per cent Protestant, 1.5 per cent Orthodox, 4.0 per cent Muslim, 32.5 per cent with no religious affiliation),² organised in *Landeskirchen* (regional churches) or in Catholic dioceses that employ professionals. From the organisational viewpoint both denominations resemble each other: they consist of local, regional and national layers and are

segmented in many departments, often structured like state offices. Academic theology is closely tied with ecclesial structures: universities may propose a candidate for tenure but the bishops may veto him because all faculties of theology are the result of cooperation between state and church.³ To an ordinary christian the parishes often resemble a public soup kitchen. The churches, however, still describe themselves with organic metaphors of family, flock, community, etc. The main mission is regarded as rescuing the human person from the inhuman structures. But in harsh reality the main decisions of the church are not the results of personal debates but of anonymous institutional processes. This is why the title 'system' matches the ecclesial realities better than the traditional title 'corpus'.

And this is why a handful of young scholars in Germany turned away from the dominating anthropological theories like that of Rahner's transcendental theology and adaptations of the Frankfurt School, rather turning towards 'post-human' positions like Foucault's and de Certeau's theory of power (Johannes Hoff, Christian Bauer, Joachim Valentin) or Luhmann's theory of systems (e.g. Hans-Ulrich Dallmann, Isolde Karle, Thomas Ruster, Johann Hafner, Günter Thomas).⁴ In contrast to Foucault, whose main thrust is to detect and to fight the 'dispositions of power', Luhmann has always been accused of being a conservative bureaucrat who despises protest movements and hails stabilised structures. This reproach seems to be right at first sight since system theory avoids observing existing structures from the outsider's perspective as comparative theology would do. Instead it wants to observe how a system tries to define and defend its own identity. This is why system theory is not interested in the history of religious things, rituals or persons but in the grammar of its second-order observations (dogmatics), which can be traced back to three questions: Who holds the authority to define (media)? What is the range of definition (codes)? And what are the plans for the future (programmes)? Of course, the results of such descriptions will look 'conservative' since they show which structures succeed in self-continuation; dysfunctional structures have died out already. But before one raises the critique of an idealistic Darwinism, one should know that system theory also reflects the relationship of organised religion with excluded free-floating religiosity.

Import of a Foreign Theory

At first sight the import of categories from a non-theological science seems to be unobjectionable. Theology always did it: the early councils used 'physis' and 'ousia', Augustine 'relatio' and 'substantia', Thomas 'actus' and 'potentia', Schleiermacher 'Selbstbewusstsein' (self-consciousness) and 'Abhängigkeitsgefühl' (feeling of total dependence), Rahner 'categorical' and

'transcendental' in order to explain revelation. So why the reluctance to use concepts from system theory like 'code' and 'programme'? It is because there is a significant difference between rationalising religious contents (which is the task of fundamental theology) and explaining why and how religion rationalises its contents. This is the shift from essential what-questions to functional how-questions. Compare it to music: As long as a Beethoven-symphony is explained to us (its contexts, composition, intention . . .), we do hermeneutics. As soon as we ask how and why the explainer explains, we do not talk about music itself, but about interpretations: which rhetoric does he apply, how does he analyse the composition, what does he want to achieve with this lecture? This is called 'second-order-observation' because we do not only want to understand what he is telling us, but we try to look behind the curtain: how he is doing it. Similarly, system theory does not want to understand the Divine itself, but how it is explained by religion, viz. by its organ for reflection, theology.

The import of such cybernetic categories neither fosters a stronger belief, nor intends to. Quite the contrary, one might reply, the knowledge of the function endangers its functioning. A mother cares for her baby because she loves it. If the socio-biologist explained to her that her emotions are a variable within the higher function of preservation of species she might be disillusioned. If the ethnologist enlightened a tribe by explaining to them that their rain-dance does not cause any rain, but rather fulfils the function of strengthening community ties, they might stop dancing. And if a priest revealed to a dying person that he will tell him stories about the afterlife because this is going to comfort him, the consolation would not work. Thus, knowing how and why the word 'God' is used in the christian religious system may cause a loss of steadfastness in faith. Are we all tiny participants in a semantic system, which uses us for its self-continuation? From a system theoretical perspective, religion has to suppress this 'enlightenment' brought about by outside observers. There is a long tradition in jewish and christian theology that tries to guard God from overly intrusive knowledge. This can be achieved by an-iconism ('Thou shalt not make thee any graven image' Dt. 5.8), by commanding humility ('Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding' Job 38.4) or by stating the inscrutability of the Divine ('For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord' Is. 55.8). Accordingly, Augustine and some rabbis interpreted the first sin as pride driven by curiosity, not by lust. Traditions which go beyond this point and fathom God's thoughts and actions, e.g. how and why he created the world, are either heretical (gnosticism) or later speculations (Kabbala, Schelling). God reveals himself as a *mysterium*, not as a mere secret (*arcantum*). Religion has to keep its main subject in latency and prevent it from being

explained and thus becoming public and manifest. Faith can only thrive, if it is contained by stop-signs, which prevent endless fathoming. System theory calls this operation 'invisibilisation' because God is defined as the only observer who cannot be observed. There is no birds-eye-view on God, this view is theologically reserved for him only. Religious organisations know that and limit the possibility of private visions, experiences and speculations, otherwise they would drown in inflation.

In theology, this kind of observation is the devil's job.⁵ He is watching God, but unlike the angels accepting his decisions he is asking for functional equivalents. Why did God create the world, because he needed it somehow? Why did he permit man to fall, because he wanted to play the saviour! Observation means to put the observed under the distinction of the observer. But each distinction consists of two sides: the positive side of indication (*This!*) and the negative side of rejection (*Not that!*). Every human concept of God contains a certain exclusion: God, and not the idol; God, and not man's projection . . . In applying a binary scheme we make the observed a contingent being that is not absolute but one of at least two equal possibilities. In the eyes of the devil, God is a realisation of further possibilities: 'There might be better gods.' The role that the devil plays in the christian narrative is similar to the role the theologian plays in religion: He observes God from the outside, often with foreign categories. Unlike the devil the theologian claims to be faithful. One can extend the circles of observations endlessly: unlike theology, religious studies observe Christianity from the outside. Religious studies are observed by philosophers, whether or not their arguments are actually logical. Philosophers are observed by economists – how expensive they are and whether philosophical education has an impact on business etc. No central perspective can observe all because a system cannot observe itself from outside, without becoming heretical. But everyone observes everyone, and everyone knows that they are being observed (in categories foreign to them). In theology the overview over this web of contingent observations is attributed to God, who mustn't be observed directly.

Basic Model of Religion

In modernity the mutual observation of religion and science became critical, and, via theology, religion applied scientific categories to itself. This is the reason for the tension between self-definition (*magisterium*) and self-observation (theology as an outside-observation within). The *magisterium* has to decide, theology wants to discern. But this conflict is inevitable in every reflecting religion. Religion observes via its special binary code 'transcendent/immanent' (*in abstracto*: indeterminate/determinable, *in concreto*: sacred/profane).

. . . *basic distinction: transcendent/immanent*

The whole world can be sorted under this alternative, except for one thing: is the basic distinction 'transcendent/immanent' transcendent or immanent?⁶ If immanent, religion could be deconstructed as a historical fact, a contingent incident, a social evolution; the individual choice to become or stay religious could be explained by biographical circumstances or psychological urge. Transcendence would be projection by the immanent. In this case, religion would destabilise itself. Other disciplines, which focused on the immanent world, would take over and dictate what religion actually is. This has happened to a great many theological subjects: the Bible is explained by history, morals are explained by secular ethics, liturgy by aesthetics. For this reason religions have to choose the second alternative and determine the distinction 'transcendent/immanent' as transcendent. Translated into theological language: the Holy Bible was revealed by God; Christianity was founded by Christ; the individual choice to be a Christian is brought about by grace. JHWH's first command is, 'Thou shalt have no other gods beside me!' Retranslated in system theoretical language: draw the distinction between the transcendent and the immanent! In doing so man imitates God who started with the self-differentiation of God and world, the differentiation of light and dark, heaven and earth, water and land. He selected one chosen people from the many peoples, taught them the distinction between Elohim and idols, pure and impure, justice and sin. The genesis and history of religion is a sequence of distinctions leading to further distinctions.

But every system suffers from the same teething-problem: initial distinctions have no foundation except the decision to draw them. Systems have no grounds beyond their functions. From the outside this can be criticised as pure capriciousness. Religion cannot heal other systems from this flaw but it can manage it in its own case, and by doing so it vicariously solves this problem for the other systems. Religion is the system that openly exists without having a determinable reason. Because religion has its reason in *God as the indeterminate* it functions as the speech about the unspeakable, the adoration of the invisible, the proximity of the distant.

Religion is not Experience Alone

One might contest that religion consists not only of semantic processes but of the experiences of the people: the consolation through sacraments, the healing through prayers, the encouragement through homilies etc. Not only Pentecostal churches see their mission as the creation of religious experiences in the form of emotions and immediate awareness. This is why interpersonal encounters and group dynamics are preferred as the silver

bullet of pastoral planning; dialogue, instead of homilies; small circles instead of big parishes. Structures and external forms may be seen merely as useful instruments for the transcendence of the individual (that – as Rahner proposed – transcends itself by self-consciousness). Protestant theology in particular stresses the relationship between God and man as an intimate and inter-subjective relation. Of course, the surface of every religion is its subjective dimension, in christian terms: faith. 'Accept Jesus as your personal saviour.' Faith-experiences seem evident to the subject but they are fragile and exposed to many psychological and biographical factors.

Whenever we try to share our religious experiences with others, we run into the problem of how to communicate them. The more differentiated our society is the more we need to mark these communications *as religious* (and not as psychological or poetic). In a secularised environment religious persons are constantly confronted with doubts from the outside if they replicated their personal needs (the lack of identity, the lack of happiness, the lack of health etc.) by religious means. This doubt was the beginning of the first systematic attack against religion: Feuerbach's *Wesen des Christentums* (*The Essence of Christianity*). Therefore experiences nowadays have to be shared in a more distinct way than ever before. It is the medium in which it is presented that counts, and less the personal persuasion by which it is presented. Interactions between persons increasingly become communication through the media. First-order-observations ('I experience or see something') become second-order-observations ('I see someone seeing something' or 'I know someone who experienced something'). This means that religion, like other systems, is subjected to the laws of attention and advertisement. The churches in Germany have reacted to these demands on the level of administration: dioceses function like companies. But they are also reluctant to apply these laws externally in their relation to the modern world. Religious programmes on television are still designed to be conversations between one person and another, in which personal persuasions are shared and in which inconspicuous everyday idioms are consequently used. Sometimes it seems that the churches want to hide their message behind experiences without the courage to display their rich dogmatic traditions to the public, even if they require an antique language, old symbols and strange rituals. So far, Christianity in Germany allows for only two alternatives: either timid assimilation in foreign contexts (like the mass-media) or staying at home in its own contexts (like liturgy). Why not produce religious quiz shows, religious music contests, religious home stories etc.? It is broadly criticised that this market-orientation only copies existing formats and leads to a consumerist attitude among the people. But the laws of attention command that religion is not consumerist enough!

The Outside Code (Netherworld/World)

System theory discerns between codes and programs. Codes are basic distinctions that are easy to detect and easy to use. They function like glasses. As soon as somebody uses words signalling transcendence (e.g. 'heaven', 'netherworld', 'spiritual'), he provokes religious communication, regardless of whether he is a believer expressing faith or an agnostic talking about religion. It may be only the conviction that 'there is something out there', or that we all are influenced by a higher energy. The only criterion for this kind of low-transcendence is its opposition and contrast to the world where we make experiences. This may sound minimalistic, but from a systemic point of view every utterance which produces contingency is considered religious: every statement that doesn't only state how things are, were or will be, but why they are what they are. Why did this happen to me and not to others? Why is this world so beautiful and not mere chaos? Why is man's life so short and not endless? In all cases the speaker holds a certain distance from the immanent reality, which he is observing from a standpoint beyond it. At this point one cannot discern whether he is taking a first-order or second-order-perspective. Religious communication can flourish without faith. It can be compared to artistic communication in a museum even when none of the visitors are practising artists. Codes are ownerless commodities freely available for everyone. So should religion be. And it is the task of the churches to feed public communication with opportunities and motives for religious materials. This is their external function.

The Inside-Program (*Sanctum/Sacrum*)

This mustn't be confused with their internal organisation: Because of the availability of the codes, organised religions try to control the inflation of religious communication by programs. Programs operate with decisions (what to do, to say), whereas codes consist of distinctions: That is, rules that determine *who* (social dimension: power) propose religious sentences, *when* (temporal dimension: urgency) they should do it and *what* (material dimension: topics) they should refer to. Similar to economic programs like spending plans and budgets, dogmas and monastic rules are also an investment into the future in the realm of religion. Churches are, so to speak, religious systems which manage to programme the authorities, the speed and the content of religious communication.⁷ Where they don't manage they remain religious movements (like esoteric networks). Programs substantiate the abstract and lofty codes down to persons, places, dates. By gaining a higher profile religion achieves more attention; it can be identified with concrete details and demands and it offers various opportunities for personal experience and relevance. Even though they are theologically very different an orthodox liturgy and a pentecostal service are both highly

programmed, and thus provide room for individual participation: songs, free prayers, saints, answers, gestures and the like.

But there is a limit to programming: whereas religious things become too tangible and too expectable they lose their connection with the transcendent, the second side of the code, and become a part of the immanent world.⁸ Transcendent beings need sovereignty, which forbids any form of instrumentalisation. One cannot force God to fulfil a request. The faithful mustn't identify the sacred things (determination by programs) with the holy himself (distinction by code). In order to keep a distance between *sacrum* and *sanctum* religion has to develop theology. Theologians make sure that there are always at least two levels of transcendence: *gratia creata* (created grace) and grace itself, blessings (sacramentals) and sacraments, the gift and the giver, the charismas and the Holy Spirit, the saints and the saviour, the angels and the Lord, the Church and the Kingdom, the covenants and the last judgement, the prophets and the final revelation, the order of creation and the order of salvation. . . . One can find these differentiations in every reflective religion: *godesch haqodaschim* (holy of holy) and the *chel* (court) in Judaism; the Qur'an and the *hadith* in Islam.

A developed religion has to provide not only the difference between 'we' and 'the world' (in religious terms: between 'the real God' and the idols) – this would reflect the primitive structure of a sect – but also the difference between low transcendence and high transcendence. If it reduces religion to a bipolar relation between man and the divine, it will lose control of its media and motives, because the Divine will get diluted into intimate and incommunicable experiences.⁹ The diffusion of christian religion in Germany documents this development: those pastoral rituals flourish which express private and intimate life-cycle events: baptism for birth, funeral for death and counselling for crises. In my opinion this is a consequence not only of the rise of individualism among the people, but also of the failure to offer low-transcendent rites. Churches still operate in a sect-like manner: they don't discern between programs for fully identified members and codes (which cannot be controlled anyway) for the non-members.

Function of Religion Today

In a functional differentiated society religion has to accept that it operates like other systems (politics, economy, art, science, law). Having accepted this, what remains as the special function of religion in Germany today? Firstly, religion can reduce its universal responsibility to its core business: salvation. It doesn't need to legitimise power, to sell anything, to produce artworks, to prove a truth, or to provide society with morals. Such functions can be delegated to systems, which do these jobs better. We all

know how healthy it is when religions give up their claims for healing (including the religious concepts of bedevilment and exorcism) and leave it to psychiatrists. In a similar fashion to that of the galaxies of the cosmos drifting away from each other, so in modern society systems get more and more self-referential, independent, and therefore also reckless towards each other. It gets increasingly difficult for the individual, who participates in different systems, to meet all the – often contradictory – requirements: as a father you should educate your child in honesty, as a salesman you should sell products, even if you are not convinced of them. As a pastor you preach unconditional confidence, but you have to double-check the billing of your church construction. The excuse that you follow your personal conscience may work only in personal interaction, but not in structural communication.¹⁰ For in the case of disagreement each system provides its own techniques of customer requests and arbitration. There is not only one '*ehernes Gehäuse der Vernunft*' ('iron case of reason') as Max Weber coined, but many 'jails' barred by different rationalities.

This situation causes immense stress for the individuals. We all drown in agendas, importance, and urgencies. Modern human beings are not the poised consumers who pick from the product-range of worldviews. Although sociologists of religion like to use the supermarket-metaphor, so far they have been unable to actually find the religious shopper, at least in Germany.¹¹ Modern people are torn apart by divergent expectations quartering them. The individuals react to the drumfire of expectations with higher stimulus-sensitivity. A quick look into the newspapers shows us the voracity of our society to arouse through sex, to outrage about politicians, to provoke curiosity through latest findings, and to excite with sports. . . .¹² We are looking for opportunities to get excited over something, and the tabloids provide them. There can be no integration of the systems but only a mutual limitation. Because every functional system tends to occupy him he needs 'redemption from society' ('*Erlösung von der Gesellschaft*').¹³

Religion is the only system that explicitly addresses the problem of the contingency of all distinctions and decisions (codes and programs).¹⁴ By remembering the contingency of every system religion reduces stress: Nothing is important, everything can wait *sub specie aeternitatis*, and even things that happened can be undone by forgiveness (*Lakol zeman!*).¹⁵ 'To every thing there is a season under the heaven' (Ecc. 3.1). Religion takes the role of a moderator: It calms down the heated systems; it relaxes the rigidity of the various programs, by revealing their contingency. Religion today is more of a *sedativum*, than a stimulant. As institutions they have to operate according to organisational laws: exercise authority, set agendas, and protect the sanctum against profanation and inflation (who, when, what-programs). But

regarding their environment, churches have to provide arguments (the transcendent-immanent-difference) which reduce the importance and urgency of any organisation: human beings must not obey any claim absolutely, except the one who gives this commandment, and this is what we call God (*id est quid deus nominatur*).¹⁶

Therefore, churches should carry two very distinct 'products' in their portfolio: for society they offer low-transcendent rites and symbols (*sacra*) trying to provoke communication about religion. Topics like angels, pious customs, creation, sacred times and saints would be appropriate for this. Parallel to this esoteric teaching the churches should preach high-transcendent topics¹⁷ like the word of the cross, vicarious and salvific suffering, trinity.

To accept the sharp difference between outside- and inside-communication might help to reduce frustrations regarding the teaching *ad extra* and to raise the expectations regarding the preaching *ad intra*.

Notes

1. In the early phase of the 1990s predominantly protestant theologians picked the Luhmann-debate (Eilert Herms, Truth Rendtorff, Wolfhart Pannenberg), whereas Catholic theology concentrated on the Diskurstheorie of Habermas/Apel (Edmund Arens, Helmut Peukert, Ottmar Fuchs). This seems odd, since one would expect that Catholics would tend to prefer theories in defence of structures and institutions, and Protestants choose theories in defence of the subject endangered by structures. Perhaps theologians want to swim against the stream of their own denomination and choose their theories in an act of defiance.
2. Two demographic peculiarities of Germany are: Firstly, the percentage of the non-religious is twice as high as in the global average. Secondly, the proportion between the 'highly religious' (18%) and the 'religious' (52%) is lower only in Russia and France (compare Britain with 19% and 44%). This shows the high degree of formal membership. Cf. Bertelsmann-Stiftung (Ed.): *Religionsmonitor 2008* (Gütersloh: Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2007).
3. Beyond that, professors of Catholic theology need a diocesan and a Roman *nihil obstat* and have to swear the *professio fidei*-oath, that obliges them not only to believe in the Credo (*credenda*) and in the irreversible decrees of the Church (*tenenda*) but also in the teachings of the ordinary *magisterium*.
4. It is remarkable that only a few of the elder generation (Gerd Theißen, Michael Welker, Detlev Pollack, Peter Fuchs) work creatively with system theory, and that Luhmann had little impact on the Anglo-American academy compared to the overwhelming dominance of Habermas and Apel.
5. Only the devil, the best of all theologians, equipped with an angelic intellect and privileged with the close viewpoint of the 'sons of God' (*bnei elohim*, the heavenly consultants of JHWH, a function that Christianity will reserve for the 'only begotten Son'), is able to observe God from aside (not from below, like the humans). The highest angel uses his position to discern God's decisions from possible alternatives; in christian language he holds the *visio beatifica* without loving God. The figure of the devil is used as a symbol for the temptation of theology to become religious studies, i.e. to switch from an internal (loving, obedient) observation to an external (comparing, relativising) observation.
6. Nietzsche was the first to point to this problem: Is the differentiation in Good and Bad, good or bad or not merely a choice of weakness or strength?

7. In a mobilised society the time-factor gains more importance because this is the only medium a system has to share with others. The churches have a hard time engaging lay-ministry if the laymen and women are occupied with family and business. And nowadays it is considered impolite to turn a request down with regard to content ('I am not interested'), so we all excuse ourselves by referring to other appointments ('I am busy already'). One of the prominent examples of religious time-control is the slowdown of apocalyptic expectation towards a patient existence in salvation history.
8. The main German theologians of the 20th century Adolf von Harnack and Karl Barth on the Protestant side, and Karl Rahner and Hans-Urs von Balthasar on the Catholic side, represent the sensible balance between contextualising and transcendentalising; between explaining and contemplating a religious subject; between the attempt to make religion relevant and the attempt to save her identity; between writing programs (Rahner considered himself a pastoral theologian!) and maintaining codes (Balthasar's project to gather rays of the 'Herrlichkeit').
9. Detlef Pollack, one of the leading sociologists of religion, has illustrated this dialectic by cross-tabling 'transcendence/immanence' and 'consistency/contingency' (in my terms: highly programmed/lowly programmed" and presents a basic matrix of religion:

	<i>consistency</i>	<i>contingency</i>
<i>Transcendence</i>	religious routine = only answers	religious vitality = answers to questions
<i>Immanence</i>	religious indifference = no questions	religious search = only questions

Cf. Detlef Pollack, *Säkularisierung – ein moderner Mythos? Studien zum religiösen Wandel in Deutschland* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2003), p. 52.

10. Not even in the religious system: Bishops wouldn't allow a Catholic professor to teach deviant dogmatics, even though he would refer to his conscience.
11. After the fall of the iron curtain the mainline denominations – the independent churches (Freikirchen) and the esoteric movements – could advertise in East-Germany. But the expected revival of syncretistic religiosity did not come. Religious patchworking in West-Germany occurs only among members of mainline churches who supplement (not reinvent) their Catholic or Protestant spirituality. People may choose to leave their traditional religion, but in most cases they are not able to assemble (bricolage, patchwork) a new one.
12. The more our society provides basic securities (against war, starvation, death, disease, i.e. the apocalyptic horsemen), the more we become sensitive to the four modern injustices: competition, consumption, aging, health.
13. Niklas Luhmann, *Die Religion der Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), p. 325.
14. By assuming a God religion increases the contingency of the world. By subjecting the world to God's plans or response to the *sanatana dharma* the world loses its contingency and gains a higher necessity.
15. Jesus' claim to forgive sins was not only the promise of his Kingdom-call (Mk 1.15) but also a main cause (Mk 7.7) and meaning of his death (1Cor 15.3).
16. If, in turn, the argument not to take anything too seriously is applied to the churches, they lose authority. In order to prevent this, religious organisations use the strategy of immunisation by ascribing holiness or inspiration to themselves. In this respect churches are living self-contradictions, but this is their vocation.
17. High transcendent are those communications which signify the unity of the difference of transcendence and immanence, e.g. God cannot be restricted to the realm of transcendence because he is free to reign/create the heavens *and* the earth. Likewise his Son inhabits both worlds (incarnation, not only inspiration) and therefore consists *en dyo physisin*.

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