

„The view from below“
Some approaches from a German perspective

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1. View from below – challenge to reflect politically

The title for this conference is taken from a reflection of Dietrich Bonhoeffer at the turn of the year 1942 to 1943, shortly before he was taken to prison. He tried to reassure himself, his family and friends of the ethical basis of their commitment. His words could have been taken from any text of the Liberation Theology. They describe the starting point from which liberation theology begins to redefine the Good News – as Good News to the poor.

If one starts to see the world from below it means to come to know a different world than the world which usually is presented to the public – be it in mass media, be it in the curricula for the education of children, young people or be it in the academic training of theologians. To see the world from below means to accept that neutrality in analyses and concepts is an illusion. It means to listen to different witnesses, to share different experiences, to make visible structures of injustice and discrimination. It means to struggle with different obstacles in daily life and to come to different political conclusions. The view from below has revolutionized the lecture of the scriptures and it has helped to discover that the project of God with the human race starts with those below. It points to visions of the Reign of God when he will bring an end to their suffering.

Liberation theology reclaimed a new subject of theological reflection – the people below. And it reclaimed a new project for the Christian churches –the Reign of God as a better future for the oppressed. It is evident that both, the liberation theology and Bonhoeffer expressed their insights in a position of a substitutionary (*Stellvertretung*) for the people below – although many of them, and also Bonhoeffer himself shared the life, the suffering and even the death of the marginalized people.

I think that it is important to remember this.

It makes a difference if an intellectual opts for the poor and reflects on those below or if these subjects begin to express in their own language who they are and where they want to go. For Bonhoeffer his perspective from below is the end of a biographical process of conversion. For those who are denied a life as fully human subjects expressing their perspective from below it might rather be a conversion to themselves and against their objective oppressor or enemy.

It is worthwhile to remain for just another moment at this view “from below”. We are only able to speak on their behalf as a consequence of consciousness raising and in the

sense of making continuous efforts to look at our contemporaneous world with an hermeneutical approach which allows to see, to judge and to act with an option for the life and the human rights of those denied the necessary attention .

Neither Bonhoeffer nor many of us here belong to the discriminated in a social or economic sense. But Bonhoeffer`s statement that he had the privilege to share the life of those below is helpful for our further considerations. Bonhoeffer`s commitment had a political and not a social character: Neither the Jews who where persecuted and violated in the thirties by the Nazi regime, nor a good portion of Protestant church members as well as the political prisoners who had resisted in the forties were necessarily members of the poorer classes. But they where politically excluded and denied their civil rights and the integrity of their personality. Although Bonhoeffer and his fellow theologians did not reflect on the theological and ethical impact of human rights it is obvious that he was inspired by the idea that there are undeniable human rights which were violated when Jewish shops were boycotted or when the Jewish population was robbed of their possessions or enterprises expropriated on the base of racist arguments.

Similarly, our commitment for economic justice in our modern context (be it local, regional or global) has rather political than a social character. To reclaim justice and good livelihood for the excluded is a political response to socio-economic deficits in the development of our societies. I would dare to defend the thesis that our answer to the unjust structures of global and national economies must be political. It cannot be economic, because we can neither counteract the power of global capitalism on the economic level nor can we expect to find the adequate answers in the purely economic sphere. On the contrary, the challenge of a radical market economy to the world today is the absolute dominion of economic thinking, economic values and is based on an anthropology which reduces the human being to an economically effective calculator – the “homo oeconomicus.” Our answer to the global making of more and more poor must also be political, because it is basically a claim for human rights – and these human rights have social, economical, cultural and other concrete implications.

The latter observation is not very original, but it has to do with my second thesis: Human Rights in the broad sense of the meaning the United Nations gave to it are to a very large extend a heritage of the biblical traditions, especially the tradition of justice and righteousness which is elaborated in the Old Testament with its emphasis on substantive law (opposite of formal law) as the form of granting social and economic justice to those below.

In the Bible we find a strong link between economic injustice and political commitment – just think of the idea of the good king who guarantees life for the poor, think of the prophets who discover the ideological and economic mistreatment of the poor. But – and this makes it rather complicated to develop an adequate Christian ethic, which is biblically based, for the challenges of today: We do not find much emphasis on the civil rights and public debate in the biblical tradition (with the exception of Paul and his context). We do not find political concepts to change unjust economic structures and discrimination of the majorities in the New Testament (with the exception of a variety of alternative economic rules and practices within the church / Jesus movements).

I cannot extend on this point very much here. But I would like to stress the gap between the Hebrew concept of justice which is mainly based on the question of land, God's gift to the people on the one side and the lack of social and economical ethics in the church which began in early Christendom and has not come to an end yet.

Therefore I stick to a third thesis: The challenge for an ethic of justice in a Christian perspective today is the following:

(1) to think in the line of Old Testament's economical justice which means of course to identify properly the analogies (comparative perspectives) in our own modern context.
(2) to act as politically aware people – in cooperation with all those of good will (as the Catholics say).

The economic and political dimension convene in the vision of the Reign of God: the Reign of God is a vision of a community with public welfare which is mainly oriented at those who are below and which is brought on by those faithful to the God of Israel. It is – as liberation theology has put it – a historical project which is carried out and directed to concrete subjects. Therefore it is a political task – although it remains of course a spiritual question.

Which project and which subjects are at stake today? How do we spell the “view from below”? How do we react as Christians? Which suggestions in the theology of Bonhoeffer are helpful or have to be reconsidered in this context?

I am sorry to say that in the following chapters I will rather underline these questions than answer them in a satisfying way. Nevertheless I invite you to continue reconsidering your concern for public ethics in the heritage of Bonhoeffer – and many others.

I am going to sketch the challenges of a public ethic for today and I will start with an emphasis on the German context, because I would like to be concrete and I hope it will be of interest to this audience.

2. Finding the “people below” in the German context

2.1 Decline of the Welfare State

The German post-war welfare state capitalism, which was also called the Rhinish capitalism is undergoing a transformation to a neo-liberally designed market economy. This means that social security, including the risk of falling ill, losing work and getting old is no longer guaranteed by a system of collective solidarity but on very basic provisions and individual capability to care for oneself. As a consequence, dignity and acceptable life standard (which has constitutional rang in Germany, Article 1, Article 20 – together with Article 14/15 of our Constitution) is no longer based on the idea of solidarity but on private possessions. This is true for both parts of the country: Western Germany and the former GDR. You could even say that in the ideological discourse the traditional welfare system in the capitalist part of the country is denounced as a sort of state socialism which seduces people to become irresponsible and sluggish – as it has been proofed for the East European Real Soviet socialism as a whole.

(Historical remark: These critics against the welfare state is rather absurd. Bismarck and some Protestant citizens of the bourgeoisie designed the original care system in the 19th century which was developed further in the Bonner Republic. The central idea of the shared contribution to the social security system was to give the bare essentials to the working class, to avoid socialism, to establish a shared responsibility between workers and capitalists).

Solidarity as a central value of political and ethical cohesion is being replaced by shareholder value and redistribution of the prosperity of the country. This is only one side of the coin. The other one is the dramatic financial situation of both the social care system and the state (national, federal and communal budgets). The very negative development of income and trade taxes as the main source of public budget income and the growing need of social care / assistance because of unemployment is indeed provoking a strong need for new sources of income. Beside these two factors the subsidizing of big West German (and international) capital is playing an important role, especially after 1989 in Eastern Germany, but also in other parts of the country (example: European Airbus: € 385 millions only by the Federal state of Hamburg given for the destruction of a natural resort which is required by the company for the assembling of the biggest passengers plane ever – the A 380. “This is of highest priority to the senate”).

There is a growing gulf between public poverty and private welfare. (Example: Hamburg is one of the most wealthiest regions of Europe, but the senate is about to close down many services of counselling and aid centres for the most vulnerable sectors of the society and is investigating if public installations like sport centres, etc. can be maintained .) Whereas private assets rose from € 2.000 Billion to € 3.700 Billion, debts of the German state doubled from about 500 Billions to more than 1.000 Billions in the same decade (1991-2001).

Reforms to resolve these budget problems have been undertaken in very small steps for quite a long time (since 1982). Now (since 1998) – as Social Democrats and Greens are ruling – reforms on a larger scale to reduce the deficits of the public social system – the funds for unemployment, health care and pension funds – have been implemented. In a nutshell, it is a process of enlarging the burden for those who are regularly employed, reducing the benefits for those who need it, privatise provision for everybody`s risks of life and commodify the market of caring.

At the same time, financial support for all kinds of local and national structures of social work with the most vulnerable, culture and sports is cut. And to make the picture complete public supply for water, electricity, transport and communication are likely to be privatised whereas the markets for these collective goods are monopolized by a handful of the very big companies. (There are different ways to privatise - one of it is cross-border-leasing which seems to have been blocked now by an US court). There is an international competition in the new European Union with regards to the tax rates for enterprises and working costs. This race for the lowest investment costs under optimal conditions of infrastructure and well educated employees deteriorates the public financial situation.

In the last years, these trends are often explained with reference to globalisation. But globalisation is not the explanation for everything. The term itself is very general and it often serves to give a new vest to capitalism. Globalisation seems to be a very magic phenomenon which comes from somewhere in space and for which nobody is responsible. Although I would not deny that changes in the capitalist model have taken place in the period since 1989, I think that it is possible to name more concretely the processes which are putting pressure on the social market economy in Western and Northern Europe.

One complex is – as mentioned above – tax policy and subsidies to the powerful and also to the well established middle classes (the famous dentists who are owners of immobile objects with dozens of flats and apartments and even larger tax write-offs). The other very serious complex is labour market and the unemployment crises.

2.2 Gender conflict and home made socio-economic problems

In Germany, I see a very important aspect which is hardly mentioned when the crises of labour market and social security is discussed: the gender conflict. Although in the nineties women were discovered as a relevant group on the labour market by all political parties and their respective think tanks, no radical measures have been taken in order to promote equal participation and equal chances for women in the labour market.

In the gender perspective the crucial point of the prevailing problem of mass unemployment is the social division of labour. While the potential of employed people has risen considerably since the seventies the social division of work remained more or less the same, if you look at it with a gender perspective. Work being done for reproduction, caring for ill and older people and the non-formal education of children is still a private, female duty. Few opportunities to combine remunerated work, family life and responsibility for children are being made available at an absolutely insufficient degree. Due to the traditional discrimination of women in the labour market and due to the reliance of social security system on income from the labour market, women still are very dependent on their spouse. They are significantly more vulnerable than men – especially if they are mothers. The sector most affected by poverty are single mothers – who are divorced and whose former spouse do not pay alimony.

Feminist social analysis has established the thesis that if women were integrated equally into the labour market this would help to resolve the general unemployment crisis. The assumption behind is that designed in a gender perspective this would inevitably mean to reduce paid working hours to an average of 30 hours per week for both sexes and to rise investment in paid working opportunities in the social services, such as healthcare, education and caring for others. Higher employment rates would also help to overcome the dramatic financial crises of social security in Germany.

(Another urgent task will be to bring back about 5.5 million jobs from the informal sector into the formal system resulting in an higher input into social security. It is estimated that in few years only two of three jobs will be “regular” jobs.)

The justice question behind is that under the given circumstances the division of labour between the sexes is not negotiated by society as a whole (social contract) but has to be

resolved on the individual / family level. This gender conflict is not a consequence of globalisation, it is home-made. Several studies about the future of the social market society have proved that its resolution would contribute considerably to the development of a more just and sustainable society. As long as it remains unresolved current trends of redistribution of property from below to the top in society as a whole will double injustice for many women.

Looking back to paragraphs 2.1 and 2.2 we can conclude that the people below in Germany are mainly employed tax payers, and the unemployed who suffer from the unjust redistribution of wealth from below the top (“Hood Robin society”). In addition to this there are other sectors that are socially, ethnically or politically discriminated. Among all these groups you will find more women than men, because the structural discrimination mechanisms of the German social state and the German labour society.

2.3 Globalisation – political responsibility

Critical economists underline that globalization is mainly another phase of competition between the three great capitalist regions in the world: EU, USA and Japan with East (and South East) Asia. This is true with regards to at least three criteria: (1) International trade is mainly executed within and between these regions. There productivity is very high and incomparably superior to the “rest” of the world. (2) Subsidies and protectionism help to stabilize and expand agricultural production. (3) In addition to this global financial markets are in the hands of the same superpowers. The profit rates of financial capital are higher than those in the productive and reproductive sectors so that the latter are forced to compete with the profit rates in the financial economy and with shareholder interests – perhaps even more than with other suppliers of the same product or service.

Globalisation is not an anonymous fate and it is not a mere economic process. The neo-liberal market radicalism and the shareholder economy require an international juridical framework. Political decisions are necessary to create this framework. In fact more decisions than ever have been made to ensure the system in the last years: Free trade agreements have been signed on regional, continental and global level (The World Trade Organisation, the NAFTA, the ALCA, the EU.) These contracts not only include free trade of capital, products and services. They also embrace the privatisation of public services and intellectual property rights. (GATS, TRIPS ...). These contracts seem to have a new quality in comparison with former agreements and initiate irreversible processes. Thus basic human rights are directly affected. Governments resign from their responsibility to provide services and to care for the natural resources like water, gas and oil and leave them to private enterprises. The treaties also ensure that private companies may bring to court those states which resist. In the analogue case of intellectual property rights companies may bring small peasants and farmers to court who continue to cultivate their own seeds – and they do (Monsanto) .

Again, these agreements are based on political decisions and international law, which of course are highly influenced by capitalist lobbying. In the European Union the liberalisation of energy, water, transport begin to show its results with higher prices and often decline in quality. National labour legislation which guarantees fair payment and

dignity of working conditions in the formal labour market has come under pressure due to the international circulation and trade of labour force.

The establishment of the international free trade agreements is one of the reasons which have led to the criticism that for two decades there is an ideological dominance of a radical and reduced vision of economy, community and human beings. This radicalized vision is very present in politics, mass communication and science and therefore has gained almost monopolized public influence.

This goes in line with a concerning decline of political competence in the established political parties, in administration at all levels. We miss visions for the future, the competence to reflect politically and ethically on decisions which are necessary. Technocratic thinking and short-sightedness characterize the daily political practises (instead of political responsibility technocratic attitude).

2.4 What about the religious sector?

If in the globalised society the main ethical challenge is a political one, the Churches might offer an important heritage to the public. The Christian church according to the Barmen Declaration Art. V has to remind government and the governed of their responsibilities for the state. According to art. VI the church has to bring the Good News to all. Both tasks are held together and based on the establishment and vigour of righteousness. What about this evangelical mandate today?

In the German religious sector we have to realize that the established historical Protestant and Catholic churches who cover round about 80 % of the population are loosing members or at least loosing bonds with the silent majority. In recent years discussions on financial and spiritual crises have led to several attempts to define the established church as a missionary church – who has to concentrate on its key capacities and tasks. This idea of being more active and hence more present in vital testimony and witness is accompanied by a clerical backlash. This is very contradictory because it leads to isolate message and practise of churches from society, from public debate on important issues of society, from ecumenical international contacts etc. from the outside towards the inside of the church.

On the other hand churches still have very high credit in society. As other large institutions like political parties and trade unions are also loosing capacity of social cohesion and turn out to be mere technocrats and defenders of privileges of their clientele, churches could have much more impact in the current debates on the so called social reforms.

I would like to conclude with another thesis about the current situation of the majority churches: The shift from a socially and ethically responsible to a missionary discourse in the church provokes exactly the often lamented spiritual crises. It promotes the emptiness in terms of visions, of ideas of what the Reign of God would bring to us if we were really longing for it.

Therefore I would describe the situation of the mainline churches as a drought situation. But there are several hidden and very diverse streams of water below that deserted surface, because there exists a very differentiated religious subculture both inside and outside the two large churches.

It is important to realize that under the broad umbrella of the majority churches you may also find many ethical, political and spiritual initiatives, experiments and networks active: feminist, ecumenical, inter-religious (see for example the day of open Mosque – 200,000 visitors in Germany on 3rd October), refugee supporters etc. who try to react in action and constructively to deficits in society and religious sectors.

In the context of globalization and poverty and its ideological impacts of market radicalism, individualism and lack of conscious exercise of public responsibility for the common good, the role of religion would be to counteract these developments.

Which type of religion is capable to do so? Clearly, it is not sufficient to remind at the close relation of historical Protestantism to state affairs, even in the critical prophetic version of this relationship. But I would appreciate if our synods and church boards would be able to use their prophetic voice.

The well known danger of the mainline or majority churches (Volkirche) is that they rather represent the ideology and interest of the middle classes and the powerful, than the ideas of society's majority. But at present my impression is that there is another danger: They seem to be a copy of the visionless technocrats who are politically in power.

2.5 Summary and Conclusion – the political task of empowering subjects

The question for the people below of today has not lead us directly to the grassroots level. We tried to name some characteristics of present society and churches. Roughly spoken we find us confronted with :

- National and international development towards more social insecurity and even precarious living conditions, more destruction and very unequal distribution of collective and natural resources, inconsiderateness in the pursuit of competitive private interests (sustainability)
- Diverse groups of people who are forced to live with minor chances, in poverty or loosing stands – they all need to affirm their civil rights in human conditions (hope, empowerment)
- A considerable lack of political and hence ethical responsibility in the dominant sectors, the elites of the executive class, the political class etc. (vision, values)
- A lack of visions and concepts which could motivate and unite larger sectors of society (social contract)
- An undetermined Christian scenery which is missing clear message, openness, capacity in cooperation with other beliefs and philosophies (commitment and

hope for the future) – but also many who are trying to work for alternatives – although they are not very audible.

Asking for a perspective or a strategy of thinking in order to counter these problematic trends I would like to formulate my next thesis:

Taking into account the complexity of the modern world and the concentration of power in the hands of a few persons and institutions I think that one major challenge to face the trends of injustice, destruction and hopelessness is to promote *political reflection* and action of people and organizations.

In other words my thesis is: We need to restore the subjects who are able to respond to their own living conditions and to take responsibility for the whole – in political, economical, scientific, administrative and socio-cultural contexts, which include of course the churches. I regard this as a central task of Christian churches especially those who emphasize the justification of the sinners through the liberation from suppressive law and the sanctification of the believers through their way of life.

2.6 Political thinking facing globalisation in a Christian perspective

In the context of globalisation to think and to act politically would mean:

- Break the ban of the capitalist fetishism – meaning to overcome the idea of capitalism as the fate of the human race despite its destructive energies
- Overcome primacy of economy and the market radicalism – meaning to open analyses and concepts for a much wider perspective both in economics and in politics
- Restore creativity in looking for practical, political and juridical solutions – meaning to be able to conceptualise utopian ideas and to look for concrete steps and measures to take in that line
- Empower the majorities instead of deepen the hopeless and powerless isolation of the individuals – meaning to act humanly

All this would mean to give birth to the “homo politicos” in a non-elitist sense. This political being can never be thought of without relationship and dependency from others and is always part of a larger community.

I owe a part of this idea of politics to the German philosopher Hannah Arendt (who by the way was born in the same year as Bonhoeffer 1906, and thanks to the openness of the USA survived Nazi regime and became such an influential and autonomous political thinker)

I see the specific Christian task in our modern world exactly in this: to help to empower ourselves as subjects with our critical rational, visionary and practical competence. Simultaneously, I would like to hold the opinion that the *biblical way* of interpreting the world and the relation of the people with God is our most important specific source for this kind of capacity.

This confidence in the contribution of biblical thinking is in my view the essential – although by no means exclusive – confidence we need to beware of as Christians. And to be beware of does not mean to conserve, but to actualize and to transform biblical tradition into our owns.

As the subjects who read the Bible are very different, because they are persons who have different experiences of unfair conditions or humiliation, the Bible must also be read against certain aspects of its message. Maybe this is most obvious in the gender case. A liberating lecture of the Bible means sometimes to liberate ourselves from certain social conditions and ideas which are stated in the Bible. But anyway without the scriptures we are likely to fail as Christians.

The second important source for becoming politically beings in the sense of the humanizing message of the Bible seems to me the use of social analyses, especially critics at political economy and political philosophy which offer explanations of the situation of those below and which offer routes to travel towards a fullness of life.

3. Suggestions of Bonhoeffer`s theology for the context of globalisation

It is an interesting exercise to list facets of Bonhoeffer's theology and ethic and to reveal their close relationship with his own biography. Many of his theological milestones can be interpreted as the reflection of his historic era in his personal biographical and theological career. A next step could be to draw parallels or to identify opposites with our times and to ask for a transformation or adaptation of the theological conclusions for our context. In fact this is what I did before writing down this lecture in order to clarify the fascinating heritage of this theologian and to get a distance to where we stand today. I think it is worthwhile doing that. I wanted to avoid the presentation of a Bonhoeffer orthodoxy which might be used as a dogmatic receipt for the present situation. So I preferred to take another road.

Having outlined some reflections on our modern times and the special German context I think it is legitimate and even fruitful to remember five characteristics of Bonhoeffer`s late theological thinking. In my opinion they already point at the coming of a new, a post-modern world and maybe useful for a theology in times of globalisation.

1. *Worldliness of the Bible* – Presence of Jesus Christ in the world (theological assumption) – to live as contemporaries (personal life)
2. *World without religion* – recognize responsibility and autonomy of the world (as it is the world come of age, jur. majority = Mündigkeit) – refrain from alienated religious rites)
3. *To pray and to do justice* – to show solidarity with the world (ethical dimension) – to accept and to enjoy diversity and polyphony of life (personal life)
4. *Life in its fullness - as a fragment* – to reclaim unity (integrity) of reality (philosophical perspective) – to accept diversity of realities (personal life)
5. *View from below* – church without economical, political and ideological power or privileges (ecclesiological aspect) -> people as subjects of their own lives (God`s purpose or mission) – political beings. (personal life)

Ad 1:

As a Christian who had become more and more involved in political conspiracy of the bourgeois and military elite against the Nazi regime and at the same time having been marginalized in his church, Bonhoeffer had discovered the worldliness of the Bible. As a contemporary fellow of people who worked for a change in Germany he discovered that the message of the Bible can only be found in the theological reflection of historical action. The Bible no longer was a book which spoke mainly to the pious individual who reserves in his or her life a separate world of faith. Especially the Lecture of the Old Testament helped Bonhoeffer to discover this. He had begun to understand that the testimony/witness of Jesus Christ has to pass through the world of the Hebrew Bible.

If this is true, the presence of Jesus Christ in the world can only be discovered by participation in the historic process and conflicts. Jesus Christ can only be found in the daily struggles, because he lives in the history of Israel. I think this insight is still a challenge to Christians because many, even those who are socially committed, keep their faith apart from the world.

Many read the Bible in a spiritualistic sense. The social significance of theological or ethical statement is regularly ignored. Simple and striking example: Pardon your debtors! (Our Father) (another example: Love your neighbour! means: Do justice to him or her – it is a compensation of solidarity which you owe to the neighbour and vice versa, give what they need, you can expect to receive back when you are in need.). Therefore Christian commitment in the globalized world should not stick to any Christian movements apart from secular movements, but should be effective as the “salt of the earth”. It should contribute to construct subjects who have their roots in the soil and who are able to interact.

Ad 2:

Many have declared that Bonhoeffer's predict of a world without religion has been proved false. Of course, religion today has not disappeared, not even in the very secularized context of Western Europe. But the main point of Bonhoeffer is that religion as ideology of church and state is going to disappear. And this seems to be true to a good extent. The idea is that to loose religion means to win freedom. To live without religion in that special sense is result of an emancipation which Christians, who live from a faith which makes us free, should welcome.

Bonhoeffer found himself in an atheist and pagan world: the communists, many social democrats, the liberal bourgeoisie were often atheists, the Nazi ideology was pagan. He was able to differentiate between an anti-human paganism and an ethically very responsible form of atheism. He understood that the Christian answer for this type of atheism is the worldliness of the Bible. It meant to recognize that society no longer wanted to be treated like a child and depend on paternalistic and clerical church doctrines. On the contrary: the Bible is witness for the renewal of the life of the world in the midst of human affairs. It is not metaphysical speculation which has to be accepted uncritically. So there lays a promise in the majority / world come of age (Mündigkeit) which already had dissociated itself from the traditional religion. As Bonhoeffer put it once: “We have to address the world were it is strong, not were it shows its weaknesses.”

In a globalized world in which religion like fetishism of capital and consumerism prevent people from developing visions for a better tomorrow, it is a promise to overcome religion. Hence these fetishisms have a religious power in the worst sense of the word. To free the world from religion would mean to leave behind fatalism of economical laws and values, to leave behind manipulation by political and commercial propaganda. Therefore individuals are being freed from binding powers which do not allow them to discover their own strength.
(Gutierrez, Hinkelammert, Hungar, Plonz)

Ad 3

Bonhoeffer's criticism of clerical religion, his sensitiveness for the beginning ideological pluralism, the compulsion to practise faith undercover – even as a minority in the minority confessing church – and his concerned attention of double standards in Christian preaching lead him to the conclusion that praying and liturgical celebration should be hidden from the public (Arkandisziplin). To him the indispensable counterpart of praying to God was doing justice *in and for the World*.

Occasionally he explained this dialectic relationship between seclusion and public presence with a figure from musicology: The cantus firmus (continuous existential stream) of prayer and service needs its counterpoint of complete involvement in human life. The counterpoint (autonomous accents of praxis) represents the diversity and richness (fullness) of life. (Pangritz)

In a globalized world which is in need of subjects who are able to act, this reflection points out that despite the complexity and diversity of culture, values and group identities, *unity* is there. This unity is not unifying and thereby subsuming plurality under a dominant category. It means that there is a powerful dimension – or should I say: a Spirit? – in life which is able to bind the world together. (Santa Ana, Plonz)

Ad 4:

In this context it is inspiring to see how Bonhoeffer had accepted that his life was fragmentary but also very rich and complete.

Life in the post-modern world must definitively accept that all we can do and our message is not more than a fragmentary and very relative invitation to others. Yet there is a unifying moment: this is the polyphony of life (multitude of expressions of life) which is experienced in human interaction, it is found by doing justice. It is discovered in active interest in the world, in acting as political beings because acting means to do politics, politics means to interact and develop power to act (Arendt).

Ad 5:

His experience of the view from below due to an extensive marginalization helped Bonhoeffer to discover a new type of solidarity in daily suffering and to visualize a economically, politically and ideologically powerless church in service to the Others. I will not discuss the problem of the “Me” and the “Other” (Levinas), the “You and Me” (Buber) and the Other as interpellant instance here (Levinas, Dussel). I only would like

to stress that Bonhoeffer's criticism to the concept of power corresponds with the experience of the powerless God – the God who is suffering as one of those below.

This correspondence may be well known. A second correspondence to the concept of power in Bonhoeffer's late ecclesiology maybe seen in the concept of power of the people. This is clearly positive power. It appears when people who have been set free from old time religion, from metaphysical legitimating of oppression and begin to recognize each other as subjects of their own lives. When they begin to interact as political beings. This power is exactly the kind of empowerment we need to face the challenges of the globalized world.

4. Instead of a final conclusion: acknowledgements to important resources of Christian Ethics

Finally, we should remember that most theologians and pastors like many other intellectuals of that time in Germany were almost incapable to form an independent political opinion. At the same time, we can find very rich reflections of others – most of them had emigrated to the USA – on the character of Nazi-totalitarianism, the war and the genocide of the European Jews. I do not know many attempts to relate e.g. the theology of Bonhoeffer or another critical and extraordinary theologian like Karl Barth with representatives of the School of Frankfurt or with Hannah Arendt. And although there has been a left wing inspired tradition in the reception of these and other less known theologians there is almost no school of followers and relatively few research done in this line today – at least in Germany. A historical analysis which pays attention to the intellectual potential of that era might help us to continue with a critical theology. This analysis could also demonstrate the analytical strengths and deficits of the high estimated theology of Bonhoeffer or other representatives of the “Confessing Church” concerning politics and society issues. Some aspects have been mentioned here, certainly without the ambition to compare or to harmonize the different thinkers. But I think that their approaches are very relevant search for politically competent subjects.

I owe important inspirations to my teacher Kristian Hungar in Heidelberg who presented Arendts political philosophy of acting together with Bonhoeffer's post-metaphysical theology. In his lectures, seminars and even more in study contexts outside the university we were accustomed to link the few, often diverse and not very attractive approaches of *critical theology with social science and impulses from the ecumenical movement. This mixture of contextually embedded theological reading of reality came together in a re-lecture of the Bible, especially of the Old Testament in a socio-economic interdisciplinary perspective.* I learned a lot and still do learn in these non conformist study contexts.

Beyond the necessary expression of gratitude and respect, there is an important point for me in this acknowledgement– and this is why I share this rather irrelevant biographical information with you.

I believe that *using these resources it becomes possible to identify topically and concretely those classes and groups who have to live as people below and in what sense they experience living below.*

If this is true, it is even more relevant to find out, *how* those who had been below had *recognized themselves as subjects and communicated that they have been set free in certain and usually limited aspects from their suffering.*

I would dare to resume (using Bethges three main characteristics for Bonhoeffer:) in a threefold conclusion: (1) using the above mentioned resources (non-metaphysical theology, critical and empirical social science, ecumenical interrelatedness and biblical competence) and exploring the capacity of humanization of those who are held below makes a true *theologian*. (2) Responding in life and action to these insights makes a *Christian* (3) To open oneself for the Other who is longing for real life is making the *contemporary fellow*.

Thank you very much for your patience.

Sabine Plonz

„The view from below“ Some approaches from a German perspective

1. View from below – challenge to reflect politically
2. Finding the “people below” in the German context
 - 2.1 Decline of the Welfare State
 - 2.2 Gender conflict and home made socio-economic problems
 - 2.3 Globalisation – political responsibility
 - 2.4 What about the religious sector?
 - 2.5 Summary and Conclusion – the political task of empowering subjects
 - National and international development towards more social insecurity and even precarious living conditions, more destruction and very unequal distribution of collective and natural resources, inconsiderateness in the pursuit of competitive private interests (sustainability)
 - Diverse groups of people who are forced to live with minor chances, in poverty or loosing stands – they all need to affirm their civil rights in human conditions (hope, empowerment)
 - A considerable lack of political and hence ethical responsibility in the dominant sectors, the elites of the executive class, the political class etc. (vision, values)
 - A lack of visions and concepts which could motivate and unite larger sectors of society (social contract)
 - An undetermined Christian scenery which is missing clear message, openness, capacity in cooperation with other beliefs and philosophies (commitment and hope for the future) – but also many who are trying to work for alternatives – although they are not very audible.
 - 2.6 Political thinking facing globalisation in a Christian perspective
 - Break the ban of the capitalist fetishism – meaning to overcome the idea of capitalism as the fate of the human race despite its destructive energies
 - Overcome primacy of economy and the market radicalism – meaning to open analyses and concepts for a much wider perspective both in economics and in politics
 - Restore creativity in looking for practical, political and juridical solutions – meaning to be able to conceptualise utopian ideas and to look for concrete steps and measures to take in that line
 - Empower the majorities instead of deepen the hopeless and powerless isolation of the individuals – meaning to act humanly
3. Suggestions of Bonhoeffer` s theology for the context of globalisation
 1. *Worldliness of the Bible* – Presence of Jesus Christ in the world (theological assumption) – to live as contemporaries (personal life)
 2. *World without religion* – recognize responsibility and autonomy of the world (as it is the world come of age, jur. majority = Mündigkeit) – refrain from alienated religious rites)
 3. *To pray and to do justice* – to show solidarity with the world (ethical dimension) – to accept and to enjoy diversity and polyphony of life (personal life)
 4. *Life in its fullness - as a fragment* – to reclaim unity (integrity) of reality (philosophical perspective) – to accept diversity of realities (personal life)
 5. *View from below* – church without economical, political and ideological power or privileges (ecclesiological aspect) -> people as subjects of their own lives (God` s purpose or mission) – political beings. (personal life)
4. Instead of a final conclusion: acknowledgements to important resources of Christian Ethics

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